

Date: August 30, 2026

Texts: I Kings 3. 5-12 / Romans 12. 9-21

Title: "How Will They Know?"

Intro -

cf. re: "How-To" books... guides...

as relates to pretty much any topic

- Titles include (seriously...) -

How to Speak Cat...

How Start Your Own Country...

How to Be Pope...

(among what one might call the "more commonly and widely helpful"

topics, like: How to Recover Your Data After Your Phone Updated

It's Operating Software While You Were Asleep...

etc. ...)

of course - all this is sort of "old school" -

since we can always go to YouTube for helpful "how to" videos -

especially when it comes to what used to be simple

car maintenance

i.e. - have you ever changed the wiper blade on the back window of an SUV?

have you needed to replace the right rear taillight assembly on your

Chevy, because it got cracked, and that's not good...?

as the guy on YouTube noted - Chevy was going to charge him \$1,200 to do it...

but he ordered a replacement part from Amazon for \$110, provided a

hyperlink (so I could get the same part), and did it himself -

guiding me to an \$1,100 savings...

"How to..."

kind of helpful

cf. - how has this spilled over into the church...?

into the matter of "how to" live as a follower of Christ

(even if you never make it to Pope...)?

hopefully - any such offering (book... web site... YouTube...)
takes as it's starting point - Romans 12... our passage here...
let's see what Paul has to say
(and maybe save you from buying a book that is totally derivative...)
i.e. - let's go to the source...

I) Love Must Be Sincere

and - let's begin with the critical foundation that:
 "love must be sincere..."
 "love must be genuine..."
there's loads more here, but -
 if we don't begin here...
 nothing else matters
cf. - it seems almost mundane... not necessary...
 to ask "why...?"
 why must love be sincere... genuine...?
but -
 that's what ministers do in sermons, and -
 these days, the obvious must be given voice, lest
 we skim on oblivious to what matters...
love must be sincere -
 which can be understood as:
 love must be un-hypocritical...
 love must be self-less...
 love like this - is genuine
and let's be honest -
 this can be a challenge
 (if not for us, then at least for people we know...)
because most folks...
 want to know what's in it for them...?
and this tends to lead toward a view of the world, and - of our lives in it -

that can best be framed in “the surrounds of cynicism...”
 sure I love you...
 (as long as...)
 yes, I love you...
 (until...)
 Sure...
 (are we any different than culture around us that sees love
 in transactional terms as opposed to
 genuine... sincere...
 self-giving and never ending terms...?)
 we can be, Paul says -
 because we have a backstory of grace to offer strength and support
 a backstory of genuine love that we have already received
 which fills in the cracks and fills up the void
 as there is an endless generosity to the love that surrounds us in Christ...
 so are we in a position to be generous...
 to be sincere... to be endlessly giving...
 in the love that we offer
 and in this -
 the world is given a glimpse of something that is seen...
 felt... experienced...
 nowhere else
 cf. - Huey Lewis sang about this - and, while maybe not as substantive as
 Paul... - not bad...
 - The power of love is a curious thing
 Make a one man weep, make another man sing
 Change a hawk to a little white dove
 More than a feeling, that's the power of love
 When it gets hold of you
 And with a little help from above
 You feel the power of love... You feel the power of love...

or -

a profound awareness of the mercy we have been shown

cf. - what form might this awareness take -

in our lives and in the way we live?

II) The Hospitality of Jesus

again...

there's a lot here in Romans 12...

a lot Paul would have us take in

so let's focus on one area - especially an area where we are in a position

to respond... to do something

i.e. - Paul offers us guidance for how to live as a Christian... as a

follower of Christ -

which... leads us to taking an active stance in

overcoming evil (vs. 9b... vs. 14... vs. 17...)

and the key to overcoming evil...?

in short - put into practice the hospitality of Jesus

cf. - For Paul, Christian hospitality is the way to overcome evil.

Hospitable living means trying to live in harmony with others,

especially with hostile people.

When he says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them"

(v. 14), he sounds like Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

When he says, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is

noble in the sight of all" (v. 17), he means that we Christians should

always be committed to loving our enemies, turning the other cheek and

praying for those who persecute us.

Paul concludes with the advice, "Do not be overcome by evil,

but overcome evil with good"

and see how that can be accomplished by looking to Jesus...

cf. - he was known for sitting down to eat with tax collectors and sinners,

welcoming outcasts, loving his enemies, pursuing peace, and -

showing grace to all people.

Nothing is more powerful than showing hospitality to your opponents,
which is what Jesus did throughout his life.

- Paul knows that generosity toward enemies is an approach they never expect,
and it is a strategy that they cannot defend against.

In fact, it drives them a little crazy,

making them feel like they have hot coals on their heads.

When hostility is countered with hospitality, “the LORD will reward you”

(Proverbs 25:21-22).

Jesus knew this, as did Paul.

We should take this approach as well...

i.e. - the way to overcome great evil is to practice an even greater goodness.

It’s an approach that works best in community

instead of isolated individual efforts.

A writer named Danielle Ayers Jones notes,

“I might not be able to solve the refugee crises,

but I can help refugee organizations in our own country.

I might not be able to adopt,

but I can sponsor a child in poverty to give them

an educational advantage.”

i.e. - hospitality is not always about opening your door and inviting someone in

it can also include choices and actions like those above -

that effectively say and show to others:

“I may not know you, but - you are welcome here...

you are welcome in my heart...”

it’s also worth noting that:

Christian hospitality is a team sport, not an individual activity.

Together in community, we can feed our low-income neighbors,

shelter our homeless brothers and sisters, and

tutor the children of neighborhood schools.

Said a retired Navy captain who began a tutoring program in his church:

“We should always approach people with love. They have no defense against it.”

so...

how do you live as a follower of Jesus...?

how do you defeat evil (which seems to be the dominant reality
in our world...)?

- working together... is how we do this

This can be done in our families, congregations, communities,
states and in our nation today.

(maybe that is exactly why Paul wrote his letter to the residents of
the most powerful city in the first-century world...)

“Let love be genuine,” he said (v. 9).

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (v. 21).

Paul’s how-to guide for Christian living, grounded in the hospitality of Jesus,
is one that the Romans needed in their world,
and it is one that we need in our world today.