

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' No, 'if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Sermon

So, I think we've officially made it to that season, haven't we? And I'm not talking about autumn. I'm not talking about baseball. But, my wife and I go out to walk our dog every morning and I have noticed a sure sign of the season. In fact I see another one pop up in our neighbors' yards every day. Not the flowers or the fruit trees. But, the yard signs.

It's yard sign season in America.

And in my neighborhood, at least, you can find just about any type of yard sign you can imagine. They express every different opinion and every different idea. They call us to vote for every different candidate for every different office.

And I've noticed that this season has changed our neighborhood. It's changed our neighbors. And it's changed me.

It's changed the way we interact with each other. We're a bit more suspicious of each other. Hesitant to engage and formal in our greetings.

We wonder which yard signs sit in the gardens of the people we meet in the street.

We wonder which banner they fly.

And it feels like the yard signs are sorting us out into teams. There's actually corners in our neighborhood that we tend to avoid on our walks, because we don't feel welcome, or we worry about what kind of interaction we might find there.

And we've got some signs in our yard too. Because there's nothing wrong with being honest and sharing what you believe. There's nothing wrong with having an opinion and wanting to encourage your neighbors to consider it.

But, I'll admit, it can make things awkward when we're weeding the garden and we see those neighbors' faces scrunch up in disagreement, as they read those signs and hurry on their way.

So, I find it interesting that when I read this passage of Paul's letter to the Romans today, all I can hear are a bunch of yard sign slogans. Can you imagine these on a sign in your neighbor's front yard?

- Love what is genuine.
- Hate what is evil.
- Hold fast to what is good.

What kind of looks do you think you'd get if you flew a flag that said:

- Rejoice in hope
- Be patient in suffering
- Persevere in prayer

What team do you think your neighbors would sort you into if you posted a big sign that said:

- Contribute to the needs of the saints
- Extend hospitality to strangers
- Feed your enemies

How would that change your relationships with your neighbors?

Because the Apostle Paul's yard sign slogans are not intended to drive us apart or sort us into separate teams. They seem meant to do the opposite - to pull us together, to teach us how to be the Church, to form us into the very body of Christ in this world. They say:

- Bless those who persecute you
- Rejoice with those who rejoice
- Weep with those who weep
- Do not repay **anyone** evil for evil
- Live peaceably with all.

Because the truth is that we **are** all on the same team. And I'm realizing that these messages from our scripture are really the slogans that I want to encourage my neighbors to consider when I post up my yard signs. These are the things I wish my neighborhood would come together around. And if they ever do decide to take these ideas up in a way they haven't before, well, I'm sure it won't be because of my yard signs - but it will be because of my life. Because I've chosen to live these slogans out. It will be for the way I treat those around me. For the way they see me using money, or caring for the things I have. It will be because of the Spirit that I bring

into our relationships and the kinds of friends they see me invite into my house. It will be based on the way I live out this passage from the Bible - and the lofty ideals that **God** calls us to live.

So share your slogans with the world - but know your rivals will stay rivals, until you decide to live God's ideals out.

Amen

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