

Engage:

Romans 12:9-21

Introduction

I read a story about a mother and father in Vietnam who had to pay six thousand and five hundred dong as a fine for having a fifth child. After having him, the parents named their child, Mai Phat Sau Nghin Ruoi, which translates to "Fined Six Thousand and Five Hundred." Because the teen was repeatedly teased over the meaning of his name, his father finally agreed to help him change his name to something more traditional: Fined Six Thousand and Five Hundred's new name is Mai Hoang Long, which means "Golden Dragon."

I am not sure why parents would name their child after a financial fine. The name this boy received would be the equivalent of my naming my son One Hundred and Twenty-five dollars after getting pulled over and receiving a ticket because I broke the speed limit trying to get my wife to the hospital so that she could have our baby.

Today we will discuss one of the words used to represent the vision we have for this church: Engage. Before we get there, let's first discuss how God engages, or rather, pursues us.

One of my favorite songs, which causes to me to reflect on the way God pursued me when I was running from Him, is Toby Mac's *Love Broke Thru*:

*When love broke thru
You found me in the darkness
Wanderin' thru the desert
I was a hopeless fool
Now I'm hopelessly devoted
My chains are broken
And it all began with You
When love broke thru*

Toby Mac's song reminds me of who I was before I became a Christian: Blind. Hopeless. Foolish. A slave. But then, love broke through! Before becoming a Christian, the Bible uses a collection of adjectives to describe who we once were:

- Spiritually Dead (Eph. 2:1)
- Follower of the Prince of the Power of the Air (Eph. 2:2)
- Child of Wrath (Eph. 2:3)
- An Enemy of God (Rom. 5:10)
- Unrighteous (Rom. 3:10)
- Blind (2 Cor. 4:4)

But, through Jesus Christ, we have received a new identity. Because Jesus entered our world and engaged us where we were, we now have a new identity:

- Alive in Christ (Eph. 2:4)
- A Disciple of Jesus (Matt. 28:19-20)
- A Child of God (1 John 3:1)
- A Friend of God (John 15:15)
- Righteous (2 Cor. 5:21)
- Seeing (2 Cor. 4:6)

We were made for a relationship with God. Our new life in him enables us to love him and love people. Praying to God, engaging our communities, and developing people who follow Jesus is the overflow of a new life rooted in Jesus Christ. These reasons are why our new vision statement makes so much sense: *“We exist to develop a culture of Jesus followers who prayerfully engage their communities with the gospel.”*

Romans 12:9-21 is the application of the first ten chapters about a God who pursues and engages lost sinners.

We are Loving because God Lovingly Engaged Us (v. 9)

The word that is used in verse 9 is the Greek word ‘*agape*,’ which is the word used for an unconditional love. Our English translations make the word “love” in verse nine into a verb, when it is really an adjective that describes the Christian. Verse nine should begin with the phrase: “Authentic love”, but that would make no sense in English, so it has been made into a verb: “Let love be genuine.” I don’t want to make a big deal out of something that really is not a big deal, but the point is simply this: Genuine love abhors what is evil and it clings to what is good.

We were once spiritually dead, but now we have been made alive in Christ. We once followed the devil, but now we follow Jesus. We were once children of wrath, but now we are children of the living God. We were once an enemy of God, but now we are a friend of God. We were once unrighteous, but now we are covered under the righteousness of Christ. We were once blind as we walked in darkness, but now we are seeing as we have been called into the light! Why? Because **“God, who said ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ”** (2 Cor. 4:6). The result is that we are now able to love as we were made to love, and our new nature as Christians should cause us to abhor evil and cling to what is good.

We Are Devoted to One Another Because God is Devoted to Us (vv. 10-12)

The next word that is used for love in this passage is *philio*, which is a brotherly love. If we have been transformed by the grace of God, we also share a common bond. That common bond is not only that we are sons and daughters of the living God, but we are also brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ. Because we are brothers and sisters in Christ, we ought to outdo one another in the

way we honor each other. I believe the point here is identical to what Paul wrote about this point in Philippians 2:3, **“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.”**

How do we remain devoted to one another? The cross of Jesus is a perfect illustration of love being both self-sacrificing, and committed to the wellbeing of others. Our love for one another must not be idle, but diligent; not uninterested, but invested; not indifferent, but enthusiastic. This kind of *“brotherly love”* happens because we are the only people on planet earth who truly have a hope that transcends death. We can be patient in the midst of suffering, because we know that it is temporary. We can follow Paul’s instructions by upholding one another through disciplined and consistent prayer for one another.

We are Generous to One Another Because God is Generous to Us (vv. 13-14)

Genuine love is a hospitable love because it does not ignore the needs of others. We share a bond, which is stronger than our DNA, because we are covered by the blood of Jesus Christ. Because God pursued us and made us alive in Jesus, we must act when one of our own is in need in the same way that God met us in our hour of need by dying for us.

However, our love should not stop with our brothers and sisters in Christ; it must bleed out into our ability to bless when persecuted, understanding that the world doesn’t know any better because those who are spiritually dead will act like they are spiritually dead. It is a curious thing that we Christians are surprised by the antics of a world that is spiritually blind. The reason the world is a mess today is because it needs the same reconciliation that we experienced in Christ. So how do we bless when persecuted? We give them a taste of heaven with our presence through what we do and what we say.

When you read through the Gospel accounts on the life of Jesus, what you will discover is that Jesus’ preaching about the Kingdom of God was always in partnership with how to make the world for his listeners better through His acts of service. The only way people will hear the gospel is if they hear it from your lips and see it validated by your life.

We Serve Our Communities Because God Serves Us (vv. 15-16)

As followers of Christ we are called to a different set of ethics than those of this present world. We are called to imitate the kind of servitude Jesus modeled for us. To be a Christian is to have the same mindset Jesus had by counting **“others more significant than yourselves.”** Jesus did not believe people were more important than himself; for Jesus to do that would have been idolatry, because He was and is God, but he had an attitude that was motivated by a love that was sacrificial in nature. It is a lifestyle that understands that people’s greatest need is God and a lifestyle that will do whatever it takes to bring God to those in need. Just as Jesus came and identified with humankind, we need to do identify with those who do not know Jesus, because that is what genuine love does. Genuine love rejoices with those who rejoice, weeps with those who weep, seeks to live in peace with others, and teaches individuals to never consider oneself better than others.

We Seek the Peace of our Communities Because We are at Peace with God (vv. 17-21)

Finally genuine love does not seek to crush the people who crush us. Genuine love is a shalom seeking, peace giving, and engaging love. It is a love that has been so shaped by a loving God that when we are wronged, we understand that God can turn the evil we suffered around for our good and the good of others. Because of the love we have experienced from God, we should know that God is bigger than our suffering and that our pain is not wasted or purposeless.

When we were far from God, God pursued us. When we were dead, God made us alive in Jesus. When we followed the ethics of an evil kingdom, Jesus found us and asked us to follow him. When we were destined for hell, God purchased our forgiveness and made us a citizen of heaven. When we were enemies of God, God befriended us. When we were unrighteous, God made us righteous through His Son. When we were blind, God made us see. When we were in darkness, God brought us into His light. We were made to love because God first loved us! Because God loved us, you have a new name! You are a Christian, and what that means is best described in 1 Peter 2:9-10, ***“But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy”*** (1 Peter 2:9–10).

As a community of Christ followers, we are called to a life of mission. The way we seek to do it is to, “Develop followers of Jesus who engage their communities.”