

## **Willow River Parish: Clear Lake, Deer Park, and Faith Family**

### **Title: Relying on the Power of the Holy Spirit**

#### **Lesson: Romans 12:9-21**

*<sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

There is a saying, "Today that you have lived in vain is the tomorrow that a person who died yesterday truly wanted to live." This was a quote by Sophocles, known as a tragedian and writer from ancient Greece. He was born and raised in a wealthy household, possessed a handsome appearance, and had exceptional talent as a writer. Also, he was very healthy and had great wealth. His life was a life without want or need."

However, around the time he turned 80, trials found their way into his life. He had a son who was always worried that he wouldn't inherit his father's wealth. Then, the son filed a lawsuit, claiming that his father, due to old age and dementia, couldn't manage his money, all because he wanted to secure his father's wealth. This news spread throughout the village, and it brought great shame and disgrace to Sophocles.

Sophocles was slandered by his own son. He was deeply saddened and felt unjustly treated. He had a few choices to consider. If he chose to remain silent and give up on defending himself regarding the lawsuit, the court would likely accept it as implicit agreement to the claim that he was incapable of managing his assets due to dementia. On the other hand, if he lost control of his emotions in court, shouted at his son, and attempted to defend himself, it would also serve as proof in front of people that he was an incapable individual due to dementia.

So, he chose to endure all the humiliation and decided to showcase his abilities in court. He stood before everyone in the courtroom and recited a poem, one he had written recently and was not well-known to the public, in a loud voice. The words that flowed from his lips were not about excuses, appeals of injustice, or anger. It was an incredibly beautiful poem. His poetry deeply touched the hearts of everyone in the courtroom. When everyone was left in awe of his poem, he asked them, "Do I seem like an elderly person incapable of managing my assets due to dementia to all of you?"

The court found him innocent and showed that it was actually his son's greedy plan all along.

Friends, as we go through life, we experience a variety of things. Along our journey, we sometimes feel joy and happiness, moments of delight and fulfillment. However, there are also times when we find ourselves in unwanted situations, facing injustice, or being mocked. In these moments, we can feel disheartened, become sad, lose interest in everything, have trouble sleeping at night, and even lose our appetite. Beyond that, we might feel anger toward those who trouble us and have the desire to give back what we've received, maybe two-fold, ten-fold, or more.

However, the Bible tells us: "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good." (Romans 12:9) If we say we love others but hold insincerity, hypocrisy, or lies in our hearts, that's not real love. What we, as Christians, should always do is to cling to what is good. Clinging to what is good means living a life in constant companionship with God. If we neglect reading the Bible, distance ourselves from prayer, and become careless about attending church on Sundays, we unknowingly become vulnerable to negative influences. Evil can slowly take root in our hearts, even without us realizing it. Furthermore, even if we are dedicated in our faith, it can be tough to maintain it when facing ongoing hardships and disappointments in life. This is why a community of believers, like the church, is essential.

In Africa, there's a saying: "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together." The journey of faith is a lifelong journey. If we try to walk this journey of faith alone, it can be extremely challenging to sustain it for the long term. However, when we come together in church and share our faith journeys, the prayers, support, and comfort from those walking the path with us can be invaluable when our faith is tested, when doubts arise, or when anger sets in. Together, we can overcome the crises of faith and continue our journey of faith.

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, was born in a humble manger in Bethlehem on a cold winter's night. He grew up and began His ministry, showing people that He was the Son of God, the Messiah who came to save this world. He demonstrated what it meant to break bread with His disciples, share wine, and give life to others. Eventually, just as He taught, He saved all people through His life on the cross. He suffered betrayal from the disciples who followed Him, endured shame and humiliation before the people, and was crucified on the cross.

If it had been ordinary people in such a situation, they might have begged for their lives, felt anger towards those who betrayed them or subjected them to shame and humiliation, and desired revenge. However, Jesus did not repay evil with evil. Instead, after His death, He rose again after three days, conquering evil with love and resurrection. He promised to establish His church upon the faith of believers and ascended to heaven.

And soon after, the Holy Spirit came to this land and established the church upon the faith of all who believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. In this way, believers gathered, forming a community, becoming one body, one church, and partaking in one bread.

Romans chapter 12 tells us how the community of believers should be: “<sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

However, if the church only loves their family, neighbors, and fellow believers, it wouldn't be much different from other communities. Romans 12:14 says, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse." The Bible encourages us to bless and not curse even those who curse us, persecute us, and revile us, going beyond loving only our loved ones.

The Bible tells: “<sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.”

Loving those who do evil to us, those who trouble us, and those who mock us can be extremely challenging. It may even seem impossible for us to forgive and love them in our own strength. However, if the Holy Spirit grants us the power to

forgive them and the courage to love them, we can rely on the Spirit's strength to extend forgiveness and love to them, rather than relying on our own strength.

I remember reading a story a few years back about an incident in Dallas, Texas. There was a female police officer who had just finished a long day of work and was going home. She lived in an apartment complex and, because she was extremely tired, she mistakenly walked into someone else's apartment, thinking it was her own. The door was unlocked, so she entered. Inside, there was a man enjoying his evening, eating ice cream and watching TV. However, when she saw him, she thought he was a robber, so she fired her gun, and he tragically lost his life right there. This incident led to the female police officer and the victim's family having to go through a trial in court.

The judge was thinking about giving her a big punishment, but the victim's brother asked for more time and said, "We don't want her to get in trouble. Our brother who passed away wouldn't want that either. If she's okay, I want to hug her." When they hugged in the courtroom, it was very quiet, and it was a quite moment, with only the sound of their tears filling the room.

Blessing those who persecute us, forgiving those who trouble us, loving those who mock us, and even treating our enemies kindly instead of seeking revenge—all these things are impossible when we try to do them in our own strength. If we try to forgive and love others on our own, we will fail repeatedly. Such failures can lead to discouragement, driving us away from the church and distancing us from God.

However, if we rely not on our own strength but on the power of the Holy Spirit, we can forgive and love others.

Beloved, I pray that you may rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. May you cling to Him in every moment. Therefore, do not yield to evil, but overcome it by the power of the Spirit. Amen.