



“A Christian Manifesto”

Text: Romans 12:9-21

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FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH - EVANSVILLE, INDIANA

A “manifesto” is, by definition: “a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer.”¹ There have been many such manifestos issued by individuals, groups, governments, and political entities. There have even been manifestos issued by the church and those who claim they speak for all churches and all Christians.

Such a manifesto was issued this week with the publication of something called “The Nashville Statement.” The Nashville Statement is another attempt by the prophets of prejudice to take cheap shots at anyone who is not heterosexual. In the preamble, they state: “Our true identity, as male and female persons, is given by God. It is not only foolish, but hopeless, to try to make ourselves what God did not create us to be.”² What follows are fourteen articles that are a fantastic example of horrible theology and velvet-gloved judgment. But, it is a manifesto. It publicly declares the intentions of its writers.

Throughout the history of the church, statements declaring what the church believes have been issued. In our tradition, we call them “Confessions of Faith.” They are written statements that declare the motives, or views, of its issuer – the Presbyterian Church (USA). Beginning with the Apostles’ Creed and running down the centuries to the Belhar Confession, we Presbyterians take time every now and then to put down in words what we say we believe and how we are to live those beliefs in our daily lives.

And we should not be surprised that throughout the Bible, there are moments when the words read like a manifesto. One such passage is before us this morning. In the Letter to the Romans, Paul gives us “a written statement declaring publicly the intentions, motives, or views of its issuer.” Paul tells us, not so much what we should believe, but a lesson on how we – as God’s people – are called to live and act and interact with the world around us.

When you go to Romans 12:9-21, the instructions simply pour forth. By count, there are twenty-three injunctions offered to us and all of God’s people. And, the simple truth is that these lessons will preach in a church, in a synagogue, or in a mosque – among the three monotheistic traditions and there is plenty of common ground with those beyond the Abrahamic faiths.

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 honor. 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.

We could spend twenty-three weeks unpacking that passage and we have less than ten minutes, so we’ll paint with a broad brush.

Look at the passage in your bulletin. The passage begins with the word “love.” It is repeated twice in each of the first two verses. The foundation of the Christian life is love – not a gooey, sentimental love, but an energetic and profoundly optimistic love. It is a love that runs against the current of culture. It is a love that seeks the best for another, that does not bear grudges, that does not seek to render judgment, that does not seek to profit the one offering love.

When we accept that living our faith means living in love, the rest follows along naturally.

Love each other like the members of your family.
Be the best at showing honor to each other.
Don't hesitate to be enthusiastic...
Be happy in your hope,
stand your ground when you're in trouble,
and devote yourselves to prayer.
Contribute to the needs of God's people,
and welcome strangers into your home.
Bless people who harass you – bless and don't curse them.
Be happy with those who are happy,
and cry with those who are crying.
Consider everyone as equal,
and don't think that you're better than anyone else.
Instead, associate with people who have no status.
Don't think that you're so smart.
Don't pay back anyone for their evil actions with evil actions,
but show respect for what everyone else believes is good.
If possible, to the best of your ability,
live at peace with all people.
Don't try to get revenge for yourselves, my dear friends,
but leave room for God's wrath.

When we switch our way of living from indifference to love, from self-centered to other-centered, from stinginess to generosity, the ripples flow out into every aspect of our living and impact the people we meet and world in which we live.

And there it is: A Christian Manifesto. This is a written declaration of how we, as Christian people, are called to live. It has been before us for over 2,000 years and it is still as fresh – and still as challenging – as it ever was. It is a life based on love and expresses love in every interaction with every person – whether we like them or not, whether we agree with them or not, whether we vote like them or not – or any of the other distinctions which we deem so critically important these days.

It is not an easy way of living. It is challenging each and every day. You know how it is. You wake up in the morning and you recommit yourself to the life of love. You make that commitment to God and to Jesus that you are going to live as God calls you to live. You're feeling positive and excited and energized. And then you get out of bed... And before too long, every promise and pledge and commitment you made is being challenged on every front. Been there, done that, and have the scars to prove it.

But we have to stick at it. This is too important for each of us and for the world for us to give up. Live the life of love:

When you encounter evil, overcome it with good.
When you encounter judgment, pour out grace.
When you encounter hatred, let laughter resound.
When you encounter pessimism, let your enthusiasm shine.
When you encounter your own ego, remember the really
dumb thing you did.
And when you are tempted to get even – just let it go. God
noticed it.

Love – it's just that simple. "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 honor." Love – authentic, genuine, unadulterated love. For now and evermore. Amen.

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- 1.) Merriam-Webster Dictionary
 - 2.) <https://cbmw.org/nashville-statement>



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