

"Divine Direction"

Text: Romans 12:9-21

May God our Father shower you with his gifts of grace, mercy and peace through our Savior, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians, by way of reminder, last week our study of part of Paul's Letter to the Romans led us to the conclusion that we should always "assume you're it." The Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul dedicated the first 11 chapters of Romans to an amazing, incomparable summary of all we need to know about how and why God saved us. We couldn't earn forgiveness by our works, so God did that for us by sending his own Son to fulfill the laws demands in our place. Paul summarized this central Christian truth in Romans 3: **"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus... Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law."** The first 11 chapters of Romans revealed God's mercies toward us.

Then, in Chapter 12, the Holy Spirit through Paul transitioned from what God has already accomplished for us to practical guidance for Christians who want to now thank and serve him for the salvation and faith he has already provided. "Assume you're it" referred not just to how we can now serve God but to how God has not just been merciful to others – died for others, redeemed others, brought others to faith, preserved and provided for others – but to assume you are the one for which God has done these things. Know that you, personally, have shared in what Paul summarized as **"the mercies of God."**

With that reminder, *assume you're still it* as we are provided yet more *divine direction* from our God in Romans Chapter 12, picking up where we left off last week. This morning we examine verses 9-21:

^{ESV} **Romans 12:9-21** *Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ¹⁴ ¶ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your*

own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This is the Word of God. Remind yourself each time you hear or read words from the Bible that these are God's own words. Treasure God's Word this morning by giving it your undivided attention. In preparation we pray, **"Sanctify us in the truth, O Lord. Your Word is truth."** Amen.

Do you remember those cheap wind-up toys you used to see as kids? They were so cheap we used to get them free in certain cereal boxes. It could have been anything from a racecar to a frog. You just wound the handle, set them on the floor, and away they went. As I recall, they were good on going, not so good on going straight. Direction was the problem, not propulsion. We got what we paid for.

God knows that about us. By bringing us to faith (creating that new man within us) he has already provided the propulsion, the desire. The holy writer in Psalm 119:32 wrote: **"I will run in the way of your commandments when you enlarge my heart!"** God has already *"enlarged our hearts"* by bringing us to faith, and the natural desire of that new man within us is to now **"run in the way of his commandments."** The problem for Christians, like those old windup toys, is direction. God gave us the desire, but he knows that he also needs to provide divine direction. This is what Romans 12, including our text for this morning, provides.

You've all seen examples of what religious motivation can look like without God's divine guidance or direction. You've seen it when someone, professing to be Christian, determines that abortion is evil (which, of course, it is) but then supplies his own direction by blowing up an abortion clinic. The examples grow ever more hideous when every mooring to God's Word is severed. Believing insurance companies to be evil, a man murders a husband and father in cold blood for no other reason than that he worked for an insurance company. Filled with zeal for their god, men fly planes into office buildings and blow themselves up in crowded markets. Motivation

without direction means shooting someone who says things with which I disagree.

That's how and why Christians read the directions that God gives us in his Word not with dread and apprehension but with pure thanksgiving and joy. Not as burdensome but as precious – not as something God needs but as that which we need. God gives his children direction to save us from ourselves – that old Adam or sinful flesh that will continue to lobby for evil until God calls us home.

Our text for this morning is part of that divine direction that God gives us in his Word. It's necessary, in part, because much of what we learn here about God's will for our lives runs exactly contrary to what our sinful nature naturally considers good, fair, and acceptable. Let's look at some examples.

In the first verse of our text, Paul says, **"Abhor what is evil."** Seems simple and straightforward enough, but the problem comes when we imagine that we get to decide what is and is not evil. Dyed hair, tattoos, piercing, and hairstyles are not inherently evil. The motivation might be, but not the things themselves. I don't get veganism or vegetarianism, but that doesn't make them inherently evil. On the other hand, I recently heard an interview with a woman who believed that abortion was loving and commendable. You see the problem when we imagine that we get to **"abhor evil"** according to our own definitions of "evil." Only God gets to do that.

Paul goes on, **"Outdo one another..."** Our old Adam would love to stop there, because that would fit perfectly with our natural, sinful inclinations. It's why we tear others down instead of struggling to be better. There's an inherent sinful desire in the human heart to be seen as better. Yet God's direction here takes an abrupt and completely unexpected turn: **"Outdo one another...in showing honor."** In other words, competition among Christians, according to God's direction, means struggling continually to elevate (honor) others, not self.

Go down through the list. The direction of my sinful heart says, **"Rake in all you can for yourself. Get yours."** God's direction: **"Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality."** My sinful heart: **"Hate those who hate you."** God's direction: **"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them."** My sinful heart: **"Someone wrongs you, get even."** God's direction: **"Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all."**

God must have known that this last one would be especially difficult and counterintuitive for his children. He knew that this desire for revenge would be an especially powerful temptation, since he doesn't leave it there. Instead he goes on: **"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.'"** ²⁰ **To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."** ²¹ **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."**

Can you see both the need and the love in the Holy Spirit's direction in all of this? Nowhere in his Word does God tell us just to do what we feel is right. Instead he warns against that very thing.

^{ESV}(Deuteronomy 12:8-9): **"You shall not do according to all that we are doing here today, everyone doing whatever is right in his own eyes, ⁹ for you have not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance that the LORD your God is giving you."** Twice in the Book of Judges we read this condemnation: **"In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes."** Nowhere and never does God treat us like windup toys that can be trusted with plotting our own course through life. Listen to how the Psalmist put it (again from Psalm 119): **"With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments! ¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart, that I might not sin against you. ¹² Blessed are you, O LORD; teach me your statutes! ¹³ With my lips I declare all the rules of your mouth. ¹⁴ In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches. ¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts and fix my eyes on your ways. ¹⁶ I will delight in your statutes; I will not forget your word. ¹⁷ Deal bountifully with your servant, that I may live and keep your word. ¹⁸ Open my eyes, that I may behold wondrous things out of your law. ¹⁹ I am a sojourner on the earth; hide not your commandments from me! ²⁰ My soul is consumed with longing for your rules at all times."** ^{ESV}(Psalm 119:10-20)

Imagine you have to walk through a field seeded with countless hidden landmines and punji pits. You can't go around it; you have to go through it. One false step and you are maimed or killed. Now imagine someone hands you detailed instructions that explain exactly what you need to do, and not do, to avoid catastrophic injury or death. Could you imagine any scenario where you would characterize that information as oppressive, cruel, or unjust? Any scenario where you would just discard it as worthless? Could you imagine feeling animosity toward

the one who provided you with that information, or regard that person as unloving or manipulative? Of course not. You would treasure it and love the one who gave it to you. Obviously.

That's life in a world broken by sin. As the old hymn put it: *"I walk in danger all the way, the thought shall never leave me, that Satan who has marked his prey, is plotting to deceive me."* Our Heavenly Father knows all of this, which is why he gave us the Bible. God's Book not only tells us how we are rescued and gain eternal life by grace through faith alone in his Son, it tells us how to avoid catastrophe as we walk through life. We can't go around it, but we can walk safely through it.

That's why the Psalmist could express such love for God's commandments. That's why he ***"delighted in God's statutes"*** and begged his Lord, ***"Hide not your commandments from me."*** They are God's perfect, loving direction for our lives. So also the hymn didn't end with *"I walk in danger all the way,"* it adds:

I walk with Jesus all the way,
his guidance never fails me;
within his wounds I find a stay
when Satan's pow'r assails me;
and by his footsteps led,
my path I safely tread.
No evil leads my soul astray;
I walk with Jesus all the way.

And yet it's vital to understand that God's Word never puts this cart before the horse. Never does God say, *"Run the way of my commandments, and then I will enlarge your heart."* Never does he say, *"If you will do your part, I will do mine."* Never, *"If you show a love for my commandments and follow my direction, then I will love and save you."* We love him only because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

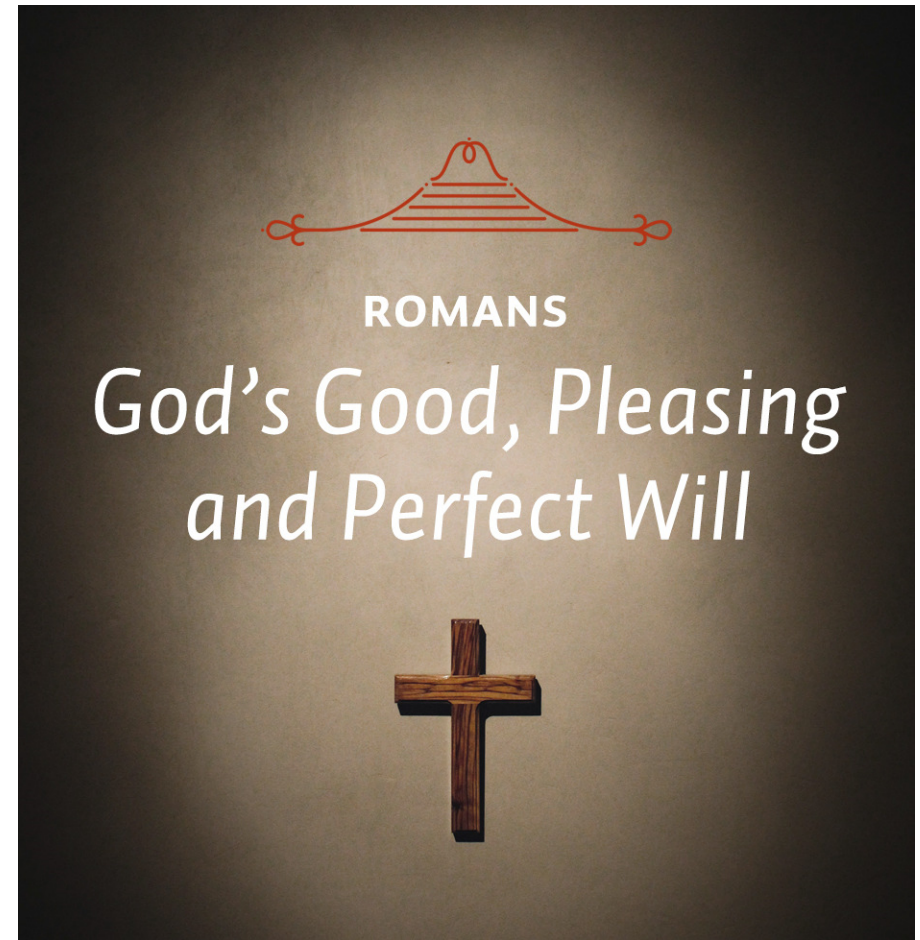
We know that that too is our natural inclination, our sinful human concept of how human beings are saved. In life, you have to work to earn, and then you get paid. God's amazing salvation plan was that his Son Jesus would work to earn our forgiveness in our place – which he did. What then he has fully earned (by offering his sinless life on the cross of Calvary) God the Father credits to us through faith alone in what his Son did for us. That is why it is by *grace* that we have been saved – by God's underserved love for us in Jesus Christ.

That is, in fact, what has us, as Christians, all wound up. That's why we have this God-given longing to thank him, to serve him, to know him better. That's why his directions for our lives aren't burdensome or oppressive. By bringing us to faith he's changed us on the inside, he's allowed us to see his direction for our lives as demonstrations of his love and concern for us. Having saved us, he not only wants to preserve us in that saving faith he has created in us, he wants to protect us from disaster in this life until he calls us to his side in heaven. Thank God for his divine direction. Amen.

ESV **Jeremiah 15:15-21** O LORD, you know; remember me and visit me, and take vengeance for me on my persecutors. In your forbearance take me not away; know that for your sake I bear reproach. ¹⁶ Your words were found, and I ate them, and your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart, for I am called by your name, O LORD, God of hosts. ¹⁷ I did not sit in the company of revelers, nor did I rejoice; I sat alone, because your hand was upon me, for you had filled me with indignation. ¹⁸ Why is my pain unceasing, my wound incurable, refusing to be healed? Will you be to me like a deceitful brook, like waters that fail? ¹⁹ Therefore thus says the LORD: "If you return, I will restore you, and you shall stand before me. If you utter what is precious, and not what is worthless, you shall be as my mouth. They shall turn to you, but you shall not turn to them. ²⁰ And I will make you to this people a fortified wall of bronze; they will fight against you, but they shall not prevail over you, for I am with you to save you and deliver you, declares the LORD. ²¹ I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless."

ESV **Matthew 16:21-26** From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised. ²² And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him, saying, "Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you." ²³ But he turned and said to Peter, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man." ²⁴ ¶ Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. ²⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. ²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?"

ESV **Romans 12:9-21** Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. ¹⁰ Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. ¹¹ Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. ¹² Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. ¹³ Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. ¹⁴ ¶ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.



**ST PAUL LUTHERAN
CHURCH**

BISMARCK, NORTH DAKOTA

ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

2510 E. Divide Ave. Bismarck, ND 58501

Parsonage and Office: (701) 223-4885 Cell: (701) 425-5483

Website: www.bismarcklutheran.org

Mick Johnson, President Angela Pfennig, Organist
Michael Roehl, Pastor

The 14th Sunday after Pentecost – August 30, 2026

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 140

"To Your Temple I Draw Near"

The Order of Service – Hymnal page 1ff. *(Blue Hymnal)*

The Scripture Lessons: *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

The Old Testament Lesson: (Jeremiah 15:15-21) How difficult for human beings – frail creatures of dust that we are – to remember during the hard times that our Lord sees and our Lord cares. It is tempting to seek out some special sin in our lives to help explain the cause of the hardship and, finding none, to regard God as unfair or careless. Yet God does not bind himself to our timetable, neither are we capable of knowing all that he knows. In the end, God's children *always* win; we are *always* delivered.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 85 (Page 85)

The New Testament Lesson: (Matthew 16:21-26) Many elements of the Christian faith seem counterintuitive and paradoxical to our human logic. We are reminded of several in this lesson. Jesus, for example, had to die to live. Christians will lose their lives if they try to save them, but will find their lives when we first lose them. Peter also here provides an example of how operating according to our own human logic and emotions will routinely cause us to act contrary to God's will and in rebellion to God's command.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed *(Blue Hymnal page 5)*

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 212 *(Stanzas 1-3, 5)*

"Thy Strong Word"

The Sermon – Text: Romans 12:9-21 *(Printed on the back page of this bulletin)*

"Divine Direction"

The Offertory – *(Blue Hymnal page 7)*

The Post-Sermon Hymn – 546

"Rock of Ages"

The Prayers of the Day, Followed by the Lord's Prayer

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 435 *(Stanzas 1 & 4)*

"Redeemed, Restored, Forgiveness"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States and around the world. We are glad you are here. Thank you for allowing us the privilege of sharing the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again.

Attendance – Sunday (46) Average (35)

This Week at St. Paul:

Today	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour
Next Sunday	-10:00 a.m.	– Worship Service
	-11:00 a.m.	– Fellowship Hour

CLC News – St. Luke's of Lemmon, SD has called former seminary graduate Mr. Nicholas Naumann. St. Paul's of Austin, MN has called Pastor Aaron Ude. Holy Cross of Phoenix, AZ has called Pastor Chad Seybt. Pastor Joe Naumann has returned the call to Mt. Zion of Madison, Heights, MI.

In Our Prayers – Please remember in your prayers the family of Pastor Emeritus Del Maas. Pastor Maas was called home by his Savior on Wednesday of this past week.

Church Newsletter – A reminder to let Allison know if you have events or prayer requests for the monthly newsletter. There is still time to be included in the September issue.

Napal Disaster – Many have been following the catastrophic natural disaster this week in Napal. The death toll is expected to rise into the thousands. We, of course, take special interest because of our sister synod in Napal and our fellow Christians there. Missionary Ohlmann has done extensive work in the areas hardest hit, as have many who participated in past Mission Helper trips to Napal. In addition to our prayers, an emergency aid package from Project Kinship has been authorized.

CLC Women's Retreat-West – Nearly 80 women from 22 different CLC congregations have registered to attend the Women's Retreat in Oacoma, SD, the weekend of September 18th. If you would like to attend, please register by Friday, September 4th. Information can be found at <https://womensretreat.clclutheran.net/womens-retreat-west/>