

Sermon Summary
11th after Pentecost
28th August 2011

- In Romans 12:9-21, Paul continues his theme of how we are to respond to God's gift of Himself in Christ.
- This is typical of the "end bits" of Paul's letters, where practical advice comes out of the more opaque doctrinal sections at the beginning.
- The technical name is PARAENESIS, or encouragement.
- This section is made up of little short, practical aphorisms all put together.
- I think they cover two themes.
- The first is summed up in "let love be genuine". Its about really not putting on airs or graces.
- The church does this when it presents itself as "better than everyone else" rather than as a group of people who know their own shortcomings and where they can find help.
- People join that arrogant church, and quickly leave because they realise it is not what it claims to be.
- So, Paul asks us to be "genuine", not self- or other-deceiving.
- The second point is that he asks us to get out of a cycle of revenge and retaliation.
- The OT had already done this, in part, by limiting revenge to an "eye for an eye" which marked a considerable advance over many of Israel's neighbours.
- Jesus and Paul take this even further, demanding that we opt out of cycles of revenge and vengeance.
- The phrases "wrath of God" and "burning coals" seem to suggest, though ultimately a return to revenge, but dealt out not by us, but by God. There's still an implication of getting more than even.
- Is this really so? We need to reflect on what the "wrath of God" is. It's linked to the day of the Lord. It's often presented as judgement.
- But the Gospels, in many ways, see this "day of the Lord" in the Crucifixion. The wrath of God is seen in Jesus' dying for the renewal of humanity and creation.
- Wrath as punishment is replaced by an offer of healing, transformation and forgiveness.
- The older cycles of vengeance and vendetta are well and truly put aside.
- This is what we are called to offer the wider communities in which we live: healing, and forgiveness, not a constant cycle of competition and grudges.

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