

Romans Chapter 12

III. Practical Godliness - Part 1

Romans 12 begins the second section of the book of Romans. We have studied eleven great chapters of doctrine foundational to our Christian belief. However, doctrine without application is not God's intent. To know and not obey is to play the part of a fool. With that in mind, Paul spends the remainder of the book of Romans laying down practical applications of the doctrines taught in the first eleven chapters. These applications include our attitude towards the world, the use of spiritual gifts, the way we conduct ourselves, the way we spend our time, the way we should treat fellow believers, and many other necessary applications of truth. The call of chapters twelve through sixteen is obedience and action based on the truths of chapters one through eleven.

A. Our Ultimate Sacrifice - Romans 12:1-2

12:1 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service. 12:2 And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

These two verses, if practically applied in the life of every believer, would totally transform Christianity and make many of the problems that currently plague us go away. Nearly every hang-up and problem faced by the average Christian could be handled much better if these three verses were the basis of that Christian's life.

Paul begins these two verses with the plea, "**I beseech you therefore, brethren**". The truths of these verses do not apply to anyone who has not taken Christ as Lord of their life. Before obedience can be given to the Lord in the Christian life, one must obey the primary command of God, repent and be saved. For an unbeliever to think that he can obey and please God is ludicrous.

What is the basis for this plea? Paul tells us that it is "**the mercies of God**". This phrase refers back to the doctrines taught in the first eleven chapters. A partial list of these mercies would include peace with God, hope of glory, forgiveness of sin, security in our salvation, eternal life, the Holy Spirit, freedom from sin, adoption into God's family, and reconciliation. Paul's plea to the brethren is on the basis of the great mercies we have received from God.

The object of this plea is that we "**present our bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is our reasonable service**". Simply put, we are to place ourselves on the altar, so to speak, as a sacrifice to God. This sacrifice involves obedience and commitment. It involves obedience in the sense that we are to voluntarily place ourselves on the altar. God does not tie us down apart from our will. It involves commitment in the sense that we are to sacrifice ourselves without reservation. Many Christians are willing to make the small sacrifices for God, but are unwilling to totally commit themselves and everything they have to him. We can think of it as a breakfast consisting of eggs and ham. The chicken made a contribution to that breakfast, but the pig made a whole commitment. The reason

for this commitment is that it is **“our reasonable service”**. The word translated “service” is *latreuo* and is often translated elsewhere in the Bible as “worship”. It is not possible for us to worship God without making the full commitment that he requires of us.

Not only are we to present ourselves as a living sacrifice to God, but we are to separate ourselves unto God. It is not possible to be a sacrifice on the altar with affections placed on this world. As a result, we are not to be **“conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of our mind”**. Note that this is a two-part command. The first part consists of a call to remove oneself from the world. John emphasizes this point in 1 John 2:15-17 where he tells us **“love not the world, neither the things that are in the world”**. It is not possible to be a living sacrifice with a love for this world. Colossians 3:1-3 says **“set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth, For ye are dead . . .”**. We are to become dead to the things of this life so that we can be a consecrated sacrifice to God. Although the idea of conformity to this world carries the idea of love of the material things, it also embodies the concept of the world value-system. The word translated “world” in Romans 12:2 is *aionios* which means “age”. In other words, we are not to allow the world “to squeeze us into it’s mold” as paraphrased by the Phillips translation of the New Testament. “Age” can be best understood as the system of thoughts, values, and philosophies prevalent at any time in history.

Instead of being conformed to this age, we are to be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The word “renewing” comes from the Greek word, *metamorpho*. We get our term metamorphosis from it. In other words, we are to be transformed from what we were, to what God wants us to be, by renewing our mind. How do we renew our mind? The answer is that we are to reprogram it with the things of God. As we study God’s word and meditate on the truths, our mind is changed and our affections for this world are replaced by affections for the world to come. It is not possible for Christians to fill their minds with the garbage of this world and not have it affect their desires. Computer experts call this idea GIGO, garbage in, garbage out. If we program our minds with the truths of God’s word, then those same truths will become evident in times of trials and testings. If, however, we fill our mind with the thoughts and values of this life, then that is what will be evidenced when we face temptations and testings.

The goal of mind renewal is that **“we may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God”**. Only those who have transformed their minds by time in the word and in God’s presence can exhibit godly character when the going gets tough.

B. The Place and Purpose of Spiritual Gifts - Romans 12:3-8

12:3 For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith. 12:4 For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 12:5 So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. 12:6 Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith; 12:7 Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; 12:8 Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation: he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.

With the idea of the living sacrifice in mind, Paul now turns to deal with the issue of “**reasonable service**”. It is not natural for a person to claim Christ as their savior and yet not serve him in any way. The whole basis of salvation is wrapped up in submitting to Christ as Lord of our lives. We may not fully understand what that means at the time of salvation, but we are willing to submit ourselves to what God demands of us. Our service to God is predicated on our obedience to his commands. However, unlike many other masters, God never demands us to do something that he has not equipped and empowered us to do. It is at this point where the doctrines regarding the definition and use of spiritual gifts come in. Before dealing with the teachings of these verses in Romans 12, we need to look at some of the general teachings of the Bible regarding spiritual gifts.

1. All Christians have them.

This first point we need to make regarding spiritual gifts is that every Christian has at least one. It is not possible to be a Christian, and not have a spiritual gift. 1 Peter 4:10 says “**As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold multicolored grace of God**”.

2. They are given and energized by the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, spiritual gifts are given to us by the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 12:11 says “**But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will**”. Not only are they given by the Spirit, but they are energized by the Spirit as well. 1 Corinthians 12:6 says “**there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh in all**”.

3. They are given to minister to others, not ourselves.

Thirdly, spiritual gifts are given to edify the body of Christ as a whole, not for the edification of the holder of the gift. This is why Paul comes down so heavily on the Corinthian believers because of their misuse of the gift of tongues. They had made the gift into a self-glorifying and self-edifying manifestation of the Spirit not realizing that all spiritual gifts are for the benefit of the entire body. 1 Corinthians 12:7 says “**But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal**”. The Greek construct literally means “for the good of those gathered together”.

4. They are essential to the health of the Body of Christ.

Fourthly, spiritual gifts are essential for the health and well-being of the church. A careful study of each of the spiritual gifts, which is beyond the scope of our current discussion, will reveal the necessary character of each gift. The church could not function as God intended, if it were not for spiritual gifts.

5. They are to unite the Body of Christ, not divide it.

Spiritual gifts are given to unite the Body of Christ. A reading of 1 Corinthians 12:12-27 will clearly show the uniting power of the gifts. Conversely, whenever we see a Christian ministering their gifts and causing

division and harm, we can rest assured that they are not empowered by the Spirit.

6. They are not a measurement of spirituality.

Perhaps no single point regarding spiritual gifts is more misunderstood than this one. Spiritual gifts do not give a measure of spirituality. If we look at the Corinthian Church as presented in 1 Corinthians, we find that they had every conceivable sin and problem, yet Paul states in 1 Corinthians 1:7 that **“ye come behind in no gift”**. The Corinthian believers had manifestations of all of the spiritual gifts even though they were characterized by carnality and division.

7. They fall into various categories.

Seventh, spiritual gifts fall into several distinct categories. Every believer has a unique gift made up of a combination of these distinct categories. Peter calls our gift **“the manifold gift of God”** in 1 Peter 4:10. The word “manifold” means “multicolored”. Just as the light falls on a gem and is broken out into various colors and hues, so God’s spirit has given us a gift that is manifest in many different ways. For example, the gift of teaching can be given to a seminary professor as well as a first-grade Sunday School teacher. Both have the teaching gift, but it is ministered in different ways to different audiences.

8. They fall into two distinct groups.

A careful analysis of the various categories of spiritual gifts will show that there are two basic groupings, the permanent edifying gifts, and the temporary sign gifts. The permanent edifying gifts exist throughout the Church age. Some examples are teaching, evangelism, administrations, and exhortation. The temporary sign gifts existed only for the early years of the Church as a validation of the new revelation concerning the New Covenant. Some examples are tongues, healings, and miracles.

9. They can be counterfeited.

Whatever God gives, Satan counterfeits. In 1 Corinthians 12:2-3 we find that this is exactly what Satan did. It seems that some believers were getting up in the Corinthian church and actually cursing Christ under the guise of exercising their spiritual gift. We must be careful to use our gift under the leading and the direction of the Holy Spirit. It is sad to realize that many people in our churches today exercise their gift in the power of the flesh, and not in the power of the Spirit.

As can be seen from the above list, spiritual gifts are an essential and necessary part of the Church. Without spiritual gifts there could be no teaching, evangelism, discipleship programs, and other ministries. Spiritual gifts are important and their correct use is equally important.

Romans 12:3-8 is one of four passages in the Bible dealing with spiritual gifts. The other passages are Ephesians 4:7-16, 1 Peter 4:10-11, and 1 Corinthians 12-14. To gain a full understanding of spiritual gifts would require a thorough study of all of

these passages. However, we can gain some understanding by restricting our study to the current passage, since such a study is not possible at this point.

Paul begins this short section on spiritual gifts by laying down a primary truth, that being the truth that spiritual gifts are not a basis for spirituality or boasting. Verse 3 could be paraphrased to say, **“do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to, but realize that God gives each man the faith and capabilities to do the job that God desires for that man alone”**. Paul’s point is that God has given each person in the Body of Christ a particular gift and the necessary faith to operate that gift in the Spirit. As a result, we are to understand that our gift has been given to us by God, and may or may not be as prominent as another’s. This should not be a cause for thinking more highly of ourselves, but to realize that God’s rewards are based on faithfulness, not potential. It is a sad fact that many Christians with great potential never tap a fraction of that while others with severe handicaps are all they can be for God. Just as Jesus commended the widow for her two mites over the rich with their large gifts, even so God will reward those that exercised all of their ability more than he will reward those with great potential but little fruit. Instead of a prominent spiritual gift being a source of pride, it should be a source of fear realizing that we will be held much more accountable.

In order to solidify this concept even farther, Paul uses the analogy of a body. Verses 4-5 state **“For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another”**. Just as our bodies have many parts, even so the Church has many members with differing functions. The metaphor of the body is fully developed in 1 Corinthians 12:14-30. In that section of scripture we find two arguments: 1) no member of the body should think itself more important than another because of greater giftedness, and 2) no member of the body should think itself less important because of lesser giftedness. It is easy for those members of the Body of Christ with great giftedness to think that they are more important and necessary, however, this is not true. Without the janitors, ushers, and secretaries, no modern mission or church could long function. By the same token, no member of the Body of Christ has a reason to think of themselves as less important because of less giftedness. The important thing for all members of the Body of Christ to understand is that their gift is necessary to the health and well-being of the whole Body. Furthermore, God requires that they exercise their gift and not someone else’s. It is easy to look at the people with prominent gifts and desire to have their ministry. However, just as a body consisting of a large eye would be useless, so a Church consisting of all preachers or teachers would be useless as well.

Verse 6 gives us the reason for the diversity of gifts, that being the different proportions of grace meted out to each believer. When we came to know Christ as our savior, each of us received a gift and the faith necessary to operate it. Not all of us received the same gift, and even when we may have received a gift like someone else, we did not receive the same proportion. Some men are gifted to teach seminaries while others are gifted to teach first grade Sunday School, although both have the gift of teaching.

With the foundation of the source and function of gifts laid, Paul now turns to some of the particular gifts that are given to believers. We need to make the point, though, that the gifts mentioned in these verses are not inclusive. If we look at all of the lists of spiritual gifts contained in the passages mentioned above, we find that we are given broad categories, not definitive gifts. What we mean by this is that one does not receive the gift of teaching and nothing else. With the gift of

teaching we often get the gift of knowledge or wisdom. Just as an artist takes a few primary colors and derives hundreds of others, so God takes a few primary categories of gifts and creates a unique combination for each believer. With this in mind, let us look at the categories mentioned in this passage.

1. Prophecy - Romans 12:6b

The first gift mentioned by Paul, and perhaps the most prominent gift of the spiritual gifts, is the gift of prophecy. The word translated “prophecy” in the New Testament is the Greek word *prophemi* which literally means to “speak before”. It does not mean to predict future events, but it means to speak as in an address to a crowd. We could just as well substitute the word “preaching”. A prophet is someone who speaks forth the truth of God’s Word and calls men to obey and respond to that truth.

2. Ministry - Romans 12:7a

The second gift we find in this list is the gift of ministry. The word translated “ministry” is the Greek word *diakonon* from which we get our word “deacon”. It has the idea of serving the needs of others. A good example of this kind of gift would be church janitors and ushers. Their “service” enables others to hear the preaching of the Word more effectively. This category of giftedness is probably the broadest and most evident in the Church.

3. Teaching - Romans 12:7b

The third gift we find in this list is the gift of teaching. The word “teaching” is the Greek word *didasko* and carries the idea of discipling. This gift differs from the gift of preaching in the sense that the teacher has a more intimate and nurturing role whereas the preacher is more distant. It is interesting to note that the one non-spiritual qualification of an elder as defined in 1 Timothy 3:2 is that he must be “apt to teach”. A preacher of God’s Word must be able to teach, however a teacher of God’s word is not necessarily a preacher in the strictest sense.

4. Exhortation - Romans 12:8a

Exhortation comes from the Greek word *parakaleo* which means “to call along side”. People who are exhorters have the ability to come along someone in difficulty, put their arm around that person’s shoulder, and strengthen and encourage them through the difficulty. Sometimes an exhorter must reprimand and reprove, however, most of the time he is an encourager. It is interesting to note that the word “comforter” as it appears in John 16, is the Greek word *paraclete*, or “one called along side”. One of the Holy Spirit’s major functions in our lives is to exhort us unto more godliness and holiness.

5. Giving - Romans 12:8b

Although all Christian’s are to give, there are some who have been especially enabled by God to give more than possible. One of these men in the history of the Church was C. T. Studd. Upon his father’s death, he gave away over 25,000 pounds (a fortune in his time), to the cause of Christ prior to

leaving for the mission field. Part of that gift, 5,000 pounds, was given to Dwight L. Moody in order to found a school in Chicago to train young men and women for missions. We know this school by its modern name of the Moody Bible Institute. Only eternity will reveal the lives won to Christ by that 5,000 pound investment.

6. Ruling - Romans 12:8c

The gift of ruling is exercised by those who lead local churches and Christian organizations. It is a divine enablement given by the Spirit to lead a local church or other organization for the furtherance of the cause of Christ. An example of this kind of gift would be the business administrator of a Church or the Sunday School superintendent. These men organize and direct the operations of programs and organizations under the leading and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

7. Mercy - Romans 12:8d

The last gift mentioned by Paul in this passage is the gift of mercy. Briefly defined, mercy is the ability to comfort and encourage those who are experiencing deep loss or extremely difficult circumstances. This gift differs from that of exhortation in the way in which it evidences itself to the one in difficulty. An exhorter is a person who serves as a corrector and encourager, whereas a person showing mercy is more of a comforter and sympathizer. Someone who is suffering difficulty because of sin needs to be exhorted while someone who has just had a spouse pass away needs mercy.

C. Duties to Ourselves and Others - Romans 12:9-21

This section of Romans is very difficult to outline since it consists of about twenty different exhortations one after another. With this in mind, probably the best way to view this section of scripture is to think of it in terms of an ever-expanding circle. Verse 9 is the most immediate circle, ourselves. Verses 10-13 includes those of the family of God. In verses 14-16 the circle widens to people in general while the last circle, verses 17-21, expands to include enemies.

1. Responsibilities to Ourselves - Romans 12:9

12:9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

True godliness always begins with ourselves. This is to say that no one can be truly godly without the internal working of the Holy Spirit to produce those attitudes that cause godliness. With this in mind, Paul starts the circle of our Christian responsibilities with ourselves.

What are those basic attitudes that will result in personal holiness and godliness? Paul lists three. First, and foremost, we are to love without hypocrisy. The word translated "without dissimulation" is *anupocritase* which means "without hypocrisy". In other words, our love towards others should be from the Holy Spirit within us and not in our humanness. Paul clearly shows this in 1 Corinthians 13. We need to love others without

“faking it”. This is a work of the Holy Spirit as we yield ourselves to Him (1 Peter 1:22).

Secondly, we are to abhor that which is evil. The word translated “abhor” carries the idea of shrinking back. A good verse that comments on this idea is 1 Thessalonians 5:22 which says “**Abstain from all appearances of evil**”. Too often we flirt with the evil of this world with the mistaken idea that it does not bother us. We need to firmly grasp the idea that we cannot fool around with sin or questionable things without adversely affecting our spiritual lives. Many things are not wrong in and of themselves, but they become wrong when we indulge ourselves.

Thirdly, we are to “cleave” or “glue” ourselves to those things that are good. Godly people do not mess around with evil and questionable things. The activities they engage in are “good” and “wholesome”. We need to take the exhortation of Philippians 4:8 to heart where Paul tells us to “think on good things”. We cannot live holy lives without filling our day with good things. Conversely, we cannot live holy lives by filling our day with meaningless or evil things.

2. Responsibilities to Other Christians - Romans 12:10-13

12:10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; 12:11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; 12:12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer; 12:13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

We find several exhortations in these four verses regarding our responsibilities to other believers. The best way to deal with these is to take them one at a time.

a. Kindly Affectioned to One Another - Romans 12:10a

The first exhortation is that we are to be kindly affectioned one to another. The word “affectioned” comes from the Greek word *philastorgay* which is a compound word from *philos*, friendly love, and *storgay*, family love. It really could be rendered “loving lovingly as family”. Those around us in the body of Christ are to be lovingly cared for and treated as members of our own family. There is no excuse for Christians to bicker and fight like enemies. We can only exhibit this kind of love if we are filled with the Spirit. For a good passage to read for commentary on this look at 1 Corinthians 13.

b. In Honor Preferring One Another - Romans 12:10b

The best way to exhibit brotherly love for one another is to prefer one another. This means that we are to view the needs and desires of others as greater than our own. This was the mind of Christ as described in Philippians 2:1-11. Christ did not hold onto his glory as God but emptied himself (*kenosis*) and became a humble servant. Not only did he become a servant, he submitted to the lowest form of death available at that time, crucifixion. Christ did not look at his own needs above that of others. He did not come to “be served” but to

“serve”. A good commentary on this idea is John 12-13 where we find Christ washing the feet of the disciples. Even though he was Lord of the Universe and the Savior of all men, he stooped to washing feet when that need presented itself. We need to have the same attitude to one another in the body of Christ.

c. Not Slothful in Business - Romans 12:11a

This exhortation, as translated in the Authorized Version, would lead us to believe that it applies to work. It does not. A better rendering of the idea being presented would be “not lazy in zeal”. What Paul is trying to say is that there is no room in our lives for lazy or slothful behavior when it comes to our spiritual life and service. We need to be careful to buy up every opportunity and “redeem the time”. Too many believe mosey through their spiritual lives without any zeal or diligence. A good passage to read regarding this exhortation is 2 Peter 1:5-11.

d. Fervent in Spirit - Romans 12:11b

Whereas the exhortation in 12:11a refers to our actions, this exhortation refers to our attitudes. It is possible to have a zealous and diligent person work hard for the furtherance of the Kingdom with a wrong attitude. Christ warned the Ephesian church in Revelation 2:1-7 that although they stood for the faith they had left their first love. In other words, they were diligent in standing for the truth, but lacked the internal attitude of love that God is interested in. We need to not only be zealous, but fervent in our spirit when we perform our spiritual service. Only then will we be building with gold, silver, and precious stones.

e. Serving the Lord - Romans 12:11c

Paul uses three words to describe our spiritual service in Romans 12. The first word occurs in verse 1 and means “worshipful service”. The second appears in verse 7 and refers to service to others. From that word we get our word “deacon”. The word used in 12:11c is *douleuontes* and means the intense service of a slave. We need to view our service to God the same way a slave would view their unquestioned and unqualified service to their master. We have been bought with a price. Paul called himself a “minister” of God. We may think that the word “minister” means an exalted position much like the “prime minister” or “minister of defense”. The actual word Paul uses is *huperetes* which refers to an “third level rower on a trireme ship”. Paul considered himself a slave for Christ.

f. Rejoicing in Hope - Romans 12:12a

The only way we can experience joy and contentment in our service to the Lord is to realize that one day it will all be worth it. We need to set our emotions and affections on heavenly things (Colossians 3:1-2). Too often we lose sight of the fact that the suffering and agony we face as Christians in this life is only a stepping stone to greater spiritual victory and glory in the life to come. Paul himself said that “**the**

sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed in us” (Romans 8:18). All of the grief and heartache of this life will be worth it someday. We need to rejoice in the promise of future glory. A good commentary on this thought is Romans 5:1-5.

g. Patient in Tribulation - Romans 12:12b

The word “patient” comes from the Greek word *hupomena* which refers to the idea of “bearing up under”. We need to bear up under the squeezing pressures of life. Note that we can only do this because of the promise of future glory. For more on this thought refer to Romans 5:1-5 and 2 Corinthians 4:17-18.

h. Continuing Instant in Prayer - Romans 12:12c

One of the two lifelines of the Christian is prayer. The other is the Word of God. We need to be in a constant, ready state of prayer. Too many times we live in sin and wonder why we lack power in our prayer life. We need to be walking in holiness before the Lord constantly engaged in prayer for every situation we face. Paul further describes this state in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 where he tells us to “**pray without ceasing**”. In other words, we need to be living in such a way that prayer to God is a natural and spontaneous reaction to the situations of life. Prayer should not be an activity saved for one or two times a day, but it should be a continuous activity whereby we are in constant communication with our heavenly Father.

i. Distributing to the Necessity of Saints - Romans 12:13a

One of the sure-fire ways to discriminate godly believers from carnal ones is to observe how they treat the necessities of other believers. If there is an attitude of aloofness and disconcern, the spiritual health of that believer is in question. John, in 1 John 3:17-18, tells us that it is not possible for the love of God to dwell in us if we neglect to meet the clear needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ. James repeats this same idea in James 2:14-17 by stating that our faith is evidenced by the way we respond to the needs in the lives of our brothers and sisters. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Christ lays down the eternal principle that our neighbor is anyone who comes across our path with a need. We have no excuse to not meet the needs of others when that need is a legitimate necessity.

j. Given to Hospitality - Romans 12:13b

One of the ways we best evidence our love for brothers and sisters in Christ is in our extension of hospitality. Our homes should be filled with the love of God so that all who come are impressed with the atmosphere of our homes. Although this exhortation was of primary importance in the time of Paul when travel was unsafe and clean, safe inns were hard to come by, this exhortation reaches down to us today. In fact, one of the primary requirements of a bishop is that “**he be given to hospitality**” (1 Timothy 3:2).

3. Responsibilities to Men in General - Romans 12:14-16

12:14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not. 12:15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. 12:16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

In these three verses Paul describes how we are to treat men in general, whether they be believers or unbelievers. As in the previous section, we will look at these one at a time.

a. Bless Them Which Persecute You - Romans 12:14

It is distinctly Christian to treat those who persecute us with love and blessing. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, emphasized this very concept in Matthew 5:43-47. He said that if we love those who love us, we are no better than the worst of sinners. Anyone loves those who love them. However, if we are to be the children of our Father in Heaven, then we are to love those who are indifferent to us and those who hate us. Christ exhibited this very attitude on the cross when he prayed to the Father and asked Him to forgive the men who were crucifying him. God the Father graciously answered Christ's prayer in the salvation of the thief, the centurion, and many others.

b. Rejoice With Them That Do Rejoice - Romans 12:15a

The key idea in this exhortation, and the following one, is that there is no place in the Christian life for indifference to those around us. Too often the spirit of envy and jealousy surfaces whenever we come across someone who is rejoicing over some good thing in their life. We wonder why it wasn't ourselves who got the promotion or the new car. Our attitude needs to reflect the attitude Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12:26-27.

c. Weep With Them That Weep - Romans 12:15b

Whereas 15a refers to the positive emotions felt by others, this refers to the negative emotions. The word translated "weep" comes from *klaio* which means "to shed tears". Again, there is no room in the Christian life for indifference to the anguish and hurts of others. Jesus himself felt our infirmities. When he encountered Mary and Martha in John 11 he wept! Imagine, the Son of God weeping over the death of a friend. Similarly when he rode into Jerusalem he wept over the city. Christ was touched with the feelings of our infirmities. Can we do less to others?

d. Be of the Same Mind One Toward Another - Romans 12:16a

Basically the concept Paul describes here is that we are not to have respect of persons. It is a natural thing for us to defer to those who are famous, powerful, or wealthy. However, in the Body of Christ all social distinctions disappear. James condemns the attitude of respect of persons in James 2. We need to honor all men over ourselves, but we need to not honor some men more than others because of fame or wealth.

e. **Mind Not High Things . . Low Estate - Romans 12:16b**

This exhortation reinforces the previous one. It is interesting to observe that most people want to be associated with those in places of power and prestige. We become name-droppers, advancing ourselves by our relationships to others. Paul condemns this activity in 1 Corinthians 1:11-16 where he criticizes the Corinthians for associating themselves with Apollos, Paul, Peter, or Christ. One of the best ways we can avoid this trap is to associate with those who are not very high on the social ladder. Christ did not come to this world to associate with kings and the rich, but with the sinners and the poor. In fact, one of the major criticisms our Lord faced from the Pharisees was that he associated himself with the tax-collectors and sinners. Our attitude towards others as Christians should be one of love for men, not love for wealth, intelligence, prestige, or power.

f. **Be Not Wise In Your Own Conceits - Romans 12:16c**

Put bluntly, “Don’t be proud!”. There is no place in the life of the believer for pride. We need to realize that all we have, and all we are, is a gift from God. Paul confronts this issue in 1 Corinthians 1:18-2:16 where he condemns the Corinthians for their intellectual pride and snobbishness. Paul was one of the most brilliant men that lived in his time, but he was also the most humble. His goal was to glorify the Lord, and he knew that that was difficult when assuming an air of intellectual pride and arrogance. The warning of 1 Corinthians 10:12, which states “**Wherefore let him that think he standeth take heed lest he fall**”, should be constantly on our mind.

4. **Responsibilities Towards Enemies - Romans 12:17-21**

12:17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. 12:18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. 12:19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. 12:20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. 12:21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Paul now widens the circle of our responsibility to include our enemies. Just as it is distinctly Christian to bless those who persecute us, so is it distinctly Christian to avoid retaliation to those who are our avowed enemies.

Paul begins this exhortation by stating that we are to “**Recompense to no man evil for evil**”. We are not to retaliate for any evil done us. The word “recompense” means “return”. Instead of returning evil, we are to return something “honest”. The word “honest” in verse 17 is *kala* which refers to something intrinsically good. The word “provide” carries the idea of premeditation. In other words, we are to be prepared to return good for evil so that when someone does something evil to us, we are ready.

Verse 18 continues with the exhortation that, if possible, we are to be at peace with all men. Paul knows, and God knows, that it is not possible to be at peace with everyone. The reason for this is simple, to be at peace with someone requires that we be honest and truthful with that person. If that person refuses to be honest or truthful, there can be no peace. Paul's main point here is that it should be our message that offends, not us. If people hate us for what we believe and whom we serve, that is too bad.

Verses 19 to 21 give us specific guidelines in dealing with our enemies. First of all, we are not to take vengeance on our enemy. We defer the taking of vengeance to God. It is comforting to know that no person will ever "get away with anything". As we look around us and see men getting away with sin, we need to consider that although they may escape detection in this life, there will come a day of reckoning.

Verses 20 and 21 tell us what to do whereas verse 19 tells us what not to do. Instead of exacting vengeance on our enemies, we are to treat them with honor and assistance. A good example of this is David, who when he was chased by Saul all over the Judean desert, never took revenge on Saul even though he had opportunity to several times. We are to assist our enemy any way we can knowing that we will heap "coals of fire" on his head. When our enemy sees the way we treat him, he will be ashamed of his attitude and treatment of us. Verse 21 is the fitting climax, do not overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good. Christ did not "win" by being evil, but by being good in the ultimate sense. We need to see ourselves as being in the hand of God at all times. In fact, the only way we can claim God as our Father, in the strictest sense, is to treat our enemies as God treated his enemies, by sending his Son to die for them and redeem them from sin.