

## Romans

### I. Living Godly In The World & Church

- A. Romans 12:14-21 . . . Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. [15] Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. [16] Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. [17] Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. [18] If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. [19] Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "vengeance is mine, I will repay," says the Lord. [20] "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." [21] Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- B. Prayer

### II. Review

- A. The standards for godly living taught in these verses are some of the most challenging standards in the NT. This is because the kinds of people and circumstances referred to in these verses are often seen as a threat to our well-being or never ending. And so in our fear, frustration, anger, or discouragement, we are powerfully tempted to question the trustworthiness of God, set aside these standards of love, and take matters into our own hands in order to protect ourselves or get relief.
1. The strength and frequency of the temptations brought upon us from challenging people and circumstances referred to in vs 14-21 – is one of the reasons we talked last Sunday about the importance of believing in and being committed to love.
  2. But love is not the only vital ingredient to faithful Christ-like living. Faith in the goodness of God, that is, trusting God to faithfully provide and protect you, is equally vital.
  3. For example, you must, and I do mean you must trust God to the point of making Him your primary source of security if you are going to feel safe enough to stay within God's boundaries of godliness, love, and the standards taught in vs 14-21 when dealing with people who are easy to view as insignificant or inferior, or when dealing with people who are obnoxious, selfish, painfully self-absorbed, frequently mean, intentionally unjust, and even deliberately cruel.

4. Therefore, to the degree you are not committed to love and you do not confidently trust in the goodness of God, to that degree the kind of people and circumstances talked about in Romans 12:14-21 will push you to take matters into your own hands and become evil yourself in order to protect yourself or get relief from them.

B. There are two more things I want to point out before looking carefully at Romans 12:14-21.

1. First, Matthew records Jesus as saying something similar. We read in Matthew 5:43-48, “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ [44] But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, [45] so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous (provides for basic needs). [46] For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors (worst sinners) do the same? [47] If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles (all sinners) do the same? [48] Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect (in how you love others).”

2. Second, to keep vs 14-21 in their context, I want to remind you that Paul began this chapter by exhorting us to seriously pursue holiness, to reject the world’s evil influences, to gain a transformed mind, to be humble, to take our place and fulfill our function within the church, to keep love pure so that it is always loving, to abhor what is evil and to cling to what is good. These are essential building blocks for godly living – so keep them in mind as we look at vs 14-21.

III. Godly ways of dealing with people in the world and in the church

A. Romans 12:14 . . . Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

1. The first truth to point out here is that we are to love everyone – which means we are to have a genuine concern for everyone’s well-being – so that we seek their good, and deal with them kindly and respectfully – even if they despise us, hate us, mistreat us, treat us with hostility, or persecute us.

2. The challenge here is that blessing those who persecute you, or who in some other way make your life miserable, doesn’t come naturally. You need the empowerment and assistance of God, along with all the godly qualities spoken of in vs 1-9. But you also need to put in the time and effort required to acquire the kind of mindset, attitudes,

- communication skills, and behaviors necessary to realistically live according to these words when faced with such adverse circumstances.
3. Now it is possible you are thinking of one or two situations that you believe are exceptions to this rule. And you may be right, for there are exceptions to this exhortation. But before considering any exceptions, let me warn you against using the fact that there are exceptions as an excuse to do other than this verse says – when you can and ought to live according to this exhortation.
    - a. One of the more popular examples of an exception to this rule is: “What if someone is trying to rape my wife or daughter? Am I to stand aside and bless that person rather than judge their behavior as despicable, use potentially lethal force to fight them off, and then prosecute them to the fullest extent of the law?”
    - b. I have three responses to this is example of an exception.
      - (1) First, Jesus told His disciples, “Whenever they persecute you in one city, flee to the next; for truly I say to you, you will not finish going through the cities of Israel until the Son of Man comes” (Matthew 10:23). In other words, remaining in an evil, cruel and unjust situation is not required of us. We can take action to get away from it.
      - (2) Second, being granted the freedom to get out from under persecution or cruelty does not include the freedom to compromise godliness and diminish love. Godly behavior and the purity of love are to remain intact.
      - (3) Third, exceptions are rare, persecution is less rare, injustice and mistreatment are common, and people making your life miserable is frequent. Therefore, focus on living faithfully in the majority of cases, for then you will be better prepared to handle the exceptions in ways that keep your faith strong, keep you within the boundaries of godliness, and uphold the standard of love – even when taking action that gets you out of an evil situation.
    - c. Ephesians 4:26-27 presents a truth that you may find helpful in determining the boundaries for dealing with evil people and persecution. It says, “Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”
  4. The second thing I want to point out about Romans 12:14 is that Paul repeats his exhortation to bless. First he says “Bless those who persecute you,” and then he says, “bless and do not curse.”

- a. Most often, when persecution comes, the persecutor holds the power and we are at his mercy. Therefore, it is unlikely we will have the power to do him harm – or even do him good for that matter. Most of us would have to call on a power outside ourselves to either bless or curse the one mistreating us. And for the Christian, that power is God.
  - b. Therefore, what Paul seems to be inferring is that though we can ask God to bless our persecutor – and that is the right thing to do, we should never ask God to do him harm. That part we are to leave in God’s hands, as Paul says in Romans 12:19 . . . “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.”
  - c. One example of asking God to bless a persecutor is Jesus, who according to Luke 23:33-34, asked God to forgive those who were crucifying Him, because they did not know what they were doing.
  - d. Another example is Steven, who, when he was being stoned to death, cried out with a loud voice, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!” (Acts 7:58-60)
5. Before leaving vs 14, I want to remind you of Paul’s words in Ephesians 4:31-32 . . . “Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. [32] Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”
- B. Romans 12:15 . . . Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.
1. Paul said something similar in 1 Corinthians 12:26 . . . “If one member (of the body) suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”
    - a. I referenced 1 Corinthians 12:26 because it helps us understand the bigger picture of what Paul is saying in Romans 12:15.
    - b. Our rejoicing is not to be confined to those receiving gifts, or taking wonderful trips, or celebrating birthdays and wedding anniversaries. After all, it is easy to rejoice with others in those kinds of settings.
    - c. We are to go beyond those occasions of rejoicing and rejoice with those who are honored, praised, promoted, or in some other way exalted – while we aren’t. And as you may well know, rejoicing in these kinds of situations isn’t so easy. It requires genuine

humility, contentment with what God has given or allowed in your life, and true, heartfelt love which seeks the good of others even when you are left out of the good being given.

- d. Therefore, to rejoice with those who rejoice, we must kill envy, and every sinful form of jealousy, and covetousness. Why? Because these are the enemies of humility, love, and contentment, and they stand in the way of rejoicing with those who are rejoicing over being honored, praised, promoted, or in some other way exalted while you are given no such gifts.
2. However, rejoicing with those who rejoice is only half of the exhortation. The other half is to weep with those who weep.
    - a. Weeping with those who weep is basically sympathy in its more intimate form. To sympathize is to identify with or share in the sorrow, grief, or broken-heartedness of another person or group of people. In today's counseling language, this is called empathy.
    - b. Now you ladies may be thinking that the men need this exhortation more than you, and generally speaking, you are right. It seems that ladies more naturally empathize with the hurting, while men have to tenderize their hearts and practice thinking in ways that enables them to come along side someone who is hurting in order to empathize with them.
    - c. But we know it is possible for men to be sympathetic because Jesus was. For example –
      - (1) Jesus expressed empathy toward the man at the Pool of Bethesda who had been lame for 38 years (John 5:2-8),
      - (2) He felt compassion for the widow whose son had just died, so He raised the boy to life and gave him back to his mother, (Luke 7:11-17),
      - (3) And Jesus wept with Mary and her friends on their way to Lazarus' grave (John 11:33-35).
    - d. In other words, empathy is possible for all of us if we will take the time to nurture the mindset, attitudes, and concern necessary to be empathic.
- C. Romans 12:16a . . . Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.
    1. Be of the same mind toward one another;
      - a. To be of the same mind is to be in harmony with one another as you work together toward a common goal. For harmony to not just exist but thrive in any group, there must be true unity, a

unity that is built on peace and friendship – or brotherly love – between the members. For peace and love to thrive, there can be no conceit, no competition for position or power or honor, no discrimination, and no partiality.

- b. Paul's words to the church in Philippi sum up his exhortation herein Romans 12:16: "Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, [2] make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose" (Philippians 2:1-2).
  - c. And Peter sums up the character qualities required to be of the same mind with one another: "To sum up, all of you be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit" (1 Peter 3:8).
2. do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.
    - a. To be haughty in mind is to go beyond pride, and even conceit. To be haughty is to be arrogant and condescending.
      - (1) In other words, haughtiness goes beyond thinking more highly of yourself than you ought, to thinking of certain people or groups as so inferior as to deserve being treated with contempt and scorn.
      - (2) An example of this is the mindset or attitude some Christians have toward homosexuals.
    - b. After warning against being haughty in mind, Paul exhorts us to associate with the lowly. In other words, we are to befriend those who are on the lower rungs of the social ladder, or who are generally viewed as having little or no importance, and include them as equal members of the group.

D. Romans 12:16b . . . Do not be wise in your own estimation.

1. According to the context, for a Christian to be wise in his own estimation is to think of himself as better or more favored by God than the worst sinners, or unbelievers in general, or Christians who are part of other denominations or groups he disapproves of.
2. Proverbs 3:7 captures the fuller truth inferred here in Romans 12:16: "Do not be wise in your own eyes; [rather] fear the LORD and turn away from evil."
3. In other words, don't be so vain as to think God looks on you with special favor because you are a Christian, or because you belong to a certain church or denomination. Instead, fear God and fear His

impartial judgment, and then calm your fear by turning away from evil and pursuing holiness like unto God's holiness.

- E. Romans 12:17a . . . Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.
  - 1. The qualifying word NEVER is to be taken as seriously as the rest of the exhortation. Why? Because you can never return evil for evil without becoming ungodly and unloving yourself.
  - 2. In other words, when you return evil for evil, both the one who did evil to you, and you, have sinned, because you both have engaged in evil doing.
  - 3. Once again, Proverbs helps us see the fuller intent of Paul's exhortation: "Do not say, "I will repay evil"; (rather) wait for the LORD, and He will save you" (Proverbs 20:22).
    - a. Usually, our reason for returning evil for evil is to convince the other person to stop mistreating us, and in so doing, save ourselves from being mistreated.
    - b. However, Proverbs exhorts us to wait for the Lord to save us from our suffering, for it is only in this way that we can be saved from the evil doer without become evil ourselves.
  
- F. Romans 12:17b . . . Respect what is right in the sight of all men.
  - 1. This is not a call to compromise God's word, or abandon any of our godly values and holy behavior.
  - 2. Rather, while remaining within the boundaries of God's word and godly living, we are to show consideration and respect for such things as a community's dress codes, dietary codes, manners, codes dealing with public displays of affection between males and females, and respect for elders or certain other members of the community.

#### IV. Conclusion

- A. Though Paul continues on, we will end here for today with the intent of looking at the rest of Romans 12 the next time we meet.