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# Romans

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

Paul goes to the words of Jesus today. In Luke 6:27, 28 we read this -

"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you."

This may be one of the most difficult of all of Paul's admonitions, but it is what we are asked to do. This is particularly so when we see that Jesus first spoke the words to us. To curse someone is, in essence, requesting their condemnation. But which one of us wasn't first facing that fate (see John 3:18)? And yet we are pleased that God has shown mercy on us. Shouldn't we likewise share the same feelings toward the lost?

These words, however, are often used as a pretext by those who would rip it out of its context to imply that we cannot call sin as sin. The implication then is that we are to bless any action by anyone without considering either the perverse nature of the individual or their action. Further, it is used as a tool against protecting oneself or taking any necessary action to guard against whatever harm may befall the believer. This is not the intent of these words. It is a clear and concise statement; we are to bless those who persecute us, not to curse them. This in no way implies that the Christian cannot at the same time use whatever means is available to secure themselves from others or to call out sin in the sinner.

Following the book of Acts, there are times where the apostles will do just these things. Throughout the epistles, we are given instructions into what is and isn't acceptable behavior and even demonstrations of how to confront offenders. There is a balance which needs to be maintained and one cannot pursue this balance without being prepared through knowing the word and adhering to its precepts.

Life application: Though it is a difficult challenge, it is one prescribed to the believer - to bless and not to curse those who persecute us. God is the Avenger of His people and we need to make room for His wrath as we pray for those who come against us.

**Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.** Romans 12:15

This admonition is straight-forward and something anyone can and should both grasp and participate in. Paul gives a life example of this same thought to the Corinthians in his first letter to them -

"And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it." 1 Corinthians 12:26

Rejoicing with those who rejoice develops a bond of love simply because it shows that what makes them happy also makes us happy. We unite in a new way when we share such uplifting times. In the same way, when someone has tragedy, loss, or difficulty then showing empathy to their situation can only increase the bond between the two, though it may be delayed more than during times of joy. Grief often takes more time to process than joy because grief can completely overwhelm every other emotion and thought. This is why it's so important to demonstrate empathy at these times.

Jesus gave us examples of both for us to emulate. When He gave the disciples authority and power as laborers in His ministry, we are told they came back "with

joy" at the marvels which had occurred. Then this is noted, "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in the Spirit..." (Luke 10:21). In the same way, those who were at the tomb of Lazarus were in mourning. Jesus likewise mourned with them, showing empathy for their plight. In the account it says, "Jesus wept." (John 11:35).

If the Lord can so fellowship with His people, then we can and should as well. Let us endeavor to participate in the joys and sorrows of those we are united to in the body.

Life application: Demonstrating empathy at sadness and showing joy at others' victories and times of happiness can only build them up. Remember that at some point each one of us will have the same times of joy or sadness and we will hope for fellowship at those times too.

**Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.**

Romans 12:16

The first part of this verse has several possible interpretations. One is that we should empathize with one another. A second possibility is that believers should be agreed in their opinions about matters. A third possibility is that believers should seek the same thing for others that they seek for themselves. Based on the translator, one will inevitably get a different meaning. To "be of the same mind" is to show unity of mind regardless of the overall intent behind the words.

After that, Paul says that we shouldn't set our minds on high things. The purpose of his words here are that we shouldn't strive for what is considered of worldly importance. Seeking after wealth will only bring troubles (see 1 Timothy 6:10, for example). Looking to be around the famous is a dead end street as well. The majority of famous people live by the world's standards and therefore our attention can only get misdirected from what is right and honorable. Further, when attempting to get into the presence of royalty or fame, we may find ourselves shamed in the process. This is well reflected in Proverbs 25:6, 7 -

"Do not exalt yourself in the presence of the king,  
And do not stand in the place of the great;  
For it is better that he say to you,  
'Come up here,'  
Than that you should be put lower in the presence of the prince,  
Whom your eyes have seen."

Instead of looking for fame and to the famous, Paul instructs us to "associate with the humble." With humble people, there is no pretence, favoritism, or arrogance. Instead, there is the calm life of one who understands his position and acts without contempt for others. In the end, associating with such a person is far more pleasing and uplifting than the constant maneuvering of seeking high society.

The verse finishes with, "Do not be wise in your own opinion." This fits nicely with the thought of Romans 12:3 which says one should not attempt "to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..." Whether it is regarding matters of faith, industry, innovation, strength, or some other ability, it was given by grace and it can end in a fleeting moment. Strong men will grow weak, invention will become passé, agility will cease with age, etc. As surely as strawberries are sweet, once we start acting wise in our own opinion we will be humbled. Rather than following this avenue, Solomon gives this advice in Proverbs 3:5-8 -

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart,  
And lean not on your own understanding;  
In all your ways acknowledge Him,  
And He shall direct your paths.

Do not be wise in your own eyes;  
Fear the Lord and depart from evil.  
It will be health to your flesh,  
And strength to your bones."

In the end, acknowledging the Lord, acting humbly, associating with the humble, and having unity of mind with other believers is a far better approach. It will lead to a much fuller life and one which is destined for heavenly rewards as well.

Life application: Humility is something which is in short supply in our society, but it is a treasure which will pay heavenly rewards. When arrogance steps in, there is no room for exalting the Lord, so be humble and set your eyes on that which will be pleasing to your heavenly Father.

**Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.**

Romans 12:17

What a difficult thing this verse asks! "Repay no one evil for evil" equates to "turn the other cheek." For a good analysis of this directly from Jesus, refer to Matthew 5:38-48. As this is a part of Paul's prescriptive writings, these words are intended to be followed despite being contrary to our normal human nature. By staying in the word, fellowshiping with others, talking to the Lord continuously, and praying without ceasing, this high and lofty goal can be attained. But with the distractions in the world, constantly tugging at us from every direction, it truly is a difficult task. In the end, repaying evil for evil is simply producing a second evil. If the first evil was wrong, a second one doesn't make the first right; it only adds to the evil.

Next we are told to, "Have regard for good things in the sight of all men." This thought comes from Proverbs 3:3, 4 -

"Let not mercy and truth forsake you;  
Bind them around your neck,  
Write them on the tablet of your heart,  
And so find favor and high esteem  
In the sight of God and man."

By living with mercy and truth as lamps on our path, we will be able to use them when strangers step in our way. When they look to harm, we should return with peace. When they bring a curse, we should utter forth a blessing. And should they refuse our graces, we should be ready and willing to offer a second helping. By writing them now on the tablet of our hearts, we will be prepared in advance when the calling comes.

It should be noted that to "have regard" for good things is not speaking of what man determines is good. The thing man determines is good is a bad standard to rely on. Rather, we are to have regard for good things which are noted in Scripture and to have that regard "in the sight of all men." They are to see our conduct toward that which is truly good. And the intention of the term "in the sight of all men" is that we are to apply this precept at all times and in all places. In other words, we're not to act rightly just when men are watching, but as if men are always watching.

Life application: Repaying evil for evil can only lead to an unhappy result. Even if we think we obtained the upper hand, in end we will always reap a negative reward. And that negative reward may only come when we stand before the Lord. It is incumbent on us to live without acting in revenge. As hard as this is to accomplish, it is the right avenue for peace in this life and favor from the Lord at our judgment.

**If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.**

Romans 12:18

Unlike other admonitions, Paul begins today with "If it is possible..." This should tell us that this will be a most difficult task to fulfill. A few reasons should be obvious -

- 1) Not all people want to live peaceably with Christians. They have harmful intent towards them, thus making peace impossible.

- 2) Doctrine must take precedence over tolerance. The concept of "tolerance" in today's society is so awry that everyone is offended by everything. The only thing that isn't tolerated is being intolerant. It is a confused system which asks all individuals to compromise morality. However, Jesus tells us differently. We are never to compromise our morals and we are to stand firm on the biblical truth that there is one and only one way to be reconciled to God. John 14:6 allows no other option. We must hold to the gospel of Christ even if it offends.
  
- 3) In a fallen world, peace is not attainable in its truest sense. Trials, stresses, weariness, etc. all effect humanity. These external pressures naturally lead to conflict.

The Christian is asked to live within these difficult circumstances with the intent and goal of living peaceably. And so, in order to establish sound guidelines, Paul adds in the thought, "as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." To the greatest measure the onus is on the believer to effect peace. Sometimes it simply isn't possible. Even though many within the faith see it otherwise, Paul would never ask a believer to compromise their morals or proper doctrine for the sake of either peace or tolerance.

When either is compromised, the believer becomes an ineffective member of the body and does more harm to the cause than good. However, this is what the liberal arm of Christianity has come to. Don't be swept up in this, but rather stand first on doctrine and then exercise the peace which Christ has granted you in order to, if at all possible, live peaceably with all men.

Life application: Some things aren't possible for us in this life, but that doesn't give us a blank pass to ignore our responsibility to attempt to meet the lofty goals set down for us. It is incumbent on every believer to endeavor to live peaceably with those around us.

*Precious Lord Jesus, thank You for the peace I find in You. In a world of toil and strife, I can rest in knowing that I have a future and a hope which will far exceed*

*the trials I face today. Because of this assurance, it gives me even the ability to stand calmly as the storms swirl around me now. I know that whatever happens, it is only temporary, but Your sure promises are eternal. Great stuff Lord! Amen.*

**Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Romans 12:19**

Paul has just written these words to us - "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men."

In order to show that this is the proper avenue and that repaying evil for evil is completely unnecessary, he will turn to Scripture ("for it is written") to show us that all will work out as it should. He begins though with "Beloved." By beginning with this, he is making an appeal to the heart because it is the heart which will inevitably lead us to do wrong if left unattended.

And so in a heartfelt appeal we are now given our instructions, "Do not avenge yourselves." This is linked right back to "Repay no one evil for evil." As noted, committing an evil doesn't cover an evil, it simply produces more evil. To grasp this, think of the modern call for abortion. The original demands came under the guise of fairness; cases of rape and incest certainly necessitated making the procedure legal, right? Once the foot was in the door, it opened the procedure for any and every reason. But even if it were only for cases of rape and incest, it doesn't make it morally right. To murder an innocent human because a previous sin was committed doesn't negate the original sin, it merely adds another to it. This is the logic of Paul here.

And so, rather than us carrying out vengeance, we are told instead to "give place to wrath." This expression is speaking of divine wrath. Though it may seem slow in coming, it will in fact come. The wicked shall not always prosper and they will have a day of reckoning. And so we are asked to not get in the way of the divine



wrath; something that we will do when we take matters of vengeance into our own hands.

And this is where Paul now cites Scripture. He refers back to Deuteronomy 32:35 for a verse from the Song of Moses to justify his stand - "'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord." As surely as evil is committed, the Lord has vowed to repay. There is no "getting off scot-free" and all sin will be judged. Because the Lord has spoken, He will follow through. This then is an absolute guarantee. So why would we seek to repay evil with evil when His coming judgment of the first evil will suffice?

Having said this, and understanding it to be true, there is still the caution against going too far in the opposite direction. This verse is held up on banners at rallies opposing the execution of criminals. It is often misquoted, being taken completely out of its intended context, in an attempt to stand against those who commit violations of set laws. This is an abuse of what is being stated here and is similar to the incessant and continuously incorrect use of "Judge not lest you be judged."

Jesus never surrendered His rights under the law, but appealed to the law during His trial. Throughout the rest of the New Testament, the apostles appeal to the law for their defense and as a just means of settling wrong-doings within society (see 1 Peter 2:13-17 for example). This verse today is speaking of personal vengeance, not the regular and proper execution of sentences within the framework of the governing laws of the land.

Life application: Paul has shown, directly from Scripture, that the Lord will avenge evil. It is not within our right to do so, except within certain contexts, such as the law of the land. Leave personal vengeance to the Lord. He will repay.

## Therefore

**"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
If he is thirsty, give him a drink;  
For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."**

Romans 12:20

Paul begins this verse with "therefore" which is translated from the word *alla* - "on the contrary." He has been speaking of not repaying evil with evil and not taking vengeance on others. Instead of such actions, he says that, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him a drink." This is almost a direct quote from Proverbs 25:21. Proverbs is one of the five "wisdom" books in the Old Testament and is one which peers deep into the state of humanity and then pulls out general applications which can (and should be) used regularly. Many of Jesus' sayings bear directly on the wisdom found there. In intent, His statement in Matthew 5:43-45 follows the same line of thinking now presented by Paul in this chapter of Romans -

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust."

What Paul has written here in verse 20, is an obvious, clear, and direct statement. It has been the customary practice of many soldiers throughout wars of the past. When the battle is engaged, you fight without holding back, but when the enemy surrenders, you patch up their wounds, give them food, and treat them decently.

This type of truly noble behavior has the positive effect of helping to bring nations together after wars end. The nations which fail to do this continue to have long-standing animosities even generations later, but those who practice this attitude can resolve their conflicts and put the past behind them very quickly. This same attitude is asked of believers as well.

By acting in this manner, we are told that "in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." Coals of fire are extremely hot and very targeted in where their heat is directed. Unlike an open flame which is all-consuming, a coal will burn what it touches directly. When coals are heaped on something, that thing will be consumed by the heat, but the surrounding area will remain unaffected. A coal, for example, is an extremely effective means of torture.

The idea here isn't that of actual torture, but that the same intended effect will result. Just as heaping coals on someone's head is intended to obtain a complete change in the person, the kindness expected of the believer towards their enemy will achieve the same. The very notion of kindness to one's bitter enemy is so contrary to what they would expect, that when it is received, their complete change in attitude is almost certain.

Life application: As difficult as it is to bless one's foes, lovingly care for one's enemies, and willfully withhold the returning of evil for evil, it is what we are called to do. In the end, by taking this course the change in the one who we direct these favors to will hopefully result in their conversion. Such a change has eternal value, so let us pursue these difficult avenues zealously.