



Romans 12:9-18
“Bless and Do Not Curse”

9 Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.

10 Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;

11 not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord;

12 rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer;

13 distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.

14 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 set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

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

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

The world talks a lot about love, in fact you might say that the world is in love with love. Love stories, love songs, brotherly love, all kinds of love. But the love that the world shows generally falls into one of three categories:

First there is Romantic Love, or what the Greeks summarized with the word *Eros*, that is the one we encounter the most, this is love that is meant when someone says “They fell in love.” These days it is often confused with lust.

Then there is Brotherly Love, or what the Greeks understood by the word *Philadelphia*, this is the love of siblings, of parents and children, of excellent friends, Sam and Frodo, Starsky and Hutch, etc.

Then finally there is sentimental love, the love we have for a certain place, a favorite chair, a book, a movie, a desert, a kitten, a puppy, etc. This is the kind of love the Greeks called *Storge*.

But what I want you to understand is that all of these kinds of love are responsive. They depend upon something in the object of love, something that makes it loveable. So we love our children because of a family bond, we love a book because the story makes us so happy, we love our wives because they are so beautiful and intelligent. The world understands that love and experiences it. But it can be a very fickle kind of love. For instance, you may no longer love many of the books and movies you loved as a child, it is highly unlikely that your best friends whom you loved as a child are still your best friends today, and sadly even family members often end up disliking one another.

The love that Christians are to show to one another, and the love spoken of here, in verse 9 is in the Greek *Agape* it is a love that the world knows nothing of. Because to have the gift of this love, requires a changed heart, it requires that you be born again. This love is not a responsive love, it is patterned on the love of God, which is a self-giving love, a love that has no regard for the worthiness of its objects. God for instance, does not love his people because of something he saw in them, **Deut. 7:7 "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers, the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you from the house of bondage, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt."**

Now one of the most obvious ways in which this love is seen is in the way that Christians will selflessly love one another as Jesus commanded: John 13:34 **"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.**

35 "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

Christians don't do that because they judge each other to be **worthy** of that love, but because it is Christ's commandment, and we have been given a new heart which is finally capable of loving in the way that he commands.

So amongst the brethren, we will HONOR one another, and give preference to one another, we won't seek to be first through the door, first in line, first to receive honors, first to get snacks, instead we will say to others, "you go first." This is the spirit that doesn't say **"The Ship is Sinking! I must get into the lifeboat first!"** It says **"The ship is sinking! I must do everything I can to make sure that others get into the lifeboat!"**

It is a love that is constantly and diligently looking for ways to serve others, not to be served. It is a love that isn't lukewarm it is *fervent* and the Greek word there is *Zeo* meaning boiling or hot. It is a love that says how can I take what I have been given by God, and pass it on to my brothers and sisters? It is a love that opens up the home and says *come eat with me my brother, my sister* and that not because you are friends with them, but because you are one in Christ with them.

It is love that doesn't fade away or wear out. It doesn't say "In my earlier years as a Christian I was really diligent when it came, to praying for others, and showing hospitality, and grieving with those who grieved, celebrating with those who celebrated. But after a while I got tired of it." It is steadfast, and it doesn't ask "what am I getting out of all of this work I'm doing?"

Last night during family worship, we read the example of David's saving of the city of Keilah from the hand of the Philistines, for which he received no earthly reward, in fact the people of Keilah weren't even profoundly grateful. But it was good example for teaching the children, that Christians should desire to do the right thing towards one another, without thought of reward. We do it because its right, and God commands it, and that only should give us joy. If we think that is hard, then we need to remember that if Christ had been looking for earthly rewards or gratitude, then going to the cross would not have been part of His agenda. But Christ delighted to perform all righteousness and to do the will of the Father, and so he went to the cross, even though it was the hardest thing that will ever be done. He did that for you, because He loved you, not because he expected anything from you.

Part of that Christian love that we show to the brethren will involve praying for one another, and not just for the ones we know, but for our brothers and sisters who are persecuted for their faith:

This Sunday, the second Sunday in November, is observed by churches around the world as the **International Day of Prayer for the Persecuted**. On this day we join with our Christian brothers and sisters around the world in praying for the persecuted church. It is vitally important that we do this, Hebrews 13:3 tells us *“Remember the prisoners as if chained with them -- those who are mistreated - - since you yourselves are in the body also.”*

Remembering the persecuted and praying for them is a biblical imperative, it's something the Apostolic church was particularly zealous for, but the really interesting thing to me, is that here and elsewhere we aren't told to pray for the saints, or the persecuted, but for the *persecutors*.

Paul says here “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” Now you and I cannot really spiritually bless someone, only God can, so what Paul is saying is that we Christians need to pray for the persecutors of the church. If you are wondering about that, rest assured that Jesus makes it even clearer, in fact Jesus makes it even clearer, that this is our duty. Please turn with me if you would to Matthew 5:43-46

Matthew 5:43 " 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, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

45 "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.

46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

47 "If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?

Notice there that Jesus acknowledges that only we can do this, because only Christians can exercise that selfless, Agape love. Those outside the body Christ can love friends and brothers, but only Christians can love their enemies. And what a difference this can make! How? Well let me give you some examples.

Mosab Hassan Yousef, is the eldest son of Sheikh Yousef, a founder of the Islamic terror group Hamas. He was walking away from an Israeli jail prison where he had served time for trying to buy automatic weapons with which to kill Israelis when someone who didn't know him invited him to a Christian bible study. He attended and he gave him a copy of the New Testament he writes in his biography: **"I began at the beginning [in the Gospel According to Matthew], and when I got to the Sermon on the Mount, I thought, Wow, this guy Jesus is really impressive! Everything He says is beautiful! I couldn't put the book down. Every verse seemed to touch a deep wound in my life. It was a very simple message, but somehow it had the power to heal my soul and give me hope. Then I read this: `You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.' (Matthew 5:43-45)....I was thunderstruck by these words. Never before had I heard anything like this, but I knew that this was the message I had been searching for all my life."** He went on to talk about the immense difference between that message and what Islam taught which was **“fight against, kill and subdue your enemies.”**

So that said, let me get to the applications:

1) *You may not actively hating and desiring to repay the evil that is done to you or your brethren with evil, but are you responding to it with good? Are you repaying evil with good? That is hard, but it is necessary. John Calvin, who himself had more enemies during his lifetime than most, wrote about this verse: “Arduous is this, I admit, and wholly opposed to the nature of man; but there is nothing too arduous to be overcome by the power of God, which shall never be wanting to us, provided we neglect not to seek for it. And though you can hardly find one who has made such advances in the law of the Lord that he fulfills this precept, yet no one can claim to be the child of God or glory in the name of a Christian, who has not in part attained this mind, and who does not daily resist the opposite disposition.*

I have said that this is more difficult than to let go revenge when any one is injured: for though some restrain their hands and are not led away by the passion of doing harm, they yet wish that some calamity or loss would in some way happen to their enemies; and even when they are so pacified that they wish no evil, there is yet hardly one in a hundred who wishes well to him from whom he has received an injury; nay, most men daringly burst forth into imprecations. But God by his word not only restrains our hands from doing evil, but also subdues the bitter feelings within; and not only so, but he would have us to be solicitous for the wellbeing of those who unjustly trouble us and seek our destruction.”

If you have trouble with that, remember that Paul was a *persecutor* of the church, he had stood approving while Stephen, the first martyr of the New Testament church, was stoned to death, for that matter so was I, so were some of you.

2) But still it’s hard to do that. Our nature rebels against loving our enemies, we make excuses for not doing it: How can we learn to love them, well here I have had a lot of help from something Eric Liddell. You’ll remember Liddell as the Scottish Runner and Missionary from Chariots of Fire who wouldn’t run on the Lord’s Day. Liddell went to China as a missionary and was captured by the Japanese and placed in an internment camp. The prisoners were horribly mistreated and neglected, and indeed Liddell himself died in the camp. But during his time there he was invaluable help to his fellow prisoners:

“During one small group discussion, he read aloud the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:43: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you.” Then he asked if this was merely an ideal or something practical they could actually do. Could they love the guards in camp and the Japanese people as a whole? Most thought it was only a lofty goal. “I thought so too,” Eric said, “but then I noticed the next words, ‘Pray for them that despitefully use you.’ When we start to pray,” he said, “we become God-centered. When we hate then we’re self-centered. We spend a lot of time praying for people we like but we don’t spend much time praying for people we don’t like and people we hate. But Jesus told us to pray for our enemies. I’ve begun to pray for the guards and it’s changed my whole attitude toward them. Maybe you’d like to try it too.” – Eric Liddell

3) But perhaps even now, Christian brother, Christian sister, you are saying yes, but you don’t understand what my enemies have done! There are some things that cannot be forgiven, or even if I could forgive them, I could never bring myself to pray for their blessing! Well, if any Christian on earth had a right to say that, I believe it would be Gladys Staines. Gladys and her husband Graham who are Australian were missionaries to India. On the night of January 22, 1999 her husband Graham had attended an annual gathering of Christians with their sons Phillip and Timothy aged 10 and 6 who

were on holiday from school. That night as Graham and the boys slept in their vehicle they were attacked by a mob of Hindu fundamentalists, who doused the vehicle in gas and set it alight and then prevented them from escaping.

Your husband and your children killed by demon worshippers for doing good? Surely she could never forgive them? Well let me read her words from an interview that was done over more Christians were killed in Kandhamal in India:

Staines remembers her husband and sons calmly, with tenderness. "During these ten years, there have been times of sadness, I feel sad that I do not have my husband to support me, to guard me, but these are just momentary emotions of sadness which also fill me with great hope, the hope of heaven and of being reunited with my husband and children in paradise and seeing the Father face to face. This guarantee fills me with consolation.

"I cannot express that how I felt when I got the news of my husband and sons being burnt alive. I told my daughter Esther that though we had been left alone, we would forgive and my daughter replied, 'Yes, we will'."

"I forgive the other, because I have first received forgiveness from Jesus Christ - I have encountered the presence of Jesus in my life and this is the spirit I share. When we forgive, there is no bitterness and we live our lives and continue the task entrusted to us - with His grace and peace. These Kandhamal widows have also been touched by Jesus. All Christians who have known the intervention of Jesus in their lives will have this gift to forgive and to be the witnesses of His peace and presence. Support them with your solidarity and prayer."

Christians, you and I must learn to bless and not curse our enemies, we must learn it from the example of Christ. If you would follow Him, that you cannot allow yourself to hold on to hate:

Luke 23:33 And when they had come to the place called Calvary, there they crucified Him, and the criminals, one on the right hand and the other on the left.

34 Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." And they divided His garments and cast lots.