

Subject: *The Church that Pleases God – Part 2*

Scripture: *Romans 12:14-21*

In these final chapters of Romans Paul describes how believers should live and he bases it on the rich teaching of Romans 1-11. In the first eleven chapters Paul explained what God has done for believers, and in the final six chapters he focuses on what God expects from believers. He gives us clear guidelines for a church that pleases God. The purpose of the church and every believer is to please God. A man that never married was bragging to a friend, “I could have married any woman I pleased.” His friend said, “Why didn’t you get married then?” He replied, “I guess I never pleased any of them.” Our one goal in life is to please God. If we please Him it doesn’t matter whom we displease, but if we displease Him it doesn’t matter whom we please.

In Romans 12 Paul describes the marks of a church that pleases God:

- A. A church with members who are truly saved by God’s grace (12:1)
- B. A church with members who sacrifice their lives for God (12:2)
- C. A church with members who are being transformed by God’s Word (12:2)
- D. A church with members who faithfully use their spiritual gifts (12:3-8)
- E. A church with members who love God and obey His commands (12:9-21)

The church that pleases God has members who are serious about God and serious about living for God. Romans 12 is all about relationships: first, our relationship to God; then to other believers; and also to unbelievers. In verses 9-13, Paul tells us about our duties to other believers, and in verses 14-21, he tells about our responsibility to all people including our enemies. In verses 14-21, Paul commands believers to do several things that are uniquely Christian, things that the world would never do and would think are foolish.

1. BLESS THOSE WHO PERSECUTE YOU

This is the kind of love Jesus demonstrated, and it’s the hardest kind of all. This also includes the command, “Do not curse them.” Jesus said for us to expect persecution. The question is not if we will have enemies, but how should we respond to our enemies.

2 Timothy 3:12 *Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*

Luke 6:27-28²⁷ *But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you,*²⁸ *Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you.*

Luke 6:32-33³² *For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them.*³³ *And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same.*

We find two powerful examples in Scripture:

- A. Jesus – **Luke 23:34** *Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.*

B. Stephen – Acts 7:60 *And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*

2. SHARE IN THE JOY AND SORROW OF OTHERS

In the church we multiply our joys and divide our sorrows. But there is a sense in which we can never fully enter into the depth of another person's joy or sorrow.

Proverbs 14:10 *The heart knows its own bitterness, and a stranger does not share its joy.*

Sometimes the flesh tempts us to resent others instead of rejoicing with them.

1 Corinthians 12:26 *And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

Christians should have sympathy (to feel with) and compassion (to suffer with). God is compassionate and Jesus wept (Jn. 11:35).

Galatians 6:2 *Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*

In order to obey this command we need to know what our brothers and sisters are going through. We have to spend time and get involved with others, and that's why we need to be involved in small groups like a SS class or men's and women's Bible study.

3. BE IMPARTIAL

James 2:1-4¹ *My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.* ² *For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment;* ³ *And ye have respect to him that weareth the fine clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool:* ⁴ *Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?*

4. AVOID HAUGHTINESS AND ASSOCIATE WITH THE HUMBLE

We are told "mind not high things." That doesn't refer to spiritual things, but self-seeking pride. There is no favoritism or elitism in the church...no big "I's" and little "you's." Whenever a church only accepts a certain class of people, it is not really a church, but a social club. Several years ago as part of the church growth movement churches were told they should target their audience and go after their own kind of people. But our Bible says that all people are important and all people need God's mercy and blessing.

Luke 14:12-14¹² *Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbors; lest they also bid thee again, and a repayment be made thee.* ¹³ *But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind:* ¹⁴ *And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot repay thee: for thou shalt be repaid at the resurrection of the just.*

It was said of Jesus that the common people heard him gladly (Mk 12:37). That's partly because He spent time with them, got to know them, and was concerned about them. It seems like Jesus always went out of His way to help people who were down and out. I'm thankful that our church ministers through the food pantry and the Haven of Rest.

5. AVOID SELF-CONCEIT

This reinforces what Paul wrote in Romans 12:3. There is always the danger of wrong thinking, of over-estimating ourselves and thinking we are better than others. This was the ungodly attitude of the scribes and Pharisees and Jesus condemned them for it.

6. NEVER RETURN EVIL FOR EVIL

This repeats what Paul wrote in 12:14. We are not to curse those who hurt us and never retaliate out of revenge. But someone may ask, What about the OT law, “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth,” and so forth? That pertains to government and civil justice, not to personal revenge and retaliation.

This is not always easy. Someone hit an Irishman and so he turned the other cheek, just like the Bible says. But when he turned the other cheek, the man hit him again. So the Irishman got up and beat the daylights out of him. Later someone asked him, “What’s the matter, at first you turned the other cheek, but why did you beat the tar out of him?” He said, “Jesus told me to turn the other cheek, but He didn’t tell me what to do after that.”

***1 Thessalonians 5:15** See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.*

***1 Peter 2:21-23**²¹ For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: ²² Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: ²³ Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judges righteously.*

To love our enemies is not natural; it is supernatural. People who are not Christians love those who love them in return, and that’s as far as it goes. To return good for good is human. To return evil for good is Satanic. But to return good for evil is divine.

7. ALWAYS RESPECT WHAT IS RIGHT

This whole passage reminds us that believers are known by how they act and react. Christians should always stand up and speak up for what is right. The word “good” refers to what is proper and honest, what is obviously right and visibly right (“in the sight of all men”). The world is watching us. We are the only Bible some people will ever read.

***1 Peter 2:15** For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men.*

8. LIVE IN PEACE WITH OTHERS

We are to live in peace with others if possible. Sometimes it is not possible, but the blame should not fall on us. The psalmist describes the struggle we may have in this world. There are some people you just can’t get along with, because they won’t let you.

***Psalms 120:6-7**⁶ My soul hath long dwelt with him that hateth peace. ⁷ I am for peace: but when I speak, they are for war.*

***Matthew 5:9** Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*

James 3:17 *But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.*

9. NEVER AVENGE YOURSELF

Christian people believe that God is in control. He is on His throne, and He will settle all accounts and have the last word. Therefore we don't take matters in our own hands...we don't need to. The wrath in verse 19 is God's wrath. Paul quotes from Deuteronomy 32:35. If we take vengeance in our hands we are trying to take God's place and take what is His right.

10. OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD

The last part of verse 20 refers to an ancient custom when someone would carry a pan of burning coals on his head to represent the pain of his guilt and shame. When believers return good for evil it will bring a sense of guilt and shame on their enemies.

Do you remember what happened to Joseph and how he treated his brothers in return? He provided for them, protected them, and forgave them. He overcame evil with good. How was he able to do it? Joseph knew that God was in control as a sovereign God.

Genesis 50:19-21 ¹⁹ *And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive. ²¹ Now therefore fear ye not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.*

After someone robbed Matthew Henry, the Bible commentator, he said he was thankful for three things: 1) that he hadn't lost much; 2) that he hadn't lost his life; and 3) that he was person who got robbed and not the person who did the robbing.

Each of these commands is directly opposite of what you see in the world. We are not to be conformed to this world, but we are to be transformed by the renewing of our minds through the Word of God. The world should have to say, "Those Christians are different from us. Why don't they act and react like us?" The answer is simple: we are new creatures in Christ, we have a different Master, and are living for a different world.