

THE EPISTLES TO THE ROMANS

ROMANS 12:1-15:13, THE PRACTICE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

INTRODUCTION

A. Outline of Romans

1. Introduction (1:1-17)
2. The need for God's righteousness (1:18-3:20)
3. Justification: the position of righteousness from God (3:21-5:21)
4. Sanctification: from position to practice (6:1-8:39)
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6. The practice of righteousness -living what one believes in relationships (12:1-15:13)
 - a. Devotion to God and humility toward others (12:1-8)
 - b. Exhibiting love to everyone in every situation (12:9-21)

B. Comments on Romans 12:9-21

1. John Witmer, *This section consists of a lengthy series of short exhortations or commands. The statements relate to a Christian's relationships to other people, both saved and unsaved.*
2. Grant Osborne, *This passage is characterized by a clipped style common to ethical material, with few conjunctions and several short exclamations on similar topics. There is a loose structure revolving around the twin issues of the internal (vv. 9–13) and external (vv. 14–21) need for love.*
3. Douglas Moo, *Paul is not always talking specifically about love, but he keeps coming back to love as the single most important criterion for approved Christian behavior...view vv. 9–21 as a further elaboration of that "good" which the person who is being transformed by the renewing of the mind approves of (v. 2).*

ROMANS 12:9-21, EXHIBITING LOVE TO EVERYONE IN EVERY SITUATION

A. The components of love (9-16)

1. Love is genuine (9a), **Let love be genuine.**
 - a. Introductory notes
 - 1) Thomas Constable, *This command acts as a heading for this whole list of exhortations.*
 - 2) Warren Wiersbe, *Love is the circulatory system of the spiritual body, which enables all the members to function in a healthy, harmonious way.*
 - b. *love*
 - 1) This Greek word (agape) has a *focus based on deep appreciation and high regard.*
 - 2) 2 Corinthians 6:6, *by purity, knowledge, patience, kindness, the Holy Spirit, genuine love;*
 - 3) 1 Peter 1:22, *Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart,*
 - c. *genuine*
 - 1) It means *real, sincere and lacks pretense or show, without hypocrisy.*
 - 2) 1 Timothy 1:5, *The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.*
 - d. Comments
 - 1) Douglas Moo, *In urging that our love be genuine, Paul is warning about making our love a mere pretense, an outward display or emotion that does not conform to the nature of the God who is love and who has loved us.*
 - 2) John Witmer, *Paul began these specific exhortations with the key ingredient for success: Love must be sincere.*
 - 3) C. E. B. Cranfield comments that a Christian's responsibility to genuinely love others is a human impossibility except by *the gracious work of the Holy Spirit.*
 - 4) John Murray, *If love is the sum of virtue, and hypocrisy the epitome of vice, what a contradiction to bring these together!*

2. Love is discerning (9b), ***Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.***

a. Select word studies

1) *abhor*

- a) It means *to hate, to despise, shudder with horror* and is only used here in the New Testament.
- b) Adam Robinson, *Abhorring evil means pushing it as far away as possible, having nothing to do with it.*

2) *evil*

- a) In the ethical sense, it means *wicked, degenerate.*
- b) 1 Thessalonians 5:22, *Abstain from every form of evil.*

3) *hold fast*

- a) It means *to cling to, attach oneself to.*
- b) Matthew 19:5, *and said, 'Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'?*

4) *good*

- a) In contrast to *evil*, it means *morally good.*
- b) Romans 16:19, *For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil.*

b. Comments

- 1) John Witmer, *Turning from evil is to accompany adhering to the good... 1 Peter 3:11, let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it.*
- 2) C. E. B. Cranfield, *Christians are to abhor, to hate utterly, that which is evil, and to cleave firmly to that which is good. The fact that this is general does not make it not worth saying.*
- 3) Douglas Moo, *Genuine love will abhor what is evil and cling to what is good.... Love is not genuine when it leads a person to do something evil or to avoid doing what is right—as defined by God in his Word.*
- 4) John Stott, *For love is not the blind sentiment it is traditionally said to be. On the contrary, it is discerning. It is so passionately devoted to the beloved object that it hates every evil which is incompatible with his or her highest welfare.*

3. Love is affectionate (10a), ***Love one another with brotherly affection.***

a. *Love*

- 1) This Greek word combines *phileo* and *stergo*, both are words for love. It is only used here in the New Testament.
- 2) It carries the meaning of *devotion, especially to those who are closely related.*

b. *brotherly affection*

- 1) It means *love of blood brother or sister.*
- 2) It is the word used in the name of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
- 3) 1 Thessalonians 4:9, *Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another,*
- 4) 2 Peter 1:7, *and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love.*

c. Emphasis of Romans 12:10a.

- 1) Louw-Nida's translation of Romans 10a, *love one another affectionately as fellow believers.*
- 2) John Witmer, *With brotherly love have family affection for one another,*
- 3) 1 Peter 3:8, *Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.*
- 4) Douglas Moo, *Paul here reflects the early Christian understanding of the church as an extended family, whose members, bound together in intimate fellowship, should exhibit toward one another a heartfelt and consistent concern.*
- 5) William Barclay, *We must love each other, because we are members of one family. We are not strangers to each other within the Christian Church; much less are we isolated units; we are brothers and sisters, because we have the one father, God.*

4. Love seeks to honor others (10b), ***Outdo one another in showing honor.***

a. Select word studies

1) *Outdo*

- a) The word is only used here in the New Testament and has the meaning, *to do with eagerness.*
- b) Here it means to *esteem more highly, to honor one another to an exceptional degree.*

2) *showing honor*

- a) It means *the showing of reverence, respect* as an action.
- b) Philippians 2:3, *Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves.*

b. Comments on Romans 12:10

- 1) Love and honor may be tied together in verse 10, with honoring a person as a way of expressing love.
- 2) C. E. B. Cranfield on why a Christian should love another Christian more than he loves himself, *It is because the other...is the representative of Christ to me, or rather the one in whom Christ is mysteriously present for me, that I must honour him, not just as myself, but above myself.*
- 3) Douglas Moo, *Paul is then calling on Christians to outdo each other in bestowing honor on one another; for example, to recognize and praise one another's accomplishments and to defer to one another.*
- 4) Grant Osborne, *It is not our own status in the community that matters, but we should go out of our way to esteem others and make them feel important...This is desperately needed in an age of personal achievement when most of us feel unappreciated. To go out of our way to lift others up is one of the most powerful ministries we can have.*
- 5) William Barclay, *More than half the trouble that arises in churches concerns rights and privileges and prestige. Someone has not been given his or her place; someone has been neglected or unthanked. The mark of the truly Christian man or woman has always been humility...There is enough natural instinct in most of us to want others to recognize our rights; but Christians have no rights—they have only duties.*

5. Love is enthusiastic (11), ***Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.***

a. Select word studies

1) *slothful*

- a) It means *idle, lazy when earnestness is needed.*
- b) Matthew 25:26, *But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed?'*
- c) Proverbs 20:4, *The sluggard does not plow in the autumn; he will seek at harvest and have nothing.*

2) *zeal*

- a) It means *eagerness, earnestness, diligence, zeal* in matters of religion.
- b) It conveys the thought of *watchful interest and earnestness.*
- c) 2 Corinthians 8:16, *But thanks be to God, who put into the heart of Titus the same earnest care I have for you.*

3) *fervent in spirit*

- a) It means *to be enthusiastic, be excited, boil over with a spiritual glow.*
- b) Acts 18:25, *He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John.*
- c) This phrase may be translated two ways.
 - 1] *in spirit*, referring to the source of fervency in one's human spirit as in Acts 17:16, *Now while Paul was waiting for them at Athens, his spirit was provoked within him as he saw that the city was full of idols.*
 - 2] *in the Spirit*, referring to the means of fervency through the Holy Spirit as in Mark 1:12, *The Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.*
 - 3] Note Cranfield's excellent inclusion of both *spirit* and *the Spirit* which follows.

- 4) *serve*
 - a) It means to *serve*, normally in a humble manner and in response to the demands or commands of others.
 - b) Acts 20:19, *serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews;*
 - c) C. E. B. Cranfield, *The real proof of the presence of this fire of the Spirit would be not effervescent religious excitement but renewed energy and determination in the humble and obedient service of the Lord Jesus.*

b. Emphasis of Romans 12:11

- 1) This verse appears to be emphasizing proper service to the Lord and others as zealous in one's works and enthusiastic in one's spirit.
- 2) John Witmer, *As believers serve God as His slaves they should be enthusiastic and diligent.*
- 3) C. E. B. Cranfield, *In lives which are truly being transformed by the renewing of the mind there is no room for slackness or sloth...Diligence in well-doing, therefore, requires the zeal which the Spirit of God has kindled in our hearts...although this zeal is the gift of God, these duties are laid upon believers in order that they may shake off their listlessness and take to themselves the flame which God has kindled.*
- 4) Douglas Moo, *The temptation to "lose steam" in our lifelong responsibility to reverence God in every aspect of our lives, to become lazy and complacent in our pursuit of what is "good, well pleasing to God, and perfect," is a natural one—but it must be strenuously resisted.*
- 5) William Barclay, *Christians cannot take things in an easy-going way, for the world is always a battle ground between good and evil; the time is short, and life is a preparation for eternity.*

6. Love perseveres (12), ***Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.***

a. Partners in perseverance

- 1) *Rejoice in hope*
 - a) Present circumstances can't hinder joy when one's focus is on future hope.
 - b) Hope for a Christian is no more sin, no more death, no more physical separation from our Savior.
 - c) Note Romans 5:2, *Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God.*
 - d) C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Christian is to allow himself to experience the joy which is his, for the Christian life is a life of joy...but this joy has its source not in this present age to which he is not to be conformed, nor in his present circumstances, but in that which is still future, which he grasps by hope.*
 - e) John Stott, *At the heart of this triplet is the reference to hope, namely our confident Christian expectation of the Lord's return and the glory to follow...*
 - f) Grant Osborne, *It is probably best to see hope as the sphere within which our difficulties are turned to joy. Due to the Spirit's strengthening presence, we see life's struggles as opportunities for us to learn anew the truth of Romans 8:28, that all things, no matter how dire, will end up working for our best.*
- 2) *be patient in tribulation*
 - a) Endurance demands patience.
 - b) 1 Corinthians 13:7, *Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.*
 - c) Grant Osborne, *In the midst of life's problems, we can endure. God's keeping us secure in Christ doesn't mean he makes our difficulties go away...Trials are a necessary part of the Christian life; they stimulate faith and force us to depend on God.*
 - d) William Barclay, *We can meet anything when we meet it with Christ.*
- 3) *be constant in prayer*
 - a) *Constant* means *busy oneself with, be busily engaged in, be devoted to.*
 - b) Colossians 4:2, *Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.*
 - c) Douglas Moo, *...our ability to continue to rejoice and to "bear up under" our tribulations is dependent on the degree to which we heed Paul's challenge to "persist in prayer."*
 - d) Grant Osborne, *With prayer the complications of life are robbed of their force before they can defeat us.*

b. Comments

- 1) Douglas Moo, *...hope, endurance, and prayer are natural partners...*
- 2) Note Romans 8:24-27, *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God.*
- 3) Thomas Aquinas, *...there is an intimate connexion between prayer and all the things which are enjoined in these verses.*
- 4) Grant Osborne, *The three exhortations in verse 12 are interrelated, all dealing with life's difficulties and trials. Paul often combines the ideas of hope, endurance, and prayer, as in 5:3-5 (the chain of suffering-perseverance-character-hope) and in 8:23-27 (prayer and hope in the midst of infirmities).*

7. Love is generous (13)

a. (13a), **Contribute to the needs of the saints**

- 1) *Contribute means to share, to do together with, to take part in.*
- 2) The focus of this ministry is on helping provide for the needs of fellow Christians. As noted by Douglas Moo, *These "needs" are material ones: food, clothing, and shelter. Therefore, the fellowship we are called to here is the sharing of our material goods with Christians who are less well-off.*
 - a) The Jerusalem church, Acts 2:44-45, *And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.*
 - b) The command of Paul, 1 Corinthians 16:1, *Now concerning the collection for the saints: as I directed the churches of Galatia, so you also are to do.*
 - c) The church in Antioch, Acts 11:27-29, *Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.*
 - d) Such ministry is pleasing to God, Hebrews 13:16, *Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.*
- 3) Comments
 - a) C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Christian who is being transformed by the renewing of the mind will not doubt his obligation to help in relieving the destitution of his fellow-Christians.*
 - b) John Calvin, *He particularly commands us to assist the saints. Although our love ought to extend to the whole human race, it should embrace with particular affection those who are of the household of faith, for they are connected to us by a closer bond.*
 - c) C. E. B. Cranfield rightly notes that in Paul's day many Christians were poor whereas, today, many are well-off, *In view of the different circumstances of the Church, less emphasis would seem to be required today on the special claim of the saints, and more on the claims of human distress generally.*
 - d) Grant Osborne, *When the church shows concern and Christian charity, it is an incredible showcase of the difference Christ makes.*
 - e) William Barclay, *Christians are intent on giving, because they know that 'what we keep we lose, and what we give we have.'*

b. (13b), **and seek to show hospitality**

- 1) *Seek means pursue, aspire to run after and hospitality means kindness to strangers.*
 - a. It may be translated, *pursue friendliness to strangers*, as noted by Douglas Moo, the Apostle Paul *...urges us to "pursue" it—to go out of our way to welcome and provide for travelers.*
 - b. Hebrews 13:2, *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.*

- 2) Importance of practicing hospitality
 - a) Douglas Moo, *The need to give shelter and food to visitors was great in the NT world, there being few hotels or motels. And the need among Christians was exacerbated by the many traveling missionaries and other Christian workers.*
 - b) Origen (3rd C.), *We are not just to receive the stranger when he comes to us, but actually to enquire after, and look carefully for, strangers, to pursue them and search them out everywhere, lest perchance somewhere they may sit in the streets or lie without a roof over their heads.*
 - c) Douglas Moo on the importance of practicing hospitality, *...is needed in our day because of how many people are lonely and truly need someone who cares. In our individualistic society we need more Christians who are willing to share their homes.*
 - d) William Hendriksen, *What should at all times be clearly taken to heart is that whatever is done for the person in need of hospitality is done for him who on the great Judgment Day is going to say, "I was a stranger, and you welcomed me" (Matt. 25:35).*
 - e) William Barclay, *A home can never be happy when it is selfish. Christianity is the religion of the open hand, the open heart and the open door.*
- 3) Strangers should include anyone, Christian or non-Christian.

8. Love is forgiving (14), ***Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.***

- a. *Bless*
 - 1) It means *call down God's gracious power, to praise, to speak well of.*
 - 2) Thomas Constable, *Blessing involves both wishing God's best on people and praying for them.*
- b. Here, the ones to be blessed are those persecuting you.
 - 1) The same word is used in verse 13b, ***pursue*** hospitality but in verse 14, those who ***pursue*** for the purpose of persecution.
 - 2) Christians are to pursue the needy with hospitality and persecutors with blessing not cursing.
 - a) Luke 6:27-28, *But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*
 - b) Acts 7:59-60, *And as they were stoning Stephen, he called out, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." And when he had said this, he fell asleep.*
 - c) Grant Osborne, *This means to ask God to pour out his blessings rather than call down his curses.*
- c. Comments
 - 1) C. E. B. Cranfield, *Not only to refrain from desiring that harm should come to those who are persecuting us, but to desire good for them and to show that this desire is no mere pretence by actually praying for God's blessing upon them...this is clearly opposed to what is natural to us.*
 - 2) John Calvin, *Although there is hardly any one who has made such advance in the law of the Lord that he fulfils this precept, no one can boast that he is the child of God, or glory in the name of a Christian, who has not partially undertaken this course, and does not struggle daily to resist the will to do the opposite.*
 - 3) Douglas Moo, *For Jesus' command that his followers respond to persecution and hatred with love and blessing was unprecedented in both the Greek and Jewish worlds.*
 - 4) Grant Osborne, *This is a radical command and counter to our natural inclinations. When we love our enemies, it becomes one of the most powerful tools for reaching the lost. As Peter says, "Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" (1 Pet 2:12).*
 - 5) William Barclay, *When Christians are hurt, and insulted, and badly treated, they have the example of their Master before them, for he, upon his cross, prayed for forgiveness for those who were killing him.*

9. Love is sympathetic (15), ***Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.***

- a. *Rejoice* was used in verse 12 where it was tied to hope.
- b. *To weep* with another is not to submit to hopelessness but to partake of others' pain even as Jesus partook of ours.
- c. Both rejoicing and weeping for Christians are tied to hope in a glorious future.
- d. 1 Corinthians 12:26, *If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.*

e. Comments

- 1) John Witmer, *Christians should be able to empathize with others, both believers and unbelievers.*
- 2) God has made us interpersonal. We need each other whether the other is Christian or not.
- 3) John Stott, *Love never stands aloof from other people's joys or pains. Love identifies with them, sings with them and suffers with them.*
- 4) C. E. B. Cranfield, *...Paul is thinking just as much, or perhaps more particularly, of Christians' relations with those who are outside the Church. There is indeed special point here in such an exhortation with regard to those outside; for truly to bless one's persecutors must surely involve readiness to take one's stand beside them as human beings.*
- 5) William Hendriksen emphasizes how important it is for Christians to rejoice and weep with others, *The opposite of rejoicing is being filled with envy (Titus 3:3); and over against weeping stands gloating (over).*
- 6) William Barclay, *It is only when self is dead that we can take as much joy in the success of others as in our own.*

10. Love is harmonious (16a), ***Live in harmony with one another.***

a. *Live in harmony* literally means *having the same attitude toward one another.*

- 1) Romans 15:5, *May the God of endurance and encouragement grant you to live in such harmony with one another, in accord with Christ Jesus,*
- 2) Philippians 2:2, *complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.*

b. Comments

- 1) Grant Osborne, *When our minds have been renewed by the Spirit (12:2), and we have gained sober judgment (12:3), that transformed mindset will produce true harmony in the church.*
- 2) William Hendriksen, *Believers are exhorted to agree among themselves, doubtlessly in order to exert a wholesome influence upon those who are still outside the kingdom...*
- 3) Robert Leighton (17th C), *When strife enters into any Christian society, the hope of doing any good work is gone.*

11. Love is humble (16b), ***Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.***

a. Connection of harmony to humility

- 1) Harmony in verse 16a is strongly tied to humility in 16b.
- 2) 1 Peter 3:8, *Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.*
- 3) Thomas Constable, *Feelings of superiority are neither realistic nor appropriate for those who owe all to God's grace.*
- 4) Douglas Moo, *As Paul recognizes elsewhere (see esp. Phil. 2:2-4), the biggest barrier to unity is pride.*

b. *Haughty*

- 1) It means *proud, exalted, arrogant attitude.*
- 2) 1 Timothy 6:17, *As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy.*

c. *associate with the lowly*

- 1) *Associate* may be translated *be carried away with.*
- 2) *Lowly*
 - a) It can mean *humble tasks* or *lowly people, outcasts, the poor and needy.*
 - b) C. E. B. Cranfield, *...it is always a sign of the worldliness of the Church when its 'leaders' no longer associate as readily and freely with humble people both inside and outside the Church as with those who are socially superior, and when such humble people no longer feel free to speak with them as man to man.*

- d. *never be wise in your own sight*
 - 1) Romans 12:3, *For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.*
 - 2) John Stott, *Few kinds of pride are worse than snobbery. Snobs are obsessed with questions of status, with the stratification of society into 'upper' and 'lower' classes, or its division into distinctions of tribe and caste, and so with the company they keep. They forget that Jesus fraternized freely and naturally with social rejects, and calls his followers to do the same with equal freedom and naturalness.*

B. Proper responses to the unloving (17-21)

- 1. Love does not react but acts honorably (17), ***Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.***

- a. *Repay no one evil for evil*
 - 1) *Repay means to render, recompense, to pay back.*
 - 2) *Evil involves harm caused by evil intent.*
 - 3) Matthew 5:39, *But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.*
 - 4) 1 Peter 3:9, *Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing.*
- b. *Give though to do what is honorable*
 - 1) *Give thought means take into consideration, have regard for.*
 - 2) *Honorable means morally good, noble, praiseworthy.*
 - 3) 2 Corinthians 8:21, *for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man.*
 - 4) Romans 14:19, *So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.*
- c. *in the sight of all*
 - 1) *All means all.*
 - 2) I am to respond to evil by doing what honors the Lord regardless of who committed the evil, Christian or non-Christian and whether it is Christians or non-Christians who see my response.
- d. Comments
 - 1) C. E. B. Cranfield, ... *Christians are to take thought for, aim at, seek, in the sight of all men those things which...are good...It can never be a light matter, if Christians, who are called to glorify God and to proclaim the gospel to the world, by their evil deeds bring dishonour on God's name and hinder men from believing.*
 - 2) Douglas Moo, ...*Paul's dependence on Jesus' teaching is clear. For not only did Jesus exhort us to love and pray for our enemies; in the same context he also warns us not to exact "eye for eye, and tooth for tooth" (Matt. 5:38).*
 - 3) Grant Osborne, *Our response should always be to take the high road. As in 1 Peter 2:12, our slanderers will "see [our] good deeds and glorify God" as a result. Our good response will convict them, then convince them, and finally convert them.*
 - 4) Warren Wiersbe, *Returning evil for evil, or good for good, is the way most people live. But the Christian must live on a higher level and return good for evil. Of course, this requires love, because our first inclination is to fight back. It also requires faith, believing that God can work and accomplish His will in our lives and in the lives of those who hurt us.*
 - 5) John Calvin, *What is meant is that we ought diligently to labor, in order that all may be edified by our honest dealings ... that they may, in a word, perceive the good and the sweet odor of our life, by which they may be allured to the love of God.*

- 2. Love is peaceable toward everyone (18), ***If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.***

- a. Paul commands Christians to *live peaceably with all.*
 - 1) Jesus in Matthew 5:9, *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*
 - 2) The writer of Hebrews, Hebrews 12:14, *Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.*
 - 3) James in James 3:17, *But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.*

- b. Douglas Moo, *We do not know whether there was any special need to exhort the Roman Christians to live at peace with their fellow-citizens...To a considerable extent, Paul recognizes, such conflict is inevitable: as the world hated Jesus, so it hates his followers (John 16:33).*
- c. Qualifications concerning *live peaceably*
- 1) *If possible*
 - a) William Barclay, *There may come a time when the claims of courtesy have to submit to the claims of principle. Christianity is not an easy-going tolerance which will accept anything and shut its eyes to everything. There may come a time when some battle has to be fought—and, when it does, Christians will not shirk it.*
 - b) William Hendriksen, *Heb. 12:14 not only advocates peace but also sanctification. The latter must not be sacrificed in order to maintain the former, for a peace without sanctification (or holiness) is not worthy of the name.*
 - c) John Stott, *...sometimes other people either are not willing to live at peace with us, or lay down a condition for reconciliation which would involve an unacceptable moral compromise.*
 - 2) *so far as it depends on you*
 - a) William Barclay, *He (Paul) knew that one person can be compelled to control as much temper in an hour as someone else in a whole lifetime. We would do well to remember that goodness is a great deal easier for some than for others; that will keep us both from criticism and from discouragement.*
 - b) Thomas Constable, *In some situations, peace might give way to conflict if, for example, the truth is at stake. Notwithstanding the believer should not be the instigator of trouble under normal circumstances.*
 - c) Douglas Moo, *...Paul does not want Christians to use the inevitability of tension with the world as an excuse for behavior that needlessly exacerbates that conflict or for a resignation that leads us not even to bother to seek to maintain a positive witness.*
 - d) John Witmer, *Harmony with others may not always be achievable, but believers should not be responsible for that lack of peace (cf. Matt. 5:9).*
3. Love leaves vengeance to God (19), ***Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”***
- a. *Beloved*
 - 1) Paul is lovingly addressing fellow Christians.
 - 2) A Christian has responsibilities to pursue the good of others and not retribution.
 - 3) This verse completes Paul’s admonition in verse 17 with a promise of relief in 19b.
 - 4) William Hendriksen, *He (Paul) was a man whose entire soul entered into the business of sympathizing and forgiving, in view of the pardon he had himself received from God.*
 - b. *never avenge yourselves*
 - 1) It means *never procure justice for yourself.*
 - 2) Note Proverbs 20:22, *Do not say, “I will repay evil”; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.*
 - 3) Douglas Moo, *The prohibition of vengeance is found in both the OT and Judaism, but it tends to be confined to relations with co-religionists. Paul’s prohibition of vengeance even upon enemies is an extension of the idea that reflects Jesus’ revolutionary ethic.*
 - 4) William Barclay, *To stoop to vengeance is to be ourselves conquered by evil. Evil can never be conquered by evil. If hatred is met with more hatred, it is only increased; but, if it is met with love, an antidote for the poison is found.*
 - c. The three-part antidote for revenge.
 - 1) Turn it over to God - *leave it to the wrath of God*
 - a) Literally, verse 19 is *give place to the wrath* or *leave room for the wrath.*
 - b) The wrath is understood to be God’s wrath based on Paul’s use of a Bible text.
 - c) The example of Jesus, 1 Peter 2:23, *When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.*
 - d) William Hendriksen, *In view of the fact that our Lord Jesus Christ, by his vicarious suffering, removed God’s wrath from us, should we not be happy to refrain from taking revenge?*

- 2) Vengeance is God's prerogative - *vengeance is mine...says the Lord.*
 - a) *Vengeance means punishment, giving of justice, vindication.*
 - b) Paul cites Deuteronomy 32:25, *Vengeance is mine, and recompense, for the time when their foot shall slip; for the day of their calamity is at hand, and their doom comes swiftly.'*
 - c) Douglas Moo, *It is not our job to execute justice on evil people; that is God's prerogative, and he will visit his wrath on such people when he deems it right to do so.*
 - d) John Stott, *The reason the repayment or judging of evil is forbidden to us is not that it is wrong in itself (for evil deserves to be punished and should be), but that it is God's prerogative, not ours.*

- 3) God promises to judge righteously - *I will repay*
 - a) God is merciful and gracious. He alone can work all things together for good. He is the God of the abused and the abuser.
 - b) John Calvin, *We give place to wrath...only when we wait patiently for the proper time for our deliverance, praying in the meantime that those who now trouble us may repent and become our friends.'* *It certainly does not mean hoping and praying for God to punish our enemies.*
 - c) C. E. B. Cranfield, *To give place to the wrath is to leave vengeance to God in the knowledge that He is the God who smites in order to heal. When we recall what God has done for us 'when we were enemies' (5:10), we cannot but hope that His mercy will finally embrace those who now are our enemies.*
 - d) Grant Osborne, *When we leave the hurt and vengeance with God, knowing that justice will indeed be done, we find the strength to forgive those who do not deserve it and to free ourselves from a life of bitterness.*

4. Love repays evil with goodness (20-21)
 - a. Convicting love (20), ***To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."***
 - 1) *To the contrary*
 - a) Paul states to do *this* not *that*. Instead of seeking vengeance, seek to do good to the one who hurt you.
 - b) In verse 19, We are told to do more than just turn the matter over to God. We are to seek the other person's good while God sovereignly determines what to do with the offender.
 - c) Matthew 5:44, *But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,*
 - 2) Paul quotes an Old Testament passage to show what an offended person can do to *overcome evil with good.*
 - a) The passage cited is Proverbs 25:21-22, *If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.*
 - b) A Christian is to meet the needs of his offender, like hunger and thirst.
 - c) Such acts of kindness will *heap burning coals on his head.*
 - 1] Some believe that this statement speaks of judgment.
 - 2] It is preferred, based on the context, to take it as conviction.
 - 3] John Witmer, *The coals on the head may refer to a ritual in Egypt in which a person showed his repentance by carrying a pan of burning charcoal on his head. Helping rather than cursing an enemy may cause him to be ashamed and penitent.*
 - 4] C. E. B. Cranfield, *...by thus ministering to one's enemy's need one will inflict upon him such an inward sense of shame as will either lead him to real contrition and to being no more an enemy but a friend or else, if he refuses to be reconciled, will remain with him as the pain of a bad conscience.*
 - 5] Douglas Moo, *Acting kindly toward our enemies is a means of leading them to be ashamed of their conduct toward us and, perhaps, to repent and turn to the Lord whose love we embody.*
 - 6] John Stott, *...coals are 'a dynamic symbol of change of mind which takes place as a result of a deed of love.'*

- b. Paul's concluding summary (21), *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*
1. It is said that the best offense is a good defense. Here, I would say the best defense is a good offense. Don't react with evil but act (go on the offensive) with good.
 2. Thomas Constable, *When people do wrong, they expect to receive evil from those they have wronged. When they receive kindness instead, their hard hearts often become softer.*
 3. Douglas Moo, *By responding to evil with "the good" rather than with evil, we gain a victory over that evil. Not only have we not allowed it to corrupt our own moral integrity, but we have displayed the character of Christ before a watching and skeptical world.*
 4. Booker T. Washington, *I will not allow any man to make me lower myself by hating him.' The only real way to destroy an enemy is to make that person a friend.*

CONCLUSION

- John Stott, *To repay evil for evil is to be overcome by it; to repay good for evil is to overcome evil with good. This is the way of the cross. 'Such is the masterpiece of love.*
- Grant Osborne, *This passage is nearly equivalent to 1 Corinthians 13 in the depth of its description of love at the core of the church family. In relations with fellow believers and unbelievers, love is a deep commitment and concern for those around us. We give ourselves entirely to building others up and making them feel wanted and appreciated, and at the same time serving God with all our strength by allowing love to reign in us. The one flows into the other, as our service to Christ is reflected and made real in our service to his people.*
- Warren Wiersbe, *As children of God, we must live on the highest level—returning good for evil. Anyone can return good for good and evil for evil. The only way to overcome evil is with good. If we return evil for evil, we only add fuel to the fire. And even if our enemy is not converted, we have still experienced the love of God in our own hearts and have grown in grace.*