

Loving and Just Behavior

August 19 • Bible Study Guide 12

Bible Background • ROMANS 12:9–21

Printed Text • ROMANS 12:9–21 | Devotional Reading • MATTHEW 5:38–48

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: CONSIDER Paul’s words about personal behaviors as indicative of a Christian way of life; AFFIRM human expressions of love for one another; and BECOME more loving, according to Paul’s teaching.

In Focus

Long before Kim’s next-door neighbors moved in, she prayed for them. She prayed that God would send neighbors who believed in Him, and imagined having regular Bible studies and being able to pray with her new neighbors. She went to meet every person who looked at the house. Most were nice, except for one woman who refused to acknowledge Kim. When Kim introduced herself, the woman asked, “May I help you?” Kim prayed not to have her as a neighbor, but was appalled to see her moving in a month later. Hadn’t the Lord heard her prayer?

Things didn’t get any better between them. Even though Kim made herself speak to the woman and her teenage daughter, neither of them spoke back. After a while, Kim began to hold bitterness and avoided having to bump into her new neighbors. Eventually, Kim felt convicted and began to pray for her neighbor. She decided to forgive them and brainstormed ways she could bless her and her daughter.

God calls us to practice loving and just behavior. Have you ever had to show love to someone who didn’t deserve it?

Keep in Mind

“Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good” (**Romans 12:9**).

Words You Should Know

A. Dissimulation (**Romans 12:9**) *anypokritos* (Gk.)—Without hypocrisy, sincere.

B. Bless (v. 14) *eulogeo* (Gk.)—To speak well of by expressing good wishes upon another.

Say It Correctly

Dissimulation. di-si-**MUH**-lay-shun.

Recompense. re-**KUHM**-pen(t)s.

KJV

Romans 12:9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all **men**.

19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

NLT

Romans 12:9 Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good.

10 Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other.

11 Never be lazy, but work hard and serve the Lord enthusiastically.

12 Rejoice in our confident hope. Be patient in trouble, and keep on praying.

13 When God's people are in need, be ready to help them. Always be eager to practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them.

15 Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep.

16 Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!

17 Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable.

18 Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

19 Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.

20 Instead, "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads."

21 Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good.

The People, Places, and Times

Jews and Christians in Rome. Because Rome was the principal city of the empire, it was inevitable that both Christians and Jews should comprise large subgroups within the city. By the time Paul wrote the epistle to the Romans (around mid first century AD), it had already become an important church (**Romans 1:8**). About the year AD 49, the emperor Claudius issued an edict expelling Jews from Rome. The fact that Christians were expelled as well (see **Acts 18:2**) indicates that at that time Roman officials did not differentiate between Christians and Jews, perhaps because the Christian community was not yet large enough to be significant.

Saul/Apostle Paul. A well-educated Roman citizen, Saul was a Pharisee who persecuted Christians as proof of his zeal for the Jewish faith and way of life (**Philippians 3:4-6**; **Acts 26:4-5**). On such a mission on the road to Damascus to carry out his mission, he had a remarkable encounter with Jesus. Shortly after, he learned of his

call from God to take “[God’s] message to the Gentiles and to kings, as well as to the people of Israel” ([Acts 9:15, NLT](#)). As an apostle, Paul’s life exemplified one of great sacrifice and persecution. He wrote about his experiences in hopes of drawing people to Christ, and to strengthen and mature believers.

Why do you think today’s passage was necessary for Jew and Gentile Christians living in Rome?

Background

The epistle to the Romans is the longest and arguably the most influential letter that the apostle Paul wrote. In fact, Romans is placed first among the other New Testament letters. The apostle wrote this letter with his apostolic mission to the Gentile world in mind.

In [Romans 15:20](#), Paul’s affirmation that he did not consider Rome as another apostle’s specific territory or mission field has led another group of scholars to suppose it could be that the church at Rome was established by some of Paul’s converts from Asia and Macedonia. However, if we look at [Acts 2:10](#), we see that some of the Jews and proselytes that were converted on the Day of Pentecost were from Rome and could have also been instrumental in establishing the church.

Paul states that he often had plans to preach the Gospel to the believers in the city, but was hindered from doing so ([Romans 1:13–15, 15:22](#)). Paul wrote this book in order to prepare the way for his missionary trip to Rome and his anticipated mission trip to Spain. Paul also needed to address certain problems in the church between the Jews and Gentiles. Their attitudes were ungodly toward each other (see [Romans 2, 11:11–36](#)), and as their apostle, it was Paul’s responsibility to correct them.

As believers, how does our attitude toward each other affect our witness to the outside world?

At-A-Glance

1. The Believer’s Call to Love ^[1]_[SEP]([Romans 12:9–13](#))
2. The Believer’s Call to Practical Living ^[1]_[SEP](vv. 14–21)

In Depth

1. The Believer’s Call to Love ([Romans 12:9–13](#))

One of the spiritual “fruits” that we must have is love (see [Galatians 5:22](#)). Just as fruit must be ripened, so must our love be developed. This love, if it is to be a logical outcome from God’s character, must be unconditional. How? When we experience God’s love despite our failures and imperfections, we are better able to love others. Out of this love for others grows an orientation toward respect, kindness, affection, and a show of sincere concern for the welfare of others. We may find ourselves desiring God’s best for those with whom we interact. We don’t mind helping others achieve their God-given goals. It is this love, grounded in God’s transforming mercy, that Paul says reminds us that we are to “prefer” one another in honor. We are to look beyond the present to the possibility seen by God in others. Too often we focus on people’s weaknesses. We are encouraged to look beyond their shortcomings and pray for their victories. Praying for others changes our attitude and affects positive change in their lives.

This dedication to love also challenges us not to be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit. Why? Because we are ambassadors for Jesus Christ. Our pursuit of excellence in everything, including our home, workplace, and ministry grows out of our deep love for the God who saved us. We cannot afford to be lazy or indifferent because we belong to a God who excels. When people are hopeless, we offer them hope. When we face times of testing, we patiently endure them because we know the love of God.

Why is it difficult to prefer others above ourselves?

2. The Believer’s Call to Practical Living (vv. 14–21)

Paul tells believers how to demonstrate their Christianity in practical ways. He acknowledges that it is not easy to be a Christian in the world we live in. Many people will do us wrong just because we are Christians. Perhaps that is why he says, “bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not” (v. 14). God wants us to respond in a

Christ-like manner since He has given us the Holy Spirit to enable us to overlook offenses. Paul tells us how to react when others experience a “season” of joy. We must be happy for them and rejoice with them. On the other hand, we need to learn how to identify with another’s pain and sorrow and weep with them. Every believer will go through seasons of joy and pain. We should be sensitive and available to the needs of others.

Finally, Paul reminds believers of our responsibilities in living out the Gospel: to feed our enemies, give them something to drink, and treat them well, “for in so doing, thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head” (v. 20). Those who have treated us wrong will be surprised that the evil they perpetuated against us did not overcome us and cause us to react negatively. They will be ashamed of how they have mistreated us. In fact, our goodness toward evildoers might motivate them to change their lives and become believers in Jesus Christ.

What is the most difficult thing about the command to do good to your enemies?

Search the Scriptures

1. What kind of love should believers demonstrate toward other people (**Romans 12:10**)?
2. Why shouldn’t a believer avenge slights against them (v. 19)?

Discuss the Meaning

Is it possible for believers to live as the apostle Paul instructs? Why or why not? Paul points toward some pretty high standards given to us by God. Does He expect us to turn the other cheek every time another person mistreats us? Why or why not?

Lesson in Our Society

Today, people are looking for the “real thing” in every area of society, including the church of Jesus Christ. They want to know whether walking in the way of Jesus really makes a difference. We are called to be distinct and set apart from the world. Let us be the light He has called us to be, not just on Sunday but every day of our lives.

This is so necessary in our African American communities. Our focus has often been on justice, but we also need to turn the mirror on ourselves and ask whether we exhibit loving and just behavior toward each other. Many problems in our communities, such as gangs, joblessness, and the lack of mentors for the next generation, could be solved. It starts with simply committing to be a good neighbor. When we walk in love toward other people, we will treat them justly.

What is the ultimate benefit of overcoming evil with good?

Make It Happen

- Make a checklist of all of the practical instructions from **Romans 12:9–21**. Check off the ones that you actually put into practice.
- Create a plan to implement the instructions that weren’t checked off on your list.
- After you complete your initial tasks, write in your journal about the results of your obedience.

Follow the Spirit

What God wants me to do:

Remember Your Thoughts

Special insights I have learned:

More Light on the Text

9 Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Here Paul begins a general parenthesis. A parenthesis was a style of teaching used by ancient moral philosophers. This style incorporated various moral exhortations that were not necessarily connected; however, most of the exhortations in this section are centered around the theme of having good relationships.

First, Paul encourages the Christians in Rome to operate in sincere love—to show real kindness and unconditional affection to one another. This timeless message speaks to Christians from various settings, times, and cultures. We are challenged to love God and love our fellow men and women. It is not a love in word only, but grounded in word and action. It is not a love based on hypocrisy—saying one thing and doing the opposite—but sincere and from the heart. Paul gave the Roman Christians a list of ways to live out their faith in relationship to God and to others, even those who persecuted them. Paul exhorts the Christians to ways of practical living that reflect their humility (v. 3) and Christian virtue.

Love reverberated as the primary theme for the rest of this chapter (see also 1 Corinthians 13). Paul's use of polarization (i.e., abhor/cleave; evil/good) further clarifies the image of a Christian (see also **1 Thessalonians 5:21–24; Psalm 34:14**). Their love is to be “without dissimulation” (Gk. *anupokritos*, **ah-noo-PO-kree-toce**) or without hypocrisy. The Christians will openly abhor evil and at the same time cleave (Gk. *kollao*, **ko-LAH-oh**), or associate with only the good. The word for cleave is normally associated with interpersonal relationships, so here Paul could refer to good people rather than just merely the abstract concept of good.

10 Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another; 11 Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord; 12 Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

Brotherly love, the second kind of love mentioned (v. 10), helps us hold all Christians as family (**Hebrews 13:1; 1 Peter 1:22, 2:17**). The later half of the verse is Paul's command to show honor by preferring (Gk. *proegeomai*, **pro-eh-GEH-oh-my**, leading) one another.

The Romans are then exhorted to not be slothful (Gk. *okneros*, **oak-ner-OSE**) or idle. This statement has the sense of being reluctant or hesitant. They should not be reluctant or hesitant in business (Gk. *spoude*, **SPOO-day**) or in applying themselves as much as they can. The Christian must be eager to apply themselves to whatever task and fervent in spirit. Fervent (Gk. *zeo*, **ZEH-oh**) here means to be kept at boiling point. The Christian's spirit should be enthusiastic and bubbling over. This does not necessarily mean that we change our personalities, but that we give energy and passion to all that we do. Their entire disposition is affected by the fact that they are serving (Gk. *douleuo*, **doo-LEW-oh**) or a slave for the Lord (v. 11).

Paul exhorts the Roman Christians to rejoice in hope and be patient in tribulation. He also exhorts them to be “continuing instant” (Gk. *proskartereo*, **pro-scar-teh-REH-oh**), or persevere constantly in prayer. (Here the King James English uses “instant” in the old sense of “urgently.”) Notice the Christian is not told to rejoice in good, or during good times; we are told to rejoice in hope. Paul also tells Christians to give thanks in everything (**1 Thessalonians 5:18**). Christians are able to rejoice in good times and bad times because their trust is not in circumstances, but in a God who is Lord of all. Therefore, we rejoice in bad times because we know that trouble will not last always.

The call to persevere in prayer reminds us that we are to live a life devoted to prayer. In good times, we acknowledge God in prayer as our source and give thanks for His grace and mercy. In bad times, we commit to persevering in prayer and to never waver in that commitment.

13 Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality. 14 Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

The importance of generosity is stressed in the injunction to “[distribute] to the necessity of saints” meaning to share in the needs of fellow Christians (cf. **Ephesians 4:28; 1 Peter 4:3**). Paul continues on how Christians ought to live with the exhortation to “bless” (Gk. *eulogeo*, **ew-lo-GEH-oh**, to speak well of) rather than “curse” (Gk. *kataoimai*, **ka-ta-RAH-oh-my**), which means to speak doom on someone (cf. **Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28**).

15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. 16 Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Paul continues to use opposites to clarify Christian behavior with the words “rejoice” and “weep.” Continuing the idea of unity from v. 15, Paul encourages keeping a similar way of thinking among themselves in v. 16. The phrase “be not wise in your own conceits” parallels the thought in verse 3 where Paul reminds each of them not to think of themselves in more elevated terms than really apply.

17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. 18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. 20 Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. 21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Verses 17 and 18 note that responding in kind when we receive evil demonstrates the difference between the Christian and the world. He warns them against being vengeful, as vengeance belongs to the Lord who will avenge them.

Paul then deals with treatment of one’s enemies (vv. 19–20). Christians should supply needs of hunger and drink—in other words, provide sustenance to their enemy. These words are direct quotes from [Proverbs 25:21](#) and support Paul’s line of thinking. Verse 21 goes back to verse 17, where the Christian is advised against handing out “evil for evil” received. As Christians, we should overcome evil with good (cf. [Exodus 23:4–5](#); [Matthew 5:44](#)).

These verses are a picture of what a true Christian life should look like. It is a life of love, not hatred; a life of giving and placing the needs of others above your own; a life that repays evil with good. Such thoughts are contrary to this world system. It is what the world calls “killing your enemies with kindness.” Enemies of the Christian are enemies of God. However, God is patient, not wanting anyone to perish but everyone to come to repentance. Therefore, Christians’ responsibility is to exemplify Christ and draw their enemies to the love of God.

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Many Members in One Body
(1 Corinthians 12:12–26)

TUESDAY

Aim to Live by the Spirit
(Galatians 5:16–26)

WEDNESDAY

Respond to Abuse With a Blessing
(1 Peter 3:8–12)

THURSDAY

Treat Enemies With Love and Mercy
(Luke 6:27–36)

FRIDAY

Don't Act by Human Standards
(2 Corinthians 10:1–5)

SATURDAY

New Life in Christian Community
(Romans 12:1–8)

SUNDAY

Behavioral Action Goals of Christians
(Romans 12:9–21)