

**Romans 12:14-21**  
**Loving Your Enemies**

I. Introduction

A. Paul is dealing with the issue of Christian behavior.

1. Because of what Christ has done for us;
  - a. We must not be conformed to this world (verse 2).
  - b. We must be transformed; we must be the new creatures God has made us to be.
  - c. We must be transformed by the renewing of our mind.
    - 1) The world thinks we are just another creature that crawled out of the slime by accident.
    - 2) God's Word says we are made in His image for His glory.
2. We must be transformed **that** we may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect (verse 2).
3. Your behavior demonstrates to others that God is both real and important in your life or your behavior demonstrates that God is of no consequence in your life.

B. In verses 3-8, God's Word teaches us that we are all part of the body of Christ and each and every member is just as important as every other member.

C. In verses 9-13, God's Word teaches us that we must behave in love toward our brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ.

1. Verse 10: Be devoted to one another in **brotherly** love.
2. Verse 13: contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

D. In verses 14-21, God, speaking through the Apostle Paul, teaches us how to behave toward our enemies.

II. You must behave as Christ toward your enemies.

A. Verse 14: "**Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.**"

1. Definitions:

- a. Bless is a compound word which means to speak well of.
  - 1) Most of us speak spitefully of our enemies; of those who have mistreated us.
  - 2) Scripture teaches that we must "speak well" of them (eulogy).
  - 3) The word is used in the idea of praying for our enemies.
  - 4) Bless means to pray for God's blessing as Christ prayed in Luke 23:34: "**Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing.**"
  - 5) Wuest's Word Studies: Bless is to speak well of. It is in the Present Imperative and therefore means **continuous** action. It is the same word used in **Eph. 1:3**: God...who has blessed us.
- b. Curse is a compound word which literally means to "pray against;" to ask God to curse someone.
  - 1) It is not profanity in the sense that we use curse. It is to pray a curse upon someone; to ask God to condemn them.
  - 2) Curse not is literally – stop cursing.
- c. Persecute is word which literally means to pursue; to press against.
  - 1) It is like an army pursuing a weaker foe.
  - 2) It is describing those who actively pursue you and try to take advantage of you.

2. The world calls down God's curse upon their enemies

- a. Even though they do not acknowledge the existence of God.
- b. The world asks that God damn their enemies, those they don't like, or those who displease them.

3. As Christians, we must pray for God to bless our enemies and not to curse them.

- a. Matthew 5:43-45: "**You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.'** "**But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He**

**causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.**

- b. 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 mistreat you."**

III. As Christians, you must identify with your enemies.

A. This is something we find easier to do with brothers and sisters in Christ

1. They are part of the family. They are like us and they mostly treat us well.
2. This passage is talking about identifying with our enemies.

B. You must rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

1. It is much easier to weep with those who weep.
  - a. We can identify with those who have tragedy in their lives.
  - b. That is illustrated by the outpouring of Christian aid to those devastated by hurricane Katrina.
  - c. It was illustrated by the outpouring of Christian aid to those devastated by the tsunami in Indonesia.
2. It is much more difficult to rejoice with those who rejoice.
  - a. It is easy to politely congratulate someone who been promoted or has been greatly blessed in some way.
  - b. It is much more difficult to rejoice with someone who got promoted over you.
  - c. It is much more difficult to rejoice with someone won the lottery when you desperately need money.
  - d. We tend to be polite, but we wish it had happened to us.
  - e. That is probably why that command is listed first in a position of emphasis.

C. You must thinking about others.

1. Verse 16 is literally **be minding the same toward one another, not minding high things, but condescending to the lowly. Do not be wise in your own self.**

2. In other words, don't think that you are better than other people, you are not.

a. Because we in western culture have, for the most part, been blessed by God, we tend to think of ourselves as better than those who have not been so blessed.

b. We are commanded not to be thinking "high things," but to be condescending to the lowly.

1) Word condescending is not to look down upon as most people use it

a) Webster's: Second definition is: To deal with people in a patronizingly superior manner.

b) That is the way most people think of condescending.

2) Webster's: First definition is: To descend to the level of one considered inferior; lower oneself.

a) That is what we as Christians are commanded to do.

b) That is what Christ Himself did.

c) Phil 2:5-10: **Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name...**

c. Do not be wise in your own self.

1) Wise is from a word which means to reign in; as a girdle reigns in the midriff. It means to be restrained in your thinking and thought process. It means to be discreet or have a cautious character.

2) We tend to think ourselves wise, in our own self. We become arrogant or puffed up.

3) When others don't agree with us, we think of them as stupid or ignorant and want nothing to do with them.

- 4) Boice: *“One writer tells of a crossroads in a small town where there were churches on three of the four corners. When a stranger asked what churches they were he was told, Well, that one is United Presbyterian, This one is Reformed Presbyterian. And this one,” pointing to the third, “is for the Presbyterians who are neither united or reformed.”*

5) Don't let your mind be puffed up or arrogant, put a girdle on it.

IV. You must be a peacemaker.

A. Verse 18: **If possible, so far as it depends on you, seeking peace with all men.**

1. The verse teaches that it is not always possible to live in peace.
  - a. Haldane: We are never to seek to maintain peace, either with the world or with Christians, by the sacrifice of any part of divine truth. A Christian must be willing to be unpopular, that he may be useful and faithful.
  - b. The Bible does not teach “peace at any cost.”
2. God's Word teaches peace “so far as it depends on you.”
3. Verb seeking is a Greek form which means continuous action.
  - a. You and I must always be actively seeking to live in peace with all men.
  - b. That peace must not be with the sacrifice of the truth of God's Word.
  - c. James 3:17: **But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable...**

B. You must never pay back evil for evil.

1. That is the way to ensure there is no peace.
2. Hagar the Horrible tells his son, “Son, don't let the sun go down upon your wrath...Attack your enemy at once and waste him while what he did to you is still fresh in your mind.”
  - a. That is what has been going on in Israel and Palestine since 1957.
  - b. That is what is going on in Iraq.
  - c. The attitude of the world is, I don't get even, I get one up.
3. Verse 21: **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**
  - a. Jesus Christ did not respond with evil toward those who persecuted, beat, and crucified Him.
  - b. Jesus Christ did not respond with evil toward you and I who despised Him.
  - c. Jesus Christ died a terrible death and suffered the wrath of God for the evil way you and I behaved toward Him, so that we might live eternally in Heaven in His presence.
  - d. Jesus Christ overcame our evil with good.
4. Verse 17: **Respect what is right in the sight of all men.**
  - a. Literally, the verse says “providing good things before all men.”
  - b. The word we translate “respect” is a word which means to “think ahead” and therefore to provide.
    - 1) You must think ahead about what is good “**before** – or in the presence of **all** men.”
    - 2) Six “P”s – Proper Prior Planning Prevents Poor Performance.

C. You must never take your own revenge.

1. That is the way of Hagar the Horrible and most of the world.
2. Verse 19: “...**leave room for the wrath...**”
  - a. Whose wrath is not specified. It is literally “the wrath.”
  - b. Since Paul quotes from the Old Testament (it is written), “**Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,**” it is clearly the wrath of God that is view.
  - c. Verse is literally, “give place.”
    - 1) The word we translate room or place means “a spot that is occupied – as a scabbard is occupied by a sword”
    - 2) Therefore, we must not put our wrath in the place of the wrath of God.
3. Murray: *The essence of ungodliness is that we presume to take the place of God, to take everything into our own hands. It is faith to commit ourselves to God, to cast all our care on him and to vest all our interests in him. In reference to the matter in hand, the wrongdoing of which we are the victims, the way of faith is to recognize that God is judge and to leave the*

*execution of vengeance and retribution to him. Never may we in our private personal relations execute the vengeance which wrongdoing merits.*

4. Paul is dealing here with **private relationships**.
  - a. He is not teaching about civil, judicial, or criminal situations.
  - b. He immediately goes on in Chapter 13 to deal with the power of the civil magistrate, the government.
    - 1) The ruler bears the sword as “a minister of God.”
    - 2) The government acts for God (or should) to avenge wrongdoing.

D. You must treat your enemies in a loving way.

1. Verse 20: **BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS UPON HIS HEAD.**
2. We must not treat our enemies in an evil way.
  - a. We must feed them when they are hungry.
  - b. We must give them a drink when they are thirsty.
3. **FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS UPON HIS HEAD**
  - a. This does **not** mean you should be nice to your enemy so that he will suffer.
  - b. Charles Hodge: *“To heap coals of fire on anyone is a punishment which no one can bear; he must yield to it. Kindness is no less effectual; the most malignant enemy cannot always withstand it. The true and Christian method, therefore, to subdue an enemy is to ‘overcome evil with good.’”*

V. You must be Christ like.

A. Christian means “Christ one.”

B. Boice: There are three steps in a progression.

1. First – do no evil; as Christ did no evil to anyone.
2. Second – Do good instead of evil; as Christ did good.
3. Third – Do good even to your enemies; as Christ did good even toward those who persecuted and killed Him.

C. Boice: Two **practical** requirements.

1. Peace with God – you must be a Christian.
2. Peace of God. – you must be at peace with yourself.
3. Philippians 4:5-7: **Let your forbearing spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.**