

Romans 12:9-21

Introduction: The message of the letter to the Romans is that all have sinned and fallen short of God's laws. This is what brings us under God's wrath. God saves us from this because Jesus became one of us and offered himself as a sacrifice to God on the cross.

If we own up to your sins, accept Jesus as our saviour, we will be forgiven and welcomed into his family.

Having explained all this up to Chapter 11, Paul then goes on to explain *how* forgiven people should live in this wicked world.

The bible passage before us today looks at how we should react when people do bad things to us. We have all experienced being hurt by someone; sometimes we are the one who have hurt somebody else.

We Christians sometimes face hostility because we won't go along with behavior that others engage in. This may well get worse as hostility towards Christianity becomes more aggressive.

The question is; what should we do about it?

This is an element of Christianity that separates us from the normal way people react. Based on the law of love, the Christian way is to forgive, accept and forgive.

Jesus taught us in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 38-47) to turn the other cheek.

Romans 12:9-21

This is exactly how he reacted when *he* was attacked. Listen to the words of someone who was there that day (1 Peter 2:21-23): 'Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow in his steps. He committed no sin, no guile was found on his lips. When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but he trusted in him who judges justly.'

That is the essence of what Paul is saying here in Romans 12; verse 14, 'Bless those who persecute you ... do not curse them'; verse 16; 'live in harmony with one another' and at verse 17; 'do not repay evil for evil'.

Further on in verse 17, Paul says, 'Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.' Another version puts it, 'Try to do what everyone considers to be good.' Proverbs 3:4, speaking of love and faithfulness says, '*Then* you will find favour and a good name in the sight of God and man.'

The point is that we must never forget that from the moment we identify ourselves as Christians, we are on display before the world. People will watch us to find fault, in some cases, to give them an excuse *not* to believe. Conversely, as Jesus said, if you let your light shine before men, they will see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

So, whether we like it or not, we are on show; and Paul says, 'Let us be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.'

Verse 18, on a similar theme; 'If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.'

In other words, try not to be the 'difficult' person. Try not to be the source of discord. Be a peace-maker and someone who binds people together, not someone who divides.

Romans 12:9-21

This is the right thing to do in itself, and it will enhance the gospel in the sight of others.

Verse 19, 'Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath ...'

The point Paul is making here is that the evil that people do *will* be judged, but *not* by you. God is the judge of all the earth and he will judge rightly, so leave it to him.

When Jesus suffered injustice, what did Peter say? He trusted himself to him who judges justly.

We know there is a day coming when every word and every deed will be assessed. We know that anyone who has not repented from the heart and sought the mercy of God will get what they deserve. So let us not try to usurp God's role.

Verse 19, 'It is written, vengeance is mine, says the Lord, I will repay'. Do we believe that? Then leave it to him.

But that raises the question, what *should* we do to those who hurt us? Verse 20, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.'

This is the distinctive 'Christian' value. Verse 21; 'Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.'

This is the same principle as going the extra mile, turning the other cheek and so on.

Following this way can have two effects on people. One is to drive them mad with rage. The other is to cause them to stop and think about what they have done and perhaps think about another way.

Romans 12:9-21

Of course there is another effect as well. If we repay evil with good and they persist in their evil ways, that only make their own judgement more certain and more deserved.

Look at verse 20, 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty; give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'

Of course you should not help someone in order to bring about that outcome. That would be contrary to our duty to love our enemy, but if what we do hardens their heart, that is on their head, not ours.

This is a hard passage to apply. But here is where we really do need the grace of God. Here is one matter we need to pray about.

And what should we pray? 'Father, forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.'

Notice the sting in the tail of that prayer, '... as we forgive those who sin against us'. In other words, 'Father, treat me the way I treat others.' That would be a pretty dangerous prayer to pray if we had a vengeful, unforgiving heart.

On the other hand, the central thrust of the Lord's Prayer at this point is that if we want God to forgive us we must surely be prepared to forgive others if they seek it.

We must pray for God's grace to do this. We certainly won't be able to do it left to our own devices.

Also, in circumstances where we might have to be kind to someone who has been unkind to us, it will be helpful if our manner of life in *normal* situations has been shaped by these principles.

Romans 12:9-21

That points to the importance of regular prayer and reading of the Scriptures.

It is only by giving attention to our daily walk with the Lord and seeking to live out the principles of love, kindness, peace and patience, the fruit of the Spirit as Paul calls it, that we can ever live godly lives in a world where people hate us and hate the values we seek to live by.

It won't always be easy. We won't always want to do it. When that is the case, remember what Peter said. 'Christ suffered for you, leaving an example that you might follow in his steps. ... 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.'