

**Romans 12:14-21(ESV)** <sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup>Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup>Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.<sup>£</sup> Never be conceited. <sup>17</sup>Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it<sup>£</sup> to the wrath of God, for it is written,<sup>£</sup>“Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup>To the contrary,<sup>£</sup>“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.” <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. Amen.

God takes very seriously the way we treat one another. If you look at the cross, you see the vertical part and you see the horizontal part. Looking at the vertical part of the cross we know that Jesus died on the cross so we can be right with God and have a loving and warm relationship with God. Jesus' death and resurrection makes every believer acceptable to God for Jesus paid the full price, His perfect life for our sinful lives. **2 Corinthians 5:21(ESV)** <sup>21</sup>For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. The only reason we can be in relationship with God is because of Jesus' finished work on the cross; that paved the way for us to God.

The cross also has a horizontal part. Jesus' death impacts our relationships one to another. Do you know that Jesus never mistreated any person, ever? He was never mean, cruel, vicious, demeaning, or abusive in any way. God is watching the way we treat each other. He is watching us when we react to people we do not really like at all and are a big pain. It is a fact that God loves all people equally. God has no favorites. When Jesus comes again, all of our relationships with each other will be completely healed. No more resentments, bitterness, hatreds, prejudices, mockeries, hostilities. Every person we see we will genuinely love. I can't wait. Until that day God asks us to be very careful in the way we treat each other including our enemies. **Matthew 12:36(ESV)** <sup>36</sup>“I tell you, on the Day of Judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak.” Be very careful what you say to one another. God is

listening and recording. I honestly want to make it my life aim to speak less and listen more. I have a long way to go.

**Romans 12:14(ESV)** “<sup>14</sup>Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” The person that wrote this verse was one of the most persecuted people in history. At one time he was stoned and left for dead. He was severely beaten several times. He was an innocent man locked up in prison. People hated Paul and were constantly seeking ways to kill him. He was slandered, mocked, taunted, and this was on a good day so to speak. If anyone had a right to have a bad attitude or worse toward one's persecutors it was Paul. Instead he writes, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.

It is my opinion that one reason Paul did not grow bitter toward his persecutors is Paul himself was the great persecutor of the church before he was saved. Paul orchestrated the stoning of Stephen in Acts chapter seven, Stephen being the first Christian martyr. God changed Paul's life around completely. Who knows the strongest of persecutors may one day be the strongest of witnesses of Jesus Christ if they are won over by Christian love. Paul wanted his persecutors saved by Christ. You do not win them over by hating them. Paul knew the depth of God's forgiveness like none other because his sins were so great. God's grace and power working in his life helped him to be a blessing to those who were cruelest to him. This can only happen when the power of the Holy Spirit works in your soul at the deepest of levels changing you from wanting to take revenge to that of being a blessing to those who have been so cruel. God forbids retaliation and commands us to be a blessing.

Paul must have known the words of Christ that go like this. **Luke 6:27-28(ESV)** <sup>27</sup>“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, <sup>28</sup>bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.” When we receive people's cruel treatment every part of us wants to get back at them in an even crueler way. God says No. Do something nice to them in response. This is God's attitude toward those who took the life of His Son. “Father,

forgive them they know not what they do.” When Stephen was crushed under the bloody stones he cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). Peter wrote about Jesus, “since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously.” As I understand more and more how much Jesus has forgiven all of us, He warns us to never grow resentful but to forgive even as we have been forgiven. This is not easy and often takes the purging power of the Holy Spirit burning the sin of an unforgiving spirit out of us. Paul repeats the point, “bless and do not curse” (14b).

“Rejoice with those who rejoice.” When my parents were alive and well I would always call them and tell them what exciting things were happening with our children, their grandchildren. Even if the news was rather small, they would gladly rejoice with me and they were so good at it. To this day I would love to call them and tell them so much, but they are with the Lord. God has provided other people that I can call and tell them of the good news that I used to tell my parents. I so appreciate the listener rejoicing with me more than words can express.

Friends, God wants us to rejoice with those who are rejoicing. I know this is not always easy. Sometimes others experience blessings from God and they are so excited to tell you. Inwardly you might feel resentful because God has not chosen to bless you in that particular way. The couple who cannot have children hear the good news of another couple having their first or fifth child. It is not easy to rejoice when God has seen fit not to bless you in such a way and yet God still says, “Rejoice with those who rejoice.” I want us all to hear this. When someone is so excited about their good news, please do not try to match their good news with an even better story. For example, a struggling student for the very first time gets all B's and A's on their report card. They tell you and then you say, Well, my child has got straight A's for

years. Please do not do that. You are being cruel and vicious by not rejoicing with those who rejoice. You are knocking them down by trying to be one up on him or her. I say rejoice and keep your own story to yourself.

“Weep with those who weep.” It is also uniquely Christian to be sensitive to people’s disappointments, hardships, and sorrows. This involves entering the suffering of another person. I am very strong on this point especially when it comes to the death of someone you love so deeply. If a person comes up to you and shares their deepest sorrow, please listen quietly, and let them talk. They are sharing their deepest of pain and it is a privilege to listen for God is using you at that point. God asks of you to weep with those who weep. Please just listen. Do not say, “Well, this is how much pain I went through” and then ramble on with your own grief that you experienced 10, 20, or 30 years ago. They do not need to hear your story when they are reeling in their own experience. Please be quiet and listen and possibly pray with him or her if the opportunity arises. People in deep grief or sadness do not need to hear about yours at the same time. They just need you to listen sensitively and with compassion. None of our pain goes unnoticed by God.

Verse 16, “Live in harmony.” I think of the various choirs we have had throughout the decades. Sometimes they sing in unison but most often they sing in parts making beautiful harmony that blesses us all. In this church, we are free to have differences with each other. We may disagree on how to interpret a particular scripture or we may differ on a doctrine or two. We do not all have to be on the same note but we are all called to work together in harmony so the message of the Gospel can be heard with clarity saving and nourishing souls. If people come here and all they see are people bickering with each other that mutes the message even before it starts, and the Good News of Jesus is muted.

“Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.” It is difficult to be around people who have too high of a view of themselves. God wants us to be

willing to associate with people regardless of their station in life, their education level, or their income.

**Romans 12:17(ESV)** “<sup>17</sup>Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.” Again, Paul is talking about how to handle one’s enemies. God forbids retaliation and tells us to do the honorable thing. Several years ago, a teacher verbally abused a person I dearly love for over 20 minutes on the phone. My friend cried for 3 weeks. Every part of me wanted to go to that person and retaliate in the worst of ways. I wanted to punch that person. I spoke to a member of this church and she told me to stay away from the person and not lower myself to the level of the person who was so abusive. She told me to do the honorable thing which was to pray for the situation and minister to my friend who was so deeply wounded. Four years later the teacher wrote a sincere letter of apology. Had I reacted the way I wanted to react it would have hindered completely the work that God wanted to do in the entire situation. To this day I thank God for my friend who told me to back off. **Romans 12:17(ESV)** <sup>17</sup>Repay no one evil for evil, but give <sup>17</sup> thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

**Romans 12:18(ESV)** <sup>18</sup>If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Friends, it takes two people to have a peaceful relationship. You may be more than willing to have a peaceful healthy relationship with another person but if they are not willing it simply will not be. Yes, you have to do your part but if the other person or persons are not willing there is not much more that you can do other than being patient giving time for God to bring about the much needed changes. We forgive them from the heart, and we let go.

**Romans 12:19-20(ESV)** “<sup>19</sup>Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it<sup>ε</sup> to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord. <sup>20</sup>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.” When you are kind to someone who has been so rotten to you it can make them feel a certain amount of shame that may change their behavior toward you.

**Romans 12:21(ESV)** <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. We have come to the end of this sermon entitled “God’s Job Description For Christians.” Another title could have been “Christian Love Defined.” Please do not let the evil of our day defeat you. God asks of us to keep doing good. God Himself is the source of all goodness. So, as we live our lives in God, united to God, at one with God, of course we will keep doing good. No matter how evil the day we will always have the Good News that outweighs by far the evil of our time. Amen and Amen.