

# ROMANS

FROM GUILT ————— TO GRACE

COMMUNITY IN CHRIST



The page features a solid tan background. In the corners, there are various geometric shapes outlined in a darker tan color. These include semi-circles, quarter-circles, and rectangular shapes with rounded corners, creating a modern, architectural feel.

# Welcome to Community in Christ!

This mini-study is an opportunity to study God's Word in community. Bring this PDF to your group meeting to follow along, or complete the lesson questions beforehand and join the discussion. We pray God will speak to you through His Word.



## What is BSF?

Bible Study Fellowship is a global community of 500,000 men, women, students, and kids studying God's Word together. Each year, BSF groups study for 30 weeks, either in person or online.

## How does the Bible study work?

This mini-study includes two lessons. Each lesson takes one week to complete.

### To get started:

Read and answer the questions for the assigned passage each day.

Attend a BSF group to discuss your answers or listen to the discussion.

Listen to the weekly teaching on the week's passage (with your group or via the recorded audio lecture).

Read the notes with the passage's historical background and life application.

Repeat for each lesson!

## How do I join BSF?

Since a friend has invited you to join their group, simply attend with them. Otherwise, to find a class in your local area, or to join a BSF Online group, go to [join.bsfinternational.org](http://join.bsfinternational.org).

We hope you enjoy using this four-fold approach to exploring God's Word in community with others. Thanks for choosing to study with Bible Study Fellowship!



ROMANS:  
From Guilt to Grace

SCRIPTURE:  
Romans 12:1-8

LESSON:  
21



# Christian Worship and Service

## Lesson 21 Questions

### First Day: Read the Lesson 20 Notes.

*The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.*

1. How did the lecture impact your understanding or practice of worshipping God?

2. What truth from the notes encouraged you or strengthened your relationship with God?

*Since you are starting with Lesson 21,  
you do not need to answer the First Day  
questions for this week.*

### Second Day: Read Romans 12:1-2.

*Paul urged believers to offer God their bodies as living sacrifices.*

3. What do you learn about God and His mercy from the following verses?

Romans 9:15

Romans 9:23

Ephesians 2:4-5

1 Peter 1:3

*Read and answer the questions for  
the assigned passage each day.  
You'll discuss these with your group!*

4. Reflect on your study of Romans 1–8. How have you personally experienced God’s mercy?
5.
  - a. Compare and contrast the Old Testament animal sacrifices with the kind of sacrifice Paul urged Christians to offer. (See also Leviticus 16; Romans 6:3-4, 11-13; Hebrews 10:1-10.)
  - b. How have you observed others offer their bodies as living sacrifices to God?
  - c. In what way is God calling you to sacrificial living, and how are you responding?

### **Third Day: Reread Romans 12:1-2.**

*Paul called believers to be transformed by renewing their minds.*

6.
  - a. From Romans 12:2, what are believers to stop doing?
  - b. Describe the pattern of this world. (See also Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 2:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17.)
7.
  - a. From Romans 12:2, what are believers to do?
  - b. How is a person transformed? (See also Romans 8:5-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 2:13.)
8. If you are a believer, how is God transforming you or proving that His will is good and pleasing? (See also 1 Peter 2:15; 3:17; 4:1-11.)

### **Fourth Day: Read Romans 12:3-5.**

*Paul described the unity and diversity of Christ’s body, the Church.*

9. What warning did Paul give, and why is it important?
10.
  - a. To what did Paul compare Christians?

- b. How does this illustration help you understand the way Christians are to relate to one another as the Church? (See also Ephesians 4:1-6.)

11. What is God revealing to you about how you view yourself and others?

### **Fifth Day: Read Romans 12:6-8.**

*Paul exhorted believers to serve God and others with their unique gifts.*

12. Share truths concerning God's gifts to Christians from the following verses:

1 Corinthians 7:7

1 Corinthians 12:4-6

Ephesians 4:11-13

1 Peter 4:10-11

13. List the seven gifts in Romans 12:6-8 and how each should be exercised.

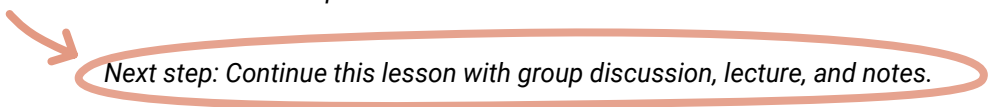
14. Which of the gifts has God given you? What opportunity has He given you to use His gifts in a local church?

### **Sixth Day: Review Romans 12:1-8.**

*God transforms and equips surrendered believers for the good of Christ's body.*

15. How does humbly surrendering your life to the Lord impact your ability to live for Him and serve others?

*Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 12:1-8*



*Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.*

# Lecture



After completing the daily questions, listen to this week's lecture. Some groups listen together, but you can also access it online by scanning the QR code.

# Lecture Notes

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal blue ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# Lesson 21 Notes

Romans 12:1-8

*Dig deeper into this week's passage by reading the lesson notes with the passage's historical background and life application.*

## Focus Verse

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship." (Romans 12:1)

## Outline

- Wholehearted Worship – Romans 12:1-2
- Wholehearted Service – Romans 12:3-8

## Engage

"The world exists to give me what I want." While few people openly state this view aloud, selfishness resides and hides in all people. Across cultures, this attitude takes different forms. Our schedules, jobs, families, successes, and pleasures drive us to justify such thoughts as, "Whatever satisfies me and my priorities matters most. Whatever I want to do is acceptable as long as my family's influence increases. I should prioritize my group's security and protection above all." Does the world exist to serve us and meet our needs? Are seemingly harmless choices ours to make? **The systems of this world are designed to provide people with what they feel they deserve.**

In contrast, Paul taught that God's will anchors all things. As Savior, Jesus rules all creation. Believers should live for God's priorities. God desires believers to live as Jesus did—for God's glory and the good of others. **God transforms and equips surrendered believers for the good of Christ's body.** People willing to wholeheartedly worship God and serve others discover that God's will for them brings personal satisfaction and eternal pleasure this fading world cannot offer.

In Romans 1–11, Paul laid the doctrinal foundation of God's saving righteousness. Then in Romans 12–16, Paul presented faith's transformative impact on our relationship with God and others. **God's righteousness is revealed as believers apply truths from Romans 1–11 to their daily lives.** These practices align with God's will in practical areas, which we will study over the next several lessons:

- Christian Worship and Service—12:1-8 (Lesson 21)
- Christian Love—12:9-21 (Lesson 22)
- Christian Submission to Authority—13:1-7 (Lesson 23)
- Christian Living—13:8-14 (Lesson 24)
- Christian Liberty—14 (Lesson 25)
- Christian Unity—15:1-13 (Lesson 26)
- Paul's Ministry and Plans—15:14-33 (Lesson 27)
- The Gospel's Impact in Rome and Corinth—16 (Lesson 28)



## ■ Wholehearted Worship – Romans 12:1-2

With the opening word “Therefore,” Paul pointed back to his explanation about how God mercifully redeems sinners through Christ’s death and resurrection. Secured through faith and eternal union with Christ, believers begin the journey of godly living. **Paul urged believers, who are indwelt by Christ’s Spirit, to live differently than they did before their salvation.** Worship of the Lord should consume and propel believers’ lives, “for from him and through him and for him are all things.”<sup>1</sup>

### Living Sacrifices – 12:1

**In View of God’s Mercy – Paul assumed that God’s merciful salvation would inspire those He saved to live for Him.** God mercifully offers fallen humanity His righteousness, which they could never earn.<sup>2</sup> God also mercifully maintains a righteous plan for Israel’s salvation through faith in their Messiah, Jesus.<sup>3</sup> Paul summarized God’s mercy: “For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all.”<sup>4</sup> Though God gave people over to their sinful desires,<sup>5</sup> His mercy makes salvation available by faith in Jesus.<sup>6</sup>

**Offer Your Bodies –** Jesus has forever broken sin’s power over believers. Paul previously commanded, “Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body ... but rather offer yourselves to God.”<sup>7</sup> **Sin still seeks to dominate believers through their bodies, but it cannot control people living for God’s righteousness.**

**As Living Sacrifices –** In the Old Testament, sacrificial animals<sup>8</sup> pointed toward Christ’s once-for-all death for sin.<sup>9</sup> **Now, believers share in Jesus’s death and resurrection by faith, living for Him and not themselves.**<sup>10</sup>

**Holy and Pleasing to God –** Paul described a believer’s living sacrifice as holy, consecrated entirely to God. Jesus held nothing back when He sacrificed himself for our redemption.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, Paul called believers to hold nothing back when they offer themselves to God. Holiness—a life set apart, reserved, and spent for God’s glory—is a believer’s identity and privilege.<sup>12</sup> Believers please God when they wholeheartedly offer themselves to Him.<sup>13</sup>

**Your True and Proper Worship –** While Paul understood worship through Jewish laws and sacrificial customs, today’s Christians might picture worship as an event or gathering for prayer, singing, and teaching. The New International Version (NIV) translates the Greek word *latreia* as “worship.” This word conveys active service to God, who has reset our minds to think correctly and our hearts to worship rightly. The result? We glorify Him rather than His created things. The phrase “true and proper” traces back to a single Greek word, *logikos*, with meanings of spiritual, rational, or right reasoning. **Taken together, the words translated as “true and proper worship” explain that wholehearted Christian worship is service, which is reformed completely in our lives, spiritually and practically.**

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1. Lord above all: Romans 11:36a

2. Mercy to humanity: Romans 1–8

3. Mercy to Israel: Romans 9–11

4. Mercy summarized: Romans 11:32

5. Gave them over: Romans 1:18-32

6. Salvation available: Romans 10:13

7. Bodies for God: Romans 6:11-13

8. Old Testament sacrifices: Leviticus 16; Hebrews 10:1-10

9. Once for all: 1 Corinthians 5:7; Hebrews 9:28

10. Living for Christ: Romans 6:3-13; 2 Corinthians 5:15

11. Jesus’s sacrifice: 1 Peter 1:18-19

12. Holy people: 1 Peter 2:9

13. God’s pleasure: Matthew 25:21-23

## Renewed Minds – 12:2

**Negative Command** – Living sacrifices that belong to God live for God alone. Paul wisely spoke truth to people of his day and ours: Do not let the time or age you live in mold your thinking and behavior to its schemes, standards, or values. **Paul called believers to think and act like Jesus Christ, rather than imitate the people in the world around them.**<sup>14</sup>

What worldly patterns might Paul have had in mind? Romans 1–11 reveals some patterns that concerned Paul: suppressing God’s truth,<sup>15</sup> judgmentalism, self-righteousness,<sup>16</sup> misusing God’s grace to excuse sin,<sup>17</sup> living to please the flesh,<sup>18</sup> works-based righteousness,<sup>19</sup> and rejecting the gospel.<sup>20</sup> **Each worldly pattern mentioned in Romans underscores our desperate need for righteousness only God can provide.**

**The patterns of today’s world still stem from humanity’s fallen nature and inherited rebellion against God.**<sup>21</sup> Many modern philosophies explain life apart from God:

- Secularism elevates the physical world as the center of all things.
- Humanism asserts that everything exists to please and glorify people.
- Relativism claims that there is no absolute truth, goodness, or beauty; each person must find their own truth.
- Materialism seeks meaning and value in wealth, health, and fame.
- Syncretism assumes that all religions are equally true, valuable, and valid.

Even without knowing the name or details of each philosophy, these ideas impact our families, economies, education, and social values.

**Positive Command** – Paul offered an alternative to conforming to the world’s pattern—a renewed mind, which leads to transformed living. Paul called believers to a new worldview. People who think biblically live differently. **God makes believers increasingly like Jesus as they actively surrender their lives to Him.**<sup>22</sup>

A biblical worldview echoes Paul’s doxology in Romans 11:33-36. **Renewed minds recognize God is eternally above and supremely beyond everything He created.** With God at the center, worship and surrender replace self-fulfillment and put all other allegiances in their rightful place. God determines the truths by which His creation operates. God has graciously revealed Himself to all people through creation,<sup>23</sup> the Scriptures,<sup>24</sup> and “his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.”<sup>25</sup> In Jesus Christ, God illustrated goodness and beauty—humility, sacrificial love, and holiness.<sup>26</sup> In His wisdom, God ordained faith in the atoning sacrifice of Jesus Christ as the only way to receive His righteousness.<sup>27</sup> We can trust God’s absolute truth.<sup>28</sup>

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14. Like Christ: Philippians 2:1-8

15. Suppressing truth: Romans 1

16. Self-righteousness: Romans 2

17. Misusing grace: Romans 6

18. Pleasing flesh: Romans 8

19. Works-based righteousness: Romans 9

20. Rejecting Christ: Romans 10

21. World’s pattern: Galatians 1:3-5; Ephesians 2:1-2; 1 John 2:15-17

22. God’s work: Matthew 11:29; John 3:30; Romans 8:5-11; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Ephesians 4:17-24; Philippians 2:12-13; Colossians 3:1-17

23. Creation’s witness: Psalm 19:1; Romans 1:18-20

24. God revealed in Scripture: Romans 15:4; Hebrews 1:1

25. God revealed in Christ: Hebrews 1:2-3

26. Christ’s humility and sacrifice: Isaiah 53

27. Jesus the way: John 14:6

28. God is trustworthy: Numbers 23:19; John 14:6, 16-17; 16:13; 17:17

**The Result** – God transforms believers by renewing their minds. People cannot transform themselves; however, Christian transformation is not a passive process. God provides daily opportunities for believers to apply His wisdom and prove His way and will are good and perfect. Saving faith believes God and acts on that belief. **When believers consciously and deliberately obey God, they experience that His will is best.**<sup>29</sup> Paul offered this encouragement to believers learning to live for God: “The mind governed by the Spirit is life and peace.”<sup>30</sup>

## ■ Wholehearted Service – Romans 12:3-8

As God renews believers’ minds, their views of God, self, and others are transformed. After urging believers to surrender their bodies and minds to the Lord, Paul addressed how God calls believers to think and live in relationship with one another. **Surrendered believers serve for God’s glory and to benefit His redeemed family.** Paul also taught that transformed believers impact the world outside the Christian community. As part of their true and proper worship, they look outward toward God and others and not to themselves. We will study this in detail in future lessons.

### Unified Body – 12:3-5

New life in Christ reconciles believers with God and His family, which includes relationships with all God’s children.<sup>31</sup> **Christ unites believers as members of His body.**

**Thinking of Yourself (12:3)** – Paul demonstrated for his readers the importance of sober self-assessment as he stated, “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you.” **Paul did not think of himself more highly than appropriate; God’s grace alone validated Paul’s message.** In his letter to Timothy, Paul called himself the worst of sinners.<sup>32</sup> He understood who he was apart from God’s mercy in Christ Jesus.<sup>33</sup> Paul also knew that through Jesus and for Christ’s sake, he “received grace and apostleship to call all the Gentiles to the obedience that comes from faith.”<sup>34</sup> Paul humbly exercised his God-given authority, calling, and gifting as he served and taught God’s people.

Building on his example, Paul exhorted believers to behave as new creations in Christ,<sup>35</sup> thinking of themselves with “sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed.” Sober thinking is faith-filled thinking grounded in truth. **Knowing that new life in Christ is God’s gracious gift helps Christians avoid proudly elevating themselves or being trapped in shame.** While no one is righteous apart from God, God also made people in His image, blessed them, and entrusted His creation to their care.<sup>36</sup> Believers are God’s handiwork.<sup>37</sup> In Christ, God’s eternal spiritual blessings are theirs.<sup>38</sup>

**Therefore, rather than think of themselves too highly or too often, believers are called to think “in accordance with the faith God has distributed.”** How should we understand faith in this phrase?

- Faith may refer to confidence in God. We align our view of self with our knowledge of God and trust in Him. Scripture teaches us how to view God, ourselves, and others.

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29. **God’s will:** 1 Peter 2:15; 3:17; 4:11

30. **Life and peace:** Romans 8:6

31. **God’s family:** Romans 8:12-17

32. **Worst sinner:** 1 Timothy 1:15-16

33. **All under sin:** Romans 3:9

34. **Paul’s apostleship:** Romans 1:5

35. **New creations:** 2 Corinthians 5:17

36. **God’s image:** Genesis 1:26-28

37. **God’s handiwork:** Ephesians 2:10

38. **Spiritual blessings:** Ephesians 1:3-10

- Faith may refer to believing God has entrusted people with gifts, talents, and opportunities intended for His glory. Because Paul's letter goes on to discuss spiritual gifts, this meaning, though unusual, may fit best with Paul's intent.

**Thinking of Others (12:4-5) – Paul explained how believers should think about and relate to one another by comparing the Church to a human body: “one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function.”** Paul's powerful word picture establishes the basis for Christian unity. A human body cannot function without diverse parts. In the same way, believers with different functions together make up Christ's body. This image helps believers understand that each one has a unique and essential function within the body of Christ. How believers connect to one another in the body and contribute to the body matters.

Continuing with the theme of unity, Paul taught, “So in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.” The book of Acts unfolds the story of how God united believing Jews and Gentiles into one faith community. The two groups learned how to find unity in Christ's cross rather than in religious laws and traditions.<sup>39</sup> Jews and Gentiles, former enemies united by Christ, had to learn to think differently about one another.<sup>40</sup> **Paul asserted that diverse believers do more than tolerate one another's differences; Christian belonging involves mutual acceptance and humble service.** God unites believers to Jesus and one another through the Holy Spirit. Every person who places their faith in Christ experiences an invisible but real spiritual union with Jesus<sup>41</sup> and fellow believers.<sup>42</sup>

Chapter 4 of Paul's letter to the Ephesians parallels Romans 12. In both passages, Paul referred to the body of Christ as he applied doctrinal teaching to Christian living. In Ephesians 4:4-6, Paul said of the Church, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.”<sup>43</sup> **This passage highlights several ways believers are united.** First, all Christians are joined by the Holy Spirit into one body, sharing the same hope for eternity. Next, they share one Lord, one faith, and one baptism, working together to serve Christ and spread the gospel. Finally, the Church belongs to one God—the Father—who created it and brings people together to live for His glory and purpose.

## Diverse Gifts – 12:6-8

**Paul's illustration of the body points to diversity within the Church's unity.** God saves individuals from various cultures and backgrounds, then gives them unique gifts to exercise in diverse settings. Each believer assumes responsibility for the gifts God has given them, not for the gifts God has given others. While the world promotes competing to surpass one another, God calls His people to receive and exercise His gracious gifts to wholeheartedly serve and bless others.

**Prophesying (12:6) –** Paul stated, “We have different gifts.” The Greek word *charismata*, meaning “gifts,” relates to *charis*, meaning “grace.” Grace is God's unmerited favor, so *charismata* are undeserved gifts of God's grace. **Believers' gifts differ because God gives spiritual gifts according to His purpose and pleasure.**<sup>44</sup> Five New Testament passages list 20 different gifts.<sup>45</sup> Each believer has at least one gift and honors God when exercising His gifts for the well-being of the whole body.<sup>46</sup>

39. Early Church unity: Acts 10:44–11:18; 15:1-31

40. Jew and Gentile: Romans 11:17-24

41. Union with Jesus: Romans 6:3-10

42. Christian unity: John 17:23; Romans 15:5-6

43. One body: Ephesians 4:1-6

44. Different gifts: 1 Corinthians 12:4-6

45. Gifts listed: Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, 28-30; Ephesians 4:11-13; 1 Peter 4:10-11

46. Each gifted: 1 Corinthians 7:7

# Christ's Unified Body

## The Doctrine of the Church

Paul taught that in Jesus diverse believers form one body. This helps us understand that there is one Church, the Church universal or invisible. **Christ's Church, present in local congregations, includes every born-again believer.** Being a part of Christ's Church is defined by internal union with Christ Himself rather than external association with an organization. The individual believers who comprise the worldwide community of Christ's body represent the diverse nature of God's creation and the gospel's global reach. The Church's diverse languages, cultures, spiritual gifts, and organizational structures punctuate Paul's teaching that God's saving grace is available to all who call on Jesus as Lord.

When God poured out the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Christ's Church was born.<sup>1</sup> **Christ reigns as the head of the Church—His body.**<sup>2</sup> Born-again believers demonstrate Christ's love and saving power. His saving grace merits loving surrender and wholehearted worship from His Church. Jesus promised to build His Church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it.<sup>3</sup> Jesus fulfills this promise as the gospel spreads and believers express loving unity and sacrificial service.

**Paul's emphatic call to Christian unity and interdependence underscores the importance of the Church.** When we do not believe that Christ's Church is a global, diverse body of believers, we live isolated from the spiritual gifts God gives the Church for the good of all. We might be tempted to exchange the global wonder of God's saving work for familiar traditions. We miss opportunities to be enriched by diversity today while we await Christ's return.<sup>4</sup>

When we embrace the worldwide community of believers in Christ's Church, God's multifaceted beauty becomes visible in each unique member of Christ's body. Fellowship with believers becomes essential to our growth, faith, and steadfast walk in the Lord. **People worship Christ when they use their gifts to strengthen His Church, both around the world and in their own local communities.** The Holy Spirit unites believers around the world to worship the Lord and serve His family.

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1. **Pentecost:** Acts 2:1-11, 36-41

2. **Jesus the head:** Colossians 1:18

3. **Build His Church:** Matthew 16:18

4. **Heaven's diversity:** Revelation 5:9-10; 21:24-26

Paul mentioned prophesying first in his list of gifts in Romans 12. To prophesy means to proclaim, or "forthtell," a message. In both the Old and New Testaments, true prophets spoke God's words. Some prophets spoke about the future (foretelling). Paul also taught about prophecy in 1 Corinthians 14. He described prophets speaking under the Holy Spirit's influence to communicate God's revealed truth, remind people of a duty, or give a warning.<sup>47</sup> In the sense of new revelation from God—words to be included in the Word of God, the biblical canon—the gift of prophecy is no

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47. **Prophecy's use:** Acts 21:10-14; 1 Corinthians 14:1-5

longer with the Church. **Today, the completed Old and New Testaments comprise God's perfect, inspired, living revelation, offering the only complete and authoritative guide for faith, doctrine, and life.** With the phrase, "prophecy in accordance with your faith," Paul may have been exhorting prophets to speak in alignment with the gospel of Jesus Christ.<sup>48</sup> Faithful Christians have varied views about how to understand the operation of prophecy in the Church today. Regardless of perspective, any prophetic message should be carefully weighed and tested against Scripture.<sup>49</sup>

**Serving and Teaching (12:7)** – The Greek word translated as "serving" is *diakonia*. While this word might refer to the specific office of deacon or diaconal (service) ministry,<sup>50</sup> God calls all of us to serve others in the Church. Some receive this gift in special measure to lead others in serving. **Jesus expressed His heart for serving: "The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."**<sup>51</sup> Paul instructed believers to follow Jesus's example.

The teaching gift appears in all five New Testament lists of spiritual gifts. God often equips pastors with a strong teaching gift. However, everyone who knows Jesus and the gospel can teach others. **Believers can teach what they know of Christ through conversations and personal testimony.** Paul called for action. Be faithful in teaching, if that is your gift, but remember that every Christian has opportunities to share truth with others.

**Encouraging, Giving, Leading, and Showing Mercy (12:8)** – The Bible strongly associates encouragement with the ministry of the Holy Spirit—the believer's advocate.<sup>52</sup> English translations of the Greek word, *parakletos*, include helper, advocate, lawyer, encourager, consoler, intercessor, and mediator. **Encouraging expresses the idea of coming alongside someone to advise and support.** Paul called the encourager to offer more than upbeat expressions like "Good job!" or "Cheer up!" but to build others up with fortifying truth.

The gift of giving extends beyond an official church offering. Paul urged people with this gift to give "generously." **God calls all believers to give generously from the funds and resources entrusted to them.** Paul would have likely instructed church officers to give wisely or prayerfully, considering they handle the money of others.

Leadership includes management, government, and administration. Church elders especially need to manage and take care of God's church.<sup>53</sup> **Those called into church leadership need the essential spiritual gift of leadership in order to seek and protect the well-being of God's people.**

Finally, Paul listed the gift of showing mercy. Through the Holy Spirit, God gifts believers to show His mercy "cheerfully," not resentfully or judgmentally. **Believers show mercy to others in grateful, humble response to the mercy they have received from God.**

By His grace, God equips all believers with compassion, forgiveness, and diverse gifts to serve the needs of others in His Church. **God transforms and equips surrendered believers for the good of Christ's body.**

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48. **Prophets and truth:** Jude 1:3

49. **Weigh and test:** 1 Corinthians 14:29; 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21

50. **Deacons:** Acts 6:1-6

51. **Jesus served:** Matthew 20:28

52. **Advocate:** John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7

53. **Church elders:** 1 Timothy 3:1-7



## ■ Take to Heart

### Hold Fast

With God's mercy in view, Paul urged believers to let the gospel change every part of their lives. **God's merciful salvation calls for wholehearted surrender to Him and His ways.** True worship means living for the Lord, rejecting this world's patterns, being transformed from within by God, and looking outward to the flourishing of other people. Transformation begins with a renewed mind and active surrender to God's good, pleasing, and perfect will.

As believers renew their minds, they think differently about God, His creation, self, and others. Paul challenged believers to view relationships with one another as essential to living a new life in Christ. **Believers live for God and others in the interconnected community of Christ's body—the Church.** Each member of Christ's Church has gifts that God intends for the good of the whole body. Paul called believers to embrace their gifts and serve others wholeheartedly.

### Apply It

What would your life be like apart from God's mercy? Some people are flooded with gratitude for God's mercy as they consider sin's devastating impact in their lives. Perhaps those saved at a young age or long ago struggle to imagine life apart from God's mercy. Without understanding God's mercy, we lack motivation for sacrificial living that opposes the world's pattern. **How we view God and His mercy impacts our perspective on everything else.** If God's mercy toward you in Christ has not yet gripped your heart, look back at Romans 1–11. Will you ask God for a fresh understanding of your desperate need for a Savior and His powerful provision of Jesus? Through faith in Jesus, God mercifully provides righteousness we do not deserve, could never earn, and can never lose.

What might be lost if you began to think and live differently than the world? **Do you fear alienation from friends and loved ones if you no longer conform to the patterns that drive their lives?** God's will for people is always good. He desires people to know Him and flourish in relationship with Christ's Church. If you have not placed your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation from sin and death, God's will is for you to turn to Him. Trust Him today. If you are already saved by faith, consider how God's transforming work in you can shine His light and love to others. As you renew your mind and live for Christ, God will change you. As a growing gospel ambassador, you can offer suffering people hope in God's love and Christ's saving power.

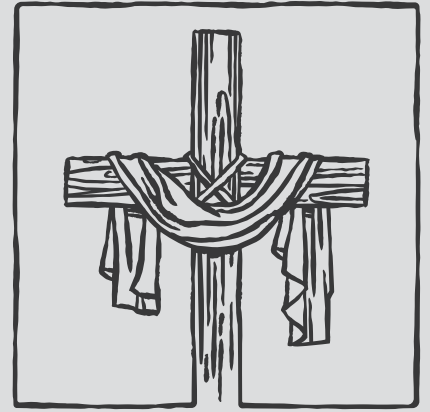
When have you forgotten God's grace and taken credit for your gifts? When a skill or talent comes easily, pride tempts us to rely on our own efforts and believe we are better than others. If we think our spiritual gifts depend on us, we become discouraged when our gifts do not measure up to other people's gifts. **Unlike human merit, status, or achievement, our salvation and spiritual gifts come by God's grace.** Our loving heavenly Father freely gives spiritual gifts to all His children. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, gratefully rejoice in God's gracious gifts to you. Look for and celebrate the diverse gifts He has given to your fellow believers. If you haven't yet trusted Jesus as your Savior, will you trust Him today? Salvation is yours for the asking. The Lord loves showering His spiritual gifts upon His children. The world cannot compete with the delight of watching God's creative work through the members of Christ's body.

ROMANS:  
From Guilt to Grace

SCRIPTURE:  
Romans 12:9-21

LESSON:  
22

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# Christian Love

## Lesson 22 Questions

### First Day: Read the Lesson 21 Notes.

*The notes and lecture fortify the truth of the passage for understanding and application to daily life.*

1. How did the lecture impact your thinking about a believer's life as a living sacrifice?
2. What did the notes teach you about serving the Church with spiritual gifts?

### Second Day: Read Romans 12:9.

*Paul called believers to love sincerely and hate evil.*

3. Looking back to Romans 12:1-2, what context did Paul give for the commands of 12:9? How might the truths of 12:1-2 impact your obedience to the commands of 12:9?
4. What do you learn about hating evil and clinging to good from the following verses:  
Proverbs 8:13

Proverbs 13:5



Ecclesiastes 3:8

Isaiah 61:8

Amos 5:15

5. How does hating evil and clinging to good help you understand what sincere love might look like in your culture?

### **Third Day: Read Romans 12:10-13.**

*Paul called believers to selfless, persevering, generous love.*

6. List Paul's commands in your own words.
7.
  - a. Which of Paul's commands in Romans 12:9-13 is hardest for you to obey? Why?
  - b. Which individuals or groups are difficult for you to honor above yourself? Why?
8. What do these commands reveal about your dependence on God for righteousness and a transformed life? (See also Romans 3:21-23; 7:21-25; 8:1, 9-14.)

### **Fourth Day: Read Romans 12:14-16.**

*Paul taught God's loving strategies for healthy relationships.*

9. What strategies for healthy relationships did Paul list in these verses?

10. a. How does a person bless persecutors? (See also Matthew 5:44; 7:12; Luke 6:27-28; or any other relevant verses.)
- b. Who might God be calling you to bless?
11. How did Jesus demonstrate the love Paul described in Romans 12:14-16? (See also Mark 2:15-17; 10:45; Luke 23:34; John 2:1-2; Romans 5:6-8; Philippians 2:7-8; Hebrews 4:15; or any other verses.)

### **Fifth Day: Read Romans 12:17-21.**

*Paul explained Christians' responsibility to all people, including their enemies.*

12. a. What responsibility do believers have regarding their enemies?
- b. What does Romans 12:19 promise God will do? (See also Deuteronomy 32:35.)
13. Give an example from Scripture of someone who did not repay evil for evil. What were the results? (Consider Genesis 45:1-5; Daniel 6; Matthew 26–28; or any other passages.)
14. How can a person live the life Paul commanded in Romans 12:9-21? (See also Romans 8 or any other Scriptures.)

### **Sixth Day: Review Romans 12:9-21.**

*God calls His people to love like He does.*

15. Write a prayer that expresses gratitude for God's merciful love toward you and requests the specific help you need to love as He loves.

*Homiletics for Group and Administrative Leaders: Romans 12:9-21*

*Next step: Continue this lesson with group discussion, lecture, and notes.*

# Lecture



After completing the daily questions, listen to this week's lecture. Some groups listen together, but you can also access it online by scanning the QR code.

# Lecture Notes

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

# Lesson 22 Notes

Romans 12:9-21

## Focus Verse

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” (Romans 12:9)

## Outline

- Love’s Expression – Romans 12:9-13
- Love’s Objects – Romans 12:14-16
- Love’s Results – Romans 12:17-21

## Engage

What is love? Who gets to define it? Movies and media portray love as stirring sentimentality. Some cultural narratives define it as unthinking emotion that embraces all and requires nothing in return. Social norms commonly associate love with likes on social media and warm feelings. Yet these versions of love fail to satisfy our deepest longings. We desire love that perseveres when difficult circumstances arise. We applaud love that rescues the helpless from crisis, like a parent pulling a child from a burning building. We quickly label love that remains aloof in danger or distress as hypocritical. **Human hearts crave more than sentiment, tolerance, and social grace.**

As Paul explained the impact of God’s mercy on believers, he turned his attention to love. Ultimately, God’s character and actions define love. Jesus’s life, death, and resurrection display what real love looks like. Love led Jesus to come down from heaven and become human like us, yet without sin. He did this so believers could know Him, receive His love, and become more like Him in how they love others. Jesus demonstrates and offers God’s love to all people: love that is righteous, outward, devoted to others, serving, enduring, and forgiving. In this week’s passage, Paul describes the type of love Jesus commands from those transformed through faith in His death and resurrection. With Jews and Gentiles now brought together in the body of Christ, Romans 12:9-21 pictures how this new community of people who have tasted the mercies of God can demonstrate sincere love in their relationships. **God calls His people to love like He does.**

## ■ Love’s Expression – Romans 12:9-13

In Romans 12, Paul taught that God’s mercy should lead believers to transformed lives that differ from the world’s patterns. As believers surrender to the Lord and renew their minds, they become more like Jesus, reflecting His righteousness in their relationships.<sup>1</sup> God’s love, expressed most clearly in Jesus, contradicted the pattern of the Roman world and continues to clash with our

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1. Conformed to Christ: Romans 8:28-29

world today. **After teaching about spiritual gifts, Paul taught believers to reflect God's love in their motives and actions.**<sup>2</sup> Through union with Christ<sup>3</sup> and the Holy Spirit's enabling,<sup>4</sup> believers can experience a renewed quality of service and love.

## Motives – 12:9-10

**Sincere Love (12:9) – Sincere love does not pretend.** *Anypokritos*, the Greek word translated as “sincere,” means “to act without hypocrisy.” Like those who wear masks to hide their true identity, hypocrites disguise themselves and pretend to be someone they are not. However, Paul began chapter 12 by calling believers to “offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God.”<sup>5</sup> Living to please God and benefit others opposes self-focus and hypocrisy.

God models and offers sincere love to fallen, sinful people. Through the costly sacrifice of His Son, God proves His love is not half-hearted or earned by good behavior. God's love is always whole, pure, and genuine in every way. **God calls and equips believers to love others with His sincerity.** As imperfect people who still battle sin, believers cannot love this way on their own. Sincere love grows as a fruit of God's Holy Spirit.<sup>6</sup> As believers become instruments of righteousness and renew their minds, the Holy Spirit develops God's love in them.

After calling for sincerity, Paul went on to say, “Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” Why did Paul include the word “hate” when describing sincere Christian love? **Christian love reflects God's pure love, which cannot tolerate evil.**<sup>7</sup> God hates sin and the damage caused by “haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up conflict in the community.”<sup>8</sup> God's genuine love distinguishes sincerity from hypocrisy and good from evil. God sees the heart and despises insincere, superficial religion.<sup>9</sup>

**Devotion to Others (12:10) –** Paul instructed, “Be devoted to one another in love.” Genuine love begins with God and flows from Him. Believers love because God first loved them.<sup>10</sup> God chose and adopted believers into His family by grace through faith.<sup>11</sup> **In view of God's undeserved mercy, members of His family put others' needs above their own.** Mutually supportive family members do not seek praise for themselves. Instead, they seek to honor others without regard for earthly status, wealth, position, education, or ancestry. Believers' devotion to and honor for one another contrast with the world's pattern of flattery and selfish ambition.<sup>12</sup>

## Actions – 12:11-13

**Serve the Lord Fervently (12:11) –** With God's wondrous saving mercy in view, Paul continued describing what sincere, others-focused love looks like in action. Paul commanded believers, “Never be lacking in zeal.” The fervor Paul called for comes from a word meaning “to boil.” How can a believer maintain zeal and bubble over with spiritual fervor? Only through the Holy Spirit's

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2. **Gifts and love:** 1 Corinthians 12–14; Ephesians 4:1–16

3. **Union with Christ:** Romans 6

4. **Enabling Holy Spirit:** Romans 8

5. **Living sacrifice:** Romans 12:1

6. **Fruit of the Spirit:** Galatians 5:22–23

7. **God hates evil:** Psalm 45:7; Isaiah 61:8

8. **God hates sin:** Proverbs 6:16–19

9. **Superficial religion:** Isaiah 1:12–15; Amos 5:21

10. **God loved first:** 1 John 4:19

11. **God's family:** Romans 8:14–17; 12:5

12. **Known by love:** John 13:35

power. Believers cannot love and serve as God commands without the Spirit's transforming work. **The Spirit leads believers to serve the Lord and love others as Jesus did.**<sup>13</sup>

**Be Joyful, Patient, and Keep Praying (12:12)** – Paul described how living sacrifices can show love amid hardship. The joyful hope Paul described is not naive optimism but steadfast assurance based on eternal reconciliation to God through Christ's saving work. **God's love and certain promises anchor a believer's hope.** God's children joyfully anticipate their blessed hope—the glorious appearing of their great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.<sup>14</sup>

Paul added patience in affliction because believers experience both joy and suffering as they await God's promised glory.<sup>15</sup> God does not call His children to a fatalistic attitude toward suffering. **Believers can patiently persevere through suffering, knowing that God will reward good, punish evil, and bring His plans to pass in His own time.** God will work all things together for His glory and the good of His children.<sup>16</sup>

What did Paul mean when he instructed faithfulness in prayer? This command issues a call to continue constantly in prayer. Jesus taught His followers to pray and never give up.<sup>17</sup> Paul also encouraged believers to pray continually, assuring them that God's Holy Spirit would help them to pray for God's will.<sup>18</sup> **Prayer deepens a believer's trust in God and love for others.**

**Share and Be Hospitable (12:13)** – At first glance, Paul's instruction to "share with the Lord's people who are in need" and "practice hospitality" might seem like two separate commands. Since Paul had already discussed the spiritual gift of financial giving,<sup>19</sup> perhaps sharing and hospitality involve more than giving money. Members of Christ's body are to practically care for one another, whatever their needs. **Hospitality involves seeking opportunities to meet the needs of others.** Jesus addressed humanity's needs throughout His earthly ministry. Christian love generously invests in sharing time, resources, and knowledge that help people thrive. The gospel opens our hearts to love, our hands to give, and our homes to welcome with abundant hospitality.

## ■ Love's Objects – Romans 12:14-16

**Paul's instructions on sincere love transitioned from relationships among Christians to love for people who hate or persecute believers.** As God mercifully loved by sending Jesus to die for sinners,<sup>20</sup> Paul called believers to show God's love to people who are not yet Christians. Paul also taught believers to think of themselves with sober judgment and live humbly with everyone, just as Jesus did.<sup>21</sup>

### Enemies – 12:14

**Paul clearly instructed, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."** Paul's teaching echoes Jesus's words: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be

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13. **Led by the Spirit:** Romans 8:9, 14; Galatians 5:18, 25

14. **Blessed hope:** Titus 2:13-14

15. **Promised glory:** Romans 5:3-5; 8:17-21

16. **For the good:** Romans 8:28-29

17. **Never give up:** Luke 18:1

18. **Help in prayer:** Romans 8:26-27; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18

19. **Gift of giving:** Romans 12:8

20. **Love for sinners:** Romans 5:6-8

21. **Christ's humility:** Philippians 2:6-8

children of your Father in heaven.”<sup>22</sup> This kind of love should distinguish Christians. The world’s pattern tempts believers to strike back spitefully when they are persecuted for their faith. However, Jesus showed God’s love for the lost when He asked God to forgive the soldiers at His cross.<sup>23</sup>

Believers can answer God’s call to bless their enemies in various ways. They can ask God to do good to their enemies rather than harm or curse them. **God’s children can actively do good for their enemies as Jesus did for all people suffering under sin’s control.** Even without warm feelings toward persecutors, Christians can extend God’s sincere love to them through Jesus.

Jesus taught His followers, “In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”<sup>24</sup> Many world religions express a negative version of Jesus’s teaching: “Do not do anything to others that you do not want them to do to you.” In other words, the world’s pattern says, “Do not hit someone unless you want them to hit you.” **In contrast, Jesus taught His followers to reflect their heavenly Father’s mercy and actively seek the good of their enemies.** God actively seeks the good of His whole creation.

## Everyone – 12:15-16

In verses 14 and 17, Paul referred to those who persecute believers. The verses form an *inclusio*, a literary form in which a repeated idea frames an important theme. Therefore, the commands in verses 15-16 are to be exercised toward everyone, including believers’ enemies. Believers need God to transform their attitudes toward their enemies. As God’s Spirit renews their minds, He helps them discern and desire God’s good, pleasing, and perfect will.<sup>25</sup> **Jesus followed God’s will when He died for His enemies.**<sup>26</sup> Now risen and glorified on high, He leads us to carry our cross and refuse any thought, word, or deed contrary to God’s person, words, and will.

**Rejoice and Mourn (12:15)** – Paul commanded believers to love by making the joys and sorrows of others their own. **When God’s children identify with other people closely enough to be touched by their experiences, they demonstrate God’s costly compassion.** The Lord Jesus graciously took on human likeness, including the weaknesses and suffering of a human body, so that He could identify with us, live the sinless life we could not, and die in our place.<sup>27</sup>

**Harmony and Humility (12:16)** – Paul encouraged believers to live in harmony with all people. Christians should not seek conflict. Believers live out and call for truth. However, they win even their enemies to Christ through His love, not their natural affections. **Pride and conceit corrupt Christian love.** Whatever believers’ worldly positions or statuses, they are not to think of themselves more highly than they ought and are to actively honor others above themselves.<sup>28</sup> We cannot remain proud or hostile when we understand our sin and the price Jesus paid to save us,<sup>29</sup> “for even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”<sup>30</sup> Jesus died for people from all social, economic, educational, and vocational backgrounds and from every generation, nation, tribe, people, and language.<sup>31</sup>

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22. Love your enemies: Matthew 5:43-45; Luke 6:28

23. Prayer for forgiveness: Luke 23:34

24. Do to others: Matthew 7:12

25. Renewed minds: Romans 12:2

26. Jesus died for enemies: Romans 5:10

27. Jesus identified with people: Philippians 2:7-8; Hebrews 4:15

28. Believer’s humble attitude: Romans 12:3, 10

29. Humbled by sin’s cost: 1 Corinthians 1:28-31; Titus 3:5

30. Jesus’s humility: Mark 10:45

31. Died for a multitude: Revelation 7:9

# The Believer's Cross and Christian Love

## The Doctrine of the Cross for a Believer

Jesus gave us the greatest expression of God's love at the cross. Because God loved the world, Jesus willingly laid down His life to provide God's enemies the way to escape God's wrath.<sup>1</sup> **Jesus calls everyone who follows Him in faith to take up their own cross, crucifying selfishness and fleshly desires.**<sup>2</sup> Following Jesus includes renouncing plans and priorities that distract from full obedience to His will. As believers carry their cross, the light of loving self-sacrifice shines into this world's darkness.<sup>3</sup> God intends for believers to demonstrate the beauty and transforming power of the gospel by denying their own interests to follow Jesus and reach out to the world.

Paul explained that sincere love leads to selflessness. His teaching aligned with Jesus's declaration that "whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."<sup>4</sup> Believers willingly take up their cross in response to Christ's loving sacrifice for them. Jesus calls believers to love Him more than their lives in this world.<sup>5</sup> Following Jesus and loving as He loves does not come easy for us. **By the Holy Spirit's power, believers crucify their old nature, which is enslaved by the world's sinful patterns and destined for judgment.**<sup>6</sup> The believer's cross brings death to self-rule but freedom from sin's bondage.

When believers refuse to take up their cross and sacrificially love like Jesus, they cease to shine the gospel's light into the world. Lives lived selfishly are not living sacrifices and instruments of righteousness for the Lord. **Believers who refuse to die to self hinder the Holy Spirit's transforming power in their lives.**<sup>7</sup> Patterns of living for self will result in sin's natural consequences, stealing the peace and joy that God desires His children to experience.

Believers who die to themselves and carry their cross invite the Holy Spirit to reprogram destructive thought patterns and habits. Through believers' transformed lives, the watching world witnesses God's love and power at work in His people.<sup>8</sup> As believers express selfless love for others, they experience deep fellowship with Jesus and fellow Christians.<sup>9</sup> **The cross for the believer kills selfish desires and ambition and unites believers with Christ in a resurrection like His.**<sup>10</sup> How is Christ calling you to die to yourself, take up your cross, and live and love like Him?

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1. God so loved: John 3:16

2. Take up your cross: Matthew 16:24; Luke 9:23

3. Believer's light: Matthew 5:14-16

4. Cross necessary: Luke 14:27

5. Love Jesus more: John 12:24-26

6. Crucify misdeeds of the body: Romans 8:13

7. Grieve God's Spirit: Ephesians 4:29-30

8. Known by love: John 13:35

9. Fellowship with Christ: John 17:20-21

10. Resurrection life: Romans 6:5-7

## Love's Results – Romans 12:17-21

Paul's letter to the church in Rome contains treasured teaching on how God's love, mercy, and grace allow sinful people to have peace with Him.<sup>32</sup> The wonder of salvation in Christ<sup>33</sup> propelled Paul's commands about transformed living, including peace among people. **Through union with**

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32. Peace with God: Romans 1:7; 5:1; 8:6

33. Paul's wonder: Romans 11:33-36



**Christ and the Holy Spirit's transforming power, believers can avoid many unnecessary conflicts and divisions in their churches and communities.** Paul offered practical teaching to renew believers' minds and direct their steps toward love's peaceful results.

## Right Living – 12:17

Paul further described how to bless and not curse enemies: "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone." *Kalos*, the Greek word translated as "right," can also mean good, honorable, true, and beautiful. **When a believer's inner transformation produces beautiful outward behavior, the world witnesses the results of God's love.**

## Pursue Peace – 12:18

**Paul challenged believers to live in peace with others.** Believers have a God-given part to play in pursuing peace. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers."<sup>34</sup> Jesus's brother James encouraged believers to "be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."<sup>35</sup> The book of Proverbs also has much to say about Christian conduct that fosters peace.

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you" warns that peace does not depend only on the believer. Others may choose to destroy peace. A believer's rejection of the world's patterns may make peace impossible. **Christians cannot exchange truth, violate purity, or condone injustice for the sake of peace.** James said, "The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving."<sup>36</sup> God's wisdom calls believers to maintain true love with purity, honesty, and justice. These essential commitments may make peace unattainable even when we sincerely pursue it. Nonetheless, as far as we are able, our goal is to live peaceably with others, even amid vast differences.

God calls His children to resist evil, sometimes even to the point of armed conflict.<sup>37</sup> Paul taught that Christians may contribute to their countries' defense.<sup>38</sup> God calls Christians to forgive and love, but hating evil means they cannot always extend trust. **Believers can trust God's generous wisdom to help them choose a path that ultimately leads to God's peace.**<sup>39</sup>

## No Revenge – 12:19

Paul also instructed believers to give up their right to personal revenge: "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord." The world's pattern rejects ideas of God, eternity, and judgment. **The thought of leaving vengeance to God seems foolish to the world.**

**God's love transforms how believers respond to mistreatment.** Believers can express their desire for justice by prioritizing Christ's righteousness over their personal desire to get even.<sup>40</sup> They are called to defend the dignity of all people made in God's image, but never by sinful means. God's love, which hates evil, provides trustworthy, eternal justice.<sup>41</sup>

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34. **Peacemakers blessed:** Matthew 5:9

35. **Slow to anger:** James 1:19

36. **Peace-loving wisdom:** James 3:17

37. **Armed conflict:** Deuteronomy 20:1-4; Romans 13:4

38. **Government as God's agent:** Romans 13:1-5

39. **God's wisdom:** James 1:5

40. **Prioritizing Christ:** Matthew 5:38-39; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:8-10

41. **Final justice:** Revelation 20:11-22:21

## Keeping Peace: Wise Words from Proverbs

- “Hatred stirs up conflict, but love covers over all wrongs.” (Proverbs 10:12)
- “Fools show their annoyance at once, but the prudent overlook an insult.” (Proverbs 12:16)
- “Fools mock at making amends for sin, but goodwill is found among the upright.” (Proverbs 14:9)
- “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1)
- “Whoever would foster love covers over an offense, but whoever repeats the matter separates close friends.” (Proverbs 17:9)
- “Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out.” (Proverbs 17:14)

## Active Goodness – 12:20

Following the passive command, “Do not take revenge,” Paul gave an active command: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.” Believers become God’s instruments of righteousness when they do good rather than evil. Paul was quoting Proverbs 25:21-22, which says, “In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.” What does it mean to “heap burning coals” on our enemy’s head? There are several interpretations. One thought is kindness can win over an enemy. Imagine yourself at a village fire pit with people who have come to seek warmth but have mistreated you. Rather than share only a few coals with them, you give them a full bucket of glowing coals to stoke their comfort. **As God makes you more like Jesus, His Spirit enables you to choose to bless rather than to retaliate for previous wrongs.**

## The Triumph of Good – 12:21

Finally, Paul said, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” Evil overcomes believers when they respond selfishly and sinfully. Not only are God’s children not to return evil for evil, but neutrality is not an option. They are to respond to evil with love. Jesus won us to Himself through His love. When we were God’s enemies—powerless and ungodly—Christ died for us.<sup>42</sup> Jesus enables those who trust Him to overcome evil with good. Believers are more than conquerors through Jesus’s love.<sup>43</sup> **God calls His people to love like He does.**<sup>44</sup>

## Take to Heart

### Hold Fast

**Paul gave believers a picture of God’s love expressed through their lives.** A believer’s life of love does not conform to the patterns of this world. Paul called believers to express love motivated by sincerity and devotion to others. Love that prioritizes the good of others relies on the Holy Spirit’s help to serve fervently, remain steadfast in difficulty, and seek ways to meet the needs of others.

42. Overcoming love: John 3:16; Romans 5:6, 8

43. Conquerors: Romans 8:37-39

44. Love as God loves: 1 John 3:11, 14, 16-18, 23

Expressing God's love includes pursuing peace with believers who view things differently than we do, loving our enemies, and welcoming the undeserving just like Jesus did. Recalling how God loved us when we were His enemies helps us to stay humble.

Sacrificial love gives up the selfish desire to seek revenge. Believers' enemies need to know Jesus. Just as Jesus's own cross produces lasting transformation in believers, sacrificial love like His impacts others. Old ways of living die, and new Spirit-led life takes their place. **Paul invited believers to embrace their identity as overcomers and overcome evil with good.**

## Apply It

Love sincerely. Honor others. Serve fervently. Practice hospitality. Bless your enemies. Live in harmony. Humble yourself. Associate with the lowly. Do what is right. Leave wrath to God. Overcome evil with good. We can read Paul's list as worthy but unachievable goals. What happens when we read these commands in view of God's love and mercy toward us through Jesus? **Jesus calls believers to express their love for Him by living like Him.** Paul was not giving believers a list of rules they must follow to keep their salvation or earn God's love. God's righteousness comes through faith in Christ, not works. God loved believers before they loved Him. When believers surrender their lives to the Lord, God's Spirit transforms their thoughts, beliefs, values, and desires. How might this list prompt you to rejoice in God's generosity, kindness, and love toward you through Jesus?

**Honoring others above yourself, especially within the Christian community, demands intentional compassion, humility, and patience.** How do you respond when honoring others is inconvenient or when you strongly disagree with them? Noticing the needs of others requires taking our eyes off ourselves. Honoring others means humbly taking the lowest place. Joyfully opening our lives to others derails personal plans and priorities. Whom are you willing to love this way? Whom is God calling you to love as He does? Ask God for the desire and power to love others. Then begin to obey Him. God will help you root out and replace your selfish desires with His selfless love.

The commands to do good to those who persecute, oppose, and hurt us clash against our natural habits. Do you feel pleasure when your enemies suffer? Unlike us, Christ actively sought His enemies' good through humble service, passionate teaching, and death on the cross. How could you seek the good of those who oppose you today? Which enemies have you stopped trying to love? While the world applauds retaliation, will you ask God to make you a peacemaker? If you are struggling to trust God's delayed justice, consider how His love and delayed justice have impacted you. **God perfectly hates evil and clings to what is good.** He calls us to do likewise.

How does Paul's message reveal reliance on your own self-effort to be like Jesus? Self-reliance tempts believers in a world dominated by merit-based rewards. Perhaps you feel defeated because you have tried and failed to live like Paul described. If Paul's list frustrates rather than inspires you, you might be trying to be good and reflect Jesus in your own strength. People cannot work to achieve God's righteous standard. Only when the Holy Spirit transforms us by renewing our minds and establishing our path will we live the righteous lives God intends for us. Paul is not commanding believers, who are saved by faith, to make themselves like Jesus by discipline or will power. **Instead, Paul described the life believers access through faith in Christ, loving fellowship with God, and the fruit of the Holy Spirit.** Will you ask God to renew your mind and transform your life?

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