

**Romans Study**  
**Session 19 - Romans 12:9-21**

In the last session we experienced the major transition from the doctrinal section of Romans to how the doctrine is lived out in the life of a Christian and through a church body. As noted, the first two verses of chapter 12 lay out the foundation for the entire life of faith in Christ.

**[Romans 12:1-2]**

Every teaching from chapters 12-15 are based upon these first two verses. It is also important as we continue our study to realize that this section of Romans is not a new law of sorts. These words flow from the teachings of grace from chapters 1-11 and are built upon that grace, not upon heaping new laws and commandments upon believers. What Paul is doing in these chapters is to lay out what a Spirit-filled Christian life will look like in this world. If one is to truly live in the power of his or her new identity in Christ and walk by faith, this is what it's going to look like. Last week we examine spiritual gifts and their role in the church body. This week we are going to move on to the critical Christian distinctive - what all Christians are to be known as being as this displays God to the world and each other.

**[John 13:34-35]**

Q: What is the nature of the love Jesus commanded us to give one another? (*v.34 - It is to be the same nature as Jesus' love was for His disciples. It is to be His love through us.*)

This session is fairly straightforward. It deals with the role of love in the life of a believer. The key is that Paul uses the entire rest of chapter 12 to define what he means by love. This is similar to his teaching to the Corinthian church. If you recall, he talks in depth to the Corinthian church about the nature and use of spiritual gifts because they were doing them wrong. In chapter 12 of I Corinthians he speaks broadly of spiritual gifts and their use. Then he follows up with chapter 13 which is called the "love chapter" where he defines God's love, what he means by love. This is what Paul's doing in Romans. He's following up his discussion of spiritual gifts with a discussion of what God's love looks like so it cannot be confused with what people often call love but it doesn't match up with God's love. This discussion of love dives directly into the depths of loving other people. This love is God's love. It comes from Him alone. **I John 4:7-8** reveal that the love Jesus had is the same love He gives us to give others. We can love because we have first been loved by God. Loving God involves loving other people. (I John 4:20-21)

**[I Corinthians 13:1-8]**

**[Romans 12:9-13]**

Q: What does Paul mean when he says for love to be without hypocrisy? (*allow for answers. Hypocrisy in the Greek language describes an actor playing a part in a play. Paul is telling the Roman Christians to avoid play-acting when it comes to loving others. If their love is not*

*sincere, then their entire Christian walk will be nothing but an act. But sincere love will look like what he's describing in the rest of this passage.)*

Q: According to Paul in these verses (9-13) what does God's love look like? *(It is not hypocritical, it abhors evil but clings to good, is devoted to other believers, gives preference to others in the church body, honors other believers, not slacking in diligent service to God, fervent in spirit, rejoices in the Christian hope, perseveres in persecution, devoted to prayer, contributes to the needs of the saints, practices hospitality)*

Let's break these down by verse.

1. v.9 - abhors evil and clings to good. Love wants, seeks and desires only what is the very best for the object of love in the long-term. What may seem like a good plan in the short term may be actually very bad for someone in the long term. Evil appears in many forms and here evil is that which is anything other than the very best God has for another person. Thus, through God's love, we believers, abhor or hate evil as it represents a vast downgrade from God's best for the other person. Love clings to good because good is what brings about God's best.

2. v.10 -

a. "devoted" - this word was used to describe family relationships.

Q: Why do you think Paul would use a word to describe our love for one another that implies a family relationship? *(Because in Christ, we are family - we are all part of God's family)*

The word "brotherly love" is used here instead of the usual term for God's love (agape). This is because Paul is talking about our spiritual family. In a family the love you share with your siblings is unique. You love them and want the best for them and there are usually positive feelings associated with the love but it can also be strong and withstand the forces of this world that seek to break it apart. It's resilient and enduring despite circumstances or bone-headed actions by the others.

b. We are to give preference to one another. We are to outdo each other in showing honor and respect to each other within the church body. God's love puts other believers before themselves. This is based upon the new creation not the old one. We are to honor each other based upon our mutual relationship with Christ we all share. Christ is in us but He is also within other believers, thus when we honor others, we are honoring Christ within others and the new creation Christ as created within them.

### **[Philippians 2:1-4]**

Q: What are some practical ways to do this within the church? *(allow answers)*

3. v.11 - this one deals with serving the Lord.

Q: What should our heart attitudes be concerning serving the Lord? *(speedy or timely, zealous,*

*active, others possible)*

This service is not to be reckless or uninformed but rather Spirit-directed and something we pursue with our whole being. This initial phrase is actually just one word in the Greek. The word “diligent” means to do something speedy because you are earnest about getting it done. It is the opposite of slothful. “Fervent” means to be hot, to boil or to glow from heat. We do our service to the Lord in the fire of the Holy Spirit, with passion. He ignites our souls to godly action and this is how love shows itself.

4. v.12 - these three deal with how love shows itself in the face of spiritual warfare and our common fight alongside our church family.

Q: How are believers supposed to demonstrate hope? *(v.12 - by rejoicing in our hope)*

Q: What is the hope of all believers? *(that we will be saved from God’s wrath and spend eternity with Him in heaven, that we have a new identity in Christ, that we are loved by God and He never leaves abandons us, that He listens to us when we pray - many other answers possible)*

a. Persevering in tribulation means to bear up under pressure, to patiently endure the burden or hardship. The underlying key to this is patience.

Q: Why is patience important in the ability to bear up under pressure? *(patience allows us to keep God on His throne in our hearts, it is us making sure we do not forget the sovereignty of God to act in His own time, not necessarily out timing on an event. It also makes sure we realize that not only is He sovereign but also loving towards us and trust He will act in our best in His time. It is truly and act of faith in the Lord.)*

b. Prayer is a vital part of our relationship with God. Many people see prayer as a waste of time or just a mental exercise, instead of spending time talking to and listening to God. It’s deeply intimate. There can be no victory in spiritual warfare without prayer - a vital connection to the Lord - His perspective and methods for dealing with a situation at hand.

5. v.13 - love showing itself in meeting the need of others and placing them first

Even when under persecution or in distress the believer is not to become so preoccupied with oneself as to become insensitive to the needs of others. We show love by sharing what has been entrusted to us by God with others.

Practicing hospitality is a strong phrase. In fact “practice” is of the same force, just in the positive direction as the word “persecute”. It is a pursuit of what is right and loving in this case. Hospitality means to show love to strangers. Historical note: the early church was able to spread and reach the ends of the known world because of the practice of hospitality. In a world without hotels or restaurants, it was essential for traveling Christian ministers to be able to trust that as they traveled to fulfil their calling, someone would be around to take care of their physical needs such as a safe place to sleep and someone to feed them as they ministered.

**[Matthew 10:11, 40]** - By opening the door to a Christian minister called to your area, even though you don't know them, you are opening the door to Christ to your community.

In this next section, Paul expands the love Christians are to display beyond other Christians to everyone they encounter. It explains how love leads us to live in harmony with other people, even those who are not saved.

**[Romans 12:14-16]**

Q: According to these verses, what does God's love look like? *(see vv.14-16)*

Persecution of Christians became widespread under the reign of Nero just a few years after Paul wrote the book of Romans. Countless Christians died and were tortured or exiled or in other ways mistreated during this time. In fact, persecution in one form or another was so common that it is just assumed that every believer would face persecution in one form or another. It was a given.

Q: What are some practical ways in which you can bless those who persecute you? *(pray for the ability to forgive them and for God to forgive them, pray that their hearts are changed so that they see the validity of faith in Christ and desire it for themselves, continue to meet their needs if they are seen to have needs, many other answers possible. The key is to see the persecutor as God does - lost and in need of Jesus.)*

The literal translation of v.15 is "rejoicing with rejoicing people and weeping with weeping people".

Q: In what way does this show God's love for others? *(It keeps us from becoming jealous of the good fortune of others and it keeps us empathetic with those who are suffering as to not neglect them, other answers possible)*

The greatest obstacle to showing the love described in v.16 is pride. To have equal regard for others is to live in harmony with them and this means to dispel discord. Conceit has no place in the life ruled by love and the love of God will shine light upon the dark acts of gossip, slander, lies, factions and strife and expose them.

The end of the verse is a word play. It contrasts a "high" to be avoided and a "low" to engage. The high to be avoided is to not think too highly of yourself. The low to engage are the people the world considers lowly and in some way beneath you. Associate with everyone is the key. We are not above anyone the teaching here and the teaching of Jesus while on earth.

Q: If you do not consider yourself as wise, what will you do for wisdom? *(Seek it from God and others - you will be open to listening and learning)*

This last section on love deals explicitly with how to love those who are hostile towards us in this world. As long as we live here, there will be opponents in our lives - those who seek to thwart our goals and rejoice in our demise.

## **[Romans 12:17-21]**

V.17 is a positive and a negative at work.

Q: According to v.17, what are Christians never to do? (*repay evil with more evil*)

Q: Why does love never repay evil with evil? (*That behavior fosters bitterness and the cycle of revenge, it sets up factions, it leads to increased animosity, it prevents the gospel from being seen or witnessed by those who need to see a difference in you from those in the world, many more answers possible*)

Q: According to v.17, what are Christians to do when confronted by evil? (*do what is right in the sight of all men - this needs some explanation. The problem is that Christians and lost people have differing standards for evaluating right and wrong. While there are some universal rights and wrongs, for the most part, both sides would see things differently. What Paul is getting at here with this admonition is to say that believers are under the constant scrutiny of both believers and lost people. We must be careful that our behavior does not betray the high calling of the gospel but instead advances the love of God in the sight of all reasonably minded people. The word "respect" means to "think of beforehand". It means that in times of persecution our actions should never be dictated by our habits but rather what each situation needs in light of the movement of the Spirit within us. It means to be determined to focus on Jesus and His goals rather than our own in such a time.*)

V.18 lets us know that we are to be dispensers of peace. If there is any disunity or disharmony that erupts in a relationship, don't let the responsibility be laid at our feet. To the extent that we are able to be at peace with people, God's love enables us to pursue peace with others. However, it also recognizes that some people will not allow us to be at peace with them. Paul had several examples of this in his ministry - people who were out for his hide for one reason or another - not that he sought their downfall or harm but they wouldn't allow peace to reach them or be brought to their relationship with him.

## **[Proverbs 25:21-22]**

Q: Why are believers to never take their own vengeance? (*v.19 - it is an act reserved for God alone to take. Think about it. God alone knows the full truth of a situation as well as the hearts and hidden thoughts and motives of each person. He alone is in the position to judge people truthfully and fairly. He knows if vengeance is needed or not and if so, to what degree. This again displays our faith in God's sovereignty.*)

Our modern and sensible world cannot grasp v.20 when it speaks of heaping burning coals upon the heads of our oppressors or persecutors. All it is saying is the truth of lost human nature. When a so-called or self-professing enemy of a Christian is helped out by that Christian, it evokes an emotional response which of frustration and angst. Love doesn't help the so-called enemy in order to induce this feeling, all God is saying in this passage is that if you are looking for vengeance, let it come in this form. Know that your godly actions will cause them to feel the

burn of godliness and might even cause them to repent and seek out reconciliation. We show kindness to our “enemies” with hope that they become ashamed of their actions and seek to discover our motive for responding to them in love. If there is more retribution needed, God will dole it out in His time.

In I Samuel 24 we are told of the account of King Saul hunting down David. At one point in the hunt, Saul went into a cave to relieve himself and David was hiding in that cave. He could have killed Saul right then and there but didn't. Instead, he cut a small swatch off Saul's robe and kept it. Later when David confronted Saul, he showed him the piece of his robe he'd cut off and told him he could have killed him but spared his life. Listen to Saul's response:

**[I Samuel 24:17-19]** - David did not give in to his fleshly temptations to kill Saul but rather by faith, loved Saul and allowed the Lord to deal with him in His own time and manner.

Keep in mind in all of these things, but especially those mentioned in vv. 17-21, the vertical relationship with God dictates the horizontal relationship with other people. Our love for God and our new relationship with Him will fundamentally alter our way of relating to everyone else in the world. Love is a choice, an act of will. In closing Paul says that we are not overcome by evil but are to overcome evil with good. This is how the Christian lives. It is our faith in the changes made to our hearts that makes this possible. It is the presenting our bodies a living and holy sacrifice acceptable to God that makes any of this possible. It cannot be done in our own strength or it is nothing but play acting.

Q: Do you have any questions, comments, rebukes or rebuttals?