

We are continuing in a list of exhortations from the Apostle Paul to the church in Rome. He has encouraged us to be living sacrifices to God and refers to that sacrifice as our reasonable service. He exhorted us to be humble and yet to recognize the gifts God has given us. Every believer has a gift to be used to build up the body of believers. Then Paul began with one liner exhortations. Our agape love should be genuine. We should abhor what is evil and cling to what is good. We are to love one another as a family in Christ. We should outdo one another in showing honor. Our zeal should not be allowed to diminish, but always fervent in the Holy Spirit as we serve the Lord. We should rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, and be constant in prayer. And we are to contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality (Romans 12:1-13).

Every time I look at these lists I can't help but think of how blessed a church would be if it lived up to these commands. I'm also reminded how short I fall in living them. We could review them daily and be encouraged to grow in the Spirit.

Paul continues with a phrase that is almost a quote from Jesus. Since Paul wasn't with Jesus during His earthly ministry, he was either taught this by the Spirit or by the Apostles he met in Jerusalem (Acts 9:27). He spent very little time with the Apostles but had numerous revelations that line up perfectly with what Jesus' taught. Of course they both drew from the same Old Testament Scriptures.

*<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.* This is a hard saying! Jesus said to love your enemies and pray for those that persecute you (Matthew 5:44). I heard the testimony of a Muslim who after reading that saying of Jesus could not get it out of his mind. He was taught to hate for so long that this saying irritated him. The Holy Spirit used it to help him see the difference between Islam and Christianity. Islam conquers with the power of the sword and hatred, while Christianity conquers with the sword of the Word and love. For the Jews of Jesus' day, this was a hard saying too. Their attitude was that Samaritans and all Gentiles were to be tolerated at best.

Loving our enemies can be found in the Law and the writings. The Law teaches that if you find your enemy's donkey that has strayed, you should return it. If you see it fall under a load, you are to help your enemy get the animal back up (Exodus 23:4-5). When Elisha miraculously captured a Syrian army unit the king of Israel asked if he should destroy them. Elisha told him to feed them and send them home (2Kings 6:22). While we tend to focus on the taking of the Promised Land and the wars against the enemies of Israel, we should understand that those were judgments of God on the depraved wickedness of those cultures (Genesis 15:16). Jesus sees something completely different in the Law and the Prophets. On the Sermon on the Mount Jesus

**Commented [notes1]: Romans 12:1-13 (ESV)**

- <sup>1</sup> I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.
- <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.
- <sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.
- <sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function,
- <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.
- <sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;
- <sup>7</sup> if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching;
- <sup>8</sup> the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.
- <sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.
- <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.
- <sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.
- <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer.
- <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

**Commented [notes2]: Acts 9:27 (ESV)**

- <sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

**Commented [notes3]: Matthew 5:44 (ESV)**

- <sup>44</sup> But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

**Commented [notes4]: Exodus 23:4-5 (ESV)**

- <sup>4</sup> If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him.
- <sup>5</sup> If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.

**Commented [notes5]: Exodus 23:4-5 (ESV)**

- <sup>4</sup> If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey going astray, you shall bring it back to him.
- <sup>5</sup> If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying down under its burden, you shall refrain from leaving him with it; you shall rescue it with him.

**Commented [notes6]: Genesis 15:16 (ESV)**

- <sup>16</sup> And they shall come back here in the fourth generation, for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet complete."

said, <sup>12</sup> "So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets. Matthew 7:12 (ESV) To Jesus, the Law and the Prophets proclaimed the Golden Rule. Do you want your enemies to love you? Then you should love them. We reap what we sow (Galatians 6:7).

Why is this so hard? It's because our old nature is all about honoring self and getting even. When someone takes advantage of you, or offends or insults you, the natural carnal reaction is to despise them. We play the offense over and over in our mind. You hurt yourself and those you love when you do that (Hebrews 12:15). That reaction only adds to the darkness in this world. But when we choose love, we will often find that we can win the person over. Many times they don't realize how offensive their comment or the action was to us.

As believers we must realize the world doesn't know how to act any different. It shouldn't surprise us (Ephesians 2:3). We should expect it. And if they are to know there is another way, then we must show them. Refuse to be offended. Choose to love. You'll make your life a lot happier and probably the lives of others as well. Forgive and move on. You don't have to give them another opportunity to cheat you, but you can be gracious and loving.

Peter taught this same lesson. <sup>9</sup> Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. 1 Peter 3:9 (ESV) Peter went on to add that if you suffer for being righteous, God will bless you (1Peter 3:14).

<sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. That is what God does for us (Hebrews 4:15). Certainly we should do that for others. We should be with the people we are with. It is the best medicine for self-centered creatures. Hear them. Feel with them. Have compassion! That word means to be "with feeling." Jesus exemplified this when He was at the tomb of Lazarus. He knew He was going to raise Lazarus. So why did He cry with the people (John 11:33-35)? He felt their pain. He had compassion for their aching hearts. At the wedding feast in Cana, He shared the joy of the guests and even provided more wine (John 2:7-9). Joy and sorrow are a part of every life. To really share the life of another, we must share their joy and pain.

There will be times when you can't do that because the reason for their joy or grief is not a godly one. They may be joyful over sin in their life or weep because they can't sin. That is the exception to this command. We can't join them in that case and should with grace and love tell them why when the time is right.

<sup>16a</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Harmony implies differences that blend. Disunity is differences that divide. The letter from Paul to the Philippian church addresses two women who had been at odds over some issue (Philippians 4:2-3). He doesn't even address the issue because their lack of harmony became the issue. How often that is

**Commented [notes7]: Galatians 6:7 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

**Commented [notes8]: Hebrews 12:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no "root of bitterness" springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled;

**Commented [notes9]: Ephesians 2:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

**Commented [notes10]: 1 Peter 3:14 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,

**Commented [notes11]: Hebrews 4:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin.

**Commented [notes12]: John 11:33-35 (ESV)**

<sup>33</sup> When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.

<sup>34</sup> And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." <sup>35</sup> Jesus wept.

**Commented [notes13]: John 2:7-9 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim.

<sup>8</sup> And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. <sup>9</sup> When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom

**Commented [notes14]: Philippians 4:2-3 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> I entreat Euodia and I entreat Syntyche to agree in the Lord.

<sup>3</sup> Yes, I ask you also, true companion, help these women, who have labored side by side with me in the gospel together with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life.

the case! It might be any number of things that sets off tensions between two people, but we are commanded to get over it and return to harmony. That goes for couples as well as a church body. When unbelievers enter a church where there is tension, they can feel it right away. They came to find love and a different way of life, and instead they find the same thing they experienced in the world. That isn't going to draw them to Jesus. Instead of outdoing one another in honoring one another, we end up upset because we aren't being honored.

There are bound to be differences. Some things are worth fighting for, such as depending on the Word of God as the source for all truth (1Corinthians 11:19). Other things are a matter of preference, or interpretation, or opinion. Allow others to have their way. Then, if they are wrong, they will respect you more for allowing them to try it and find out that you were right. If you insist on your way and it has bad results, won't you wish you'd have let someone else lead?

*<sup>16b</sup> Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.* We went over this last week under the first exhortation of not thinking of yourself more highly than you should but soberly (Romans 12:3). The flesh tends to exalt itself, while life in a Spirit filled person is humble and sees their own faults and weaknesses. I think that is one reason God chose the Apostle Paul who was formerly a Christian killer. We know it is one reason he had a thorn in the flesh (2Corinthians 12:7). Jacob had a limp (Genesis 32:31). Moses spoke with a stutter (Exodus 4:10). God uses the weak and foolish things of this world to confound the wise (1Corinthians 1:27).

The heading in the ESV Bible for this section that started in verse nine is: **Marks of the True Christian**. While it is true of every verse, I find this one most revealing. A genuine believer values every life. They don't shun the socially or mentally impaired. I wish the Ranchers could still be with us. They gave us a chance to practice this verse. The Ranchers may not have your I.Q., but God speaks to their hearts in the most profound way. Their love is genuine. They never pretended to be better than anyone. They exemplify many of these attributes we are looking at.

**To associate with the lowly can not only refer to people but also to things.** This is another sign of the true believer. They aren't too important to take out the trash or clean up after someone that has left a mess. They see a need and do it without asking whether or not it is beneath them. They see an opportunity to serve to the glory of God. This is one of those areas in which Christianity took a word that the world used in a demeaning way and exalted it. The world used the word "lowly" with disdain, whereas the church used it as something to be sought after. The last shall be first (Matthew 20:16).

*<sup>16c</sup> Never be wise in your own sight.* Once again Paul addresses a natural tendency of the flesh. We always think *our* idea is the best. However, love demands that we give

**Commented [notes15]: 1 Corinthians 11:19 (ESV)**  
<sup>19</sup> for there must be factions among you in order that those who are genuine among you may be recognized.

**Commented [notes16]: Romans 12:3 (ESV)**  
<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

**Commented [notes17]: 2 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)**  
<sup>7</sup> So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited.

**Commented [notes18]: Genesis 32:31 (ESV)**  
<sup>31</sup> The sun rose upon him as he passed Penuel, limping because of his hip.

**Commented [notes19]: Exodus 4:10 (ESV)**  
<sup>10</sup> But Moses said to the LORD, "Oh, my Lord, I am not eloquent, either in the past or since you have spoken to your servant, but I am slow of speech and of tongue."

**Commented [notes20]: 1 Corinthians 1:27 (ESV)**  
<sup>27</sup> But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong;

**Commented [notes21]: Matthew 20:16 (ESV)**  
<sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first last."

equal weight to others opinions and suggestions, unless of course they contradict God's Word (Isaiah 8:20). When that is the case, we would be wise to ask them for the Scriptural basis behind their opinion. We might be surprised by their answer.

*<sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.* Turnabout is not always fair play. Just because someone does what is wrong does not justify us doing the same. I think you can see on your own how these instructions overlap. Some of the points Paul is making are being expressed in different ways. These could all come under the first exhortation of letting our love be genuine. Agape love lives up to all the exhortations that follow verse nine, but the Holy Spirit through Paul is elaborating with all these different expressions.

The reason we give thought to doing what is honorable in the sight of all is because we are witnesses of Jesus' life in us. To return evil for the evil of another damages our testimony, but when we do what is honorable, we glorify Jesus. People will wonder how we rose above the common tit for tat and did what was righteous. When we ask our self how Jesus would react, we are asking what the life of Christ in us would have us do. When He was treated in an evil manner, He taught the truth and forgave (Luke 23:34). With that in mind, Paul is not teaching us to be doormats, but to speak the truth in love and with forgiveness in our hearts (Ephesians 4:15).

*<sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* I think we can all relate to the way this is worded. Disharmony and unforgiveness should never be due to the condition of our heart. Others may insist on it because of the truth we proclaim. Some will insist that you call their sin acceptable or they will not accept you. Our part is to love them anyway but never compromise the truth. Love would not lie and encourage a person to go merrily on their way to hell. We will increasingly find that this is where we come in conflict with the world (John 15:19).

The world will insist that we should not judge. But it is the Word that judges. Sin destroys now and forever. **Love does not compromise warning people about what is harmful to them.** However, we can do so in a way that is more likely to be accepted. We can scream, "Repent or burn!" or we can speak of the love of God that sent Jesus to die in our place that we might have life (1Peter 3:15). Which is more likely to be heard? Sometimes both are necessary, but I believe more are won by the love of Christ than the fear of judgment. The fear of judgment brought me to prayer, but the love of Christ won my heart.

*<sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."* "Getting even" should not be in a Christian's vocabulary. What if Jesus said He needed to get even with us? That is a frightening thought. The most difficult task is forgiving those who harm a loved one. What an amazing testimony the world witnessed when the Amish parents came to the

**Commented [notes22]: Isaiah 8:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> To the teaching and to the testimony! If they will not speak according to this word, it is because they have no dawn.

**Commented [notes23]: Luke 23:34 (ESV)**

<sup>34</sup> And Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." And they cast lots to divide his garments.

**Commented [notes24]: Ephesians 4:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ,

**Commented [notes25]: John 15:19 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.

**Commented [notes26]: 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

parents of the man who killed their children with gracious forgiveness. We can only do that by the grace of God and remembering how much we have been forgiven. Only God knows the heart. Will that person that harmed you one day repent and become your brother or sister in Christ? Only God knows the answer. How can you bless your enemies if you are thinking of vengeance? We must leave it to the One that knows what that person needs. He can save them or give them what they deserve if they refuse to repent. It reminds me of Pharaoh during the Exodus. He was shown that his gods were nothing, and yet his heart was hardened. It was love that showed him truth again and again, and he still ordered his army into the sea (Exodus 14:23). The Lord knows how to forgive or how to repay. Leave it to Him and let go of it. He alone is the moral judge.

<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."* Paul quotes a proverb to remind us of his Old Testament source for these exhortations. He is quoting from the Wisdom section, Proverbs 25:21-22. There are two differing opinions on the interpretation of this passage. One is that by being gracious to your enemy, they will be convicted and have a sense of guilt. There is an eastern expression of fire in the liver meaning guilt.

However, the context seems to lead to another interpretation. Hebrew often rephrases itself in another way to give two expressions with the same meaning. If one's hearth fire died out, they would go to a neighbor to ask for coals to relight their fire. A few coals would make it more difficult to light and might die out before one made it home. A generous person would heap up coals into the neighbor's container that was carried on their head back home. This interpretation seems to fit better with the context.

<sup>21</sup> *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* That sums up much of what Paul has been addressing. It is not being conformed to this world (Romans 12:2). Don't react like the world does. So much of the Christian life is about relationships with people of the world, believers, and family. That is where our biggest tests take place. Those who are close to us cause the most pain but bring the most joy. They are our biggest test as to whether or not we are walking in the Spirit.

Do yourself a favor and memorize this little summary verse, Romans 12:21. Do you see how the numbers reverse just like the idea reverses? That will help you remember it. Let it guide you. Let the Holy Spirit bring it to mind when you are tempted to take matters into your own hands or to hang on to offenses. Life in Christ is a life of agape love toward all, and brotherly love toward the family of God. Our flesh will challenge both of these types of love at every turn but the Spirit of God empowers us to rise above the ways of the flesh and walk in the Spirit if we will yield to Him (Galatians 5:16).

**Commented [notes27]: Exodus 14:23 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> The Egyptians pursued and went in after them into the midst of the sea, all Pharaoh's horses, his chariots, and his horsemen.

**Commented [notes28]: Romans 12:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

**Commented [notes29]: Galatians 5:16 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.

## Questions

- 1 Review 12:1-13.
- 2 Why should we bless our enemies?
- 3 Why should we forgive?
- 4 Why should we share others' highs and lows?
- 5 How can we have harmony?
- 6 How did God change the word "lowly"?
- 7 What kind of people does God like to use?
- 8 Why do we need to do what is honorable?
- 9 Why can't we seek vengeance?
- 10 How does verse 21 sum up this passage?