

## Introduction

- Because we have been saved by the unending mercies of God in Jesus Christ, Paul has called us to offer all that we are to God as worship (12:1). This begins with our minds (12:2), where we are tempted to think of ourselves rather than each other (12:3), even though God has saved us into one body of Christ (12:4-6a). In putting us together, God by His grace gifts us to serve one another (12:6b-8) and commands us to live together in real love (12:9-16).
- Of course, we don't live in a world where everyone loves us. How are believers to live lives of worship in relation to those who hate them? The apostle, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, now tells us that offering ourselves to a merciful God as “*living sacrifices*” means not reacting in retaliation and revenge.
- Because we have received mercy, how then should we live?

## Be Peacemakers (12:17,18)

### We Are Not to Be Agents of Evil (12:17a)

12:17a *Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.*

- Avoiding vengeance (repaying evil with evil) is forbidden in the Old Testament, as well (Exodus 23:4,5; Proverbs 20:22).
- What we are not talking about:
  - Self-defense. Protecting yourself, your family, your property, or victims is not paying “*back evil for evil.*”
  - Government. We will talk about the role of government in punishing evil-doers in chapter 13. Paul is not addressing the government's right to wage war or exact punishment.
- READ 1 Thessalonians 5:13b-15; 1 Peter 2:8,9 for similar teaching.

## Our Place in Society (12:17b)

12:17b *Respect what is right in the sight of all men.*

- Proverbs 3:4; Luke 2:52; Acts 2:47; Romans 14:18.
- If we are to be contrary to the people around us, let it be solely because of the commands of God in the Bible.<sup>1</sup>

## Be Agents of Peace (12:18)

12:18 *If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.*

- “*Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord*” (Hebrews 12:14). Our pursuits of peace with others never crosses the line of God's holiness (which is described in His Word). “The cause of conflict must not arise from you. Your duty is to preserve peace...Paul's own example shows that he was far from thinking that either truth or principle was to be sacrificed for the preservation of peace.”<sup>2</sup>
- May we be hated only because they hate our Jesus, and nothing ugly in us. Sometimes believers think they are being persecuted for Jesus, when in reality they're just jerks.
- Jesus is Prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6; John 14:27; Acts 10:36; Romans 5:1). As those saved by faith in Him, God's purpose is that we be conformed to Him (Romans 8:28,29). READ Matthew 5:9.

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<sup>1</sup> An illustration of this principle is found in 2 Corinthians 8:20,21 (see also 6:3; also 1 Corinthians 10:31-33). Paul and associates, in taking up an offering among believers throughout the Roman Empire for the believers in Judea (there was a famine), made sure to take “*precaution so that no one will discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.*” In another illustration, the apostle advises the Thessalonians to “*abstain from all appearance of evil*” (1 Thessalonians 5:22, K.J.V.).

<sup>2</sup> Charles Hodge (1797-1878), *Epistle to the Romans* (1835).

- The Church needs peacemakers! Step up!

## Meditation on the Old Testament:

### Trusting God’s Judgment (12:19,20)

#### The Lord’s Part (12:19)

12:19 *Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written [in Deuteronomy 32:35], “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.*

- To some degree, this hints at the discussion we’ll have in chapter 13 about civil magistrate.
- It is in this area that we are specifically commanded to imitate Jesus: “...*this find favor, if for the sake of conscience toward God a person bears up under sorrows when suffering unjustly...if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps, [as it says in Isaiah 53:9] Who committed no sin, nor was any deceit found in His mouth; and while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but **kept entrusting Himself to Him Who judges righteously**” (1 Peter 2:19,20b-23).*
- “...believers will not be able to conquer feelings of revenge unless we know that ultimately there is justice, that God will set all accounts right. We would fall prey to retaliation in the present if we did not know that God would vindicate us in the future.”<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner (b. 1954), *Romans* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1998), pgs. 673-674.

### Our Part (12:20)

12:20 [And in Proverbs 25:21,22] “*But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.*”

- This builds on what was first mentioned in Paul’s directions to believers earlier in the chapter: (12:14).<sup>4</sup>
- “*Burning coals*” in the O.T. often represent God’s wrath (2 Samuel 22:9,13//Psalm 18:8,12; Job 41:21; Psalm 140:10; Proverbs 6:27-29; Ezekiel 24:11). That the “*burning coals*” here in 12:20 also refer to God’s wrath is strengthened by the parallel with 12:19.

### Victory Over Evil (12:21)

12:21 *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

- To “*overcome*,” or have victory, is the mark of a true believer.<sup>5</sup>

“...*God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were **enemies** we were **reconciled to God through the death of His Son**, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life” (Romans 5:8-10).  
**All human beings are born rebels – enemies – against God. His Son has paid the price for that rebellion on the cross, a love-gift of God’s mercy. This is how He treated us as enemies. Have you received this mercy? Do you show it to others?***

<sup>4</sup> Paul is echoing the teaching of Jesus:  
READ Matthew 5:43-48//Luke 6:27-36.

<sup>5</sup> Consider this description of believers as it is used by the apostle John (1 John 2:13,14; 4:4; 5:4,5; Revelation 2:7,11,17,26; 3:5,12,21; 12:11; 15:2; 21:7).