



# Christian Love

Romans 12:9-21

## Sincere Love

□ Paul continues his instructions to believers. Read Romans 12:9-16.<sup>1</sup>

1. It may seem strange to see the command to *love* immediately next to the command to *hate* (12:9-10). How are these commands related?<sup>2</sup>
2. Based on this passage, in what ways is Christian love expressed? (see 12:10, 13)<sup>3</sup>



## Good Will

- Paul writes, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse”<sup>4</sup> (12:14, NIV).
- 📖 Jesus said, “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).
  - 📖 He also said, “Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (Luke 6:27-28, NIV).
3. In what ways should we pray for those who mistreat us?

## Sharing Feelings

- “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn (weep) with those who mourn (weep)” (12:14, NIV).
- 📖 Using the analogy of the human body for the church (12:4-8), Paul writes elsewhere, “its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it” (1 Corinthians 12:25b-26, NIV).
- When you hear about the success or accomplishment of a classmate, coworker, colleague, etc., do you feel joy, or do you feel envy or bitterness? Do you truly share in their joy, or do you get stuck thinking about how you compare with them?

## Thinking Properly

- Paul writes, “Live in harmony with one another. *Do not* be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. *Do not* be conceited (i.e., think too highly of yourself)” (12:16).<sup>5</sup>
- Think of the “lowly” people that you encounter. Do you look down on them? In what specific ways can you begin to show love to these “people of low position?”

<sup>1</sup> In general, these instructions concern relationships with other believers, but not exclusively (e.g., 12:14).

<sup>2</sup> Many people equate “love” with unqualified “acceptance” and “tolerance.” However, genuine love does not accept evil because evil is destructive. Genuine love desires what is truly good for others, and thus hates evil.

<sup>3</sup> 12:11 says, “Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor” – that is, do not be lazy or complacent, but be enthusiastic and passionate. However, zeal should be based on knowledge (10:2) and guided by “serving the Lord.” 12:12a echoes 5:1-11. “...faithful in prayer” reminds us that prayer is easily neglected; thus it requires commitment.

<sup>4</sup> “bless” (*eulogeite*) – to wish good things on another person, or call on God to bestow (give) good things to another person; “curse” (*katarasthe*) – to wish, or ask God to bring, bad things on another person.

<sup>5</sup> Jesus was known for associating with the “lowly.” He reached out to the poor and needy (Luke 17:11-14, 18:35-43); he ate with “tax collectors and sinners” (Luke 5:30). He crossed social and cultural boundaries (John 4:4-10).

### Reflection/Application

- Everyone wants to be loved. We also need to love others. Is your love for others “sincere?” Is it difficult to love others? The Bible says, “God is love” and “love comes from God” (*1 John 4:7-8*). God gives his children the desire and capacity to love. “We love because he first loved us” (*4:19*). Have you experienced the love of God through faith in Jesus Christ?
- As a Christian, in what specific ways are you expressing your love for others? What is the evidence that you are “devoted” to your brothers and sisters in Christ? (*12:10*) Commit to “brotherly love” and ask God to show you how you can express your love for others.

### Responding to Attacks

- ❑ How does “Christian love” respond to personal “attacks?”<sup>6</sup> Read Romans 12:17-21.

4. Verse 18 says, “...live at peace with everyone.” Does this necessarily mean we should be completely passive and “tolerant?” Is living at peace with *everyone* a reasonable expectation for the Christian?<sup>7</sup> Explain.



5. What types of acts provoke us to seek revenge?<sup>8</sup> Why do we get angry?<sup>9</sup> Why is it difficult to “bless those who persecute us” and “love our enemies”?

6. Verse 19 says, “Do not take revenge.” What steps can we take to avoid thoughts and actions of revenge?<sup>10</sup>



- ❑ Read 12:21. Evil can overcome us when we allow the wrong attitudes and actions of others to cause us to respond in a wrong way. If we repay evil for evil, then evil has overcome us.
- ❑ Can evil really be “overcome” with good? (*12:21b*) Yes! That is what Jesus did! As he said, “I have overcome the world” (*John 16:33c*). As followers of Jesus Christ, we are called to bless those who persecute us, love our enemies, and overcome evil with good.

### Reflection

- Think about your “enemies.” They might be in the school, workplace, neighborhood, church or family. Think about how you respond to others’ anger, negative words and actions toward you. Think of one of your “enemies” right now. Commit to pray for, and bless that person. And remember, the capacity to love enemies is found in Christ.

<sup>6</sup> In this context, the offenses are primarily personal. For attacks against society and state, consider Romans 13:1-7.

<sup>7</sup> Jesus said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Matt. 5:9). However, true peace is peace with God, and “the world” is opposed to God. As we align ourselves with God, conflict is inevitable. Even “the Prince of Peace” said that he was bringing conflict into this world (Isaiah 9:6; Luke 12:51). In any case, if it is possible, live at peace with everyone.

<sup>8</sup> For example, criticism, lies, deceit, slander, financial damage, physical injury, intrusion into relationships, etc.

<sup>9</sup> For example, personal injury and loss, group injury, injustice, etc. In this context, personal “injury” is primary. While “righteous anger” exists (in response to moral wrong), our anger is usually self-centered and negative.

<sup>10</sup> First, we need to move from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. We must turn the matter over to God, for He is the Judge (12:19; quote from Deut. 32:35a). We should “bless” the offending person (12:14). At a minimum, this involves prayer (Matt. 5:44), and may involve concrete positive actions toward the person (12:20; Proverbs 25:21-22a). What is the result of such positive actions? (12:20b) Many scholars say the phrase “heap burning coals on his head” refers to bringing shame on the person with the hope that it will lead to repentance. Others say the phrase “burning coals” refers to God’s judgment, with the idea that the unrepentant person’s guilt is increased.