

Living Like a Christian in Our Relationships with Other People (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] Let's ask God to speak to us now. Father, as we open your word, open our minds, open our hearts, we might hear you.

We might understand what you're calling us to be and to do. Make it clear, Father, how we should respond as we work through this passage of Scripture.

To each one of these attitudes that we need to have, develop, demonstrate toward other people and especially those who oppose us.

Help us, Father, to hear and respond wholeheartedly in obedience. In Jesus' name we pray.

Amen. How hard is it for you to love someone who loves you? It's a no-brainer, isn't it? It's easy.

People love you.

[1 : 12] You just love them back automatically. Well, how difficult is it to relate to someone who is very much like you? I mean, they share your same beliefs, your same values.

They live a lifestyle similar to yours. You just naturally know how to talk to them, do things with them. You can just relate well, understand one another.

But what about people who are different from you? Isn't it harder to love somebody who is very different from you in the way that you look at life and live life?

Well, what about people who oppose you? People who don't like you. People who are against you because you're a Christian. They don't believe like you.

They don't think like you. They don't live like you. Do you put forth an effort to love them and to show them by the way that you treat them?

[2 : 24] What we're talking about in relating to difficult people, especially people who oppose us, who would even persecute us because we're Christians, to relate to them in a positive way, to love them, to not retaliate.

That's one of the most difficult things in the world to do, isn't it? It's just contrary to how we are with a sinful human nature. What we're going to see in a passage this morning, Romans chapter 12, go ahead and turn.

We're going to see in this passage this morning that God calls us and expects us and will equip us, enable us to relate well, to love such people.

We've been looking at Romans chapter 12 over the past several weeks. What we've been doing is looking at what is involved in living like a Christian in a lot of different ways in our relationship with God.

We saw in verses 1 and 2. We saw what's involved in living like a Christian in our understanding of ourselves, of our church, and of our gifts, talents, talents, abilities.

[3 : 43] We started looking at what is involved in living like a Christian in our relationships with other people verses 9 through 13.

Now, most of what we saw there was relating to people who are Christians, relating to church family members.

It wasn't exclusively that, but that was really the focus of those verses. Well, today, we're going to look at the rest of chapter 12. We're going to look at what all is involved in living like a Christian in our relationships with people who oppose us, who oppose us because we're Christians.

Now, there's, it's not exclusively everything we're going to look at, and I'll point it out, it'll be obvious. Everything's not about how we relate to people who are opposed to us, but most of this is.

And as we go through this, you're going to see that it's hard but I want you to understand, this is the Word of God to us as God's people.

[4 : 52] Let's read. Romans 12, beginning in verse 14. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them.

Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty. Or prideful.

But associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil. But give thought to do what is honorable or right in the sight of all.

If possible. So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 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. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

[6 : 03] For by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

How should we relate to people who oppose us? Well, first, be gracious. Verse 14, he's telling us, be gracious. Look at how he describes this.

Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. Curse. That's the response of grace, isn't it? Grace is undeserved, but it's not natural, is it?

Look at it. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. People who persecute you, the last thing in the world you want to do, really, is bless.

You want to curse and do more. If you're honest, don't you? Because they're out to get you. They're out to hurt you because of your faith in the Lord, because of your belief in the truth that God's revealed to us in His Word.

[7 : 17] Jesus says something very similar. Paul tells us something that's not natural. Jesus says something that's even more not natural in the Sermon on the Mount.

In fact, Jesus said this on more than one occasion in different forms, but look at it in Matthew chapter 5. Jesus said, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

Bless rather than curse. Love rather than hate. Pray for those who persecute you. Here's what I want us to understand.

Again, this is not easy and it is unnatural, but as we've been talking about throughout this whole series on Romans chapter 12, when God saves a person, God puts His Spirit in us.

Becoming a Christian is not, quote, just a decision that somebody makes. You'll never find that in any place in the Bible. Becoming a Christian is a work of God.

[8 : 19] God. When God saves us, He puts His Spirit in us. He brings about a new birth, regeneration. He changes the way that we look at life, the way that we think about life, the way that we feel about life.

And the Spirit of God who lives in us will enable us to do the things that we're reading about here, about being gracious even to people who persecute us.

So this is sort of the first thing as we go through this list. Everything's going to be basically this hard or harder that we're called to be and do as Christians.

And it's not that we just work up the ability to do this. And He's not talking about some people it's easier to do this than others.

This is the Word of God to the people of God. This is how we're to live in this world as God's people even in the face of persecution. Bless, don't curse.

[9 : 24] Love, pray for them. That takes the supernatural help of God's Spirit and then we must cooperate with Him and actually do those things in situation by situation.

Let's look at the next one. Be empathetic. Now what He's saying here in verse 15 this is a more general statement that would apply to everybody.

It'll apply to other Christians as well as those who would persecute you. Look at it in verse 15.

Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.

To be empathetic means to feel with another person. To try to understand what they are going through and share those feelings.

Look at the situation from their perspective. Try to put yourself in their shoes. How would you feel? Feel with them is what He's talking about.

[10 : 24] Now to do this we've got to set aside our own feelings and how we would how we think we would feel in that situation. In other words if there's someone and you can tell they're just heartbroken there's tears there's just real sorrow and you find out what the situation is and you think to yourself well if that happened to me it wouldn't bother me they must just be weak.

No. What Paul is saying here is it's not about you. When there's another person that you're involved in a relationship with a friend even an enemy and you see that there is something that has bothered them hurts them He is saying what you need to do is come along beside them put yourself in their position looking at it from their perspective weep with them.

Be a friend to them and walk with them through that. Same thing about rejoicing let's just think about this which is it easier to do to rejoice or weep with someone think about it just for a moment isn't it easier to weep with those who weep than to rejoice with those who rejoice I mean most people when you see somebody who's just really broken I mean they're just they're emotionally spent broken hearted your heart goes out to them you just you feel sorry for them that's not really a Christian response that's a human response if you can't feel for people who are broken something's wrong with you there's something missing there about just you as a human being but it's not always easy to rejoice with those who rejoice it's not always easy to congratulate someone for their success especially if you think you deserve it ahead of them think about somebody at work they get a promotion or they get a raise and they're all excited about it but you think

I should have got that promotion that money should be mine somebody plays a sport with you and they get some kind of recognition win a trophy or named some most valuable or something and they're all excited about it but you think to yourself I should be the most valuable I should have gotten that see a lot of times when people rejoice it's hard for us to rejoice with them because we're jealous because we're envious of them you know there may be a point as to why when Paul wrote this in verse 15 he said rejoice with those who rejoice first because we have a problem doing that God calls us to learn to empathize with people in both the good times and the bad and Paul really stresses in another place that we need to do this with one another fellow Christians look in 1 Corinthians chapter 12 verse 26 he says in talking about the church just like we saw last week in Romans 12 about we're all part of one body many members we're parts of the body look in 1 Corinthians 12 if one member suffers all suffer if one member is honored all rejoice together in just about every Sunday school class in this room there's a time in your class where you bring up concerns that you have that you want your fellow classmates to know about some of them are announcements some of them are prayer requests but 9 times out of 10 what you bring up are sad things hurtful things bad things and in this context you usually bring up things for people to weep with you or somebody else who's weeping why is it that's mainly all we ever bring up why is it we don't bring up the good things why can't we come to our

Sunday school classes and announce how God has worked in our life or how some good things have happened to us and we're happy about it we're excited about it and get everybody to rejoice with us as we rejoice what would be wrong with that nothing what would be right with that everything I think it'd be a whole lot more positive atmosphere in our Sunday school classes if you had to balance that you can only bring up so many things for us to weep with without bringing up things for us to rejoice with that might help us to work on some envy some jealousy that we can have for one another not just in the church family although it happens to be anywhere else I'll give you one more example about this one person could get up in Sunday school class and talk about how their car just died engines blown

[16:14] I can't get it fixed I'm in bad shape you weep with that person because their car is broken somebody else comes in and say I bought a new car yesterday why can't you be happy for them why do you have to be jealous because they bought a new car you can't afford one you see Paul's talking he's being serious here I'm being funny but he's being serious as a part of being brothers and sisters in Christ we're supposed to rejoice with one another when there's something good going on but we need to also suffer with one another when there's suffering going on both are important in a healthy body family and it's important in all of our relationships we need to show this weeping with those who weep rejoicing with those who rejoice to unbelievers believers because this is a great way to build a relationship and witness to someone you know you may have some people at work but they don't really think a whole lot of you because you're a

Christian they think you're some kind of hypocrite they think that you are you know you don't really practice what you preach they don't have anything to do with you maybe somebody in school with you you really want to be a witness to them they don't have anything to do with you they won't let you talk to them about what you believe they won't let you share the gospel with them but what about when something happens in their life and they are hurting you think they're going to tell you if you come up and say I sure am sorry you put your arm on them you touch them maybe even say

I'm going to pray for you you think they're going to reject that not like they might but not likely and when they something is good going in their life in their life and you join the celebration with them you don't have to like it you don't have to agree with it but you become a friend who is rejoicing with those who rejoice it'll build some relationship it'll build some bridges may even tear down some walls walls of hostility if we'll learn to be empathetic note the next statement about how we should relate to people be humble we're going to look at several little things here in verse 16 I want you to notice verse 16 live in harmony with one another all says something like that a lot in his letters live in harmony with one another be of one mind talk about members of the church church family be united do not be haughty don't be arrogant don't be proud but associate with the lowly never be wise in your own sight don't think more highly of yourself than you ought to we've already seen in this chapter live in harmony do not be haughty associate with the lowly never be wise in your own sight this verse applies to our relationships both in and outside the church John

Stott former pastor conference speaker writer he explains the meaning of this verse very well I want you to look at what he said few kinds of pride are worse than snobbery snobs are obsessed with questions of status with dividing society into upper and lower classes and middle people they forget that Jesus fraternized freely and naturally with social rejects and called his followers to do the same with equal freedom and naturalness think about that we need to learn in this country we need to learn in churches to guard against being class conscious and along that same line being condescending toward people we think are beneath us

Kent Hughes had a good illustration of this from the life of former chief justice Charles Evans Hughes when Judge Hughes was appointed to the Supreme Court of the United States he was a Christian he was a Baptist and so when he moved to Washington DC he joined a local Baptist church in that church they had the habit of certain every now and then they would introduce new members having come to the front one Sunday the Sunday he was going to be presented at the end of the service several people came forward the first one that came forward his name was Ah Sing he had moved from San Francisco to Washington DC to open up a laundry service he was a Chinese laundromat well he came first he spoke to the pastor and then he went over on this side at the end just like here several other people came forward just like he did they spoke to the pastor and each one of them went to the far other side than this man

Ah Sing after several people had come all standing over here the judge came he came last he came and spoke to the pastor and Hughes said he did this in a very deliberate intentional significant way he made his way over to that man that Chinese laundromat Ah Sing and stood beside him identifying with him very very overtly the point is even in church we have a tendency to just get in circles with people that we think and think and feel and act and talk just alike and sort of isolate ostracize those that we consider to be different we as

[22 : 56] Christians we cannot have and be right with God this elitist mindset and think that we're above anyone we cannot have have this class conscious mindset and be looking down at people and by the same token think that some people are above us have a chip on our shoulder toward them now our Lord calls us to love all kinds of people to build relationships with all kinds of people reach out to all kinds and bring all kinds into the church I want to make it real clear I don't think I have to make it clear I think everybody understands but just in case one person doesn't when we leave here today we're going to scatter and go a lot of different places in this county and beyond this coming week if in your work or in your school or in your play or whatever wherever you go whatever you do if you have people you're trying to share the gospel with reach or they're Christians looking for a church home

I want you to know that whoever on the face of the earth you're involved with you are not they're not only welcome but you're encouraged to bring them to our church and they will be accepted they will be accepted warmly by most people and if anybody does not like them coming the one that don't like them coming can leave and a bunch of people here will join me we'll open the door for you if that's the person's attitude because the church of Jesus Christ it is open to all human beings we want to be inclusive we want to be warm and receiving of people who want to or are willing to come here and hear the word of God and we pray will be changed by the word of God and become true a true child of God we need to be humble our Lord God and the Lord calls us to be this as we move on to this passage the focus now going to be more on those who oppose us how we should relate to them let's look at verses 17 and 18 under the caption do what is right look at those verses again verse 17 repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable or right in the sight of all

if possible so far as it depends on you live peaceably with all

Paul is saying here do what is honorable or do what is right regardless of what others do to you when the day is over don't look at how other people have treated you you look at how you have treated others how you have responded even to their mistreatments you know we're not judged by how people treat us but we are by how we treat others we're not ever judged by what other people do but we are held accountable for what we do I'm sure a lot of you parents and grandparents and others who work with children even teachers you've told your children do what's right do what's right it doesn't matter what other people do you know the right thing you know what it is that God expects you to do you know what it is that we want you to do I've told my grandson sitting here the important thing for you to do you do what is right you know what you know is right do what you've been taught is right what God says is right and don't worry about other people you're responsible for you let them be responsible for themselves we need to learn to do that as adults we need to learn to not be reactors to how people treat us so much we need to learn to act and act in doing the right thing you know if we just can't get along with some people that are the right thing we need to learn to act and act in doing the right thing thing. You know, if we just can't get along with some people, verse 18, we need to make sure that it is not our fault. I want you to look at that verse again. He says, if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Sometimes I think we, me, you, we use that as an excuse.

Let's just all admit it. There's some people in life we don't like. There's some people in life that we have a hard time getting along with. And so it's just sort of easy, natural for us to look for a way out where we don't have to treat somebody right. And so I know this verse.

I'm very familiar with it. Look at it again. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peacefully with all. And the implication is, is if they're just hard to get along with, if they won't respond well to you, write them off. That's not really the emphasis here.

[28 : 35] The emphasis is on us as Christians, if possible. It means we're trying. We're putting forth the effort. We're trying to make it possible. If possible, so far as it depends on you, the monkey's on our back. We've got some responsibilities. And it's only when we are trying to make it possible, and we're doing our best to relate to someone, to reconcile with someone, it's only then, if they won't cooperate, then we can let it go. Even when we let it go, we need to keep the door open in case God works in their life, in case they just change.

They become more responsive. But there are some situations. There are some people who don't like you and will never like you, who do not want to relate to you and will not relate to you.

And so you're not responsible in those situations. That's what this verse is talking about. Now, what we're talking about, all of this is just very difficult. It's not easy. And as Paul writes this, he's not even implying that it's easy. But this is one way we're to live in this world and be faithful witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ, be honorable witnesses, doing what's right, even if people don't agree, even if people do not like it. Now, as we move on, the last three verses, this is the most difficult. As I've gone through this, thought about this, it's all difficult to me.

But this is going to be even more. So let's look at it. Verses 19 through 21, be restrained. We're called, as we live in the world, this world, people who oppose us, exercise restraint.

Now, Paul tells us how we do this. Number one, we must trust God. Look at verse 19. 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. We've got to learn to trust God to work in the life of the person who has wronged us to bring about what needs to be done. Bottom line, we can always trust that God's going to make things right one day. Paul pointed that out to the Thessalonians.

[31 : 06] I put it even, I wrote a little note in my Bible a long time ago. Beside this verse that we're looking at, verse 19, I put down 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, 2 Thessalonians, 2 Thessalonians chapter 1, verse 6 and following. I want you to look at these verses with me.

We're looking at verse 19 of Romans. 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. We can trust God.

Here's more details about that. God is just. He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

This includes you because you believed our testimony. That's the last verse. Enemies of God and enemies of God's people, one day when the Lord Jesus Christ returns, they will be dealt with by God very harshly. They'll be eternally condemned. Justice will prevail when all is said and done. Now, what this does not mean is your enemies, you just sort of smile and think God's going to put them in hell one day and I'm glad of that.

[32 : 56] That's not the point. In the end, people who do not respond to the grace of God, in the end, people who do not respond to your patience and your blessing and your prayers and your love. We're supposed to work with people, pray for people, try to reach out to people who are even our enemies. But if they reject it, the day will come that they will reap what they've sown. God will settle all scores. His justice will prevail without exception. We can count on that. Let God be our avenger.

Second thing about being restrained, we need to do positive good. Look in verse 20. To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head. In doing good to the person who does wrong to you, he says we'll heap burning coals on his head.

[34 : 08] And the idea is we'll heap burning coals of shame and remorse on his head that will hopefully cause him to wake up, to realize what he's done, to cause her to repent, to seek your forgiveness, to seek God's forgiveness.

A good example of this is found in the life of David. King Saul was seeking to kill David. David had an opportunity to kill Saul. David had an opportunity to do to Saul before Saul did to him, but he would not do it. And when Saul found out, it humbled him as his words revealed. Look at it. 1 Samuel 24. As soon as David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, Is this your voice, my son David? And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. He said to David, You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me and that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands.

[35 : 33] Now if you know the story, Saul didn't, it wasn't a life-changing event. But Saul was humbled for a while. He was remorseful for a while.

Now, David's kindness, David's not doing what he could and killing Saul, it did make a difference. Got his attention, humbled him and recognized he was wrong and David was right. Third thing, we must overcome evil with good. Look at the last verse. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Here's what we're being told here. Don't let your enemies drag you down to their level. We as Christians need to learn to take the high road always and seek to overcome their evil with Christian goodness and love.

[36 : 35] That's to be our goal. What we're called to do in this passage, as I said at the beginning, is impossible on our own. We cannot do this.

We're not wired to do this on our own. But if we are Christians, even though it's still hard, we're still tempted to lash out, get revenge, if we're Christians, the Spirit of God within us will convict us to do what Paul's telling us to do here. Do the kind of things that Jesus said to do about loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us, by the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us, we can live like a Christian, even in our relationships with people who hate us and oppose us. It very well may be that God will use your loving attitudes, your grace, your patience to turn your enemy into a friend, or even better, to turn them to faith in Jesus, to call them to become a real child of God. But even if that doesn't happen, we will still have the joy and satisfaction of knowing, if we do the right thing, that we have been faithful to God.

[38 : 02] When it comes to living like a Christian in this world, all we're really called to do is be faithful to God. That's how He measures success. Being faithful to Him, to His Word, with the help that He gives us.

When all is said and done, that's what matters most. Not what other people have done to you, but how you have lived before God and before other people.

That's what God holds us accountable and responsible for. Let's pray together. Dear God, help us now to deal with our attitudes, words, adverse actions and the kind of situations that we've been looking at this morning.

Father, if there's some attitude adjustments that need to be made, make it clear to us. If there's just a whole mindset that needs to change, show us.

Father, if there are people in this room that this whole passage has not made sense to them because your Spirit does not dwell in them, show them, Father, they're not Christians.

[39 : 24] Disturb them, Father, over that and so work to bring about that change of their heart and mind. Work in them, dear God, to cause them to want to humble themselves before you and seek your forgiveness by turning from their sins and trusting in Jesus as their Savior and Lord.

Father, if there's Christians in this room who need to go to someone and seek forgiveness, seek to be reconciled, show them. But, Lord, help us all to desire and to look to you to give us the what with all we need to truly live like a Christian in this world and our relationship with you, with other people, even with people who are our enemies.

And in an attitude of prayer, you just listen to the Lord and respond to Him. That's all He's wanting you to do is listen and obey. I'd be happy to pray with you here at the front if you want to step out during this time.

Let's just be still and quiet and listen to the Lord.