

## Parson to Person

### ROMANS 12 PART 6

*“Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another; not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer; distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:9–21 NKJV).*

In verses 3–13 Paul gave detailed instruction to believers concerning their proper valuation of self, servanthood, and the handling of fellow believers and/or strangers. In verses 14–21 he addressed how to handle and treat those who are hard to love, semi-resistant, or even directly opposed to us—and the truth.

Every believer has faced disappointment, loss, and/or opposition from other members in the body of Christ. With our brothers and sisters there are protocols for address and resolution. Some are found here in the text! However, when unbelievers show us opposition, the protocols are much different. For this reason, these lessons in orthopraxy become critical.

Paul laid out several principles that believers should employ when dealing with those who are difficult, when there is discord, or worse—opposition. He began with, *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”*

The human reaction to opposition is to become defensive and retaliatory. However, believers are called to bless those who persecute them rather than curse. This call is indeed contrary to our natural propensities, and therefore Paul asked the believer for these acts following regeneration and the Spirit’s infilling.

When Jesus first gave this injunction the unregenerated audience was convicted as unable. Therefore, Jesus’ sermon revealed the standard but also showed how impossible it was to love as He loved—as unregenerated men—thus proving that men need the Savior. Paul’s injunction could now be demanded of the believer, for those who are born again are enabled by the Holy Spirit to live “otherworldly.” Moreover, when Jesus gave this command He added the command to pray for the persecutor (see Matthew 5:44). There is good reason for this practice! All believers must pray, and when we pray, the persecuted and the persecutor are both benefited.

Continuing, Paul wrote, *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another.”* This injunction relates to our empathy and/or sympathy with others. We as believers are not unlike others. We can empathize with the weaknesses and shortcomings, struggles and losses, or pain and sufferings of others—because these are things we all have experienced.

On the other hand, there are things we have not experienced and in these we sympathize. For example, we may have never experienced disappointment with or anger toward the Lord—while others have. We may have never experienced the elation of leading another to Jesus or serving in some admired capacity when indeed others have— or do. But, as believers, we are called as “lovers of souls,” and as such are called to be of the *“same mind”* with those around us (by either rejoicing or weeping). Being in a contradictory posture comes of the flesh. It usually manifests as jealousy and judgment. This kind of jealousy is the result of selfishness (lust).

When Paul wrote, *“Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble,”* and, *“Do not be wise in your own opinion,”* he supported the earlier comments on humility and others-centeredness. One may be gifted and educated, but those who are unteachable will never grow, and “know-it-alls” are a pain to be around. We are called to be open and welcoming to all—not just those we see as rich, famous, good looking, popular, or smart!

The command, *“Repay no one evil for evil”* is likened to *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”* This statement re-emphasizes to the fact that believers will be persecuted and/or mistreated by the believer and unbeliever alike. One would hope that evil treatment would not come from fellow believers, but (to our disappointment) this does occur. Therefore, practicing forgiveness and grace toward the believer and unbeliever alike is the call of every Christian.

In the flesh we are prone to retaliate against those who poorly treat us, but this should not be our disposition. Therefore *“[h]ave regard for good things in the sight of all men.”* That is to say, look and plan ahead to the potentials of “good” and how we are to demonstrate “good” toward all men—*“in the sight of all men.”* This is the testimony of grace and genuine love! We do live in the full view of the God who sees and knows, but we are also being watched by man every day. Our testimony matters!

*“If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.”* If and when we fail, may it only be because of the rebellion of others—not our own. There will be times when peace eludes us. When it does, may that only occur when it is the result of rebellion against our efforts and love, or rebellion against the truth and ways of the Lord.

Finally, *“Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’”*

Paul has made it clear that we are to *“repay no one evil for evil.”* Therefore, when the temptation for vindication or vengeance arises, step out of the way, trusting the Lord. He may indeed bring repentance to the rebellious—or, if need be, judgment. Either way, God is God. Don’t get in the way. He knows all, sees all, and can handle those things He reserves for Himself—without our help.

Paul’s recitation of Proverbs 25:21–22, *“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head”* also contains a clause Paul did not include: *“the LORD will reward you.”* We must always know that the Lord blesses those who obey Him—trusting Him in all His ways.

Some would suggest that heaping coals of fire on an enemy’s head was an act of mercy (they needed coals for their own fire) and others liken it to an old Egyptian form of expiation for wrong (a consequence intended to bring humiliation). Herein I will dare suggest an interpretation! We know that providing our *“enemy”* food when hungry or water when thirsty seems a better fit with blessing than with trying to bring discipline and incite humiliation. However, the end result may be the same. If we bless those who curse us, we may indeed see humility come upon the *“enemy”* rather than providing them fodder for continued anger or evil. We must remember that *“a soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger”* (Proverbs 15:1 NKJV).

All the above is summarized in the statement, *“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”* This phrase is similar to saying, *“It is better to light a candle than to curse the darkness.”*

I love you all,  
Pastor Paul