

28. ROMANS SERIES: Christian Practice

Romans 12:9-21

In the previous passage (12:1-8) Paul has begun to explain the practical implications of the doctrine that he has taught in Romans 1:1-11:36. His emphasis so far has been in the area of Christian living in the church. In this section Paul's emphasis falls on the implications for Christian living in the personal life toward all humanity in general. There is nothing especially difficult to understand in the remaining section of Romans 12, but the actual practice of what is taught in Romans 12 is another story.

The great spiritual grace behind this whole section is clearly that of love. It lies at the foundation of Christian living, which is clearly seen throughout this current passage. Here then is a portion of Scripture that has at its core the principle of love in action toward others. The Christian is a person who is other-centred and not self-centred.

Please Read Romans 12:9-21

Verse 9: The practice of love by Christians is to be sincere and genuine. It is not to be false or mere words of professing to love. There is no room for play acting love in the Christian community (1 Jn 3:18). This love is not that toward God alone, and neither is it brotherly love alone, but includes both. Christians are to love genuinely in all circumstances. This sincere love is an all-inclusive love, including even those that the world considers unlovable.

Believers are to completely reject what is evil (Ps 97:10), with the greatest hatred of it. Evil is to be defined by the Bible, and it is from the Bible therefore that we learn what we are to hate as being evil (Rev 2:6).

QUESTION: What practical things will come from a hatred of evil? Give examples. Consider 1 Thessalonians 5:22

Rather than entertaining evil, believers are to be found persevering in attachment to that which is good (Philip 4:8). Again, for the Christian it is Scripture that determines what is

good.

Verse 10: The love in this verse is a more exclusive form of love, which is to be specifically directed toward Christians. It is a love that reflects the bond that unites the spiritual family in Christ, finding expression in tender affection toward one another (Gal 6:10; Col 3:13). This will involve placing others above ourselves, or being other-centred and not self-centred (Philip 2:3,4). It includes the idea of not thinking badly of our brethren, but always regarding them in a better light than ourselves.

QUESTION: How is Romans 12:10 to be reflected in the lives of Christians?

Verse 11: Christians are not to be slothful in anything, especially their service in the Lord. In serving the Lord Christians are to be zealous and enthusiastic, and not inactive and slumbering. We are to serve Christ without seeking any self-exaltation and advancement, and to do this with all our strength and desire.

Verse 12: In our lives as Christians we are to be rejoicing in hope (1 Thess 5:16), which is to look forward with certainty to that time when we enjoy the fullness of our salvation (5:2,4,5; 8:24,25; 15:4,13). This means we are not to be cast down in difficult times, but to always have before us the hope of our salvation. With this joy there is patience in the face of tribulation. This is the strength to bear up under difficulty, resting confidently in the Lord, knowing full well that God is still in control no matter what and trusting Him with in every situation.

As we persevere in joy, we are to continue steadfastly in prayer (1 Thess 5:17), which is the avenue to obtaining the ability and strength to continue through all circumstances (Acts 1:14; 6:4; Eph 6:18).

Verse 13: Christians are to meet the needs of fellow believers, regarding these needs as though they were their very own (Gal 6:6). Every believer is to be given to hospitality, going out of his or her way to practice it. This seems to be especially so in the case of elders (1 Tim 3:2; Tit 1:8).

NOTE: INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY QUESTION HERE: How is Romans 12:14 to be obeyed?

Verse 14: Christians are to seek God's blessing for those who persecute them (Mt 5:44; Lk 2:34; 6:28; Heb 11:20), actively praying for them to be blessed. There is to be no desire for the exercise of divine vengeance toward them at all. Rather the Christian is to speak well of those who seek him harm.

'I have said that this is more difficult than to let go revenge when anyone is injured; for though some refrain their hands and are not led away by passion of doing harm, they yet wish

that some calamity or loss would in some way happen to their enemies; and even when they are pacified that they wish no evil, there is yet hardly one in a hundred who wishes well to him from whom he has received an injury; nay, most men daringly burst forth into imprecations. But God by His Word not only restrains our hands from doing evil, but also subdues the bitter feelings within; and not only so, but He would have us solicitous for the well being of those who unjustly trouble us and seek our destruction.’

John Calvin

Verse 15: This verse calls Christians to identify with others, manifesting a general sympathy in the joys and sorrows of others as if they were their own. This practice must have clearly before it the clear implications of verse 9.

QUESTION: How can Romans 12:15 be hypocritically obeyed? How is this verse to be rightly practiced in the life of a Christian?

Verse 16: This verse continues the idea of belonging to each other which seems to arise throughout this chapter (12:3-8,10,13,15). Here we are to be united in our feelings and affections toward one another (15:5-7; 2 Cor 13:11; Philip 2:2-11). The thought seems clearly to be that of not thinking ourselves better than anyone, and no one lesser than ourselves or others (Pr 3:7; Lk 14:13; Rom 11:20; 12:3; Gal 2:13).

QUESTION: How is Romans 12:16 to be applied to a Christian’s life? Give examples.

Verse 17: Christians are not to be vindictive by desiring to get even or take revenge. There is to be no desire to retaliate in the Christian life (1 Cor 6:7; 1 Thess 5:15; 1 Pet 3:9).

Rather, Christians are to live in such a manner that outsiders will have no legitimate reason to accuse us of wrong doing (Pr 3:4; Mt 5:16; 1 Cor 10:32; 1 Tim 5:14; 1 Pet 2:12; 3:16). We are to live in a manner that gains the good opinion of men.

Verse 18: This verse calls for Christians to seek to live at peace among all men, both believers and unbelievers. This therefore means that we should seek to avoid offending and injuring people, having no desire for conflict (Mt 5:9; Heb 12:14; Jam 3:17).

However, Paul recognizes that conflict cannot always be avoided, but the source of conflict must not come from the believer.

Verse 19: Here Paul, seemingly full of emotion pleads again with his readers to not seek revenge. Instead of revenge, Paul calls for believers to leave this issue of wrath entirely with God. This is His domain alone and not ours. We are not to seek God’s wrath upon our enemies (12:14), but to leave this entire area to God.

Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:35 (see 32:20,34,36-43) to prove his case. Vengeance and requital are God's sole prerogative, and men are to leave them completely alone (Ps 37:1-17; Heb 10:30; 1 Pet 2:23).

Verses 20,21: With vengeance and requital being God's prerogative, we are therefore instead of seeking revenge and playing God, to return good for evil, treating with affection and kindness those that seek our harm (Pr 25:21,22; cf 2 Kings 6:20-23).

The context would seem to suggest (12:19-21) that this is the most effectual means of subduing our enemies - by kindness.

We are not to allow our enemies to get us down, and to influence us to return evil for evil in a spirit of retaliation. Rather, we are to subdue our enemies by kindness.

It is important to note that these verses are the practical implication of the gospel for all believers. All believers are to practice and live in the manner described in Romans 12. We are not to focus merely on one or two aspects of the chapter, but to actively seek conformity to the entire chapter all of the time.

INDIVIDUAL DISCOVERY

Explain by giving specific examples, how Romans 13:1-7 is commonly disobeyed by Christians today?

How does Romans 13:8 find practical relevance in a Christian's life?

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