

Romans

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Romans 12:14-21



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- As with verses 9-13, Paul here in these verses is addressing the whole church, specifically as to what day to day Christian life is to look like, how this new life in Christ is to be lived out. Again, John says that the difference between Christians and non-Christians should be “obvious” (1 John 3:10) and here Paul continues into the specifics.

Vs. 14

- Paul returns to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount and the example of Christ Himself. In Matthew 5:44, Jesus tells us that we are to “love our enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”. In Luke 6:27-28, our Lord tells us to “love your enemies, **do good** to those who hate you, bless those who curse, pray for those who mistreat you”. And of course, Christ modeled all of this Himself when He prayed for the forgiveness of His murderers. You see it again in Acts 7 when Stephen cries out to God asking forgiveness for his murderers. And all of this is hard. On our own it’s impossible. Only by the power of the Holy Spirit at work within us are we able to love like this, love as Christ loves.

Vs. 15

- What does it mean to be family? What does it mean to be a witness and evangelist? To be family means rejoicing and weeping with our brothers and sisters, but here Paul does not limit us to the church alone, but points that by so connecting with those outside we are better able to win their hearts for Christ. People always remember you were **THERE!**

Vs. 16

- Jesus in His High Priestly Prayer of John 17 elevated unity within the church: “I am not asking on behalf of these alone, but also for those who believe in Me through their word, that they may all be **one**; just as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.” Thus the unity of the church is absolutely key to the church’s witness, for if we are not one, then the world will not know that the Father sent the Son. Why? Because the world will only see divisions of power, race, and position and only see in the church what they commonly see everywhere else.

Vs. 17

- One must wonder if Paul had a written copy of the Sermon on the Mount with him. There were collections of sayings of Jesus circulating around the Roman world and it would seem likely that Paul had some of these, including the Sermon. In Matthew 5:39-41, our Lord tells us, “But I say to you, do not resist an evil person, but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other toward him also. And if anyone wants to

sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak also. Whoever forces you to go one mile, go with him two.” There is also a “don’t hid your light under a bushel” thought here. Let the world see your inner strength as witness to The Way.

Vs. 18

- “...so far as it depends on you...”. The Christian may be the enemy of others, but the Christian has no enemies. So far as it depends on us, we are to live at peace with everyone. But as Jesus turned over the money changers’ tables and spoke Truth in a way that would provoke those who had made Him their enemy, He calls us to a Way that is not an easy-going tolerance which will accept anything and shut its eyes to everything. There may come a time when some battle has to be fought, and when it does, the Christian will not run but stand with Christ.

Vs. 19

- When Ghandi said, “An eye for an eye leaves the whole world blind”, surely he too had read the Sermon. Evil creates more evil as its own fuel, but when we do not take our revenge, evil runs out of gas. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his classic book, “The Cost of Discipleship”, points out that, “Violence stands condemned by its failure to evoke counter-violence... Jesus, however, tells us that it is just **because** we live in the world, and just because the world is evil, that the precept of non-resistance must be put into practice. Surely, we do not wish to accuse Jesus of ignoring the reality and power of evil! Why, the whole of his life was one long conflict with the devil. He calls evil evil, and that is the very reason why he speaks to his followers in this way...The passion of Christ is the victory of divine love over the powers of evil...”

Vs. 20

- Paul is goading the Jewish members of the church here a little bit. He is primarily quoting Proverbs 25:21-22, but also touches on a story from 2 Kings 6. The king of Aram thought Israel had an unfair advantage having the prophet Elisha on their side, so he went into battle to capture him. But God fought the battle and the whole army of Aram was captured. When asked if the captives should be put to death, Elisha replied no and gave the captives a great feast before retuning them to their king (2 Kings 6:8-23).

Vs. 21

- Dr. King perhaps had this verse in mind, along with the corresponding verses in the gospels, when he said, “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that”. “But love your enemies and do good...” (Luke 6:37a-b).