

## Radical Love Romans 12:14-21

Those who follow Christ will be persecuted. It's a promise. There will be a cost if you stand for Jesus in this hostile world. And when that mistreatment, ridicule, and abuse comes our way, we are to do the impossible: we are to respond in radical love. Rather than demand justice, we must sacrifice our rights to serve and care for those who hate us and frustrate us. We must ask God to love them supernaturally through us. And as we do so, we overcome evil with good.

Turn to Romans 12

### Review

- Rom 1-11 – theology of God's righteousness
- Rom 12-16 – application – how do you live out that righteousness day-to-day
- Last week – in our relationships with other believers – LOVE
  - o = sacrificial devotion to one another
- This week – looks outside these walls – relationships with non-Christians
  - o in particular, how are we to relate to those hostile towards our faith

### That question became real to me one day in high school...

- good friend "Sarah" – kind, popular, not a believer
- prayed for her; tried to share my faith – often chickened out
- another non-Christian classmate used our friendship as an opportunity to humiliate me
  - o knew what the Bible teaches about hell
- "So Blake, you believe Sarah's going to hell cause she doesn't believe in Jesus, right?"
- Perfect set-up – humiliated, ridiculed
  - o can't remember what I said! Just remember embarrassment

**That experience left an imprint – dawned on me that this world is not a friendly place** for those who believe in Jesus – we will be persecuted

- Jesus guaranteed it... Jn 15:20
- so did Paul.... 2 Tim 3:12

### Many of you have experienced that hostility

- **professors & academic experts** – ridiculed; lost promotions or jobs
- **your business suffers** or you lose your job over an ethical stand
- those of you not from America – some of you are from countries that don't just ridicule you – lose your freedom, even your life
  - o 1 month ago, **believer in Egypt, Makarem Diab** – sentenced to 6 yrs for "insulting Islam" in the process of sharing his faith

**By God's grace at the moment, we don't suffer imprisonment in America...**

### But we do suffer ridicule and shame

- **Dan Savage** – speaking to 3,000 high school students
- in profanity laced rant, says we can ignore what the Bible says about homosexuality since we ignore what it says about slavery, divorce, shellfish
- ~30 students and faculty walk out
- mocks them – words I can't repeat here – from an "anti-bullying expert"!
- worst part: vast majority give him an ovation!

## **Graduating seniors – that’s the world you’re about to enter! Hostile**

- When I left A&M for Washington DC – shock to the system
- Most coworkers not believers – did not respect my beliefs or values

## **So what do we do? How do we relate to a hostile world?**

How do we respond to persecution and mistreatment?

Paul gives us 4 steps

### **First step: read v14**

- “**ble**ss” = “to ask God to bestow favor upon someone”
  - o for an unbeliever = grant salvation
- **opposite** = “curse” – “ask God to judge and destroy them”
- so, step #1...

### **1) Seek our enemy’s salvation...**

- **by praying for them (v14)**
  - o present tense – continual command
  - o most important step; but doesn’t end with prayer...
- **by caring about them (read v15)**
  - o Do life with them
    - share in joys (so long as doesn’t involve moral compromise) & sorrows
    - tendency in Christian circles – isolate ourselves from the world
      - good defensive strategy; but not good evangelism!
  - o Ill: missions in Italy – average 9 years of committed friendship!
  - o True in America, too
    - Must know we care about them before they’ll care about gospel
    - Must see we’re not just another salesman... politician...
    - Must see that you’re a friend who will stick with them
  - o Often, when life gets hard, you’ll get an opportunity to share
- **by serving them (read v20)**
  - o Quote from Prov 25:21
  - o “Heap burning coals...” – always confused me! Sounds mean!
  - o Metaphor for conviction
    - Egyptian practice of carrying tray of burning coals on head
  - o Point: your good deeds increases his conviction and shame over sin
  - o Ideally, God uses that conviction to save
  - o So v20 is all about their salvation – open their eyes thru good deeds
- **How Jesus summarized it... read Luke 6:27-29**
  - o “Love your enemies” = be sacrificially devoted to their good
  - o Radical, shocking
    - unprecedented in Jewish and Greek culture
  - o Email I got last Sunday
    - Does God really expect us to love bad people... Hitler??!!
    - **Answer: Yes! Isn’t that crazy!**
      - Not enough that we just don’t hurt them
      - God expects us to love them!!!
    - **After all, that’s what Jesus did for us!**
      - **Rom 5:8,10**
        - While we were His enemies – loved us; sacrificed for us
    - Yes, Jesus expects us to love people like Hitler because, by nature, we’re no better than Hitler!

- Email ends with great question, "How can we really truly love them if they do mean things?"
  - **Answer: You can't!! Waaayyyy too hard for us!**
  - **Must have God's help**
    - Rom 8 – walk by the Spirit
    - Pray for His love for your enemies
    - Meditate on His Word to see them as He does
- **But... what about imprecatory Psalms**
  - = Psalms that plead for God to destroy the Psalmist's enemies
  - Ps 109 – written by David – cruel and deceptive enemy
    - Ps 109:8-9,12,17
  - **Opposite! How do you explain apparent contradiction?!**
  - **Answer: Progressive revelation**
    - God's revelation not given in an instant – given progressively
  - **By David's time, God had only revealed part of answer to evil: He is always just**
    - That's true. David was right to pray for justice
      - Isa 61:8a "For I the LORD love justice; I hate robbery and wrong..."
  - **But Jesus, living 1000 yrs later, revealed more**
    - God loves something more than judging the wicked... saving!
    - Ezek 33:11 (hundreds of yrs after David)
    - 1 Tim 2:4
    - Judgment is good; salvation is better
  - **So should we pray imprecatory Psalms against our enemies?**
    - No.
    - Right for those under Law
    - No longer apply for those of us under Grace – pray for salvation
  - **Example: 1 yr anniversary of death of Osama Ben Laden**
    - How should we respond?
    - Rejoice that justice was done – that's good
    - But grieve that he wasn't saved – that would have been better!
      - God never rejoices in the death of the wicked
      - So neither should we
      - Salvation would have been a far greater victory!
- **Application: Get practical**
  - **Who are your enemies?**
    - tough neighbor who makes you angry
    - coworker gunning for your spot or promotion
    - witty person who cuts you down in public
  - **How does God want you to treat that person? With love!**
    - Sacrificial devotion to their good
    - Pray, care, serve
    - Look for an opportunity this week

## Step 2 – read v16

- "be of the same mind" – be united
- with "one another" = other believers
  - be united in our devotion to Christ

## 2) Present a united front (v16)

- our unity speaks volumes to a watching world
- John 17:20-21
- Rest of v16 tells us how to be united: through humility
  - 2<sup>nd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> line: don't think too highly of yourself
    - Pride is poison to unity

- Pride destroys our witness to the world
  - Pride is normal operating procedure – nothing special
- Notice prideful thoughts and take them captive
  - Use as trigger to thank the Lord & ask Him to remove
- 3<sup>rd</sup> line: “associate with the lowly”
  - those of low social standing – poor, vulnerable, unpopular
  - Funny – battle between 1% and 99%
    - 99% want to be the 1%
    - what I want to see: 1% who lives like 99%
    - That’s what Jesus did!
      - God – top of 1%!!
      - But came as carpenter – blue collar tradesman!
- Humility builds unity & proves the gospel to the world.

### **3) Model Integrity and Peace**

- **Be an example of good (read v17b)**
  - Do that which all of us can agree is good
    - Not an excuse for sin
    - “Good” by definition = that which God approves
    - Point: while pleasing God, do that which the world also calls good
  - e.g. be above reproach with your finances
    - Paul’s goal as he collected offering for Jerusalem – 2 Cor 8:20
    - No one approves of theft, extortion, cheating
    - So be above reproach in financial & business dealings
    - Otherwise, you give world a compelling reason to reject gospel
- **Be a peacemaker (read v18)**
  - Notice double clarification...
    - Paul knows:
      - (1) peace may not be possible for us in hostile world
        - remember His words – we will be persecuted
      - (2) we can never compromise on gospel or truth
        - can’t compromise with evil
  - But that said, whenever possible, seek peace
    - Don’t look for a fight
    - Toddlers: “I don’t want my brown shoes!! Other ones!” “I don’t want to go OUTSIDE, STAY INSIDE!!!”
    - Everything is a potential battle
    - Don’t be like that
      - don’t take offense
      - don’t make an issue out of minor things
    - Diffuse conflict through love and good deeds

### **4) Be Patient (read v17a, 19)**

- “vengeance” = appropriate penalty for wrong done
  - legitimate
- but not our place to give it
- vengeance belongs to God
  - “give room to His wrath”
  - Leave it to Him – not our job to punish evil-doers
- clarification – about personal vengeance, not government justice
  - Read Rom 13:3-4
- Leave it to God
  - Celestin – 5 family members murdered in 1984
  - Deserves vengeance
  - Chooses forgiveness and love

**Summary: read v21**

- Abraham Lincoln understood that; he challenged the North towards the end of the war to love and forgive the Confederates. People pushed back – why should we forgive? To which he replied... “Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?”

**Application:**

I want to end by answering the most likely objection someone might give to this sermon.

**“I don’t have any enemies”**

**How I feel – feels theoretical**

**Great! But if I’m to love even my enemies, then I’m certainly to love those who annoy me, frustrate me, bore me, embarrass me...**

- **Longhorns**
- **Those of other political persuasions**
- **Peers you are competing with**

## Questions for Romans Sermon #26 – 12:14-21

*Note: these questions have been written for small groups studying Romans together. You can also adapt these questions for your family or for personal study.*

### REVIEW & OVERVIEW

1. What is the big idea of this passage? Overall, what does Paul want us to do?
2. How do chapters 12-16 relate to chapters 1-11 (look closely at 12:1 for a clue)? Do you need the truths of chapters 1-11 in order to practice the ethics of 12:14-21? If so, why?

### OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

3. What does it mean to “bless” rather than “curse” those who persecute us (see also Lk 6:28)? What exactly are we to do in order to “bless” them?
4. See Jesus’ similar commands in Luke 6:27-36. Summarize how Jesus wants us to treat those who mistreat us.

Why should we do so (it’s hard, so what’s our motivation)?

5. What does it mean to “be of the same mind toward one another” (v16)?

Based on the rest of v16 as well as Paul’s parallel discussion in Phil 2:2-8, how do you make this happen?

Why would Paul include this in a passage about how we are to respond to a hostile world?

6. In v18, Paul is careful to clarify his command to be at peace with all men (“if possible, so far as it depends upon you...”). In what situations would it *not* be possible or appropriate for us to be at peace with others?

Practically speaking, how do we become peacemakers?

### **APPLICATION**

7. Do you personally have human enemies (not “enemies of state” like a terrorist leader, but particular people in your own life seeking to do you harm)? If so, how have you treated them? Have you acted in accordance with this passage? If not, how can you do better?

If you do not personally have enemies, think instead of those who annoy, irritate, bother, or bore you. How can you show love to them? Be specific.

**Memorize Romans 12:15-16**

### **Additional Questions**

1. What questions came to your mind during this sermon? Write them down and bring them up with your group.
  
2. REVIEW: What is the big idea of the book of Romans?
  
3. INTERPRETATION: What does it mean to “heap burning coals” on someone’s head (12:20)? Is Paul encouraging us to do good to our enemies in order to increase their punishment by God or in order to make them feel bad? Or does he have something else in mind?
  
4. APPLICATION: Have you ever suffered persecution for your faith (ridicule, mistreatment, loss of something, etc.)? How did you respond?

Based on this passage, how might you respond differently next time?