

“Love Without Limits” (Romans 12:9–21)

How do you want to be remembered? Reflect on that question for just a moment. Imagine that you have passed away and are able to be a heavenly spectator at your own funeral. What would your pastor be able to say about your life? More importantly, what would people from church, work, and your neighborhood say about you? What would your family and friends say? What would you want them to say? When your life is all said and done, I believe that you will want to be remembered as a loving person. You won't wish that you had spent more time at work. You won't wish you would have made more money. You won't wish that you would have had a nicer home. You won't wish you could have played more golf or purchased nicer clothes. You will wish that you had loved people with God's love.¹

Rom 12:9–21 is a practical “how-to” guide on God-like love.² In this passage Paul demonstrates that love is an action not an emotion. Consequently, you can love those who are unlovely and unlovable. You can even love your enemy or persecutor. Paul's thesis is simple: *Love without action is not love*. This text calls for two radical, yet biblical displays of love.

1. Display sacrificial love (12:9–16). In 12:9a Paul writes, “*Let love be without hypocrisy.*” These are unusual opening words because they are not linked to anything in the previous context, and there is no verb in the Greek. If you notice in the NASB the words “Let” and “be” are in italics. This means that these words are not a part of the original Greek; rather, the translators, for clarity, supplied them.³ Paul literally says, “Love without hypocrisy”⁴ or “Sincere love!” These words serve as the title or heading for the entire passage. Paul assumes that you will manifest “love” (*agape*); however, he wants to ensure that your love is free from hypocrisy.⁵ The word “hypocrisy”⁶ was used in the Greek world of the actor who wore masks to portray the emotion of his character. The facial expression could change with the move of a mask. Paul's point is: Sincere Christians wear no masks. Instead, we should exemplify true love.

So how can we live out true love? In 12:9b Paul defines true love with two participles that function like commands.⁷ “**Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.**”⁸ Although this verse is a broad Christian principle, Paul seems to apply it to all that follows in 12:10–21.⁹ The word translated “abhor” (*apostugeo*) is only used here in the entire NT. It means “to have a vehement dislike for something, hate strongly.”¹⁰ True love does not tolerate evil. In the same breath, Paul says you are to also “cling [or cleave] to what is good.” The verb “cling” (*kollao*) is used elsewhere by Paul only with reference to sexual relations.¹¹ In extrabiblical Greek, the word can mean “to glue.” Paul wants you to be intimately glued to that which is good.¹² I challenge you to spend some time this week meditating on 12:10–21. Ask yourself repeatedly, “Do I ‘abhor what is evil?’” Am I enraged over pride, selfishness, favoritism, revenge, and other ungodly behaviors? Then ask yourself, “Do I ‘cling to what is good?’” Am I enthralled with humility, selflessness, generosity, and servanthood? *Love without action is not love.*

In 12:10 Paul shares two exhortations concerning your attitude towards fellow believers (see the twofold use of “one another”). He writes, “**Be devoted to one another in brotherly love**” (12:10a). The word translated “be devoted” (*philostorgos*) refers to a special kind of love. It's used only here in the whole New Testament. The term was a common word in wills to denote “tender affection” within a family.¹³ Paul is saying that you should have a tender affection and concern for your fellow believers like you would have for your family members. He then compounds this thought with the term “brotherly love.” This phrase is the Greek word *philadelphia*.¹⁴ Paul expects you to exercise warm affection, family love, and brotherly love toward believers.¹⁵ After all, the Spirit is thicker than blood. Do you have family-like relationships in your local church? Do you miss your brothers and sisters when you are out of town or separated from them? Are you able to express your love for other members of your church family verbally, physically, emotionally, and even financially? Would those in your small group, Sunday school class, or ministry team say that you are “devoted” to them? *Love without action is not love.*

You may be thinking, “Paul is asking too much. I just can’t love so-and-so; the only feelings I have for him or her are disgust.” While that may be true, you can’t excuse yourself from 12:10b: **“give preference to one another in honor.”** For lexical reasons, I prefer the NASB alternate translation: “outdo one another in showing honor” (see also ESV, HCSB, NRSV).¹⁶ Paul issues a friendly competition to treat one another well. He wants you to lead the way in showing honor for other believers. In every sphere of your life, you ought to seek to “outdo” other believers. Look for ways to honor other believers before they honor you. Recognize other believers’ accomplishments before they honor yours. Defer to other believers before they defer to you. Look for what you can provide in a relationship rather than what you can receive. Be aggressive in giving yourself away.¹⁷ You’ll be surprised how quickly you can start liking someone when you begin to treat him or her with honor and respect. *Love without action is not love.*

In 12:11 Paul goes on to deal with your attitude towards God’s work. Paul writes, **“not lagging behind in diligence,¹⁸ fervent in spirit [the Holy Spirit],¹⁹ serving the Lord.”** You’ve heard, perhaps, about the guy who was asked if he thought ignorance and apathy were the two greatest problems of human nature. He responded, “I don’t know and I don’t care!” Well, Paul doesn’t want to see that kind of attitude in the church; rather he urges us to be diligent and fervent in our love and service for others. The word that is translated “fervent” (*zeo*) means “to boil or seethe.”²⁰ To be “fervent in Spirit” is to allow the Holy Spirit to set you on fire. He is the one who will give you strength to love and to serve.²¹ Rom 12:11 is particularly meaningful to me because it is my wife’s favorite verse. I have prayed this Scripture over Lori ever since we were first married and she has fleshed it out before my eyes. Similarly, why not pray this verse for yourself and your loved ones? God loves to set His people on fire for Him.

In 12:12–13 Paul offers five exhortations dealing with your attitude towards difficult circumstances. In 12:12 he states that we display true love when we are **“rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation,²² devoted²³ to prayer.”** There is a logical progression of thought here. Rejoicing in the certain hope of God’s promises that leads to persevering through tribulation, and one advantage in tribulation is that tribulation makes it easier to pray! Nothing will make you love a person so much as praying for him or her. A simple adage is: The person who prays best is the person who loves best. Are you having a struggle loving another brother or sister in Christ? Today, will you begin praying for him or her? The Lord can often resolve the issues as you turn to Him in prayer. When V. Raymond Edman was president of Wheaton College, he often exhorted the students, “Chin up and knees down.” That’s good advice.²⁴

There is a connection between 12:12 and 12:13: **“contributing²⁵ to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.”²⁶** Times of tribulation demand a spirit of generosity and hospitality when others are in need. The word translated “contributing” (*koinonia*) means “to have in common or to share.” You are to share your material resources to help meet “the needs”²⁷ of other saints. In addition to generosity, troublesome times require hospitality.²⁸ Some would say hospitality is “making people feel at home when you wish they were.”²⁹ The word “hospitality” (*philoxenia*)³⁰ is more expressive than the English, for it means “love for strangers.”³¹ The word translated “practicing” (*dioko*)³² is also not strong enough. The Greek word means “pursue” or “persecute.” Paul wants you to pursue hospitality.³³ Yet, the average American views his home as his castle, reserved exclusively for his own pleasure, but God says our homes are all leased from Him and are to be used as places of support and strength for others. While it is often easier to meet the material needs of someone by writing a check or giving a possession, God expects you to open up your home. There is something special about being invited into someone’s home. It is one of the greatest expressions of love and acceptance. Yet, very few of us do this on a regular basis. Why? Many of us would complain that it’s too much work. Yet, what’s really required? Surprisingly, very little. Just kick the toys into a corner and make sure you have some microwave popcorn, paper plates, and water. Or just invite people over for dessert instead of an elaborate six-course meal. Don’t get fancy. There’s no need to try to impress anybody. You don’t have to be Martha Stewart or Betty Crocker; you just have to be full of love. Why not pick an evening that works well for you and make a goal to have others over weekly or monthly. You might just change someone’s life with an evening of Christian fellowship.

In 12:14–16 Paul returns to your attitude towards fellow believers. He writes in 12:14: **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”**³⁴ I believe this commandment relates primarily to persecution you might receive from other believers. Taking shots from someone we consider a friend is perhaps the toughest kind of persecution to handle.³⁵ The Greek word for “bless”³⁶ (*eulogeo*) means “to speak well of a person.”³⁷ Our English word “eulogize” is taken from this Greek word. Here, to bless your persecutors is to eulogize them, to speak well of them. This requires incredible self-control and grace.

Paul continues his motif of gracious living in 12:15 when he states: **“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.”** An old Swedish proverb reads: “Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow.”³⁸ The Swedes had it right! Here, Paul wants you to show fellow believers sympathy and understanding.³⁹ Which is more difficult? For most of us, rejoicing with those who rejoice. We can show sympathy when believers (and unbelievers) are hurting, but it is often another thing when we are called to rejoice in the blessings of others. We are to look for opportunities to love. If we were to share in the lives of others by experiencing their joy and feeling their grief, all kinds of walls would come crashing down. By the way, one of the practical ways we can fulfill this command is to attend weddings and funerals. That might seem like an odd exhortation, but I have noticed over the past twenty years that attending weddings and funerals is becoming less and less of a priority to many Christian people.

Paul concludes this first section with a power-packed verse. In 12:16 he writes, **“Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind,⁴⁰ but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.”** Paul is calling all believers to a common mindset. He is not suggesting that we must all think in just the same way or that we must think exactly the same thing about every issue.⁴¹ Instead, we are to agree to disagree agreeably over non-essentials. In doing so we demonstrate the love, unity, and sacrifice that can only be found in Christ. Paul commands us not to be haughty in mind. Rather, to associate with the lowly. The word translated “lowly” (*tapeinos*)⁴² refers to those first-century Christians who could boast of little in the way of worldly goods or social position. The command, “Do not be wise in your own estimation” implies that we need to recognize that often the socially “lower” Christian has much more to give than the rich Christian.⁴³ Indeed, all Christians have something to share with other Christians; and all Christians have things to learn from other Christians. The problem is that we can often think like Archie Bunker who said, “I’m not prejudiced, I love all those inferior people.” We need to get over ourselves! We need to see our fellow believers accurately and biblically. We need to exercise humility (cf. 12:3, 10b). If we’re humble, we’ll never look down on anyone. We can only look up to them. May we begin to regard others as more important than ourselves (Phil 2:3). May we ensure that our Christian relationships are healthy and whole. *Love without action is not love.*

[Paul has called you to display sacrificial love. In 12:17–21 he kicks it up another notch. He now tells you to . . .]

2. Display supernatural love (12:17–21).⁴⁴ We’re going to embark on what is likely the most challenging teaching in the entire Bible. This concept is not hard; it’s flat out impossible! But that’s good because supernatural behavior forces us to go back to Jesus Christ on a moment-by-moment basis. In this section, Paul has one theme: “Don’t fight fire with fire.” In 12:17a he writes, **“Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.”**⁴⁵ This statement is a general summary statement for the next five verses. Notice Paul uses the word “Never” (*meden*). This provides you with no loopholes. “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.” I have a confession to make: I have always been a closet Charles Bronson fan. Bronson is an actor who has been in ninety different movies. He is especially well-known for his roles in the *Death Wish* series where he plays Paul Kersey, an unimpressive, mild-mannered, middle-aged vigilante. Each of these movies begins with Kersey being the victim of a tragic crime. The storyline is then filled with his escapades to avenge his family and friends. In my flesh—I love these movies. Yet, Paul says this is unbiblical. This is not how God’s kingdom operates.⁴⁶

Instead, in 12:17b the apostle exhorts us to **“Respect what is right in the sight of all men.”**⁴⁷ The word translated “respect” (*pronoeo*) literally means “take thought beforehand.”⁴⁸ If you are to respond biblically to your enemy, you must thoughtfully prepare *before* a crisis arises.⁴⁹ In other words, carefully and deliberately think through how you will respond if someone does something to you or one of your family members. If you fail to do so, you will respond according to your fleshly impulses. Conflict, however, ought to be in spite of you not because of you. Hence, it is critical to think carefully of how you should respond in every situation so that even unbelievers observe your life and glorify God.⁵⁰

Paul goes a step further in 12:18 when he says, **“If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”**⁵¹ Notice the conditional nature of this verse. The phrases “if possible” and “so far as it depends on you” reveal that you can’t force others to do what is right.⁵² Once you have done everything within your power to resolve a conflict, you have fulfilled your responsibility to God.⁵³ Now, if circumstances change and there seems to be a new opportunity for peace with an enemy, you should pursue it. In the meantime, you should not waste time, energy, and resources with a person who refuses to be reconciled. Therefore, (1) don’t blame yourself. Some people are just antagonistic.⁵⁴ (2) Trust God to change the other person. He prepares and softens hearts. Often it takes a great deal of prayer and many months or years before a person is willing to reconcile. We must be patient and wait on God.⁵⁵ (3) Get the help of a third party. Some conflicts require mediation from a mature Christian.⁵⁶

In 12:19 Paul returns to his forceful use of the word “Never.” He writes, **“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,’**⁵⁷ **says the Lord.”**⁵⁸ It was John Kennedy who said, “Don’t get mad, get even.” However, Paul again slams the door shut for revenge. Rather, he states that you must “leave room for the wrath of God.” The verb translated “leave room” (*didomi*) literally means “give place.” In other words, “get out of the way and leave room for something else.” Paul wants you to give God His job description back. By refusing to take revenge, you are leaving room for God to exercise His wrath. The wrath of God is likely both temporal and eternal in this context.⁵⁹ Paul quotes Deut 32:35 to serve as a reminder that no one can avenge you quite like God. Therefore, if you want Him to avenge you, step out of His way. If you want to avenge yourself, God will remove His hand from your situation.⁶⁰ I don’t know about you, but I would rather have God avenge me and act on my behalf.⁶¹

Paul now wraps up this chapter with a series of commands. In 12:20 he writes, **“BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.”**⁶² These verses are a quote from Proverbs 25:21–22, which show that Paul understood the classic military principle that the best defense is an effective offense. He does not encourage a passive response to evil. Instead, he commands you to go on the offensive—not to beat down or destroy your opponents, but to lavish your enemy with love. Abraham Lincoln once said, “The best way to destroy your enemy is to make him your friend.” Augustine said, “If you are suffering from a bad man’s injustice, forgive him lest there be two bad men.”⁶³ Does this mean that you are called to be a doormat? No, you are not called to be a doormat; you are called to be an elevator. You are to lift people up into the presence of God by graciously giving your enemy food and drink in his or her time of need. Paul says, in so doing “you will heap burning coals on his head.” This phrase is offered as the motivation for the kindness shown to an enemy, so I think it is very important that we understand the meaning of this statement. Some have traditionally seen it as simply meaning “you will burn him.” If you’ve got an enemy and you really want to see him burn, be extra nice to him or her—he or she won’t be able to stand it! Now that’s hardly in the spirit of this passage. A better interpretation, I think, takes the burning coals as a figure of God’s judgment that will come on your enemy if he or she persists in antagonism.⁶⁴ The figure of “coals of fire” in the Old Testament consistently refers to God’s anger and judgment (cf. 2 Sam 22:9, 13; Ps 11:6; 18:13; 140:9–10; Prov 25:21–22). Thus the meaning appears to be that you can return good for evil with the assurance that God will eventually punish your enemy, if you don’t win him or her by your lovingkindness.⁶⁵

Paul concludes with a summary in 12:21: **Do not be overcome by evil,⁶⁷ but overcome evil with good.** Unlike 12:20b, 12:21 is straightforward and very easy to interpret. However, in our flesh, this is not a verse we want to obey. We would rather overcome evil with evil. To return evil for evil is natural; to return good for evil is supernatural. But this is how God's economy operates. Evil cannot overcome the Christian by doing us harm or even by killing us. Evil will only overcome us if it makes us use evil ourselves. As Boromir discovered in *The Lord of the Rings*, the evil ring of power could not be used to wage war against the Dark Lord. Evil cannot be overcome by a stronger force of the same kind.⁶⁸ May you and I refuse to be overcome by evil, but may we overcome evil with good.

How do you want to be remembered? My hope is that you now want to be remembered as a believer who loved other believers. When you stand before Jesus Christ, I believe that one of the first questions Jesus may ask is: "Did you love my children?" Remember Jesus' words, "all people will know that we are His disciples *if* we have love for one another" (John 13:35). Love was VERY important to Jesus; it compelled Him to give up His life for us! He wants us to imitate Him in how we love others. Before you stop reading this sermon, identify those relationships where you need to grow in love—it may be a family member, a co-worker, a neighbor, or a person at church. Target specific people, not just everyone in general. Then commit to begin loving those people as Christ has commanded.

Scripture References

Romans 12:9–21
1 Samuel 24:1–22
2 Samuel 16:5–14
Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:28
2 Timothy 3:12
1 Peter 3:8–11
Proverbs 25:21–22

Study Questions

1. What kind of “hypocrisy” might manifest in loving church relationships (Rom 12:9)? How would I describe my relationships within the body of Christ (12:9–13)? How do fear and insecurity demonstrate themselves in my life? What things tend to preoccupy me so that I fail to demonstrate love to others? How can I turn these hindrances around so that something positive results? To what acquaintance, friend, or enemy, do I need to show more love?
2. How can I be more devoted to my brothers and sisters in Christ (Rom 12:10a)? Am I characterized by enthusiasm for Christ and His church (Rom 12:11)? Why or why not? Do I model consistency and perseverance in my Christian relationships (12:10b, 12:12b)? If not, how can I become more committed? How might I “pursue hospitality” and look actively for opportunities to meet those in need in my church (12:13)?
3. Do I pray for God’s blessing on those who curse God and me (Rom 12:14)? Do I rejoice with those who are experiencing God’s blessing (12:15a)? Do I grieve with those who are hurting (12:15b)? Am I a humble person (12:16)? Do I deeply desire the growth and maturity of others? Am I a true team player? How can I seek to think more highly of others than I do myself?
4. Who is my enemy (Rom 12:17–21)? How can I apply the healing balm of Romans 12 to my relationship with my enemy? By what specific action this week can I demonstrate love to one who is my enemy? What actions could any of my “enemies” cite to show that I have tried to take revenge against them? How can I serve as a mediator of reconciliation with others?
5. What harm does my vengeance produce to the honor of Christ (Rom 12:19–21)? What are some subtle forms of revenge-seeking that Christians practice against those who have “harmed” them? How does the church’s practice of love influence how the world thinks about the God of love? How can I learn to trust God’s brand of justice?

Notes

¹ Some scholars make a distinction between “insiders” (believers) and “outsiders” (unbelievers). E.g., Paul Barnett, *Romans: The Revelation of God’s Righteousness* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2003), 278–85; Grant R. Osborne, *Romans*. The IVP NT Commentary series (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2004), 329–30.

² Rom 12:9–21 is held together by the *inclusio* of *to agatho* (“the love”). Further, 12:10–16 are held together by an *inclusio* using the prepositional phrase *eis allelous*. Therefore, within the unity of 12:9–21 Paul grammatically breaks down his argument in this way: 12:9 forms an introduction, 12:10–16 explain that love within the Christian community and 12:17–21 explain how Christian love functions toward those outside the community. Commentators who take this view include Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988), 443–56; John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 330–37; Michael Eaton, *Romans*. Preaching Through the Bible (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2010), 230–35.

³ Nonetheless, all English versions have rightly added an imperative (e.g., “Let love,” “Love must be”). Paul is exhorting his readers to action.

⁴ BDAG s.v. *anupokritos*: “without pretense.”

⁵ Moo explains: “. . . so basic does Paul consider love that he does not even exhort us here to love but to make sure that the love he presumes we already have is ‘genuine.’ In urging that our love be genuine, Paul is warning about making our love a mere pretense, an outward display or emotion that does not conform to the nature of the God who is love and who has loved us.” Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*. New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 775.

⁶ Gk. *anupokritos* (2 Cor 6:6; 1 Tim 1:5; 2 Tim 1:5; Jas 3:17; 1 Pet 1:22). The word *anupokritos* is simply the negative (negative prefix “*a*” plus “*n*”) of *hupokrites*, from which derives our word “hypocrite.”

⁷ The verb *apostugountes* (“abhor evil”) and the verbs following through the end of 12:13 are all present participles. The main verb of this verse is implied rather than explicit, but it seems that Paul is using these participles in an exegetical manner. In other words, he uses the ideas of “abhorring what is evil” and “being devoted to what is good” to flesh out what it means to love without hypocrisy. The pattern in these verses is to imply the very means of a noun phrase in the head clause, and then use participles exegetically to flesh out the intent in the remainder of the verse. Lopez comments on the intent of the participles: “Though numerous participles (*abhor*, *cling*, *preference*, *fervent*, *servicing*, *rejoicing*, *patient*, *continuous*, *distributing*, *given*) describing the characteristics of *love* are not (technically speaking) imperatives, the context indicates Paul uses them as commands to obey specific mandates (cf. Schreiner, *Romans*, 663–64).” René A. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked: Power to Deliver* (Springfield: 21st Century Press, 2005), 248.

⁸ See Amos 5:15 LXX (“Hate evil and love good”) where the nouns are the same but the verbs are different. See Arland J. Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011), 454.

⁹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* 776; Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 454.

¹⁰ BDAG s.v. *apostugeo*. Most English versions translate this term “abhor” (NASB, NET, ESV, KJV, NKJV) or “detest” (HCSB). The translation “hate” (NIV, NRSV, NLT) does not seem strong enough. The prefix *apo* makes the verb emphatic = “hate strongly.”

¹¹ See 1 Cor 6:16–17; cf. also Matt 19:5. The verb *kollao* means “to join closely together” or “to be closely associated” (BDAG s.v. *kollao* 1 and 2). BDAG s.v. *bc.* defines its use in Rom 12:9b as “*be attached or devoted to what is good.*”

¹² In Phil 4:8 Paul writes, “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” A great exercise is to write this verse on a 3x5 card and post it in a place you will frequently view it (e.g., bathroom mirror, steering wheel column, desk).

¹³ MM s.v. *philostorgos*.

¹⁴ See 1 Thess 4:9; Heb 13:1; 1 Pet 1:22; and 2 Pet 1:7.

¹⁵ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 777.

¹⁶ See Dunn 1988b: 741; Moo 1996: 777–78; Eaton, *Romans*, 231; Hultgren, *Paul’s Letter to the Romans*, 455. Cranfield 1979: 632–33; Schreiner, *Romans*, 663; opt for the translation as it stands. The verb *proegeomai* is only used here in the NT and BDAG s.v. *proegeomai* 3 allows for both interpretations.

¹⁷ See Phil 2:3–4; 1 Thess 5:12–13.

¹⁸ See Gal 6:9 and Heb 12:3.

¹⁹ I take this as a reference to the Holy Spirit because of the parallel reference to the Lord in Rom 12:11c (see the translation of the RSV: “aglow with the Spirit”). Schreiner, *Romans*, 664 writes, “Believers are to burn and seethe in their spirits, but the means by which this is done is the power of the Holy Spirit.”

²⁰ The verb *zeo* is used figuratively of emotions, anger, love, eagerness to do good or evil (see BDAG). The only other NT use of the verb is in Acts 18:25 where it describes Apollos as a man “fervent in spirit.”

²¹ Eaton, *Romans*, 231 aptly writes, “We clear away the ashes. We cannot give the fire but we can put away the things that put the fire out!”

²² See also Rom 5:2b–3; 8:24–25; 1 Cor 13:7; and 1 Thess 1:3. However, Paul says it best in 2 Tim 3:12, “Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

²³ See Acts 1:14; 2:42; 6:4; and Col 4:2.

²⁴ Quoted in Ray Pritchard, “The Agape Factor: 12 Ways to Love” (Rom 12:9–16):

www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2006-11-17-The-Agape-Factor-12-Ways-to-Love. Accessed 10 July 2011.

²⁵ Gk. *koinoneo*, see Rom 15:27 for the root use of the word.

²⁶ See 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8; Heb 13:2; and 1 Pet 4:9.

²⁷ Not surprisingly, the only other occurrences of the word “needs” (Acts 20:34) in the plural have material possessions as their focus. Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 249 notes: “Usually the word group associated with the verb *koinōneō* is often employed in the New Testament as helping those with financial or material needs (Acts 2:44; 4:32 Rom 15:26–27; 2 Cor 8:4; 9:13; Gal 6:6; Phil 1:5; 4:15; 1 Tim 6:18; Heb 13:16).”

²⁸ For an excellent read, see Alexander Strauch, *The Hospitality Commands* (Littleton: Lewis and Roth, 1993). This is the finest book I’ve ever read on hospitality.

²⁹ Christopher Ash, *Teaching Romans, Volume 2* (London: Proclamation of Trust, 2009), 164.

³⁰ The only other NT use of *philoxenia* is Heb 13:2.

³¹ There are at least five NT commands, which insist that we demonstrate hospitality.

³² Gk. *dioko*, see Rom 9:30–31; 12:14; and 14:9.

³³ William R. Newell, *Romans Verse-By-Verse* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1994), 471. Cranfield rightly remarks: “. . . one is not just to wait and take the stranger in, if he actually presents himself at the door, but to go out and look for those to whom one can show hospitality . . .” C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 2 vols. ICC series (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1975), 2:639–40.

³⁴ Here Paul alludes to Jesus’ words in Matt 5:44; Luke 6:27–28. See also Schreiner, *Romans*, 666.

³⁵ Read David’s words in Psalm 55:12–14: “For it is not an enemy who reproaches me, then I could bear *it*; nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me, then I could hide myself from him. But it is you, a man my equal, my companion and my familiar friend; we who had sweet fellowship together walked in the house of God in the throng.”

³⁶ Cf. 1 Cor 4:12; 10:16; 14:16; Gal 3:9; Eph 1:3.

³⁷ Lopez, *Romans Unlocked*, 250 explains: “The Greek term *eulogeō* is where we get the English word ‘eulogy’ that means ‘to speak well’ or ‘praise’ someone. Since both sentences are parallel, the second sentence indicates the specific meaning of the term *eulogeō* in context. Believers are to *bless* their persecutors. Hence, *eulogeō* cannot mean in this context ‘praise.’ For how could one praise a persecutor? Instead, ‘to speak well’ with kind words rather than cursing them (cf. Acts 7:59–60; Luke 23:34) is Paul’s meaning. Jesus’ instruction (Luke 6:27–28; Matt 5:44) was probably in Paul’s mind. In fact, such behavior promises a special reward (5:46; 1 Pet 3:9), since it is a supernatural response indicating a spiritual origin and maturity. Those who practice such behavior are rightly called: ‘sons of your Father in heaven’ (Matt 5:45; cf. Rom 8:14–17).”

³⁸ Quoted in Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010), 260.

³⁹ *Contra* Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on The Epistle to the Romans*, 641, who thinks those outside the church are especially in view, and Dunn 1988b: 746, who says that those outside the church are included.

⁴⁰ Stott comments: “Few kinds of pride are worse than snobbery. Snobs are obsessed with questions of status, with the stratification of society into ‘upper’ and ‘lower’ classes, or its division into distinctions of tribe and caste, and so with the company they keep. They forget that Jesus fraternized freely and naturally with social rejects, and calls his followers to do the same with equal freedom and naturalness.” John R. W. Stott, *Romans: God’s Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 333.

⁴¹ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 783. Cf. Rom 15:5; 2 Cor 13:11; Phil 2:2; 4:2.

⁴² Gk. *Tapeinos* see Luke 1:52; Jas 1:10.

⁴³ Eaton, *Romans*, 232.

⁴⁴ This section continues to echo Jesus’ teaching in Luke 6:29–38.

⁴⁵ See also 1 Thess 5:15 and 1 Pet 3:9.

⁴⁶ One of my favorite passages of Scripture is found in 2 Sam 16:5–14. This passage describes an encounter King David had with a man named Shimei. “When King David came to Bahurim, behold, there came out from there a man of the family of the house of Saul whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera; he came out cursing continually as

he came. He threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David; and all the people and all the mighty men were at his right hand and at his left. Thus Shimei said when he cursed, ‘Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! The LORD has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the LORD has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. And behold, you are taken in your own evil, for you are a man of bloodshed!’ Then Abishai the son of Zeruiah said to the king, ‘Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over now and cut off his head.’ But the king said, ‘What have I to do with you, O sons of Zeruiah? If he curses, and if the LORD has told him, ‘Curse David,’ then who shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’ Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, ‘Behold, my son who came out from me seeks my life; how much more now this Benjamite? Let him alone and let him curse, for the LORD has told him. Perhaps the LORD will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day.’ So David and his men went on the way; and Shimei went along on the hillside parallel with him and as he went he cursed and cast stones and threw dust at him. The king and all the people who were with him arrived weary and he refreshed himself there.” In seminary I took a class called “Conflict Resolution.” During this class, Dr. John Weeks expounded on this passage and taught us the importance of not retaliating when we are cursed or criticized in the church. Instead, he urged us to exercise self-control and pay careful attention to what the Lord may be teaching us. This is great counsel, although it’s impossible to do, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit.

⁴⁷ See 2 Cor 8:21.

⁴⁸ Better renderings include “consider” (NET) and “give/take thought” (ESV, NRSV).

⁴⁹ Eaton, *Romans*, 234.

⁵⁰ Matthew 5:16 “Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven.”

⁵¹ For Paul’s use of “peace” in Romans, see 2:10; 3:17; 8:6; 12:18; 14:17, 19; 15:13, 33; 16:20.

⁵² See 2 Cor 8:21; cf. also 1 Thess 4:12; 5:15.

⁵³ Sometimes an aggressor may make immoral demands upon us to be at peace (Stott, *Romans*, 335; cf. Acts 4:13–22).

⁵⁴ Don’t forget what Jesus said in Matt 5:9: “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.”

⁵⁵ The psalmist understands our plight, “Too long has my soul had its dwelling with those who hate peace. I am *for* peace, but when I speak, they are for war” (Ps 120:6–7).

⁵⁶ Paul writes, “The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 2:24–25).

⁵⁷ James Pittman, *What Do You Do With A Broken Relationship* (Grand Rapids: Radio Bible Class, 1987), 22–24.

⁵⁸ A quotation from Deut 32:35.

⁵⁹ This principle is dramatically illustrated in 1 Samuel 24:1–22. When King Saul was pursuing David through the desert, intending to murder him, he inadvertently entered a cave where David was hiding with his men. David’s men urged him to kill Saul, but David refused saying, “I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD’S anointed” (24:10b). After Saul left the cave and walked away David emerged and called after him. When Saul realized that David could have killed him, he was deeply convicted of his sin and said, “You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and yet you did not kill me. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day. Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand” (1 Sam. 24:17–20). Years later, Saul’s prediction came true and David ascended the throne of Israel. David’s determination to obey God and to keep doing what was right helped him to avoid doing and saying things he would have later regretted. As a result, all of his enemies were eventually won over or defeated. Thousands of years later people are still taking note of David’s righteousness. See also Ken Sande, *The Peacemaker* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 200–1.

⁶⁰ Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 787 n. 88 clarifies: “Since Paul normally places the visitation of God’s wrath at the last judgment, many commentators think that it is this eschatological revelation of wrath to which he refers here. But Rom. 1:18 makes clear that God’s wrath, though decisively revealed in the last day, is even now operative. This makes it possible that Paul is leaving unspecified here the exact time or nature of God’s wrath.”

⁶¹ When you fail to forgive, you lose fellowship with God. God may then turn and deal with you in a severe manner (see Matt 6:14–15; 18:35).

⁶² Michael Eaton, *Romans. Preaching Through the Bible* (Kent, UK: Sovereign World Trust, 2010), 234. The word (“leave room”) is used in Luke 14:9 when someone sitting in a wrong seat was told “Give place to this person.” It is used also in Eph 4:27: “Do not give the devil a place” (lit. trans.).

⁶³ A quotation from Prov 25:21–22.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Pittman, *What Do You Do With A Broken Relationship*, 24, 26.

⁶⁵ It is also possible to take the heaping of the coals as a way of producing a burning sense of shame and remorse at such unexpected treatment. Our generosity results in shame and remorse that is intended to lead our enemy to repentance and restoration (see Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 788–89 and the vast majority of commentators).

⁶⁶ Several facts support the first view that the “coals of fire” represent divine judgment and that Rom 12:20 is in large measure reinforcing the message of 12:19. These facts include the grammatical structure of the verses in their apparent parallelism, the context in which they are located, and the development of the imagery from the OT. The imagery of “coals of fire” is invariably used in the OT as a symbol of divine anger or judgment. For example mirroring the imagery of Prov 25:21–22, from which Paul quoted, Psalm 140:9–10 reads, “As for the head of those who surround me, may the mischief of their lips cover them. May burning coals fall upon them; may they be cast into the fire, into deep pits from which they cannot rise.” For the apostle Paul to utilize this potent image in a manner foreign to its common usage—and without any clear contextual indicators to that effect—seems unlikely. See esp. John N. Day, “‘Coals of Fire’ in Romans 12:19–20,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 160:640 (Oct-Dec 2003): 414–20. See also Krister Stendahl, “Hate, Non-Retaliating, and Love: 1 QS x, 17-20 and Rom. 12:19–20,” *Harvard Theological Review* 55 (1962): 352; John Piper, “Love Your Enemies”: *Jesus’ Love Command in the Synoptic Gospels and in the Early Christian Paraenesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 115–19; Craig S. Keener, *Romans. A New Covenant Commentary* (Eugene: Cascade, 2009), 151–52. Piper, “Love Your Enemies,” 118 notes that “there is a very real sense in which the Christian’s love of his enemy is grounded in his certainty that God will take vengeance on those who *persist* in the state of enmity toward God’s people.” Cf. the example of Christ in 1 Pet 2:23, who suffered without retaliation, because He entrusted Himself to God the Father, who judges justly. As Schreiner *Romans*, 675 summarizes, “The sure realization that God will vindicate us frees us to love others and to do good to them,” thus conquering evil with good (12:21). Bock notes the following with regard to the love command in the Sermon on the Plain, from which much of the essence of Paul’s remarks was drawn: “The reason the disciple can love all humanity is that the disciple knows that God will deal justly with all one day. Even the woes of Luke 6:24–26 are grounded in God’s final act of justice. It is the sermon’s eschatology of hope and justice that lays the groundwork for the disciple’s love ethic.” Darrell L. Bock, *Luke 1:1–9:50. Baker Exegetical Commentaries on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 567.

⁶⁷ The passive *niko* (“to be overcome with evil”) is significant as well; we must never allow evil to passively overwhelm us. Some Christians, in the face of great evil, give up and give in. Paul commands just the opposite; rather than allowing evil to overcome us and conform us to its ways, we must instead overcome evil by means of the good that Paul has instructed us here. Thus instead of passive acceptance of the world’s standard we must actively combat evil with good.

⁶⁸ Ash, *Teaching Romans Vol. 2*, 168.