

“Dealing With Our Enemies”
Romans 12:14-16
(Preached at Trinity, February 20, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verse 9** Paul says our love for one another must be without “hypocrisy.” The word means our love must be genuine, sincere. Genuine love is always an active love. It is full of emotion, but it isn’t emotion without action.
In **Verses 10-13** Paul sets forth several virtues that flow forth from love. This is one of the reasons love is so essential in our lives. Everything else depends on it!
Paul considers in these verses our love for Christ and our love for our brethren and how this love is put to action.
 - The virtue of brotherly love – of caring for our brothers and sisters – **Vs. 10, 13**
 - The virtue of zeal in service – **Verse 11**
 - The virtue of joy – **Verse 12**
 - The virtue of perseverance in suffering – **Verse 12**
 - The virtue of prayer – **Verse 12**
2. Then in **Verses 14-21** Paul describes the virtue of loving our enemies.
3. This morning I want to begin this last section. How do we deal with our enemies in love?
The first thing we have to understand as we enter this section of **Romans 12** is there is a presupposition in this passage that Christians should expect opposition from those who do not know Christ.
 - A. When we looked at the phrase in **Verse 12** – “persevering in persecution” I posed the question for your consideration:
“Are the countless New Testament references to persecution addressing a situation for that generation only or are they dealing with something connected to the nature of Christianity itself?”
 - B. There is no doubt that persecution is a part of the Christian experience. Those who live righteous lives in this evil world will inevitably face the displeasure of people who suppress the rule of God in their lives.
 - C. There is a natural (and sinful) inclination of human beings to dislike those that are not like them. This is why racism has plagued humanity since the scattering of the races at the Tower of Babel.
The world hates us because we are not like them. When professing Christians do not face opposition it is usually because they are just like the world.
2 Timothy 3:12 – “And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

- D. It is the righteous who suffer persecution.
Matthew 5:10-12 – “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ "Blessed are you when *men* cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. ¹² "Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
4. The persecution Paul is talking about here is not for ill-doing but for well-doing.
1 Peter 3:17 – “For it is better, if God should will it so, that you suffer for doing what is right rather than for doing what is wrong.”
5. The Bible is clear that Christians should expect persecution. The question is, how do we respond to our enemies. This section tells how love affects how we behave towards our enemies.
- I. First of all, we seek their blessings – **Verses 14-15**
- A. Human nature says curse your enemies
1. We naturally want to hate our enemies and desire their downfall.
 2. There is something very satisfying in a movie when the bad guy falls. There is a particular temptation for the Christian to lash back at his enemies because their persecution is so unjust. We struggle with resentment, bitterness, perhaps hatred
 3. This passage isn’t speaking about the issue of justice. We’ll deal with this later on in the text.
 - a. Of course all of us should seek justice. God is a God of justice. This passage, however, is dealing with how *we* should treat our enemies.
 - b. This passage deals with the matter of the heart. What should our attitude be towards our enemies? The Biblical teaching for the Christian deals with the principle of love.
- B. The positive response:
 The Christian way is to bless our enemies rather than curse them
1. This is the essence of love – listen to our Lord on the Sermon on the Mount:
Matthew 5:43-48 – “You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you in order that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on *the* evil and *the* good, and sends rain on *the* righteous and *the* unrighteous. "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax-gatherers do the same? "And if you greet your brothers only, what do you do more *than others*? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? "Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”
 2. This is the opposite to the world’s approach to enemies
Matthew 5:43 – “You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.’”
 - a. The Jews defined neighbor to be another Israelite - everyone else they saw as their enemy – vile and unclean. And they thought it was their business to hate them.

- b. This was not the Biblical principle but their own perverted interpretation. The teaching of the Law was quite different.
Exodus 23:4-5 – “If you meet your enemy's ox or his donkey wandering away, you shall surely return it to him. ⁵ "If you see the donkey of one who hates you lying *helpless* under its load, you shall refrain from leaving it to him, you shall surely release *it* with him.”
- C. Paul's charge here is that instead of hating them and cursing them we are to love them and bless them. Not only are we charged with the duty not to retaliate. We are charged with the duty to respond with the positive disposition of blessing.
Romans 12:14 – “Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.”
 What does it mean to bless them?
 Blessing has several different meaning in the Bible
1. Sometimes we find human beings blessing God
Psalm 34:1 – “I Will bless the LORD at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth.”
 When we bless God we ascribe to Him the praise that is His due
 2. Sometimes we find God blessing human beings – it is an expression of His goodness and grace.
Ephesians 1:3 – “Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ,”
 3. When we bless others there are two expressions of our heart
 - a. We desire to do good to them out of goodness and grace and mercy
 We see this with the Good Samaritan
Luke 10:33-35 – “But a certain Samaritan, who was on a journey, came upon him; and when he saw him, he felt compassion, ³⁴ and came to him, and bandaged up his wounds, pouring oil and wine on *them*; and he put him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. ³⁵ "And on the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I return, I will repay you.'
 - b. We also invoke God's blessings upon them
 We see this with our Lord and also with Stephen as he was being stoned
 Jesus - **Luke 23:34** – “Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing."
 Stephen - **Acts 7:60** – “Lord, do not hold this sin against them!"
 4. The best illustration of blessing one's enemies is found with God Himself
 - a. God causes it to rain on the just and the unjust
 It is not just the Christian farmer that God blesses
 It is not just the Christian businessman that God blesses
 Unbelievers marry and find happiness.
 Unbelievers enjoy great measures of pleasure.
 Unbelievers acquire great storehouses of wealth

- b. God does not deal with them according to what they deserve
What moved upon God to choose us?
- c. Likewise, as we consider our enemies our behavior must not be controlled by their actions

II. Second, we approach them with meekness and humility – **Verses 15-17**

- A. **Verses 15-16** have universal application – They speak first of our duty towards our brothers and sisters in Christ.
 - 1. These admonitions are repeated throughout the New Testament
 - a. **Verse 15** - We are to rejoice with those rejoicing and weep with those weeping. In **1 Cor.** Paul states this as the essence of being united to one another as a body
1 Corinthians 12:26 – “And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.”
 - b. **Verse 16** – this charge to humility is expressed over and over
Philippians 2:3-4 – “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.”
 - 2. As members of the body of Christ we live together in peace and harmony
 - a. We are charged to compassion, pity, forgiveness, mercy, patience, and on and on.
 - b. All of this flows from our love to one another
- B. But these verses are in the midst of this section dealing with our enemies so I think Paul has in mind this attitude towards our enemies – our persecutors
 - 1. This demands great measures of love and mercy
 - 2. We are to rejoice in God’s blessings upon them. In fact we are to pray for God’s blessings upon them.
 - a. This is absolutely contrary to human nature. Instead of love and mercy we are naturally inclined to envy and jealousy, hatred and malice.
Titus 3:3 – “For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.”
 - b. Can you rejoice when your enemy is blessed when it is natural to rejoice at their calamities?
Can you rejoice if they have children while you don’t
Can you rejoice when they get the promotion while you don’t
Can you rejoice when they have a larger house, drive a nicer car
 - 3. Instead of cursing our enemy we must show mercy. If they are weeping we must weep with them.
 - a. We are to be full of empathy – the ability to place ourselves in the place of others—to enter into their condition—to truly feel their pain

- b. This is easy to do with those we love. We automatically share in their grief. It's much harder to do with those that hate us. It is natural for us to rejoice in their calamity.
 - 4. If we love our neighbor as ourselves we should enter into their joy and grief as if it were our own.
 - C. This takes large measures of humility – of being able to step outside of self-interests – **Verse 16**
 - 1. “Be of the same mind toward one another” – In other words, we should strive to live in harmony with one another – even your enemies. We aren't in the same mind with our enemies but we can seek to live in peace with them. We'll see this more in **Verse 18**.
 - 2. “do not be haughty in mind” – keep your pride in check.
 - a. The problem with pride is it only thinks of self. A friend is promoted or receives a particular blessing and we are jealous. We may even attend a party to congratulate them, but our envy burns in our bosom. Could you rejoice in the birth of a child when you are unable to bear?
Genesis 30:1 – “And when Rachel saw that she bare Jacob no children, Rachel envied her sister; and said unto Jacob, Give me children, or else I die.”
 - b. How much more difficult to humble ourselves before our enemy and rejoice in their blessing.
 - 3. “but associate with the lowly” – not being concerned for what benefit they might have for you.
 - 4. “Do not be wise in your own estimation” – don't spend all of your time pondering how wonderful you are.
Leon Morris – “The person who is wise in his own eyes is rarely so in the eyes of other people.”

Conclusion:

- 1. Christ's people will always be hated upon this earth. The issue is how will we treat them? God demands that we show them mercy as He has shown us mercy.
- 2. This takes much grace. It takes much love, but isn't that the point.
Romans 12:9 – “Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.”