



## International Bible Study Commentary

Verse-by-Verse Bible Lessons Thru the Bible

L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.

### Lesson 14

## Romans 12:9-21 Commentary

### New International Version

**(Romans 12:9) Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.**

Love must be genuine, sincere, and honest toward God and others; therefore, Christians do not hypocritically put on a show of love to gain a selfish advantage over others or to manipulate or try to manipulate God or others for personal gain. Hate is the opposite of love. Hate is the personal total rejection of someone or something, along with the desire to never be near what is hated. Some people hate God and Christians. Christians need to reject all association with evil. Evil can include indifference to right and wrong and good and bad, and thinking that evil is simply subjective personal preferences instead of a part of reality. Evil refuses to listen to reason or to accept the fact that the Bible is true. The Bible defines and illustrates the meanings of good and evil. The Bible gives an objective definition of the moral law, which we find described in the Ten Commandments. For example, in the Ten Commandments we learn to embrace godliness, to worship the true God, to love and honor God and our parents, and to reject lying, stealing, murder, envy, coveting, and other sins. Doing evil is disobeying the moral law of God as revealed in the Bible and following the desires of the world, the flesh, and the devil.

**(Romans 12:10) Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.**

Paul wrote that Christians should not only love one another as they do others but commit themselves to doing all they wisely can with the material and spiritual resources God gives them to promote what is best for all their brothers and sisters in Christ. In doing so, they look for ways to

acknowledge the achievements of others in the cause of Christ and commend them above themselves rather than seek personal glory in serving Christ. When Christians honor one another, they promote goodwill in the Church, and draw others to the Church when they see how much Christians love one another. And old acrostic poem JOY stands for putting Jesus First, Others Second, and Yourself Third, which brings everyone JOY.

**(Romans 12:11) Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.**

When we serve the Lord, we need to do so do with zeal (with cheerfulness, confidence, energy, enthusiasm, helpfulness, and hopefulness) and in ways that will help others see the supreme value we place in serving Jesus. Then, perhaps they will come to agree that He is worthy to be served and come to serve Him too. To keep our spiritual fervor, we need to continue in prayer and Bible study while asking the Lord what we can do to serve Him in better and new ways. Our prayers and Bible study time should help us learn what we need to change in our ways of living with the Lord's help. We also need to work and worship with our fellow Christians; then, we can encourage and inspire one another to pray and serve, especially when any of us are afflicted or discouraged.

**(Romans 12:12) Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.**

In Romans 12:10 & 12, Paul has brought faith, hope, and love together (see also 1 Corinthians 13). When we think about God's plans and how He prepares His people for the future, and when we begin expressing our thanks to God for the glorious possibilities involved in our spending eternity with Jesus and all those who love Him, we have many reasons to be joyful and patient in affliction. In 2 Corinthians 4:16-18, Paul wrote: "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles (afflictions) are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal."

Because God deserves our worship and wants fellowship with us, He has commanded us to be faithful in prayer and faithful in keeping an open conversation with Him no matter what trials we may be experiencing—we should never, never, never give up on prayer and our personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ—He will answer our prayers.

**(Romans 12:13) Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.**

From the early days of the Church, Christians have shared with others in need. Among other times, Jesus shared with those in need when He fed 5,000 people who came to hear Him teach and when He fed His disciples after He rose from the dead (see John 21:1-14 and the IBSC on [John 21:1-8](#) and [John 21:9-19](#)). After the Day of Pentecost, the apostles followed His example in the power of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2). Christians have always sought to help others in need, whether the needy were Christians or not. Their selfless sharing has led many to faithfulness in following Jesus Christ. For centuries, many Christians have opened their homes and fed traveling missionaries and ministers. When Francis and Edith Schaeffer opened their home to others in the Swiss Alps, they prayed for the people of the Lord’s choice to come to their home, and for Him to keep all others away. They did not want people coming who just wanted a free vacation (see [Francis and Edith Schaeffer: Expanded and Updated Edition](#) by L.G. Parkhurst, Jr.). Others have opened their homes to Bible study and prayer groups and home churches.

**(Romans 12:14) Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.**

Beginning with this verse in our lesson, Paul turns to the Christian’s relationship with nonbelievers and the spiritually immature. Christians will be persecuted in this world in one way or another, and the Bible commands us to bless those who persecute us. To bless those who persecute us, we need to pray for them to make the changes in their lives that they need to make, that they will repent of their sins and place their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior; otherwise, they will face the just judgement of

God. To bless others, we can pray for the light, life, and love of Jesus Christ to shine forth from our lives that they might be drawn to faith in Jesus and receive eternal life through Him. To bless others, we can pray that the Holy Spirit will lead them to read what they need to read in the Bible or learn what they need to learn from the Bible—perhaps even understand for the first time—so they will turn from their sins and to trust in Jesus to save them from sin and for eternity. To curse someone is to call down evil or a curse from God upon them so they might be condemned rather than be saved. The Bible commands Christians to bless and not curse anyone, and following this command shows the sharp contrast between Christians and many unbelievers.

**(Romans 12:15) Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.**

Christians need to empathize (understand and share the feelings of another) with those who are rejoicing or mourning. Christians need to sympathize (show interest, concern, and compassion) for those who are suffering. Whereas some may envy the good news or achievements others receive, the Bible encourages us to rejoice with them and praise God with them for the blessings they have received and the good they might have done. What may seem like baby steps or small advancements to us may be giant steps and awesome achievements to others because of their situation, so we need to be sensitive and rejoice with all who rejoice. When someone mourns, it usually does not help them for us to put on a happy face and offer words that minimize their suffering. We need to express sincere sorrow and pray for and with them (when possible).

**(Romans 12:16) Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.**

Sometimes even those (and perhaps especially those) in Christian churches and families need to heed this command. We can pray for the Holy Spirit to work in our lives and in the lives of others to bring harmony into our relationships. The Holy Spirit can help us overcome the differences that

divide us by showing us how we can conform our thoughts and behaviors to all the teachings in the Bible. Arrogance and pride can become stumbling blocks to developing and maintaining Christian relationships, and barriers to telling others effectively about the life-changing power of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ should be our example, and in Philippians 2:8, Paul wrote: “And being found in appearance as a man, He (Christ) humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!” Jesus Christ exemplified every virtue that Paul commended. The Holy Spirit will help those who believe in Jesus Christ live with the virtues of Jesus Christ.

**(Romans 12:17) Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.**

Paul does not teach that we should not seek justice when someone does evil to us or others. Our seeking justice may discourage someone from continuing to pursue evil and deter others who see the consequences of doing evil. Two wrongs do not make a right. Christians are never to do evil, no matter what the reason. Protecting yourself and others from evil is not repaying evil for evil; there are times when self-defense is necessary. When we prayerfully follow Jesus and the Bible’s teachings, we do right, and we should so live rightly that others can follow our good example.

**(Romans 12:18) If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.**

Looking back to Romans 12:16, we should strive to live in harmony with others. However, in some situations our Christian values and efforts to proclaim the truth about Jesus will offend some and they may attack us in immoral ways—perhaps by telling lies about us as Jesus’ enemies did about Him. While teaching the truth about the ways of God, Jesus strived to bring peace and live in peace with all people, but He did not soften His message to be at peace with those committed to doing evil and dishonoring His Father. We are not to sacrifice the truth to maintain peace at any cost. Jesus came as the Truth to teach the truth to everyone, and in Matthew 10:34, Jesus described what He came to do: “Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

**(Romans 12:19) Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord.**

To take revenge can result in our taking the law unjustly into our own hands, or in our bearing a grudge against someone which can also spiritually harm us and them. God will do whatever is just and right in every situation where we have been unjustly attacked and wronged. Indeed, God always and inevitably will work out all our unjust sufferings for our good. In many ways, we can experience God at work making our lives spiritually better through suffering. In Romans 8:28-29, Paul wrote, “And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters.” God works out all these unjust experiences for our good to conform us to the image of His Son.

**(Romans 12:20) On the contrary: “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.”**

In some sense, Paul is telling Christians to do for others what Jesus Christ has done for us. Jesus came to save us while we were still His enemies. His demonstrations of God’s love for us worked on our conscience; that is, “heaped burning coals on our heads,” revealed our true moral guilt to us, led us to faith and repentance, and to our embracing Jesus Christ as our Friend, our Lord and Savior. When we try to meet a real need of one of our enemies, when it’s wisely in our power to do so, we might lead them to see the difference Jesus Christ can make in a person’s life, lead them to repent, seek forgiveness, make amends (if wise and possible), to faith in Christ, and to true friendship with Jesus Christ and us.

**(Romans 12:21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

We can be overcome by evil when we do evil against an enemy who has done evil to us. Retaliation can lead to escalation. Overcoming evil with

good can mean that we justly defend ourselves or seek justice in legal ways. No matter what others do to us, we need to keep on doing good as the Holy Spirit leads us according to the Bible and we can keep praying for them. We can pray that as they justly suffer punishment for the evil they have done that they will repent, turn to trust in Jesus, and find forgiveness. Acting justly and mercifully is doing good. We will also be tempted to do evil by the evil example of others (and by the world, the flesh, and the devil), but we must keep on doing good according to the Scriptures and the leading of the Holy Spirit. We can pray for Jesus to show us what good we can do to or for His enemies and ours that might by the grace of God turn them from doing evil to living rightly, to repenting, and to placing their faith in Him.

### **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further**

1. Complete this command: Be joyful in \_\_\_\_\_, patient in \_\_\_\_\_, faithful in \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Give four reasons a Christian can be joyful every day.
3. Name four things a Christian should do faithfully each day.
4. Remembering what you have learned from the Bible, how might you encourage a Christian who is suffering persecution.
5. How did Paul say a Christian should treat his enemies? In your own words, why should a Christian treat his enemies in this way?

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