



Group Discussion Guide

Romans 12:9-21

For groups meeting June 14 evening through June 21 morning.

In this second portion of Romans 12, Paul continued to give instructions to believers regarding the mindset and the actions they must seek to have in everyday life. In verses 9-21, we see valuing others above ourselves as a constant theme. This is to be practiced within the fellowship of believers, and also outside that fellowship. He emphasized genuine love, as opposed to claiming to love someone but then not following through. The believer is instructed to hate what is evil and cling to what is good (v. 9). Paul then offered more detail about showing love, as he wrote that we are to have “brotherly affection” for one another and to show honor to one another (v. 10).

Believers are to be zealous in our service to God, with a strong and active spirit (v. 11). The next sentence gives us guidance through every time in our lives, but seems especially appropriate with what we have faced and continue to face in our nation today: “Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer,” (v. 12). Hope is powerful, and we who believe in Christ have hope that others do not. We have the hope that comes from knowing God is with us, the hope that He has a plan for our future here on this earth, and the hope of eternity in heaven with our Savior. This allows us to be patient when hard times come. Rather than jump to conclusions or allow ourselves to show “knee-jerk” reactions, we are to be patient and allow God to lead us. We do this through constant prayer.

Paul then shared a truth that Jesus taught in the Sermon on the Mount: “Bless those who persecute you ...” (v. 14). Following Jesus means forgiveness and blessing, rather than revenge. Believers are to share in the joy of those who are experiencing joy, and share in the grief of those who are experiencing loss (v. 15). Paul again focused on humility with his instructions in verse 16. We are to live in harmony with others, live humbly and spend time with those who have a lower place in society, and not think that we have all the answers. Paul echoed these same instructions in verses 17-18, as he wrote we are to do what is honorable when someone wrongs us, rather than doing evil in return. We are to live at peace with others.

Paul’s final point regarding revenge is given in great detail in verses 19-21. He already had given instruction about this in verses 14 and 17, but was moved to address it again. In these final verses of chapter 12, Paul reminded his readers not to take revenge on those who have committed evil against them, but rather to count on God to repay those who commit wrong. He referenced Deuteronomy 32:35 and Proverbs 25:21-22. Regarding the Proverbs 25 reference, one author states this:

A quotation from Proverbs 25:21–22; Paul omits the concluding clause: ‘and the Lord will reward you.’ The original force of the admonition may have been: ‘Treat your enemy kindly, for that will increase his guilt; you will thus ensure for him a more terrible judgment, and for yourself a better reward—from God.’ Another view is that the proverb refers to an Egyptian ritual in which a man testified publicly to his penitence by carrying a pan of burning charcoal around on his head. In any case, by placing the proverb in this context and omitting the last clause, Paul gives it a nobler meaning: ‘Treat your enemy kindly, for that may make him ashamed and lead to his repentance.’ In other words, the best way to get rid of an enemy is to turn him into a friend, and so overcome evil with good (verse 21).

F. F. Bruce, Romans: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 6, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 229.

Discussion Questions

1. Our reading this week took us into some very direct, practical instruction about how we who follow Christ are to live. What challenged you the most? Why?
2. Romans 12:9-21 deals with how we handle our relationships with one another. What does it say about us when we claim to love God and yet do not show love to others? What changes do we need to make when we realize this is happening in our lives?
3. Let's consider what is happening in our world right now, regarding the pandemic and now racial tension added to that. How do these verses speak to you personally as you navigate how to live amidst the pressures of daily life?
4. "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them." These words from verse 14 are contradictory to our human nature and the world system we live in. How do we move forward in living this out?
5. Notice what Paul writes in verse 16. How do we reach a place of being "haughty" and being "wise in our own sight"? What type of attitude does this lead to?
6. What is one specific action step you can take to apply the truths Paul shares in this passage?