

More Manifestations of Love

 Romans 12:14-21

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Remember, as we work through the application section of Romans, chapters 12-16, that what we are viewing is what the Christian life looks like, not how to live the Christian life. How to live the Christian life is by presenting ourselves to Him to be used for His service. This is what results in us walking by the Spirit. Walking by the Spirit is how we live the Christian life and at any moment we are either walking by the Spirit or walking by the flesh. So this is a moment-by-moment issue and the important thing is when we start walking by the flesh we come back, present ourselves to Him again so that we are walking by the Spirit again. That's how to live the Christian life and Paul discussed that at great length in Romans 6-8, he reviewed it in 12:1-2 and he will review it again in 13:14. Like Paul, we need to constantly review how to live the Christian life because we can read all these commands and get the idea that this is what we have to do to please God. Then we try to do it and we wipe out. That's because we're trying to do it in our strength and not by presenting ourselves to Him in dependence upon the Spirit. So Paul keeps reminding us that we can't live the Christian life, only the Holy Spirit can do that through us. All we can do is present ourselves to Him to be used for His service.

What Paul is telling us now is what the Christian life looks like. It's important to understand that He is not saying, "How you live the Christian life is by being humble and loving others" but "This is what the Christian life looks like when you are living by the Spirit." The difference between those two statements is a great difference because one is saying that you can't live the Christian life but you can learn to live by the Spirit and the other is saying you can live the Christian life. Friend, you cannot live the Christian life. Paul tried that in Romans 7; that is where he said I want to do this but I do that and every time I try I fall on my face. Romans 8 was Paul's solution, the Spirit, the Spirit, the Spirit and every time he said I live by the Spirit I have victory and enjoy life and righteousness and peace in my life. So I simply cannot tell you how important it is to understand what Paul is doing here in Romans 12, 13, 14 and 15. He is not saying "do these things." He is saying "these things are the result of living by the Spirit, they are the fruit of the Spirit".

We are getting close to a very controversial passage in Romans 13:1-7, about our relationship as Christians to the governing authorities and to understand this passage you must understand what I have been saying all along in Romans 12 and that is that Paul is giving us general pictures and trends, he's not laying down strict instructions.

J. Vernon McGee said it well when he said, "...Paul puts down great principles that are to guide the believer. The Holy Spirit is giving the believer a road map of life, showing the curves but not the speed limit. He identifies the motels and eating places which he recommends without commanding the believer to stop at any certain one. Detours are clearly marked, and there is a warning to avoid them. The city of Vanity Fair is named, and the routes of exit are clearly marked. The believer is told to leave without being given the exact route by which to leave—there are several routes."¹ That is very wisely stated. If you get too strict with these passages you'll misuse them. You'll use them in ways they weren't intended to be used. And if you've followed this principle so far you will find that you are prepared to understand the basic principle of Rom 13:1-7 and that Paul is not dealing with exceptional cases. And to understand the exceptional cases of Christians and their relationship to government you have to understand all of the Bible's teaching on that topic. And because it's such an important topic we'll slow down and do that.

So far we've seen the manifestation of the Spirit in 12:3-8 which is humility and in 12:9-13 which is love. Paul continues to show manifestations of love today in 14ff but let's take a moment to review 12:9-13. Paul says the love of the Spirit is "love without hypocrisy," he means it is love that is not an act, it is sincere love for one another. Also it is abhorring what is evil, having an extreme hatred for it and clinging to what is good, being glued to it, involved in it, continually. In 12:10, the love of the Spirit is stated to be one of devotion to one another in brotherly love, both words of familial love. We need to think of ourselves as a family because we are a family. All genuine believers are a family. All who by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone are in Christ. This isn't about one local church, this is about the Church and the Church is a multi-generational organism that God is building. That organism does not include those who think they have to repent of their sins, be baptized, commit their life to Christ, persevere to the end, go to the right church or whatever. It is always faith alone in Christ alone. They are a family. Also, the Spirit's love is manifested by giving preference to one another in honor, meaning going first and leading the way in commending others, not waiting on them to commend you. In 12:11 not lagging behind in diligence uses two speed words to describe us not slowing down in our optimum devotion to the Lord but instead maintaining a fervent spirit, a vibrant enthusiasm for the Lord in our service to Him. In 12:12 rejoicing in hope is maintaining a joyful attitude relative to what is stored up for us in the future, the rapture, the judgment for rewards, the kingdom, reigning with Him and the eternal state in the New Jerusalem. Keeping this hope helps us persevere in our tribulations, which we all face, but we should not give up, not give in. And through these afflictions we should be devoted to prayer, requesting of God that He give us the wisdom and patience to see our way through the difficulties. All the while in 12:13, contributing to the needs of the saints as we find needs to be met among our fellow believers. And finally, practicing hospitality, pursuing opportunities to show kindness to others. These are all manifestations of the fruit of the Spirit called love.

In 12:14 this fruit of the Spirit continues to be described and it continues to be in the context of how we love one another, within the body of believers because you still see in verse 16 the "one another" language being used but in verse 17 it shifts to how we express our love for those outside the body of believers because you see in

verse 17 the “all men” language and in verse 18 “all men” is used again. So I divide the passage between verse 16 and 17. Up to verse 16 Paul is talking about how love as a fruit of the Spirit is manifested within the Church but in verse 17ff he is talking about how love as a fruit of the Spirit is manifested outside the Church, including our relationship to governing authorities. Alva McClain says, “The remainder of chapter 12 explains how love should manifest itself. This covers an area that is twofold: first, love within the church, and then, in the latter part of the section, love outside the church. Verse 13 identifies love within the church...Verse 17 identifies love outside the church...” Not all commentators do agree but I hope you see from the shift in the language that there is a break between verses 13-16 and 17ff and that the shift is from love within the church to love outside the church.

In 12:14 we have something that sounds strikingly similar to the Sermon on the Mount. **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.** In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.” There he was contrasting the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees with the kind of righteousness the Law demanded. Here Paul is also talking about a kind of righteousness that results when we live by the Spirit. It is specifically described as “blessing those who persecute you; blessing and not cursing.” What does this mean? This does not mean what many ecumenical Christians say it means. They say it means we throw our arms around every religious group and show solidarity. You probably saw the Wheaton College professor who wore a Muslim scarf in order to show solidarity with Muslims and that we worship the same god. That is not what this is talking about. This is not talking about blessing Muslims who persecute Christians. First of all, the context is believers not unbelievers. Second, when you look at this closely you find that the word **persecute** is *διωκοντας* and in this context the lexicon says “the one’s harassing you because of your beliefs.” In the context the one’s harassing **you** because of your orthodox beliefs are fellow Christians who have false beliefs. In the early church these differences had to be sorted out because each city or town only had one church, it was the Church of Corinth or the Church of Ephesus, each town only had one church and you were stuck with those people. Of course, they often met in separate individual homes because they didn’t have large, spacious buildings to accommodate all the people, so there was some separation, but they were still considered the same church and in some cities like Corinth they did have access to large buildings and occasionally did all meet together (1 Cor 11:18). But my point is they had to work it out. You couldn’t just walk out the door and go to the next church down the street. In these churches factions often formed and one faction would harass another. At Corinth this was a real problem, one faction was of Paul, one of Apollos, one of Peter and another of Christ (1 Cor 1:10-12). They were quarrelling with one another. This revealed to Paul that the church was dominated by the flesh and not the Spirit (1 Cor 3:1-4). He’d say the same thing today since the Church is all broken up into denominations. The only difference is we don’t have to work it out, which is actually worse. But there is still wide disagreement and the harassment you get for your beliefs usually occurs through books being written against your particular beliefs.² One example in modern times is the criticisms against our view of dispensationalism that holds to a pre-trib rapture, premillennial return of Christ and restoration of national Israel to their homeland. This teaching came under intense criticism about 50 years ago. The criticism was that

dispensationalism was a recent view started in the 1820's by John Nelson Darby who got it from a little girl named Margaret McDonald who was visiting him while he was convalescing after a horse accident in 1827. In about 2007 William Watson, a history professor in Colorado, got sick and tired of hearing this nonsense. He knew enough about history to know this was not true. To document it he went back to the original source material of hundreds of English theological writings dating back as early as the 1540's that demonstrate that Darby's ideas of a pre-trib rapture, premillennial return of Christ and restoration of Israel to their homeland were not original. Instead he was one in a long line of British clergy who taught these ideas. He cites hundreds and hundreds of original source documents from the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries that evidence that dispensational ideas have been around for hundreds of years. This was necessary to do and the charges against dispensationalism being recent, and therefore wrong, should be dropped by those fellow Christians who so loudly criticize it.³ These types of harassments should be answered and silenced. But how does Paul say we should respond to those who harass us? He says "blessing" them, "blessing and not cursing." What does Paul mean by "blessing?" The Greek word *ευλογειτε* means "to ask to bestow special grace" upon them. In other words, it is praying for them, asking God to bestow grace upon them so that they would stop harassing the true faith. That is consistent with what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, "pray for those who persecute you." You want them to stop harassing you so that you can be united in the faith and get on with clarifying the truth. That is what we are to do when there is someone harassing us over some true belief. We are not to go on a tirade, we are not to deal with them in an uncharitable manner. We are to pray for them, that God would bestow His grace upon them that would lead them to the truth so that we can be united with one another. When we do that it is of the Spirit. We are not to **curse**. To curse would be the opposite of bless, it would be to ask God to send judgment upon them. When we do that it is of the flesh.

In 12:15 there is more manifestation of loving by the Spirit. **Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.** Remember that we are a family. In a family there are certain emotional responses that are family appropriate. The first one mentioned here is **rejoice**. The occasion is not mentioned. It may be a new baby or a wedding or one's salvation. But whatever the occasion for rejoicing, when one family member rejoices we should rejoice with them. On the flipside a manifestation of the love of the Spirit is **weeping with those who weep**. The occasion is not mentioned. It may be difficult suffering, it may be a son or daughter gone away from the faith, it may be a death. But whatever the occasion for weeping, when one family member weeps we should weep with them. This is just showing genuine sympathy and identifying with them. We are to identify with one another in both our joys and our difficulties. The reason is because we are all part of the same family.

I found verse 16 to be the most difficult verse. Paul says **Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.** He uses the root *φρον-* for mind or thinking three times in this verse. **Be of the same mind...do not be haughty in mind...Do not be wise...**We might think by the first one, **Be of the same mind toward one another**, that Paul is saying we ought to be united in thought, as in doctrine, having unity in doctrine. Paul does teach that elsewhere (e.g. 2 Cor

13:11; Phil 2:2; Rom 15:5). But in none of those passages does he use the preposition **toward**. Paul seems to be referring to how we think about one another relative to class distinctions that the flesh insists on making. As Moo says, "Paul's point might then be that Christians should display the same attitude toward all other people, whatever their social, ethnic, or economic status."⁴ I would only modify his statement by pointing out that Paul is talking about our attitude toward other Christians and not all people. If we are living by the Spirit we will not make class distinctions in our thinking **toward one another**; whether rich or poor, slave or free, male or female, we will not think of ourselves as on a higher plane than others. Class distinctions based on economics, ethnicity or social differences have been common in Christian circles throughout the centuries and are still very common today. Such thinking should be set aside since such distinctions are secondary issues. Primarily we are all one in Christ through faith and that is the way we are to think about one another. There is no place for putting on airs as if you are something special.

This sets the tone for the rest of verse 16. The second time Paul uses the root for mind or thinking he says **do not be haughty in mind**. The word **haughty** comes from a word that means "height." Thus the word means "to think too highly of oneself." Thinking too highly of oneself is what leads to an attitude of pride. It is pride that gets in the way of thinking about one another as just as important as ourselves. To protect against this Paul contrasts saying, **but associate with the lowly**. The word translated **associate** could mean one of two things. First, it could mean to adjust to a condition or circumstance, *accommodate*. If this is the case it means that we should be involved in tasks that are considered lowly or humble. For example, a rich man ought to do lowly tasks at the church. This is a protection against thinking too highly of oneself. Second, it could mean to "join the company of others, *associate with*." If this is the case it means that we should associate with those who are of lower privilege or poorer. This second view has more going for it because of the context of our attitude toward "one another." However, both views are valid options and the NT teaches both elsewhere. Both involving ourselves in lowly tasks and associating with lowly people are bulwarks against thinking too highly of ourselves.

The third expression in verse 16 that uses the root word for mind or thought is **do not be wise in your own estimation**. Paul said something similar earlier in 12:3, "I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think." We are to have a proper evaluation of our mental abilities. If we measure ourselves against others we may overestimate ourselves. If we measure ourselves against God we will have a good estimate. Everything we know is almost equivalent to nothing. But what we do know of God's word we know truly and is true knowledge. That gives you a proper estimate.

In verse 17 Paul turns to how the love of the Spirit produced through us toward all men, that is, toward those who are unbelievers. We see the shift because verse 17 uses the phrase "all men" and verse 18 uses the same phrase, "all men." Moo agrees saying, "After two verses that exhort Christians about their relations to one another, Paul concludes his delineation of the manifestations of "genuine love" (v. 9a) with admonitions about the attitude Christians are to adopt toward non-Christians (vv. 17–21)."⁵ So there is a love of the Spirit that is

produced through us and made manifest to unbelievers and this is how the love of God is shared with them. It is from God...through us...to them...as we live by the Spirit.

In verse 17 Paul says **Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.** It is a very strong statement that, like verse 14, reminds us of some of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. Paul seems to have Jesus' teaching in mind. There Jesus said, "But I say to you, do not resist an evil person; but whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also." This is part of Jesus' contrast between the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, which cited the letter of the Law, and the true spirit of the Law. The scribes and Pharisees argued the law of retaliation; eye for eye and tooth for tooth, and that this was not only a right but a duty for the courts to exact. If the courts failed to exact the full punishment they thought it was up to the individual to exact vengeance for the remainder that was due. Jesus didn't reject the law of retaliation but He showed that the courts were to exercise restraint in order to insure that the punishment did not exceed the crime and no matter the decision the individual was never to exercise personal vengeance. The main point was to exercise personal restraint and have a gracious attitude toward an offender. A slap on the right cheek would be administered with the back of the hand. In Jewish culture this was an idiom for a public insult that struck a blow at one's personal dignity. All Jesus was saying was do not retaliate against personal insults by taking them to court or take the law into your own hands. Like Jesus, Paul is not talking about major criminal offenses like striking, clubbing, stabbing or punching. He is talking about minor issues and saying if someone does something **evil** to you on a minor scale then **do not** take it into your own hands to pay them **back** with **evil** by taking them to a court of law or taking the law into your own hands.

Instead, the next statement in verse 17 tells us how to respond, **Respect what is right in the sight of all men.** The Greek word **respect** is *προνοεω* and means "to give careful thought to," "have regard for." In this context "to give careful thought to" what is right in the sight of all men. This is not to say that what is right in the sight of all men is the standard for what is right but it is saying that generally speaking cultures recognize there are things that are right and that in general we are to make sure that we respond to an evil person by doing what is right in that sense. We are not to stoop to their level and repay evil for evil. That would not be a good testimony to the world. We are to show restraint. A good testimony would be responding in a way that was right in the eyes of the world, showing restraint. Restraint would go a long way to showing the love of God to the world. We should never forget that as long as we are here we are to be showing the love of God to the world. If we return good with good and evil with evil what more are we doing than the world? To do what Paul says here is a result of living by the Spirit of God.

In verse 18 Paul says, **If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.** This too reminds us of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount about being a peacemaker. Notice that Jesus did not say a peacekeeper. A peacekeeper keeps the peace at all costs. A peacemaker makes peace at a cost. Here Paul's point is that it may be possible and it may not be possible, but so far as it depends on us we should be at peace with all

men. It may not be possible because unbelievers may pursue us at all costs against our attempts to be at peace. In such cases we may necessarily be involved in conflict. That is not desirable but it is valid. But as far as it depends on us we should not instigate conflict, we should instigate **peace**. It is always better to be at peace than it is to be at war, unless the price is too great!

In verse 19, **Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ²⁰"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."** Paul seems here to move from minor personal insults to criminal offenses against us. This introduces us to the issues of chapter 13:1-7. In such cases where an unbeliever commits a criminal offense against us, just like Jesus taught, **never take your own revenge...but leave room for the wrath of God.** *Of God* is not in the original, it simply says **leave room for the wrath**. But probably it is correct that it is **the wrath of God**. But what is **the wrath of God** in this context? Probably it is governing authorities. 13:4 also uses the word wrath and refers to the governing authorities as those who carry out God's wrath. As Paul says, speaking of governing authorities, "for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is evil, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil." We should remember here and now that these injunctions are general and assume that the governing authorities are punishing evil and not rewarding it. All of the commands in these chapters are general only and do not refer to exceptional situations. All of this is ensured by the fact that in 12:18 Paul said, "if possible" reminding us that there are situations that are exceptional but what is in view is the general state of affairs.

Thus the point of verse 19, **never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God**, is basically, don't take the law into your own hands but take them to the law, take them to court since the governing authorities are a minister of God to bring wrath on them. We have to follow the procedures of the governing system in order to get justice. If we follow those procedures and justice is still not met then God will take care of the rest. The quote supporting this, "**VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY**," comes loosely from Deut 32:35. There Moses referred to criminals as those who would eventually overstep their bounds and His vengeance would overtake them. We can be sure that those who do evil in this world and are not corrected by the judicial system will ultimately be recompensed by God. So while there appears to be a lot of injustice that does not mean that we are to take up the slack by personally taking revenge. Both Jesus and Paul taught against taking revenge saying, **leave room for the wrath of God**. God will repay them in due time. Many passages support this teaching (e.g. 2 Thess 1; Jas 5:1-6).

In verse 20 Paul cites another OT passage that gives a principle, "**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.**" This quote comes from Prov 25:21. The point is, that since you cannot take your own revenge what you can do is do good for those who are your enemies. If you do this it will prick their conscience and convict them of the guilt of their wrongdoing.

Evidently the meaning of **HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD** comes from an ancient custom. If your coals went out in your home you would go to your neighbor's home to get some hot coals to rekindle your fire. Carrying the coals in a pan on your head was somewhat dangerous and uncomfortable, but they were evidence that your neighbor was good to you. In the same way, when you do good to your enemies it is somewhat uncomfortable to them since they wronged you in the first place. So doing good to your enemy will prick their conscience and convict them of their wrongdoing.⁶ Sometimes this is all that can be done and sometimes this is a witness. Again, if we only do good to those who do good to us, what more is that than what the world does.

Finally, in 12:21 Paul concludes with a summary of the manifestation of love by the Christian living by the Spirit. **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** The point is that it is tempting to return evil for evil, whether it's a mere public insult or a crime for which justice is not met in the legal system ordained by God, but we should not fall to that temptation, to do so is to give in to the flesh. If we yield to the Spirit then we will show restraint and do what is good in the sight of all men and even do good to our enemies, knowing that in the end God will exact recompense for any remaining wrongs committed by our enemies. This, in general, is the Christian way. Constable says, "When people do wrong, they expect to receive evil from those they have wronged. When they receive kindness instead, their hard hearts often become softer."⁷ There is a progression in Romans 12 from our love toward one another which is to be seen by the world to our love toward the world which is to be felt by the world. Paul always had outreach in mind whenever he spoke of our behavior. He realized that a Christian must truly be living like a Christian in order to have the rank and prestige among unbelievers to influence them. This life, of course, is entered into by presenting ourselves to Him which brings about walking by the Spirit resulting in love for our fellow brethren and love for the world as described in the text.

Constable made an interesting comment showing the contrast between Israel under law and the Church under grace, "The general nature of the commands in this pericope illustrates the essentially gracious character of the Law of Christ (Gal. 6:2) under which Christians now live. Compare this with the legal nature of the commands in the Mosaic Law (cf. 10:4). God gave the Israelites many explicit commands about how they were to behave in a multitude of specific situations. The commands in verses 9–21, as well as in all the New Testament, are much more general and are similar to principles. This is one reason we say the Israelites lived under "law" and we live under "grace."⁸ I would only add that according to Jesus in John 1 the Israelites Law was tempered by grace but we have a greater grace or grace upon grace such that the primary emphasis for Israel was law but for the Church is grace. This is an important difference.

¹ J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible, Volume IV: Matthew Through Romans*, p 729

² And in part the books need to be written because there are false beliefs that need to be exposed. Paul said there must be factions among you so that those who are approved by God will become evident among you (1 Cor 11:19).

³ E.g. John Gerstner, *Wrongly Dividing the Word of Truth*. Ernest Reisinger, <http://founders.org/fj09/the-history-of-dispensationalism-in-america/> For a well-documented and irenic refutation of such claims see *Dispensationalism Before Darby*, William C. Watson.

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 782–783.

⁵ Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996), 784.

⁶ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Pr 25:21.

⁷ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 12:21.

⁸ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Ro 12:21.