



# THE TRANSFORMED LIFE

Romans 12:9-21

A verse-by-verse  
focus on Paul's  
words to the church  
in Rome and us  
today.

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*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.*

*Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

*Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

*Live in harmony one another. Do not proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.*

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

*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."*

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Romans 12:9-21

New International Version 1984

## Sincere Love

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

Focus requires in-depth analysis. We remove everything around to focus in on the central message. In this booklet, I want to focus in on the verses found in the twelfth chapter of Romans, beginning in verse nine. This passage is so rich and gives detailed instructions on living the transformed life.

To live this life, requires the initial act of transformation that comes through faith in Christ Jesus. If you don't have that, these verses will mean nothing, so stop now and ask Jesus to be your Lord and Savior. If you know him, read on!

Paul starts this chapter with a reminder that we are not to conform to the pattern of this world but be transformed in our thinking. When we live this way, it will affect our actions, and they will be greatly different from those of the world around us.

*Verse 9 says: Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.*

What's the opposite of sincerity? Insincerity or hypocrisy. I think most of us know what hypocritical love looks like. It's the love that is dripping with syrupy language. We know when someone is trying to "butter us up," as we say in the South.

Hypocritical love is easy to spot, because it usually wants something in return. “I’ll be happy to help, if you do this for me.” It’s conditional and not easily given.

If that’s insincere love, then sincere love is radically different. It’s...

- Patient
- Kind
- doesn’t envy or boast
- not proud, rude or self-seeking
- not easily angered and keeps no record of wrong
- not the kind to delight in evil, but rejoices in the truth
- the kind of love that always protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres and never fails. (1 Corinthians 13:4-7)

How do you rate on the sincerity level with the love you show? The more intimate our relationship with Christ, the more sincere our love toward others.

That level of love naturally leads us to distance ourselves from evil, because it leaves a bad taste in our mouth, hurts our heart, burdens our soul. Instead, we cling to all that is good and lovely. As Paul told the church in Philippi:

*whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.* (Philippians 4:8)

Are you struggling with the love you show? This verse gives us the answer by flipping the sentences around. If you cling to what is good and push evil away, then your love will be purified and become that which gives honor to God.

How will you put sincere love into practice this week? Focus first on Christ, whose love led him to the cross on our behalf, and then in doing good, you'll show that sincere love to others to his glory.

## Honor and Devotion

*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

I'll start with a confession: In my effort to focus on a passage in Romans 12, I lost focus! I had to tell myself to stop, put the temptation of writing about some other "pressing" matter aside, and stick to my plan.

Oh, how easy it is in life to be distracted.

So, as I look at this verse, this post almost writes itself:

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

Loss of focus has really affected our relationships in this world today. Just think about the last time you heard the word devoted. In the last week? Last year? Last decade?

I think it's safe to say that devotion is a lost art, because it takes effort, and if there is one thing most people do not want to put into a relationship — it's effort. Of course, Paul's not talking about marriage relationships here, but he easily could be. No, he's talking about relationships among the body of believers in Christ.

This is what people in the Church are supposed to do. We are to show devotion to each other; and not just devotion, but loving devotion.

How's that working for you? For your church?

Once again, as he did in his admonition to love sincerely, in the previous verse, Paul uses the second statement to help us practice the first. How can we show loving devotion to our fellow brother and sister? Honor them above ourselves.

Easier said than done, I'd wager, but thankfully, we follow Christ, who gives us the strength to do all things through him. I think that's the key:

In my own strength, I can't put others first or show devoted love.

I have to rely on Christ to increase in me, as I offer myself as a living sacrifice. (See Romans 12:1). Those earlier verses were all about humility and using sober judgement to keep the proper perspective on your role in the Body of Christ. When I remember that I'm just one part of the whole, that each member is important in the work of the Kingdom, then I'm more inclined to give honor to those sitting in the pew next to me on Sunday, to show loving devotion when I know they're hurting or sick or struggling with sin.

Keeping the attitude of Christ is the only way to put others first over self.

What can you do this week to make things right with the other parts of your local Body? Does it need to start with a time of confession to God? or maybe to someone else? Ask God to open your eyes this Sunday to find an opportunity to show another person the honor and devotion long overdue. It's worth the effort.

## Fever or Fervor?

*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor,  
serving the Lord.*

There are some things in life which are just hard to maintain. An A average or a constant speed in driving quickly come to mind.

Yet, in our focus on the Christian life as expressed in Romans 12, there is a verse which speaks to this subject. Let me share it with you. It's verse 11:

*Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor,  
serving the Lord.*

All I can say, is this:

Sometimes I can get my spiritual fever up, but maintaining fervor is another thing!

Paul has the Hebraic knack of saying the same thing in two different ways in order to get the message through those of thick skulls. I need it with this verse, because I wouldn't call myself a zealot for Christ. Yet, that's what he says.

As we live the Christian life, we should never be lacking in zeal or drive. Our desire should always be high to serve Christ to our utmost. Or, as Oswald Chambers would say, "My utmost for his highest."

To stress the point, Paul adds the second phrase, "keep your spiritual fervor."

I don't mind serving the Lord, but with zeal and fervor?  
Always? I'm not so sure.

Do you know our problem as descendants of the great Protestant work-ethic patriarchs? We think this verse is the litmus test to a person's Christian faith. If they're not zealously serving the Lord 24/7, then they must not be a good or real believer.

How quick we are to forget all the other verses in the Bible, when one will do the trick!

As one who said "no" and stepped back this past year from an area of service, this verse can be very damning. Thankfully, however, the Lord brought people into my life and guided me through his Word to other verses that helped me learn to rest.

Rest? How can you rest and be zealous at the same time? You can't. Plain and simple. There is a time for everything in God's economy. What I discovered is that only when I do rest am I then able to serve with fervor and zeal.

There's nothing worse than a wimpy servant. God doesn't want me to serve out of the dregs, the tiredness, the bottom of the barrel of my spiritual tank, but that's what I was doing, and it wasn't helping me or those I was serving. I had to rest.

Is there a time period for the rest and the service?  
Sorry, no tidy boxed set here. You have to figure that out for yourself with God's guidance. He'll show you when to step back and when to step forward. A key though, I think, is that internal fervor gauge in each of

us. When the zeal wains, when I lose the joy of service, I need to step back and ask God what to do.

Jesus is our ultimate example in service. He gave himself over to the horrors of crucifixion “for the joy set before him.” Without that zeal to serve the Heavenly Father, he would never have endured the shame of the cross.

Rest in Christ and focus on him, so that as you serve, you’ll overflow with zeal and fervor to his glory.

## Patience, Really?

*Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*

If only Paul had stuck to his theme. I mean, it's his best-known brand logo -- sung at weddings, preached from pulpits. What could be better than faith, hope and love? Obviously, nothing, right? Even he said, "the greatest of these is love."

Did he have to mess it up with patience? Really?

Yep, that's what he did, right in the middle of his letter to the church in Rome. The letter we happen to be trying to focus on. Paul can be so irritating. Listen to how he gets it wrong:

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

Was it really too hard for him to substitute love for patience? Of course, then he also talks about affliction. Like we need to be reminded of that!

Well, for Paul's sake, we'll break it down and see if we can swallow this pill any easier.

Remember, we're talking about living the transformed life. It's a high calling, but someone's got to do it, and Jesus wants it to be you and me. Just in case you've forgotten, some of that requires loving sincerely, clinging to good things, being lovingly devoted to others and showing them honor, while maintaining your spiritual fervor.

How are you doing so far?

No worries, I'm right there with you. We'll press on by his grace.

So, in this short, but painful verse, Paul tells us to "be joyful in hope." Have you ever seen a sad hopeful person? If we're honest, we can all say, "Yes," because there are some pretty miserable Christians out there who are just counting the days until Jesus comes back, because this life is not worth living. I don't know anything more depressing or that provides more reason for nonbelievers to want to stay as far away from Christianity as possible.

Do you think that's why Paul had to remind the Romans to stay joyful in their hope? I do, because the next phrase is a big giveaway for the reason: He said, "patient in affliction."

These first-century believers were living under the oppressive thumb of a ruler who thought himself god, much less wanted anything to do with those who followed "The Way." One of them even burned the city and blamed it on the Christians, just to cause them problems. How much more affliction could you want?

But Paul says, be patient in what you're suffering. Don't let your affliction suck the joy from the hope you have in Christ. Does this resonate with anyone out there?

That's probably why he ends his little triplet with telling them to be "faithful in prayer." Oh, how that affliction should bring us to our knees. However, sometimes we find that when, after we've prayed once or twice for our

cup of suffering to pass, we stop when God doesn't seem to answer. That's why we have to be faithful.

Don't stop praying when troubles come. Stay faithful in prayer. Keep the line of communication open with God.

**Prayer powers patience. Patience powers joyful hope.**

So, even though we have three wonderful things in the Christian life -- faith, hope and love. Sometimes we need patience to see us through.

## **We're Taught to Share**

*Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.*

If you are an only child, you had to learn the hard way, once you went to school. For those of us with the blessing of siblings, it's a lesson learned whether we wanted to or not.

### **Share.**

What may come naturally to some of us, is not necessarily the case for others. Sharing is definitely not a trait that comes with the fallen nature. I'm actually the first to admit, I'm not a good sharer. My husband, on the other hand, held lightly to the things of this world and was a generous giver. Maybe my spoiled baby-of-the-family tendencies have been hard to lose for me. It's no excuse, though, but it does make Paul's words to the church in Rome a bit tough for me today, but I'm willing to share my pain:

*Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. (Romans 12:13)*

Why would Paul have to teach such rudimentary things to these new believers? I think it's because sharing is a lost art in the world, then and now. How easy it is to hold on, to let someone else step up, to wait until you have more to offer.

Do you realize that not sharing takes more energy than sharing? To hold back is an act of the will — a conscious

decision to withhold, that is made between me and myself. I would never tell the person in need, “I’m choosing not to help you today.” How ludicrous! No, we might give an outward excuse, but the real reason and decision is done in secret, or at least we think it is.

Sharing, on the other hand, is done out of motives so opposite of selfishness. It’s done with an understanding that what we have in the first place is not ours at all, but his. It’s done because we’ve received so much from Christ through his sacrificial act on our behalf. He gave so much, what can I do but give to others?

Yet, Paul did have to say it to the believers. He did, because we are not perfect. We’re still working out our salvation in fear and trembling, because there’s a war still waging between the natural man, I’ve grown comfortable with and the spiritual man, who desires to do good, yet can’t but by the grace of God. It’s another post-it-note reminder I need to carry around with me to say: Jesus first, others second, myself last.

While helping those in need could be done without too much trouble, Paul wants us to go even further and practice hospitality. As an introvert, it’s one thing to help someone in need, it’s completely another to host someone in my home. I have to do my Martha bit and clean and cook and have everything perfect — right?

No, sorry. Wrong.

Life in the Middle East put hospitality to the test for me, as I was competing with the pros, but thankfully I lived with a man who knew his Bible better than his own

culture and nipped that cultural norm in the proverbial bud. Thank you, Jesus!

I learned I didn't have to compete with their cooking, having them over because they had us over, keeping my house in perfect order — no, I just had to open my home and welcome them in. What we ate was insignificant. What we said and how we listened was what mattered.

How are you doing with your sharing these days? Still staying in the safe zone or have you gone all in by opening your home in hospitality?

Don't forget the saying: "Open home, open heart."  
When we open our homes, their hearts are open to the One who stands at their door and knocks.

## Bless

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

I have to smile as I think about what crossed my mind today in reading the following verse:

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

In the South, we have a way of saying things nicely, or in other words, saying what we don't mean. We use the word bless that way a lot!

So, obviously, as I read Paul's words to the believers in Rome, I need to look at the word bless in a different light. I cannot bless those who persecute me for my faith in a way that really means I'd like God to rain hail and brimstone down on them.

Apparently, Paul knew Roman believers were a lot like American Southerners, because he told them very specifically in the second part of the verse: "bless and do not curse."

**Easier said than done, Paul.**

Maybe the easiest thing to do in this situation is to say nothing. We can't always be trusted with the words we use, so how could we then bless without cursing?

**Do good to them instead.**

Does that sound familiar? It should — because Jesus said it.

*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31)*

Not as easy as a quick “bless you,” is it? Well, that’s the tricky thing about the transformed life — it’s not meant to be easy — it’s meant to draw people to Jesus.

What good does it do to wish evil on those who treat us with contempt? None — for us, for them, or for the Kingdom. But what difference does it make when I pray for those who hurt me, turn the other cheek, or do to them as I would have them do to me? That’s where God works the most in us and in them.

You may never know the persecution felt by those like Stephen or Paul or Christians in lands like China, North Korea or the Middle East, but if you live the transformed life, opposition will come. What will you do?

Bless or curse? A life could hinge on your response.

## Rejoice and Mourn

*Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.*

Just when you think a Bible verse is pretty cut and dry, the Holy Spirit makes you really think about it. That's what happened on first glance at this week's focus verse from Paul.

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

It really doesn't seem like such a directive is needed for people who are learning to live the transformed life. I mean, isn't it obvious that when someone's happy you're happy with them and when someone's sad, you're sad with them? Right?

That's when I think about the times when a colleague or acquaintance has been so excited about something in their lives, and what did I do? I got jealous. Yep, even though my face showed a smile in public, my heart was doing calculations on the cause for them to be so blessed when I wasn't.

And if you think believers are immune to this, think again. Think about yourself, because it doesn't take me long to remember times in church youth group or in the choir, when someone got chosen for a part in the church play or musical. They were so happy. I was not.

Yet, Paul says that if we're really to live the life that's transformed because of Christ, we are to rejoice with those who are rejoicing.

I see now that it's not as easy as it looks. Why? Because it takes some self-denial, humility, and love. We don't come by that naturally, but the Holy Spirit can sure help us in those moments when the little green-eyed monster would like to have his way.

I can see why it might prove difficult to rejoice always with those who rejoice, but what about mourning? Surely there would be no cause for me to be happy when someone else is sad, would there?

Actually, it becomes pretty easy to see, when I flip the rejoicing scenario on its head. What if it's me who gets the part, but my friend had been practicing for weeks and her dad was coming to church for the first time to see her perform? Wouldn't that be a reason for her to mourn her loss? Do I need to be rubbing my victory in her face and jumping up and down in joy? No, because the Holy Spirit wants to prick my heart to see her disappointment and move me to ask if she's alright, and to see if there is anything I can do to ease her pain.

Mourning with the mournful takes on another dimension when I think about my own hurts. Sometimes, when I'm so deep in my own loss, I find it hard to sympathize with others. Yet, God is calling me to mourn with them, whatever that may look like — a hug, a visit, a card, an act of kindness, a listening ear.

The person living the transformed life is one who gives value to the feelings of others. We don't just overlook them or trivialize them but come alongside them and empathize with them.

Holy Spirit make me aware of the feelings of those around me, that I may be one who rejoices and mourns with them in a way that draws them to Christ.

## Harmonious Living

*Live in harmony one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

You would think that the Apostle Paul was writing to a church in 21st century, Anytown, not one in Rome over two thousand years ago. These verses in Romans 12, about living the transformed life don't get any easier as the weeks go by. I'm just glad we're taking them one-by-one, because they almost can't be handled in one sitting. It's too painful!

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

Maybe 1st century Romans had problems with living in harmony, but surely not modern-day folk. Right?

Yes, I know you're laughing right there with me. What could be harder to swallow these days.

### **Live in harmony with one another.**

Well, at least Paul was talking only to the church. We can easily get along with our fellow congregant.

How's that working for you? I know I have my days.

Actually, most American church goers have found a great solution to this struggle — just start another church! We're so good at changing and moving out

when the harmony is broken. Christians don't like conflict, or at least we haven't learned to deal with it, even though Jesus gives us clear instructions on how to handle it. (See Matthew 18:15-19). But that's for another day.

Here, Paul is letting us know that if we're claiming the transformation that only Christ can bring, then we should be practicing harmonious living. Yes, first and foremost, it must be with our fellow believers, our brothers and sisters in Christ. After all, "they will know we are Christians by our love," right?

The harmony found in diverse groups of people, called the church, is what draws others to Jesus. Really, it does. We just have to practice it.

So, how does that happen? Paul lets us know with the second sentence. It's a three-step process:

- 1. Do not be proud.**
- 2. Be willing to associate with people of low position.**
- 3. Do not be conceited.**

Do you see the two negatives and one positive there? Basically, he's saying: Get over yourself, and be nice to everyone, even those you think are beneath you. I think that's why he has to say it twice — don't be proud and don't be conceited. They're the same thing really. They both are focused on self.

Harmony only really happens, when we willingly put self aside and associate with others, knowing that Christ did the same for us.

Did that sting? It should. Think about it. Christ gave up his place in Heaven at the side of God the Father, to willingly humble himself and associate with us, created beings of extremely low position in relation to his heavenly glory.

Chew on that a bit. Once you do, I think you'll find harmony an easier pill to swallow, as long as you've already swallowed your pride and conceit first.

The amazing thing is that once you've got the harmony down pat with like-minded believers, you can more easily practice it with those still "in the world." It's called learning to live at peace with all men.

Ultimately, remember harmonized voices sound so much better than flat unison — to the ears of God, that is.

## Right vs. Evil

*Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.*

I thought this verse was going to be easier. What do you think?

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

As a person transformed by Christ, I can say with confidence that I'm not an evil person. So, it should be easy for me to handle this first directive from Paul. I don't intentionally do evil, yet, when I read the entire seven-word sentence, I have to give it a bit more reflection.

**Do not repay anyone evil for evil.**

Oh, yes, I see his point. While I might not be going around committing evil acts, I can get pretty testy when someone does me wrong. I think that's why they call it a "knee-jerk reaction." That natural man in me is quick to hit back when hit, which makes me look the jerk.

**Living the transformed life requires of us pause before reacting to evil. We must be careful.**

Easier said than done.

His second sentence shows the reason for the needed pause: because the eyes of everybody are on us.

Yep, that's right, people are watching — not just the person who did evil to you, but his brother, neighbor, and co-worker, along with your family, fellow believers and friends.

**Everybody's watching if you'll do the right thing.**

What if the right thing looks different for different people? Are we really going to go there? No, that's not what Paul's saying, because the right thing is always the right thing. Jesus talked about it.

- Love your enemies.
- Pray for those who persecute you.
- Do good to those who hate you.
- Turn the other cheek.

Someone treating you with evil intent? Pause and do good. Everyone's watching.

## Doing What's Possible

*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.*

As I continue through this passage in Romans 12, relating to the transformed life, I find today's directive interesting in light of the current world situation. (The COVID-19 Pandemic of 2020).

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

Is it only me, or have you noticed that everyone's a bit stressed these days?

**Stress makes us do weird things.**

- We panic and buy extra toilet paper.
- We snap at a grocery clerk.
- We rush around doing errands, hurrying to get back to our isolation.
- We develop ill-feelings towards others for no good reason.
- We don't eat or sleep well.

It really doesn't seem possible right now to live at peace with everyone, because everyone is acting crazy! Then I'm reminded:

*I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength.*  
(Philippians 4:13)

So, I go back to Paul's word of exhortation and try again.

What's the goal? To live at peace with everyone.

Is it impossible? Only in that it's hard to do it with *everyone*.

So, how can we manage it?

By doing our part of the task: ***As far as it depends on you.***

I can't control everyone else's feelings and actions, even on a good day, and especially not when our communities are under such stress and pressure, but I can control mine.

Why? Because I've got the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ living in me, and that's not to be taken lightly. I can't just shrug off my poor reactions to stress or a bad day. If I am living in the Spirit -- living the transformed life -- he's going to give me the strength to make the impossible possible -- at least as it depends on me.

I will live at peace with everyone, because the Prince of Peace gives me the power to display his peace, even in a wildly unpredictable time.

Will others act peaceably in response? Maybe, maybe not, but that's not my concern. **My concern is my part.**

What seems impossible to you right now? Seek power from the God of possibilities.

## The Big Payback

*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

I've been working on memorizing the verses we're focusing on in Romans 12, about the transformed life. I used to pride myself on scripture memorization, as I was involved, as a young girl, in what we called Bible Drills in my church. I still credit those years with the reason I am able to recall as many verses as I can today.

However, the memory's not what it used to be. Enough said.

Still, I am making the effort, because these verses, among others, are so helpful as reminders of what my life should look like as a Christ follower. It's a work in progress.

As I reflect on today's verse 19, I wonder why we're circling back to the idea of repaying evil. Here's what it says:

*Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

Seems we were already told not to repay anyone evil for evil (see verse 17). Isn't that the same thing he's talking about here?

I'm not so sure.

Verse 17 was talking about not doing evil back to a person who had done evil to you. This verse seems to speak of revenge in a larger sense of the word.

What would be the things that would lead me to want to take revenge anyway? That seems to take repaying evil to a whole different level. What kind of things might lead me to such thoughts?

- Child molestation.
- Abuse toward children, women or the elderly.
- Acts of terrorism.
- Robbing the poor.
- Unexplained acts of evil.
- Murder.

When these seemingly “harsher” sins are committed in our world, it’s easy to see why thoughts of revenge come to mind. That’s when we need to stop.

**Leave the big payback in God’s hands.**

Though it might not look like it today or tomorrow, God does not allow sin to go unpunished. His wrath is sure.

The great day of the Lord is near—near and coming quickly. The cry on the day of the Lord is bitter; the Mighty Warrior shouts his battle cry. That day will be a day of wrath—a day of distress and anguish, a day of trouble and ruin, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness... (Zephaniah 1:14-15)

*But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be*

*revealed. God “will give to each person according to what he has done.” (Romans 2:5-6)*

No one can avenge sin like God, because no one is so utterly holy as he. That wrath is only held at bay by his mercy and grace, but rest assured — it will come for those who do not turn from their wicked ways and follow Christ.

Because of that, why should I bother myself with petty attempts at revenge? It’s not worth it. Seeking revenge only hurts myself, and it’s so short-lived. The wrath of God is for eternity. I surely wouldn’t want to face it.

So, when you get that feeling of righteous anger rising in your bones, take a breath, and let God handle it.

He knows what he’s doing.

## Heaping Coals

*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."*

Putting the transformed life into practice cannot help but change our relationship with others — even our enemies. As we near the end of our study in the twelfth chapter of Romans, Paul is still working to help us deal with those who might choose to do us evil.

We've already learned not to repay evil for evil or to take revenge. Instead we're to strive to live at peace with everybody. It's a big order to fill. Thankfully, this verse gives us even more guidance on how to make it happen.

*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."*

(Romans 12:20)

While it's really hard to deal with an enemy, a person who claims to follow Christ, will do what is in contrast (or contrary) to what the world does. We will leave vengeance to God and, in a very practical way, do good to the other person.

**By offering food and drink, we are showing hospitality — welcoming our enemy.**

Think about the parable of the Good Samaritan. He did some very practical things to a person who would

otherwise have been seen as his enemy — a Jew. What did he do? He bandaged his wounds, put him on his own donkey, carried him to an inn for rest, and paid the inn keeper to meet his needs for food and lodging.

He really heaped on the coals there!

I know. You're probably wondering about that part of the verse. It doesn't really sound very pleasant, does it. Who would put hot coals on someone's head?

Can I put your mind at rest by saying it's a figure of speech? Good, because it is.

To heap burning coals is to do so much good to them, that your enemy will feel sorry for what he's done against you and seek repentance.

Have you ever experienced that? I have. It came in something as simple as privately mentioning that what my enemy thought she was saying against me in a computer chat to someone else, was really sent to me by mistake. I didn't condemn her publicly, but just messaged back that I think she'd sent her message to the wrong person.

What happened?

She sent me a message that said, "I'm sorry. That was a very gracious response from you."

Did I make my enemy my friend? Not really, but I did show so much kindness to her that she was sorry for her wrong against me.

The coals worked.

Facing those who don't like us or actively work against us is not easy, but if we claim to live the Transformed Life, we must face them — with practical grace and kindness.

You'll be blessed if you do.

## Be an Overcomer

*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Living the transformed life is not an easy task. As we've walked through these twelve verses in the twelfth chapter of Romans, I find I could spend a year just trying to focus on or live by one of these precious gems. Living out a sincere love is hard enough, but as is evident by the number of verses dedicated to the challenge, facing evil with goodness obviously takes the cake.

Paul's reminded us to let God take care of any ideas of revenge we might have. We need to focus on living at peace with everyone, even our enemies. We can do this by doing good to them, even when they want to harm us.

It's the final verse of this passage that sums it all up:

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

A picture comes to mind — two people fighting. Both are pushing at the other with an equal amount of strength. The pain inflicted on one is the same as on the other, because when one hits, the other hits back with the same force. No one is winning. Both are suffering.

Then it happens — one lowers his hands, allowing a final blow to come. Falling to the ground, the match is over.

Who won? The one who hit last or the one who allowed the fight to end?

Another picture comes to mind — it is of an innocent man, hanging on a cross. Satan thought he won the match that day, but oh, how he was mistaken. The one who laid down his life had the final victory.

We cannot, in our own strength, overcome the evil we will face in this life. Thank God, we don't have to. Jesus has already won the ultimate battle, which allows us, by the power of his Spirit, to do good to our enemies, as Jesus taught us:

*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you. (Luke 6:27-31)*

Jesus said in this world we will have tribulation — we will be faced with evil and those who want to do us evil — but then he said, “but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!”

In him we can be overcomers too.

Grace and Peace

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