

Romans 12:14-16

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Living harmoniously by faith in God looks like blessing our enemies. It looks like sympathizing with other people, in good times and bad times. It looks like unity, not elevating ourselves. Living only for ourselves is contrary to God's design for our lives; we were made to live in harmony with others.

Here in Romans 12, Paul is not prescribing a new law or to-do list to lead to righteousness. He is describing what living by faith looks like. He is painting for us a picture of what it looks like when we have renewed minds, minds that think after the reality of what is true rather than the falsity of the ways of the world.

When we walk in the newness of life through the resurrection power of Jesus, our character changes. Our sin nature tells us to look out for ourselves, to take from others. When someone attacks us, our natural instinct is to engage in conflict to defend ourselves and attack them back. Here Paul is saying to *bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse* (v 14).

Don't wish harm on them. Living by faith looks like blessing our enemies.

How do we *bless* enemies? It depends. It can look like confronting our enemy with truth, as Paul has done in this letter. But although Paul confronts his detractors with truth, his motive is to protect the Roman believers as well as goad his enemies to repentance, to their great benefit (Romans 3:8-9, 9:3).

It is clear from Paul's letters that he would have greatly rejoiced had his enemies reconciled with him; he had their best interest at heart as he was chiding them. It is our job to do our part to seek resolution, but not at the expense of the truth. Jesus also confronted the Pharisees and goaded them to repent (Matthew 23).

Loving our enemies may also look like turning the other cheek. We should always contend for the truth and for the benefit of others, but as a general principle we should not defend ourselves. We might say that turning the other cheek means "Never react."

In his letter to the Romans, Paul defends his ministry, and his authority, and the gospel. He does not really defend himself. We should look to ourselves to see that we are blameless (Matthew 7:3-5). When attacked, if we follow our sinful nature, we are led back into fighting and separation (death). We follow the flesh, and end up with "outbursts of anger" (Galatians 5:20). But to live according to God's design looks like living righteously (correctly, in harmony with God's will). This can be accomplished by blessing our enemies and trusting God's sovereignty. Our job is to pursue peace with one another, to the extent it depends upon us.

A practical benefit of practicing this approach to *bless those who persecute you* is that it frees us from being controlled by others. If we bless those who persecute, then we show that we are free and have joy regardless of what they do to us.

In addition to not reacting to provocations, we are to *Rejoice with those who rejoice* (v 15). This is the opposite of envy.

If others are celebrating, we should celebrate too. But if someone is in mourning, we should sympathize and share in their sorrow, *weep with those who weep* (v 15).

With either emotion, we are sharing; in the case of joy, we elevate the person's joy by reciprocating it, and in the case of weeping, we alleviate sorrow when we share the burden of grief in another. The point here is to meet people where they are. We shouldn't insist that they meet us where we are, we should *be of the same mind toward one another* (v 16).

We are also to reject social divisions and deliberately seek to avoid dividing ourselves by classes. *Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly* (v 16). There should be no social hierarchy in the church; social status only matters to men, not God. He is a God who made kings out of shepherds (1 Samuel 11-12) and brought emperors to their knees (Daniel 4:1-3).

Paul's consistent warning is against haughtiness, arrogance, and pride. The theme verse for Romans quotes Habakkuk 2:4, which tells us that the opposite of faith is pride. Faith is believing that God's ways are for our best. Pride is believing we can seek and control our own way, and exploit others to gain our best.

In Chapter 11, Paul discouraged the Gentile believers in Rome from feeling haughty since God showed mercy on them and allowed the Jews to fall away (Romans 11:18-24). He continues now, saying *Do not be wise in your own estimation* (v 16); arrogance is contrary to faith.

If we lie to ourselves to think we are better than we are, then we are listening to ourselves in preference to God. We are creating a false reality. It is a lie our sin nature tells us, and it always leads back into sinful living and death (Romans 6:20, 21).

Throughout his letter to the Romans, Paul encourages a life of faith and humility, because through faith we can live as God designed us, by humbly trusting in Him. Through living according to God's design, we live as we were intended, which will be for our best. We thus please our Creator by living sacrificially (Romans 12:1-2).

Biblical Text

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ 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.