

## Romans 12 (ESV)

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

<sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

<sup>3</sup> For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

<sup>4</sup> For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup> so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

<sup>6</sup> Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup> if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup> the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

<sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor.

<sup>11</sup> Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

<sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

<sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

<sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

<sup>20</sup> To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**"If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."** That's a tall order. Unless you're a hermit or live on an island, there will always be people who will irritate you.

Living peaceably with everyone doesn't mean that you will like every person that you meet. It does mean that you will do everything you can to remove any barriers that would prevent you from loving them in Christ.

This morning we conclude our time in Romans 12 that has had the theme of LIVING SACRIFICES.

### **Romans 12:1-2 (ESV)**

I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

As living sacrifices we are to daily offer up to God our thoughts, words and deeds in the spirit of: *"LORD, not my will but Thy will be done."*

That will be put to the test by the people you interact with every day. As far as it depends on you, live peaceably with everyone. Why is that so difficult to do?

Is it because of those other people out there in the world that need to change, or is it because of what's inside of you that needs to change or be transformed?

Have you ever been the target of someone's road rage? You're minding your own business on the highway and somebody doesn't think you're going fast enough. They pull alongside of you and if you can read lips, you know that they're not paying you a compliment.

How can you live peaceably with somebody like that? Those kinds of people aren't the problem. You can't control what others choose to do.

Our passage for today says, “As far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” It’s that first clause in the passage that you’re responsible for, not the second.

What makes that so difficult is that we place expectations upon the people around us. Unless you’re a habitual curmudgeon who doesn’t care one bit about what others think of them, we expect to be treated a certain way.

Most of us have in mind what kind of life we’d like to live and what kind of person we’d like to be. We have an image of ourselves that we want others to see and respond to appropriately.

Those who don’t see you the way you think they should are a problem. They are not cooperating. They are supposed to see you as the wonderful person that you portray yourself to be.

However, you cannot control what another person thinks, says or does. It is hard to live peaceably with those who put you in a bad light.

But here’s the rub. The problem is not with the jerk who doesn’t like you. The problem is within your own heart.

A living sacrifice is to daily offer up to God your thoughts, your desires and your expectations. Instead of saying, “LORD, this is the way I think I should be treated by others,” you need to express:

*“LORD, I am not in control, you are. My thoughts are not your thoughts. What I want for my life isn’t necessarily what I need. Use the difficult people and circumstances in my life to show me how much I need Christ. Don’t let me be conformed to the patterns in this world, but transform me by renewing my mind and heart for His honor and glory.”*

This morning’s theme is taken from verse 18

**If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably  
with all.**

The first thing we need to do is acknowledge the difficulty of being a living sacrifice in a fallen world. There are external and internal challenges.

In a fallen world you have those who do evil. You have those who oppose the way of righteousness. Some will seek to harm those who get in their way. Others will openly persecute those are believers because they hate God and those who follow Him.

In a fallen world you have those who will not treat you the way you believe you ought to be treated. This is especially true from those we are closest to.

The world may be a nasty place, but we expect more from those who are supposed to be loving toward us. When that doesn't happen the way we think it should, it's hard.

A living sacrifice in a fallen world is a daily battle. Along with the external forces that seem to work against you, there are internal struggles.

It is easy to become cynical, bitter, impatient, and disillusioned with life. When your countenance is down, it's hard to be at peace with anyone.

How are you supposed to love somebody that you're angry with? What are you supposed to do those negative thoughts that you have toward someone that you don't particularly like?

Being a living sacrifice in a fallen world isn't meant to be easy. We live in a sinful world and we have a sinful nature. Yet the passage for today is clear: "As far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."

Let me give you three things that this passage is NOT saying, and then three points that are true applications of verse 18.

1. This passage isn't just about being nice.
2. This passage isn't about avoiding difficult people
3. This passage isn't about pretending to like those you're really annoyed with.

A nice person is someone who's agreeable and pleasant. They are easy to get along with and they go out of their way to avoid any kind of conflict.

Nice is good, but it's not very deep. It's being civil but only on a surface level. It's kind of like somebody who says, "Have a nice day." Nothing wrong with that, but it's rather benign.

In the world of social media, being nice is equivalent to liking someone's post on Facebook. It doesn't mean all that much. The Gospel is meant to penetrate much deeper than that.

Neither is this passage isn't about avoiding difficult people

Being at peace with everyone doesn't mean that you quarantine yourself from those who irritate you.

Christians are meant to be the salt of the earth. If you only associate with those who think favorably of you, then you won't be much of a preservative.

The Gospel doesn't avoid the messy parts of life. We are not meant to escape from difficult people or situations, but enter into them boldly in the name of Christ.

Third, this passage isn't about pretending to like those you're really annoyed with.

There's nothing fake or artificial about the Gospel of JESUS Christ. We don't put a smiley face on a callused heart. Being at peace with everyone is not pretending to be something that you're not.

Verse 9 says, "Let your love be genuine." The Gospel is about changing our hearts and dispositions. If you don't feel loving toward someone, don't fake it, but confess that to the LORD.

The love that God has bestowed on you through Christ isn't contrived. He loved you when you were at your worst. Even while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Where our love falls short, the love of Christ is more than sufficient. Being at peace with everyone is not just being nice, it's not about avoiding certain people, and it's not about putting up a façade.

Being a living sacrifice in a fallen world does mean:

1. Remove barriers
2. Don't blame others
3. Do what is honorable

Living peaceably with all doesn't mean that you will like every person that you meet. It does mean that you will do everything you can to remove any barriers that would prevent you from loving them in Christ.

We're talking about resentments, grudges, and old antagonisms. These are barriers to the love of Christ.

There's an artery that leads to the heart that's called the widow maker. If there's a severe blockage, it could be fatal. Sometimes a person can be in seemingly excellent health, but drop dead because of something that didn't even know that they had.

Your old resentments, grudges and antagonisms can do that to you spiritually. As far as it depends on you, remove those barriers that would prevent the love of Christ to flow through you.

Secondly, stop blaming others for your cold heart and unloving attitude. You can't control what others do, say or think. If someone doesn't like you, that doesn't give you the right to respond in kind.

When you do that, it's easy to justify yourself by blaming the other person. The other person is not the problem. Your response is. Ask God to change you first.

Third, take the high road. Do what is honorable in the sight of all. It may feel good to say something snarky to someone you don't like, or to at least think of something nasty about them. But you will never regret taking the high road.

### **Romans 12:17 (ESV)**

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

Proverbs says that it is to a man's credit to overlook an offense. That may be one of the hardest things you will ever do.

But nothing can be more countercultural, especially in today's day and age. From the top down in this country, the norm is to trade insult for insult, one nasty tweet after another.

You however are to be conformed not to this world, but to Christ. All of these exhortations in Romans 12 are possibly only by a transformed heart.

### **Romans 12:14-21 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

<sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

<sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

<sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

<sup>18</sup> If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

<sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

<sup>20</sup> To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

This is teaching us at least two things. First, it takes deliberate action to be at peace with those around you. If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.”

Being at peace isn't something you can be passive about. It takes deliberate action. Being conformed to Christ is actively pursuing the good for the benefit of others.

That's what Christ did for you. That's what the Gospel is all about.

### **Romans 5:6-10 (ESV)**

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. <sup>7</sup> For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— <sup>8</sup> but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. <sup>9</sup> Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. <sup>10</sup> For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.

Being at peace means that you take deliberate action to end whatever hostility there may exist.

For some of you, that means making a phone call, or talking directly with another person face to face.

For others, it may be committing yourself to pray for the person you're having friction with.

For JESUS, it was becoming flesh and dwelling among us. It was the active obedience of Christ that made Him worthy of being the lamb of God who took away the sin the world.

Second, being conformed to Christ is basically doing the opposite of what your natural inclinations are. To bless someone who persecutes you; to associate with the lowly or outcast. That doesn't come naturally.



Being conformed to the pattern of this world does come very naturally. *Eye for eye. Tooth for tooth. You hurt me, I'm going to hurt you. You say something nasty to me, I'm going to put you in your place.*

Being conformed to Christ is following a pattern that JESUS set. Though He was rich, yet He became poor. Though He was God, He didn't consider equality with God a thing to be grasped.

He was LORD, but became a servant. He was despised and rejected by men, but He did not revile in return. Instead, He prayed even for those who crucified Him, "*Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.*"

Doing what comes naturally may be fine as long as life is going the way you want it to. Normally you can trust your instincts when things are going well.

Don't trust your instincts when you don't get your way or when you are in the midst of a conflict. Remember that you're not in control, God is.

You are to be a living sacrifice, not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of your mind. You are to be conformed to Christ.

Well, how is all of this even possible? It's possible because of the curse that became a blessing. Verse 14 says, "Bless those who curse you."

**Romans 12:19 (ESV)**

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

JESUS came unto His own, but His received Him not. That didn't stop JESUS from doing what He was called to do.

**Galatians 3:13 (ESV)**

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—

Verse 21 in our text says, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

That's what JESUS did on the cross. It may have looked like the devil won the day when JESUS gave up His spirit and breathed His last.

But actually, it was just the opposite. The evil that was meant to bring Him harm turned out for the salvation of many.

The curse of sin brought about the just wrath of God. The wrath of God is not the opposite of His love. God's wrath is the expression of His love.

### **Romans 12:20 (ESV)**

To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

Does that mean that we do good so that others will suffer if they don't change their ways? Paul here is quoting from Proverbs 25.

### **Proverbs 25:21-22 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink, <sup>22</sup> for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you.

Burning coals in the OT represented punishment for iniquity. Psalm 11:6 is one of many passages like this.

### **Psalm 11:6 (ESV)**

Let him rain coals on the wicked; fire and sulfur and a scorching wind shall be the portion of their cup.

God's wrath upon evil is what will save your soul. The God who is holy must deal justly with sin. And so His wrath fell not on His people, but a substitute.

The only substitute that could die for the sins of others and not His own sin, was JESUS Christ. The burning coals of justice fell upon Him.

### **Isaiah 53:4-5 (NIV)**

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

JESUS took the curse that became for us the blessing. Most people think that they need a little help to become a better person, but they're not wicked. They need improvement, not salvation.

That's not the Gospel. Apart from JESUS Christ, you are lost and without hope. With Christ, you are a new creation and a living sacrifice.

Our strength is not in ourselves, but in Him. Our hope is not in what we do or try to do, but in what He has accomplished on the cross.

He is the one that overcame evil with good. Place your trust in Him. He is our Mighty Fortress.