

Paul continues to outline our path as believers as beneficiaries of the mercies of God declared in chapters 1-11. Having presented our bodies as a sacrifice to God we are able to live out God's will in our lives visibly to all. Thereby we are able to avoid being conformed to the world but are continually transformed more and more into God's image as our minds are renewed daily through the scriptures and prayer. We first are to put ourselves in the company of other believers as part of one body. Then we learn we have been given spiritual gifts by the Lord to use for the blessing of others, believers and unbelievers. The behaviors God want to see in His own are laid out for us now in these chapters of Romans. No, not as a new law of sorts but gifts, activities and conduct which should characterize justified saints. Those now delivered from the bondage of sin by faith through the power of the Holy Spirit in each of us. Six special gifts are marked out in the first part of the chapter. None of us has every gift named but each has some gift.

Paul points out attitudes, conduct and behaviors becoming to Christ that are to be seen in all of His own. Some are briefly mentioned. Others are given considerable space, one topic has more than a whole chapter (14:1-15:4).

How gentle God's commands!

How kind His precepts are!

"Let . . ." is the word used to lead us, not "Thou shalt . . ." or "Thou shalt not . . ." The Lord appeals to our new nature not to the flesh. Our loving, willing sacrificial obedience conforms us to Him. He is displayed in us.

Love is first mentioned. Genuine love, nothing "put-on" or faked about it. Sincere, unfeigned, undeserved, "agape love." An intelligently generated love towards another beyond simply sentimental or emotional love.

Holiness is next. Simple words these but profoundly extreme and uncompromising. Abhor! Evil! Cleave! Good! And we believers, as we are transformed, become more and more able to discern evil and good.

Hebrews 5:14 But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

The word "cleave" says more than simply "do that which is good." It means "to cleave to," or be joined to, those who are good. Keep company with them. Our companionship and association with others come into play here. 1Corinthians 15:33; 2Timothy 2:19-22.

Kindly affection to one another. Here unreserved "phileo" (brotherly love) is encouraged. Our relationships with other believers are to be warm and affectionate as well as simply unfeigned "agape love." Agape love comes from the heart whether the other person is "lovable" or not. But we need to consciously work to develop and maintain affectionate friendships with one another to carry out this

desire of the Lord for each of us. This includes honoring and respecting one another, giving others the first place, not elbowing others aside whether for seats in meeting, cookies at break, in leading classes, taking meetings, etc.

Business? My job in the work place? Yes, but more. What has God given us to do for Him? Tend to it. I am to use whatever gifts He has given me to do the "business" He has for me to do for Him. This is working to earn a living, raising a family, keeping house, maintaining my home, car and other belongings, serving the assembly, bringing the gospel to unbelievers, taking a Sunday School class, taking a gospel meeting. The admonition also refers to diligence in the care of the assembly and its well being and purity. And we are to diligently, collectively deal with matters that the Lord has given the local assembly to deal with. Examples include reception, ministry to diligent, gifted servants, ministry to the needy, discipline, and restoration of those who sin.

Fervent in spirit. **Hot!** Examples: boil, if a liquid; or glow if a solid. Earnest, not slacking off, but obviously, not hot tempered. All for Jesus, All for Jesus, All my days and all my hours.

Rejoicing. What a joy to be around a rejoicing believer. Our rejoicing is not necessarily dependent on our circumstances. But no matter what is going wrong we rejoice in a given: "Jesus love me this I know for the Bible tells me so." Rejoicing in HOPE, for He who loves me will never, never forsake me and is coming for me. And "if I die He will take me to his home on high."

Patient in Tribulation. Enduring trouble and hard going. There is no lack for trouble in this scene. But that hope of glory we have sustains us.

Prayer. Instant! The best translations give the idea here as persevering in prayer, steadfastly continuing earnestly in prayer. So we can pray immediately and incessantly no matter when, or where we are, silently or aloud, for He hears us. We don't have to wait to go kneel by our bed at night to pray. We don't have to go to church to pray. We have an instant connection to the Father in heaven. No busy signals. No "not on line" notices. Use it. Involve Him in our joys and sorrows, our troubles, problems and solutions.

Looking after others. Distributing to the necessity of saints, other believers. Are we aware of someone in need? If an illness or difficult situation is confronting a family a meal might be gratefully received. A lawn mowed, a sidewalk cleared, a car or furnace repaired, a ride somewhere, babysitting, an outing, a check?

Given to hospitality. We can welcome folks into our homes for coffee, a meal, for shelter from a storm or flood, travelers passing through, a visiting servant of the Lord, 3John 5-8, but note a caution in 2John 7-11. There will be opportunities, sometimes awfully inconvenient opportunities, but God gives more grace.

Hebrews 13:1 Let brotherly love continue. 2 Be not

forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. 3 Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

Bless people that seek to harm us. Even those which persecute us? He repeats, “bless!” And with a jolting admonition “and curse not.” How easily an idle curse rises to our lips. We hear them so often in the world about us and in the media now as well. Someone cuts in front of us in line on the road, in a parking lot, or a store checkout line. Do we bless and curse not? James speaks of the utter inconsistency of a believer cursing, James 3:2-12.

James 3:9 Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.

On the other hand there have been instances of a persecutor being touched and eventually saved by the prayerful blessing of his victim. Paul perhaps was such an one, touched by Stephens prayer “Lord, lay not this sin to their charge,” Acts 7:60. Stephen simply said what Jesus had said himself while here.

Matthew 5:44 But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;

Luke 23:34 Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.

We are privileged to fellowship with one another’s joys and sorrows, not just with a formal or superficial acknowledgment, but with genuine joy or sorrow. After all we are one body.

1Corinthians 12:26 And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. 27 Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

We often cannot find suitable words of comfort and may tend to talk too much in our unease in the presence of suffering. But we can just sit with a sorrowing one and listen.

And we do rejoice with another’s blessing. Envious or jealous feelings are so utterly inconsistent with the Lord who saved us they are not even mentioned here.

So we being one are to be of one mind, the same mind one toward another. Too easily we get off the simplicity of Christ and busy minding high things, verse 3. Things of self, things that stimulate our minds or emotions but do little to draw out true worship of God or our affections for others. Are there others who we might haughtily consider inferior to us? Shame. We are to freely mingle with every member of the body of Christ. Not condescendingly as superior but humbly acknowledging our redemption is by the same blood of the Lamb as theirs. (And no one is too degraded to hear the gospel.) Wise in our own conceits? We naturally resent a person like that. Yes, we may know more than another, perhaps many others, but do we feel

conceit because of this? Do we seek to control others? Do we feel more godly than them? Do we ignore their spiritual exercises? Do we humbly simply seek to bless others no matter who they are and where they are? Befriend them, help them, nourish them through a suitable word, guide them, warn them, gather them, strengthen them, protect them, encourage them. And appeal to the lost as well.

Seek peace with all men. The next few verses speak to our lives in difficult, and often evil, surroundings and situations we encounter while living in a hostile world. There are the positive ways we can carry on that are peaceful. Then there are the positive responses to experiences harmful to us, our loved one and others around us.

Repay evil with evil? Never! That is God’s prerogative, not ours.

Live peaceably with all men? Yes, as much as it depends on us. We can’t force others to be at peace with us but we can remove barriers to peace and avoid unpeaceful acts. Don’t meddle in others affairs or try to reform the behavior of the unsaved. Does this mean don’t picket abortion clinics? Does this mean don’t seek to change laws to enforce morality? Does this mean don’t seek to unseat an elected official? Does this mean don’t seek to outlaw pollution by others? Etc. etc. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. (NASB)

Avenge not yourselves dearly beloved. There are many things that people do that make us angry. Selfish, thoughtless, hateful things. Things that harm us, or worse, harm those we love. Things that harm innocent people minding their own business. Things that nobody deserves or should have to experience. We naturally want to do something. Take vengeance. Get even. But,

Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Hebrews 10:3 It is a fearful thing to fall into the hand of the living God,

Then we are told to feed and refresh our enemy. While this may seem novel it was enjoined upon Israel by Moses, Leviticus 19:18; taught by Solomon, Proverbs 25:21-22; and by the Lord Jesus Himself, Matthew 5:44.

Leviticus 19:18 Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people, but thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself: I am the LORD.

Even though the thought of heaping coals of fire sounds vengeful, the context and other scriptures seem to indicate a kindness or favor being done rather than a punishing act. Although the conscience of the one who sought harm might well indeed burn with regret upon receiving good for evil.

Next we learn our relationship to those whom God has appointed to rule men and nations. God has provided them for order and also for reward and vengeance. Let them deal with it.