

Romans 12:9-21

Practical Christian Living

What legacy or example are you leaving the next generation? Is your most valuable legacy the example that you have set of a Christian life well lived? What is your life saying to those you know whether they are close or just acquaintances? Do you reflect Christ to the world? Do you radiate His love and give it away faithfully every day of your life? Do you model the grace of God?

Romans 12:9-21 is a **list** through which the apostle Paul teaches us how to **love others in practical, tangible ways** that will fill the memories of those we love and meet in life and teach them how to live well. Remember though that all of the following injunctions should be thought of only in the light of verse 1 and 2 of chapter 12 or we will not properly understand them. Paul is not saying, 'Pull yourself together and get busy for God no matter what'. We are **not to be mere activists** rushing about in all directions. We are to be **living sacrifices** who offer up ourselves to God and His will, and who have a **transformed, Christ-like life**, because we have a **renewed, Christ-like mind** that knows and, therefore, **lives in the good of all God in His mercy has done** for us.

Romans 12:9 "Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good."

"Love from the centre of who you are; don't fake it. Run for dear life from evil; hold on for dear life to good." (The Message)

The Greek word for love used here is '**agape**' which is **love that is selfless, unconditional and sacrificial**. This is the word that Paul uses to express God's love for us. He is basically saying here that we should be **animated in our Christian living by the kind of love with which God has loved us**. Our whole Christian conduct should be governed by the kind of loving outlook which characterizes God's outlook upon us. It is unconditional love that is without reservation. We are to regard ourselves in terms of love – love to God and love to neighbour. **Love should be the basis for our whole life and everything we do**. Our conduct should have love at the start, middle and end.

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself." (Mark 12:30-31a)

Jesus said, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him....If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." (John 14:21,23)

You do not love God in words only, but in deeds and truth. Love is something that always shows itself in conduct and action. It is strong and it motivates us to keep the commands of God. You not only keep the letter of God's commands, you keep to the spirit of them. You are not just keeping on the right side of God because you fear punishment if you don't, you are wanting to please Him in all you do because you love Him. We should live a life of obedience to God and His commands that is wholehearted, entire and with no reservation. God wants us, as His dearly loved children, to want to love Him and please Him above all else and to live to His glory and praise. If you regard the Christian life and the commands of God as hard, grievous and narrow and are sometimes tempted to give them all up, then it is because you know don't know enough about God and His love. We should be consumed by a passion to serve God who has done so much for us in Jesus and we should show our gratitude to Him by doing everything we can to find out His commands, obey them and in so doing please Him and show our love for Him.

To grow in love we need to:

- Get to know our God by spending time in His presence by prayer, praise and worship – it is impossible to love someone that you do not know.
- Get to know God by spending time in His Word, which teaches us about Him, His ways and all that He has done for us. If you want to know how to live in love, do not start with the practicalities, start with the truth. Understand and grasp it and see what it means in terms of God's love to you, and then you will find great love welling up in your heart. Love is a command of God that is the result of our understanding that God first loved us and by knowing what God has done for us – and we will find this out mainly by reading and studying His Word.
- Yield our lives to the Holy Spirit who wants to pour out God's love into our hearts. "God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us" (Romans 5:5b). The Holy Spirit is God, so if we want to know God and what His love is like, we should give ourselves over to the Spirit of God living within us.

Some principles of love that we need to remember:

- Love is a summary of the Law and it is at the heart of the two greatest commandments of Jesus.
- The most important thing in life is personal relationships – our personal relationship with God and other people – and the thing that matters most in these is love.
- Love isn't something that we can create or work up when we like – authentic love is neither quick nor easy.
- Love needs to operate within the parameters or boundaries of truth and discernment, otherwise it tends to get abused and cause emotional damage.

- When you **truly love other people**, the rewards that come back can be remarkable – it is usually **worth the risk**. Love for God though carries no risk, **only gain**.
- Love is **not politeness or mere affability**; it is **not sentimental or weak**. It is the **most powerful force in existence**.

A literal rendering of the first Greek words in this verse is ‘**Love, unhyprocritical!**’ The second Greek word used here is ‘*anupokritos*’ which is a compound of ‘*an*’ meaning ‘**no**’, and ‘*hypokritos*’ meaning ‘**hypocrisy, pretence or pretext**’. Our love that we show God, each other and the world should have no pretence. In other words, “**love must be sincere**” (NIV). **If hypocrisy creeps in**, love ceases to be **love** and **becomes** something grotesque – **manipulation, quid pro quo, competition, pretentiousness**. We must **not deceive others or ourselves** with an **artificial product which simulates love**. **In true, godly love: there is honesty; there is no place for a mask; there is no play acting; there is no room to think one way and act another**. That is because love and truth go hand in hand. Whereas hypocritical love is nothing more than impulsive urges and idle feelings, **genuine love takes action to do what is in the best interest of the other person**. Love seeks **the highest, greatest good of another before our own**.

We **cannot deceive God** or take Him in and fool Him. **Don’t just obey God to please yourself or merely to please others**. The moment we start thinking of ourselves and our reputation and what other people are thinking and saying about us, we have departed from the principle of love – it is nothing but sentiment. **The world may applaud our act** and God may not strike us down immediately, but it is not for our good to pretend to be loving when we are not. We may think it has worked and we have got away with it, but **God knows all**. The **pure realm of love never comes out of calculation, diplomacy, pretence and dissimulation**.

“Nothing in all creation is hidden from God’s sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account.” (Hebrews 4:13)

Hate what is evil. The Greek word used here for ‘hate’ is ‘*apostugeo*’ which means ‘**to hate intensely, abhor, detest, to shrink back from, utterly dislike, to have a horror of**’. We need to **shrink from evil with abhorrence**. We should **find evil as revolting as God does**. The **only thing that can ever make us truly hate that which is evil is a positive love for God**. Evil is the opposite of the holiness and love of God. We need to **see things as God sees them and react to them as He would react**.

Cling to what is good. The Greek word for ‘cling’ is ‘*kollao*’ which means ‘**to join fast together, to glue, cement**’. It conveys the idea of **sticking two pieces of wood together with glue**. What Paul is telling us is to **cement or glue ourselves to that which is good so firmly that we cannot be separated from it**. Good means that which is good in the sight of God. We should have a passion for God’s holiness and truth. It is far more than mere morality. **Holiness is not something that is done to you – it is a command that you have to go on fulfilling and obeying and working out**. Our sanctification (the process of being set apart and made holy and thus fulfilling our Creator’s purpose for us) is a lifelong process.

Romans 12:10 “Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves.”

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. The Greek word translated as ‘devoted’ in the NIV is *‘philostorgos’* which means ‘tenderly loving’. It is a compound Greek word being made up of *‘philos’* meaning ‘friendly’ and *‘storge’* meaning ‘love of kindred, especially of parents for children and children for parents’. The Greek word translated as ‘brotherly love’ is *‘Philadelphia’* which is a compound word derived from *‘phileo’* meaning ‘tender affection’ and *‘adelphos’* meaning ‘brother or near kinsman’. *‘Phileo’* is never used in the Bible when it commands men to love God – ‘agape’ is used instead. *‘Phileo’* is though used, at times, in the Scripture to describe the love of the Father for His Son (John 5:20) and for the believer (John 16:27).

So, the brotherly love that is talked about here is natural affection, not an affection called forth by circumstances. It is something which is innately there because of the relationship in which we find ourselves. This phrase describes the tender or warm affection we often have for relatives or family. If truth be told, family members can be especially difficult to love! Nevertheless, we often make every effort simply because we have a family bond that cannot be broken in this life. The truth is that we should love the brethren in the faith as though they were brethren in blood. They are part of our family in Christ. Church life would be very different if we practiced this. However, we cannot create feelings like this, as they are always the result of understanding and thought. It is hypocrisy to just try to put on a cloak of feelings which we do not have. Like our blood family, we should defend our own, make excuses for and look out for our Christian family. When we find that some brothers and sisters are difficult and doing things we cannot understand, then we do not condemn them as outsiders, but treat them the same as we would treat our natural relatives who were doing the same sort of thing. This is how the church can be in harmony and show the world what the church should be. Remember, our relationship with our non-Christian relatives lasts for a life time, but our Christian relationships last for eternity.

Honour one another above yourselves. The NIV does not very accurately translate this phrase from the original Greek, but it does convey the spirit of the meaning that Paul intended. The Greek original should be translated ‘in honour one another preferring’. The word ‘honour’ used here is the Greek word *‘time’* which means ‘respect or value’. The Greeks used this word to refer to the price fixed for an object after you had gone to the trouble of having it valued. If God has valued our fellow believers and found them to be worthy of His Holy Spirit, His love and affection, shouldn’t we treat them with reverence and respect. Having this sort of attitude towards our fellow believers will encourage us to behave as God wants us to with each other.

‘Preferring’ (Greek word *‘proegeomai’*) means ‘to go before, to lead, to lead the way’. We need to be the first to show honour and respect to our fellow Christians and, set such a good example in this area, that others follow our example. The Greek phrase

'in honour one another preferring' could also be translated 'outdo one another in showing honour.' In other words, if you insist on competing, see who can genuinely value the other more.

“Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.” (Philippians 2:3)

To 'honour one another above ourselves', we should be willing to:

- let another have his or her preference in non-essential matters.
- give our fellow Christians the advantage instead of claiming it for ourselves.
- listen when someone speaks and give his or her words careful consideration.
- respect their opinions, even though we may disagree.
- treat another person's feelings with care and respect, demonstrating gratitude for one another.
- allow another Christian to take a role that we can see God has gifted them for, instead of taking it for ourselves just because we fancy the prestige of the position. This may even be contrary to what the church leadership is suggesting. We are getting out of the way, so that they can get into their rightful position in God.
- rightly evaluate each other's gifts in God. We may not have the same, high-profile type of gift ourselves, but this should be irrelevant. If we see faithful, godly service, then we should honour it, whatever our gift in God. We should not make little of the gifts in us or our fellow believers, as to do so would be to criticise the Holy Spirit who gifted them in the first place. If someone is doing something that is worthy of our praise and honour and respect in God, then we should overcome our pride and accord or bestow what is due.

To evaluate and honour others, we need a right view and true estimation of ourselves. A wrong view of self is the source of nearly all evil. Over-estimation of ourselves usually leads to under-estimation of others. Pride is destroyed or kept in check if we maintain our sense of wonder at the fact that we became a Christian. God chose us and loved us to Himself! Everything we are and have and do is entirely the result of the grace of God. Under-estimation of ourselves leads us to think of ourselves as incompetent and a failure, because we fail to see ourselves rightly in God.

“For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?”

(1 Corinthians 4:7)

Romans 12:11 **“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervour, serving the Lord.”**

“Don't burn out; keep yourselves fuelled and aflame.” (The Message)

Never be lacking in zeal. The NIV has translated this phrase very well, as the Greek literally means ‘in zeal or diligence never be shrinking or causing to shrink’. Paul here deals with our attitude to our service for the Lord and the spirit in which we do it. Paul wants us to be diligent, morally earnest, alive, vigorous or zealous and not to shrink back from this. Therefore, we must not be slothful, lazy, slack, or half do things. Reasons why we become lazy include:

- The devil will try to get us to be lethargic by feeding in thoughts like: ‘You’re too tired to do anything today, do it tomorrow. Unfortunately, when the devil tries the same tactic the next day and the one after, etc., it works. This results in us achieving very little, if anything, for God.
- Discouragements can get us to think: ‘Why bother, it never works anyway!’ So we don’t bother.
- Doing something for God in a half-hearted manner is not easy and can cause us to fail repeatedly and give up or settle for mediocrity and can even lead to depression.
- Giving in to our naturally lazy temperament (if we have one). Some Christians can all too easily be put off in their service for God, as they would prefer to do something far less energetic like watching TV. If you continue to disuse something, it goes from a sluggish to a diseased condition.
- Letting our lazy mind cause us to be lethargic in a service for the Lord. Congregations often want to be entertained rather than taught, because their minds are lazy. They don’t want to do anything for God, just be spectators and keep well outside the field of play where the action is.

Remember, if you don’t do your bit, all the other parts of the body will suffer. The church needs everyone to function for it to operate properly. You cannot isolate yourself and say it doesn’t matter if my bit is not done, as things left undone or half done will affect the whole. The more that do this, the greater the danger that the church has of functioning in a diseased way.

We need to rouse ourselves. This is dealing with our laziness on a natural level, but it is often surprising what you can really do. We must sow in order to reap – doing nothing achieves nothing positive most of the time. We must learn to know and understand ourselves. Rousing ourselves is not turning us into something we are not by nature. So many people, in neglecting their own temperament, try to produce a stereotyped, standard kind of Christian. We are not all the same and should not try to be. Once we know and understand ourselves, we can then deal with and talk to ourselves. We are rarely quite as bad as we think we are. We should shake ourselves so that we function at our full potential or head towards it. Our body, mind and spirit is always at its best when exercised appropriately – not over-extended or lazy. If you don’t exercise physically, mentally and spiritually, you probably will not want to and will find it more difficult to start doing what you know you should – our mind-set is wrong.

Keep your spiritual fervour. As Christians, our spirit is the place of residence of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of power and energy and holy fire. He lives within us and wants to be our source of power and energy to do God's will – whatever this may be and whatever it takes.

“For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.” (2 Timothy 1:7)

Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” (Acts 1:8)

‘In spirit, hot, burning, aglow or boiling’ is the literal translation of ‘keep your spiritual fervour’. The Greek phrase used here has the idea of boiling over or boiling up or bursting into flame.

So, we are not expected to be zealous for God and fervent in spirit on our own – indeed we cannot. We need to “be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Ephesians 6:10). God has given us His Holy Spirit to live within us so that we can live our lives in the way that He wants. The Holy Spirit, who is by nature always aflame and on the boil, can fire us up and cause us to always be on the boil or aflame for God and His service.

As we yield more of our lives to the Holy Spirit, in effect, He will have access to more and more of our spirit and soul. When He takes residence in us, He brings with Him His holy Fire. The more of ourselves we yield to Him, the greater access He has to spread His fire. This will cause our spirit to begin to glow and, therefore, our life will begin to take on the fire of God, because we will have a fire in the very centre of our being. We should let the energy and power of the Spirit work in us and manifest itself through us. We should have a passion which boils up in our spirit to serve the Lord. This enthusiasm is characterized by an energetic zeal that cannot be contained; it is the very opposite of lethargy and indifference. Be warned: the fire of God in our soul likes to burn up the dross or rubbish within us first. This is for our best, but it can be painful and cause us to have to give certain things up.

John the Baptist said, “I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire. His winnowing fork is in his hand, and he will clear his threshing floor, gathering his wheat into the barn and burning up the chaff with unquenchable fire.” (Matthew 3:11-12)

We cannot produce such a fire within us. False fire and carnal zeal is not what Paul is talking about here. This tends to burn itself out anyway. We must not limit ourselves by thinking of ourselves in natural terms only, as we have the Spirit of God living within us. So, we must learn to distinguish between our natural energy with the energy of the Spirit; and at the start, this is not easy. We must learn to understand His gentle nudges and pushes – His not so gentle ones are hard to miss! – and get in step with Him. When we do this more and more, the fire within us will grow more and more.

The Holy Spirit is always with us, as Christians, no matter what we do (otherwise we would no longer be a Christian). So, the **Holy Spirit's fire cannot go out**, but the **fire He creates within us can** ("**Do not put out the Spirit's fire**" – 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Even if the fire doesn't go out, it **all too often** becomes **nothing but a weakly glowing ember**. This occurs because we **grieve the Holy Spirit** (Ephesians 4:30) and **keep Him bottled up or contained by our choices in life**, effectively smothering His **effectiveness within us**. In other words, the ability of the Holy Spirit to keep us supernaturally on fire and full of spiritual fervour is subject to our will and choices. Some of the ways that we can bottle up or smother the effectiveness of the Holy Spirit include:

- **Sin**, because the impulses of the flesh usurp the place of the energy and fire of the Spirit, and so hinder His operations within us.
- **Ignorance**, as we don't know how the Holy Spirit operates within us.
- **Believing the enemy's lies** instead of the Word of God and the Spirit within us.
- **We ignore or refuse to submit to or fail to recognise the Holy Spirit's prompting** or leading **choosing instead to do our own thing**.

Whatever the reason, if we **bottle up the Holy Spirit**, then the fire or fervency that He sought to create within our bellies becomes quenched. So, the **Holy Spirit's power, peace, order and edification** that He sought to impart to us are negated.

This is why we **need to be a living sacrifice that stays offered up to God**. This is why we **need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds**, so that we **start to have Christ-like thinking** which, in turn, **enables us to know what the Holy Spirit wants to us do** (which is always in line with the good, pleasing and perfect will of God) . This is what this phrase 'keep your spiritual fervour' is all about.

Our responsibility is to fan into flame the fire of the Holy Spirit by **choosing to live as He wants us to live**. We cannot produce the fire, but we can maintain the glow. We can **rake out the ashes** that are smothering the fire by **getting rid of the sin** in our life and then fan the flame into life by starting to live as God wants us to live. We also need to **increase the air supply** to the flame **by prayer and spending time in His presence**. Then we can **add more fuel**, a little at a time, by **reading and studying Scriptures** (or the next best thing, which is to read about revivals and the lives of great Christians). Finally, we **get the fire within us really blazing by maturing into a servant of great faith who can do whatever God asks of us**, no matter how impossible. This is what the Holy Spirit wants and is working towards in all of our lives.

Serving the Lord. This should be **our supreme motive for Christian living** and service. If we think of our Christian life and work in terms of ourselves and other people, we will soon be in trouble, because we are focussing on and being motivated by the wrong things. We should think of ourselves as **nothing but God's servants**, His bond-slaves, which He bought with a great price. A **slave does not do anything for himself**; he does all he does for his master. A **slave has no right to think of himself and his own interests, because he belongs entirely to another**.

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honour God with your body.” (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Some principles of serving the Lord:

- We **don't serve our church or our cause**, we serve God and His cause and His body on earth – the church.
- If we are truly obeying God and serving Him in the way that He wants, then it is **His service and not ours**.
- When opposition comes against what God wants the church to do, it is **opposition against God and not us**. It is His church, not ours!
- We are **not in competition** with other churches, we are **in partnership**.
- The church denominations are just a **man-created label and don't mean very much to God**. We must not let labels lead us to all sorts of rivalries, quarrelling and misunderstanding.
- It is a **great privilege to be given a part in God's work**. God could have **chosen to do everything without us**, but instead He has chosen to act through His people like us. This is the antidote to self-importance.
- Serving the Lord is a wonderful way to **show our gratitude for all He has done for us**. We owe Him everything. He deserves our very best.
- **Our behaviour** when we serve the Lord **affects not merely what people think of you, but also what they will think of Him** and the truth that comes from Him. God's honour is involved in the way we conduct our Christian service.
- **God is involved in our service failures and successes**.
- Because we are serving the Lord, **His eye is always upon us**. **What do we let Him observe?** We must rouse ourselves, because we don't want to be ashamed when He comes again. After all, we will **have to give an account** of ourselves at the judgement seat of Christ.

“So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.” (2 Corinthians 5:9-10)

Romans 12:12 “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Be joyful in hope. This is **not putting on a smiley face** or cultivating a hopeful outlook or expecting things to get better in this world. **Our whole attitude and outlook towards life and our understanding of it should be as God sees it**. We have been given so much by God and what we have now is only the beginning – a foretaste – of what is to come. If we **truly understood what God has done for us and we always lived in the good of it, then we couldn't help but live in joy**. The trouble is **our thinking is clouded by the enemy, our sinful nature and what the world is throwing at us** moment by moment, so we don't really see the truth and live fully in the good of it. We need the **Spirit of God and the Word of God to renew our minds** transforming

them into vessels where faith in God, hope in God, and love for God and each other prevail.

The world as it is has no hope apart from what is offered by God. It is only by God's actions in Jesus that anyone has any real hope at all, because without all our Lord and Saviour has done, we would be heading for an eternity of regret and punishment. We, as Christians, are delivered from this present evil world through Jesus Christ and translated into God's kingdom, and we have the hope of eternal life in a God-transformed, new world. We are in this world of trouble but for a moment compared to the eternity with God to come. Why do we live as if this life is all there is? We should live for God and for the glory to come because of Jesus, and not for the meagre offering that this world is submitting to us. There is nothing so destructive to Christian lives as to fail to realise the nature of our lives in this fallen world. Whatever the world may be like, whatever it does to us, however good or bad it may seem, we should know and live according to the hope of all God has in store for us. Look at what He has done, look at what He is doing, look at what He is yet going to do. "Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter (or finisher) of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). Let us set our hearts and minds on things above, not on earthly things (Colossians 3:1-2).

"Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure." (1 John 3:2-3)

Patient in affliction. The Greek word translated as 'affliction' is *'thlipsis'* which primarily means 'a pressing, pressure, anything which burdens the spirit'. It means 'to suffer affliction, to be troubled' and has reference to sufferings due to the pressure of circumstances or the antagonism of persons. The word is used to describe the distress of a woman during child birth, and to describe the suffering we, as a part of the body of Christ, can undergo during persecution. 'Patient' is the Greek word *'hupomone'*, which literally means 'an abiding under'.

How do we remain patient through affliction? We continue to hope, anticipating that which has not yet happened and celebrating as though it has. We continue to fulfil all of our obligations and enjoy our blessings even when we're discouraged and want to quit. And all the while, we devote ourselves to prayer talking to the Father on one another's behalf.

Jesus said, "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

"For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (2 Corinthians 4:17-18)

We should be patient when the pressing or pressure of affliction comes upon us. All Christian people have to bear trials, tribulations and afflictions. We must not let them get us down or cause us to be complainers and grumblers and we certainly shouldn't be surprised by them (1 Peter 4:12). The world treated Jesus in horrendous ways and He told us to expect the same.

Trials, tribulations and afflictions though do have their benefits, because they teach us things that nothing else can. We all have rough edges that need to be smoothed; and we must be patient as we undergo God's process of removal, which often utilises trials, tribulations and afflictions. Nothing teaches us more about ourselves. When things are going well, we tend to coast through life and take things for granted. Patience under trials or afflictions is one of the main ways that our Christian character is matured and perfected.

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance (*hupomone*). Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.” (James 1:2-4)

Trials, tribulation and affliction teach us:

- humility and show us our weaknesses, pride, self-interest and rebelliousness.
- how bad this fallen world is and what the people in it are really like.
- how to empathize with the people in the world and the problems they suffer under.
- not to live for this world alone, because we will contrast what we see here with how good it is going to be in glory.

Faithful in prayer. The Greek word translated as 'faithful' in the NIV is '*proskartereo*' which literally means 'to be strong towards, to endure in, or persevere in, to be continually steadfast, to attend continually upon'. The only way to keep going in a world like this is to keep praying and faint not. Prayer isn't positive thinking or talking ourselves into something, it is talking to God and having personal communion with Him. Prayer helps us realize that we are not alone – we are in this with God. He protects, empowers, strengthens, cares about and loves us.

God's grace is not automatically received – we have to ask for it. We are not given everything in one great donation from God and then left to go drawing on that when we need it. No, we have to keep going to the Giver and in so doing build relationship with Him and dependency on Him. If we are strong towards prayer and we endure and persevere in it and attend upon God continually, we will get to know our God intimately and what He wants us to do. We will then know that He is with us in all things and will provide whatever we need in order to fulfil His will, no matter how impossible. We can do everything through Him who gives us strength (Philippians 4:13). 'Faithful in prayer' is translated 'continuing instant in prayer' in the AV. I like this, because we should instantly, by prayer, bring God into everything that we encounter in life. That is why the Scriptures encourage us to pray continually (1 Thessalonians 5:17). There is nothing more vital to the Christian life.

Romans 12:13 “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality.”

Share with God’s people in need. As Christians, we have a responsibility for each other. This is a God-given responsibility and so should not be taken lightly. We need to help each other. Paul’s phrase ‘share with God’s people who are in need’ uses the Greek word *‘koinoneo’* which means ‘to share in common with, participate in’. This has more in mind than simply sharing one’s abundance with someone in need. This has shared suffering in mind. We are to become partners in the need. Their burden is our burden.

Do not give grudgingly, as to do so is to miss the point of the body of Christ and our place in it. Christianity is not communism (yours is mine and mine’s me own), but rather is stewardship. A steward is someone who manages another person’s possessions. God has provided for us so that we can manage those possessions for Him. You still have your possessions, but you are governed by a spirit of love and a desire to do what God wants you to do with those possessions. So, if you see a brother in need, you give to him out of what God has given you, as He directs or prompts. God wants us to be responsible for each other and to give as we see need and are able, like the early church did (Acts 2:44-45; Acts 4:34,35). As God’s steward, we must understand that what we have belongs to our brothers and sisters in Christ as much as it belongs to us, if they are in need.

“Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfil the law of Christ.”
(Galatians 6:2)

Stewards must be wise in God and know what He wants them to do in terms of giving – we need discernment here from God. We must let God’s love and the Holy Spirit within us show us what to do. Remember though that ‘need’ means basics and not luxuries or desires. It isn’t throwing money or things at a problem, when God is screaming at us to deal with it in another way. Also, as a general rule, God does not ask us to give away everything that we have, as we too have to live and provide for our family.

Love should be at the centre of everything we do as a Christian. Love isn’t stingy – love freely shares what it has. Love gives even when it hurts. It shares money freely, even when money is tight. And when the money has run out, love continues to share in the need of another.

“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:17-18)

Practice hospitality. Love is also hospitable. The Greek term for ‘hospitable’ is *‘philoxenia’*, which originally meant ‘love of strangers’. It carries the idea of extending love to those who are different – sojourners from another culture, another race, or a different belief. Furthermore, the Greek word translated as ‘practice’ is *‘dioko’*, which would be better rendered as ‘pursue’. So, practicing or being given to hospitality

means pursuing or seeking after it. Love takes the initiative, actively looking for opportunities to benefit one another, especially those who are different. I like the Message's rendering of this phrase: "be inventive in hospitality." What creative, inventive ways can you come up with to practice hospitality, so that the love of God is expressed to each within the body of Christ – love shown to each other is what cements the church together? Further, how can you show God's love to strangers in terms of hospitality?

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

The literal meaning of the word 'bless' (*eulogeo*) is 'to speak well of'. Interestingly, the word translated here as 'persecute' is the same Greek word *dioko* that was translated as 'practice' in the previous verse. *Dioko* means 'to put to flight, drive away, to pursue'.

The enemy, and the world which he dominates, is pursuing us. He wants to drive us away from God or put us to flight so that we run away from or give up on fulfilling the will of God. We should not be surprised when the world hates us, especially when we are truly living as God wants us to. The enemy hates the fact that we have escaped his clutches. Our freedom in Christ reminds him that his fate is eternal punishment – no wonder he hates us and wants us to fail. It is he who orchestrates the blinded people in this world to pursue us with ill intent.

Jesus said to His disciples, "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. Remember the words I spoke to you: 'No servant is greater than his master.' If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the One who sent me." (John 15:18-21)

Our reaction to our persecutors should be positive even though this is difficult. We certainly must not go around saying things that will ruin our persecutor's reputation and favour with other people by bad-mouthing them or get them into trouble. We also must stop cursing or calling down a curse from God on those who persecute us.

God is asking to do far more than just refraining from retaliation or being neutral towards or just putting up with or silently suffering persecution. We must positively desire the good of those people who persecute us. God wants us instead to bless them and desire good to come to them from Him. When people persecute us, we must pray and ask God to be merciful to them and to pour out His blessings upon them, as this is the highest good we can do for them. If we want to know how we can react in this way to our persecutors, we need to remind ourselves of how God reacted to us and what God has done for us. We were born a sinner and God's enemy. Nothing at all recommended us to God. God did not curse us for what we were; instead He loved us and extended to us His grace. From God's Word, we can also see how Jesus reacted to persecution and seek to learn from Him.

We should not expect to get true Christian conduct from people who are not Christians, as they are not capable of it. We must remember that the people persecuting us are unregenerate, ignorant, spiritually diseased, blind to spiritual truths, darkened of mind, biased against God and all His ways – and yet God still loves them. The persecutor cannot really help it. They do not know what they are doing. It is as wrong to get annoyed with them, as it is to get annoyed with a baby who cries because he is hungry – they cannot help it. The sin of persecution, which is always wrong, must be differentiated from the sinner. You must feel sorry for the sinner and desire their salvation. You should say, ‘What a tragedy – they are still as I once was!’ Thank God I’ve been delivered and I pray that they will be delivered too. Doing this will show something of the divine nature that was in Jesus to our persecutors.

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:43-45a)

Romans 12:15 “Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

Whatever happens to others in the body of Christ is really also happening to us, at least in some measure. Once we truly realize this, then we cannot help but react as other members of the body react. If we are truly Christian, we cannot live independent, aloof, isolated lives. It is not we who decided this – God did when, by His Spirit, He made us all part of one body.

“So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:25-26)

For those who are not completely hardened, mourning with those who mourn is a natural response. We empathize with the humility, brokenness and difficulty. Rejoicing with those who rejoice is frequently harder because of our pride. We are often jealous or envious of someone else who is on the up. God doesn’t just want us to refrain from envy, but to not even feel it, and instead take pure pleasure in the rejoicing of our fellow Christians. This is not achieved by mentally disengaging (like that taught in yoga, so that we are not negatively affected by anything that happens), this is rejoicing as if the success were our own. We are all in this together with God. Remember though that sin caused success should never cause us to rejoice.

The only way to truly rejoice with those who rejoice and mourn with those who mourn, is by the love of God and the work of the Holy Spirit within us as He deals with our old self and gives us a new selfless nature. This new Holy Spirit-led nature wants to manifest God’s love. When love knows that a brother or sister is rejoicing, it cannot contain excitement. Instead, it celebrates his or her joy. And, with just as much empathy and passion, it grieves the loss of another as if it were its own. An old Swedish proverb states, ‘Shared joy is a double joy; shared sorrow is half a sorrow’.

Does the world look at the church and see us mourning and rejoicing with one another? The answer to this is probably not enough and it is one of the reasons why

many despise the church and all we stand for. The test of the reality of our doctrine is what we do in our daily behaviour. The people in the world are watching us and we are often found wanting.

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

Live in harmony with one another. The Greek phrase rendered in the NIV as ‘live in harmony’ is ‘autos phroneo’ meaning ‘minding the same, thinking the same, have a common mind-set and understanding’. There should be unity among Christians because we all have the same Word of God, the same mind of Christ and we all share the one Spirit. We should, therefore, think along the same channels and our minds should come to the same conclusions. The fact that this doesn’t happen as often as it should suggests that the renewal of our minds is in its infancy with many of us. We, therefore, cannot discern clearly what God’s will is, let alone put it into practice. God wants us to be for the same things, even if our perspectives and approaches differ. This means that we should have unity in respect of the truth, even though we may not always agree together about everything. We should seek to understand before being understood; prefer to communicate rather than do battle with words; try to find common ground with others without sacrificing truth; and regard the thoughts of others with high regard.

“I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.” (1 Corinthians 1:10)

Do not be proud. This phrase could be literally translated from the Greek ‘not high things minding’ The phrase uses the Greek word ‘phroneo’ again, here meaning ‘set your mind on’.

Paul here is warning us against intellectual pride and haughtiness. We should not be proud of our understanding, but we do need to gain it. We should not be smug or so pleased with our own learning, knowledge and understanding that we despise people who don’t have what we have. We must not be condescending and patronizing with each other, no matter how great our intellectual prowess, as we are all one in Christ. Remember, intellectual pride was the first sin in the Garden of Eden and also caused the downfall of Satan, so we need to be careful not to fall in the same way.

Paul here is also warning against the ambition to climb socially or to pander to those of higher class or position or with more money with the hope of our personal, worldly advancement. ‘Do not be proud’ also counsels against thinking of oneself as highborn, high-ranking, high-class, or high minded – distinctions that almost always expect corresponding treatment. There is nothing more incongruous than social distinctions in the Christian church. We should assess each other according to the faith manifest in each other and not socially or in terms of money or power. Proud people are difficult to live with, as it is all about them.

But be willing to associate with people of low position. This phrase, from the Greek, literally means ‘allow yourself to be carried away by people of low lying or low rank’. God wants us to seek out people on the fringes and risk embracing them.

Do not be conceited. This phrase, from the Greek, means ‘become not wise with yourselves or do not be wise in your own estimation’. People who think they are wise and attempt to let others in on the secret are usually the most laughable characters of all. If someone is wise, others notice. **Wisdom is the power and capacity to use and apply knowledge.** We should not congratulate ourselves if we can do this. This is a **gift from God.** We should humbly operate to the best of our ability in this God-given gift giving God the glory for it. **True wisdom makes us humble, self-controlled, loving and peace-making; and shows in life, because we boast in God and not ourselves.** Remember always that **Solomon**, the wisest man ever to live, **didn’t make good choices**, as his choices were often **ruled by pride.** Not being conceited though is **not false modesty or the pretention of humility.** True wisdom comes from God, with any other source, like the clever wisdom of Satan, being false. **True wisdom can be attained by asking God in faith for it** (James 1:5-6).

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbour bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such ‘wisdom’ does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” (James 4:13-18)

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

When something horrible is done to us, we are very tempted to give up being God’s living sacrifice and instead crawl down off His altar and get some much deserved justice. **Evil stirs up evil.** Many of us give out a mouthful of abuse when we are wronged. Minor forms of road rage spring to mind, in terms of me. The **heart is a well and the tongue a bucket.** The tongue can only draw from what is in the heart. In fact, **when evil is done to us, it often shows us what is in our heart** and it reveals just **how far our lives have been transformed into Christlikeness.** An untransformed heart contains an insatiable desire to protect its own rights. It wants to get even at the very least.

When a sinful, evil act is suffered by us, we often need healing; and vengeance whispers a tantalizing promise that if we get even, we will know some healing of our emotional wound and it will make us feel warm all over. This is a lie. **Vengeance cannot heal wounds.** Heartfelt repentance by the offender and a sincere apology from them will go a long way towards our healing, but offenders almost never risk that kind of humility.

Jesus said, “You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone wants to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your brothers, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” (Matthew 5:38-48)

So, we have a choice to make. Will we go God’s way, when we suffer at the hands of another, and give room for His grace to flow out to us and the other person, or will we take the world’s way and seek pay-back? Fortunately, the Lord has promised to provide supernatural ability to rise above the malicious deeds of another, because in these types of circumstances, we find it very difficult in our own strength to remain submitted to God. Grace, in response to sin, is a quality unique to God; and God’s grace is available to us in abundant supply, just for the asking. So, instead of seeking retribution, ask God for His grace. The grace of God, in whatever form we need it, is available to us to carry out God’s will. And it is His will not to pay back evil for evil.

God’s ways of enabling us not to repay evil for evil include:

- We need to learn not to obey our natural reaction to evil, because evil stirs up or begets even more evil. Do not pay back evil with evil even though you might instinctively want to and even feel you are entitled to or must do. This requires selflessness, discipline and a life that given over to God and His ways. We must continually offer up ourselves as a living sacrifice to God.
- We need to forgive those who do evil to us. Let’s be honest. Forgiving an offense is much easier when the guilty person is contrite and has sincerely apologised. When we see our pain reflected in their remorse, curses easily dissolve into blessings. We need to learn to forgive. Not to do so, only hurts ourselves and goes completely against the grain of what God wants us to do. Forgiveness is one of the greatest powers of this age. The person who has wrong us can be very shaken if we truly forgive them and this can lead to their finding God and true repentance. Forgiveness can be the pathway of God’s grace into even the most evil person’s life.

Jesus said, “For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.” (Matthew 6:14-15)

- **Paying back evil with good.** Not only is this what God wants, but it also enables us to take a **huge step towards our own healing**. Returning good for evil goes against every natural instinct we possess, especially when the offender is a fellow Christian, as they should know better. It is even harder when the offender takes delight in our suffering or personally benefits from our injury, choosing to treat him or her kindly and forgive them defies everything we know about justice and fair play. Kindness is a response beyond our natural capacity. It will require supernatural strength. Fortunately, that is precisely what God has promised. In Christ, we have the capacity to **no longer be controlled by sin and our sinful nature**. We are a new creation in Christ with the power of the Holy Spirit residing within us. Nothing that is in line with God's will is impossible for us and paying back good for evil is God's will.
- **Following the example of Jesus**, which is always **something God's grace will enable**. Jesus didn't retaliate, even though He could have obliterated those who wronged Him. **Jesus knew that there was a time and place for judgement (later) and a time and place for grace (now)**.

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. ‘He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.’ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.” (1 Peter 2:21-23)

- **Letting the Holy Spirit be the manager, director or controlling principle of our mind.** We must allow God to transform our minds by the choices we make, so that we accept the truth that God works all things for our good, as naturally as we accept the laws of gravity. It is a **faith question**. **Do we really believe that God is in control?** How we answer this will largely determine how we respond to evil. If we truly believe that God is in control, then, when we are fired upon by an enemy, we will have the shield of faith to defend us, we will have God's peace and love to protect us, and His grace to respond with God-empowered goodness.
- **Gaining the support of our fellow believers.** Unfortunately, this is often far **scarcer than it should be**. We are all part of the body of Christ and should be mutually supporting each other. Remember, if **one part suffers, we all suffer**. When we see a fellow Christian suffer evil, we should **rally around and help** them to get through it. We should **be their advocate** when they need it; and, if possible, **stand in the firing line with them** when this is required.

Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. The phrase **‘Be careful to do what is right’** in the Greek has the meaning **‘to take thought in advance or take thought for, foresee, have regard for’**. Paul is saying **don't instinctively or automatically react**, but rather before you do anything, **think about it**. We should take thought and **work out our response in the context of our total position and outlook as a Christian**. Retaliation is bad; we must instead do what is right. Instead of hitting

back or retaliating, we should take thought and provide, produce, let there be evidence of things which are obviously right and good in the sight of everyone. We are to **look past the offense to see what good we can do**, so that our actions aren't mere reactions. **Our behaviour should be guided by godly character, not pulled here and there by this insult or that offense**. Don't think of evil done to you only in the context of yourself; **be concerned about the honour of the Christian faith and of God and how our response will reflect on this**. The world should see that we are different by the way we react to evil and it should bring glory to God.

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

Paul is realistic. He – perhaps better than most men – understands that **some people are determined to be our enemy regardless of how we choose to behave**. Some people simply live to fight and wouldn't know what to do without someone to harass. Even some people who call themselves Christians do this! **We should live at peace with all men unless they make it impossible for us to do so**. Paul is also pointing out that, it is **not just if you can, but as far as it depends on you**. We may have the knowledge and capacity to do what is right in God, but simply choose not to do it. We must never be the cause of strife, because of what we are or do, as far as it rests in our control or power. **If there is anything we can do, within the constraints of Scripture, we must do it in order to live at peace with everyone. How then do we do this?**

- **Always contend first for the truth and for the faith**. This verse is not a demand for peace at any price, as God, His truth and His righteousness come first.
- **When an enemy deliberately causes us harm, we are to react as God wants us to react and bless them in the best way we can**. This may mean letting the harm to us go unanswered, especially when confrontation is pointless; but in most situations, it will mean reaching out to them with God's love and bringing God's will to bear in the situation.
- **We must be patient and as helpful as we can in all other matters**. We are not to be bigoted or unyielding. On certain matters that are not vital to salvation, we must be prepared to be accommodating. **We must ask ourselves, 'how will what I do or say affect another?'** Then often, even when we know we are right, we should accommodate or make a concession.

"Everything is permissible"—but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible'—but not everything is constructive. Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others." (1 Corinthians 10:29)

- We should **only speak the truth in love** (Ephesians 4:15).
- **Never make a personal issue of these things, as the truth is not a personal matter**.
- **Let the peace of God act as umpire** (Colossians 3:15). The peace of God for ourselves and for the church should rule always.

Romans 12:19-20 “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.”

The reason we are to set aside our revenge is to leave room for God’s wrath. This rarely means that the person suffers the wrath of God here on earth. Each person has an unavoidable appointment with death, at which point, each one will stand before their Maker to be judged. The age of God’s grace for that person will have ended and the time of their judgement will begin. If punishment is due, God will mete out vengeance according to that person’s deeds. If that person is ultimately doomed to suffer God’s eternal wrath, they are those we must deeply pity.

“God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels.”

(2 Thessalonians 1:6-7)

No matter what is done to us, we must leave judgement to God, because only He gives just punishment. We must allow God to be the judge of souls, to dispense justice or bestow mercy according to His infinite wisdom. We must never presume to take the Creator’s place on the seat of judgement in the life of another. Our desire for justice is corrupt, so we must refuse to seek our own justice. We are unqualified to judge. In fact, we are unfit for the task. We should leave vengeance to God, for it is His domain and not ours. We should certainly not seek personal vengeance, because our judgement is inadequate, due to our sinful nature and the fact that we are still being impacted by the world and the enemy. We should leave matters of judgement to the perfect judge. We don’t see the whole position as God does. His judgements are always right, unbiased, holy, just, righteous, and controlled. Our wrath is passionate and lacks control. We must stand aside and allow God to work.

Jesus said, “Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.” (Matthew 7:1)

In this age of God’s grace in which we now live, God would prefer that no one is subject to His ultimate judgement of eternal punishment. He is extending His offer of grace to all who do wrong and seeking the redemption of all sinners. God is pursuing sinners, cutting off their escape, confronting them with their sin and the consequences of their sin, chastising them and making continued sin miserable.

Why? To bring the individual to repentance; to give him or her His grace; and to redeem our enemy, as He has redeemed us and all believers. And God wants us to participate in this activity. Our vengeance limits God’s grace, so we should surrender the matter to God. We are to surrender our desire for revenge and seek blessing for the offender instead. When we take our own revenge, we dare to stand between God and His beloved, whom He may choose to pursue or may be in the process of actively pursuing.

While we must never desire an enemy personal harm, we **must always be concerned about the God's truth, righteousness and justice**. We are not to avenge personal wrongs, but we should have a zeal for the name and glory of God.

'Heap burning coals on his head' is not talking about greater vengeance. This is not **God hurting the person for us**, because He can hurt them a whole lot worse than we can. In fact, we are not only to do our enemy no harm, **we are to do for them positive good and provide for them whatever they need**. Instead of taking revenge, God wants us, in response to their wrong, to extend to the person the same hospitality that we would a stranger in need – if he is hungry, feed him; and if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. **The purpose of returning good for evil is to 'heap burning coals on his head'**. Most commentaries suggest that this is an **idiom describing humility**, although the precise meaning in this day and age is unclear. One suggestion is that in ancient times, allowing one's household fire to go out was seen as the epitome of irresponsibility. The humiliating experience of walking from a neighbour's house with a pan of coals, which they often carried using the support of their heads, probably gave rise to this word-picture of humility. Remorse of this type can be painful and make people miserable, but if it leads to repentance, it is the best result possible.

Romans 12:21 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

"Don't let evil get the best of you; get the best of evil by doing good." (The Message)

Returning good for evil is not a complicated concept; it is very simple. However, it's also **one of the most difficult tasks we undertake** throughout life.

This verse **sums up the proceeding arguments**. We must put the fate of our soul first, as it is our primary objective in life (Matthew 16:26). Our possessions don't matter apart from doing what God wants with them, as we cannot take them with us to glory – but our soul lives forever. **What should interest Christians is the effect of an action on our soul and the soul of another person** – its spiritual effect. **The enemy is fighting for our soul and the souls of others using evil. God wants us to overcome the effects this evil by doing His good.**

The devil wins this battle if:

- We take vengeance.
- We do anything that causes us to lose the peace of God.
- Our pride rises up for any reason.

So we **must not lose control of ourselves, whatever the provocation**. We are to overcome, and conquer evil with good.

The benefits of such a response:

- We **are overcoming evil in ourselves** and **overcoming our sinful nature**, and so growing in maturity in God.
- We are also **overcoming evil in our adversary** and so nudging them towards repentance by the good that we do.

- We are **getting victory over Satan**, the enemy, by doing something positive and good. He cannot stand this and so it will cause him to flee.

We are **God's soldiers in a great war against evil**, but we must **only fight in God's way**. It is **only what God sees and what He will say to you at the end that really matters**.

Jesus said, "But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone strikes you on one cheek, turn to him the other also. If someone takes your cloak, do not stop him from taking your tunic. 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. If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful." (Luke 6:27-36)