***Provide Things Honest  
RO162-02***

**© Berean Memorial Church of Irving, Texas, Inc. (1977)**

We are studying Romans 12:9-21 on the subject of "Christian Conduct," and this is segment number 12.

The apostle Paul is giving us some very specific guidelines for Christian conduct in this chapter. These are necessary in order to help us to apply doctrine to life. It is so easy to miss these principles of conduct that are befitting the Christian life, because they are foreign to our sin nature. So, we do not naturally gravitate toward this kind of conduct. Furthermore, we are surrounded by Satan's world, which tends to shape our conduct, instead of the Word of God. So, it is extremely helpful for someone to put in specific statements: "This is the way a Christian ought to live." And that's what the apostle is doing here.

Therefore, the happiest; the most stable; and, the most significant people in the world are those who apply these principles to their lives that we find here in Romans 12. We come now to a new section at the end of the chapter, in verses 17-21. In this segment, we have guidance to the believer for his contacts with other people. This has to do with the social life of the believer in all of its various contacts with other human beings.

**Do not Recompense Evil for Evil**

First of all, the principle is set forth that the Christian does not operate on a tit-for-tat basis. Paul says, "Recompense to no man evil for evil." The word "recompense" looks like this in the Greek Bible. It's the Greek word "apodidomi." This word means "to repay" or "to pay back. The verb "didomi," meaning "to give" has a prefix here as you see: this preposition "apo." And what that does to this word is intensify it to the idea of repaying all that a person deserves.

So, what Paul is saying is don't give a person back everything he really has coming to him. We're not talking simply about somebody that has made you mad, and you really shouldn't gotten mad at him; but they really did something, and you really do have a ground of indignation, and you really do have a ground for demanding some retaliatory justice.

Well, the Word of God says, "Don't give him what he really fully deserves. This is in the present tense, which indicates that this is to be our constant conduct as Christians. It is active, which indicates that this is how we individual believers are to conduct ourselves. It is a participle in mood, which is always indicating that a spiritual principle is being stated. But in this particular case, in the Greek Bible, it is in the form of a divine command. So, it refers here to something that God is telling you to do. This is not just good advice. This is obligatory advice, and it refers to the spirit of vindictiveness in the believer which should not be there.

So, God the Holy Spirit says, "Don't repay anyone evil for evil. The word "evil" is the Greek word "kakos." This is the word in the Greek Bible which refers to something that is inherently evil. It's not just bad in its effect. The whole thing is a corrupt act. It is an evil substance in itself. And here he says, "Don't recompense (don't pay back evil for)," and it's this Greek word "anti," which is a preposition which means "in place of;" that is, do not respond to the abuse of Satan's world with more abuse.

Now, the people of Satan's family, and carnal Christians, are going to do evil things to you as a child of God. And what we are confronted with here is the guiding principle that, when that happens, whether from the unbelieving world or from the carnal Christian side, we are not to pay back in kind. That is the human viewpoint reaction of our sin nature. Instead, we are to refrain from retaliation. And that is the divine viewpoint response of the Holy Spirit.

**Joseph**

A biblical, classic example of what the apostle is speaking of here is Joseph, and the way he treated his brothers in Egypt after what they had done to him. As you remember, they had ridiculed this boy, and he was just a teenager. And that's tough on a teenager. It is very painful for people to make fun of him. They ridiculed his moral purity. They resented his father's special care and affection for him, because he was the son of his most beloved wife. And they persecuted him. And then finally, out of their hatred, they sold him into slavery in Egypt.

Years passed, and suddenly, the tables turned. They come to Egypt as abject creatures, trying to buy food to survive the enormous famine that has overtaken that part of the world. And they come up before the second in command in Egypt, who has the power of life and death in his hand, and is subject only to the Pharaoh himself. And they don't recognize him. He happens to be the little brother that, years ago, they treated with this kind of despicable brutality.

So, how should Joseph react? Here's a classic case. Returning evil for evil? Did these brothers give that kind of abuse to Joseph? You bet they did. They "apodidomi" him to the fullest extent. They had justice coming to them at this point in time. Joseph could have executed it, had he chosen to do so. Instead, he chose not to get even. But he treated the brothers with love; with kindness; with care; and, with reassurance that he was not going to retaliate.

**David**

This is the same principle that David operated on in the way he treated the house of Saul after Saul was killed. Saul, during his lifetime had abused; he had threatened; he had pursued; and, he had actually sought the life of David on numerous occasions. David, in turn, treated the descendants of Saul with kindness and with care, and without any bitterness toward the treatment that had been given him. David was in a position to have retaliated on the family of Saul in the same way that Saul had treated him.

Certainly the apostle Paul himself understands this principle from experience. Here was a man who was regularly persecuted and pursued by his countrymen, the Jews, but he was ready, as he has told us in this book, to give up his own salvation if they could be saved in his place, so that they could escape the consequences of eternity in hell. That is indeed not paying back evil for evil.

This principle is a very strong concept which is repeated in several places in the Word of God. For example, 1 Thessalonians 5:15 puts it this wa: "See that not render evil for evil unto anyone, but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men."

In 1 Corinthians 4:12-13: "And labor, working with our own hands, being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; and, being defamed, we entreat. We are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day." The apostle Paul knew what it was to be abused, but still to stand by the people he was trying to win to eternal life.

One more: 1 Peter 3:9 says, "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but on the contrary: blessing, knowing that you are called to this, that you should inherit a blessing." We Christians are a blessed people. We are called to be blessed by God with enormous eternal blessings, and therefore, we should live in a context of blessing. And when people abuse us and mistreat us, we should not respond with abuse, but we should respond with blessing.

The problem with responding to evil treatment with evil is that you take upon yourself your abuser's problem. You immediately step out of temporal fellowship, and now you begin to pay a price. Because the Word of God, as I have shown you, is so explicitly clear that we do not respond to abuse with abuse, when you do, you have violated a very grave principle of the Word of God. You've stepped out of temporal fellowship, and now there's a price to pay. So, you want to keep that in mind when you decide that you're ready to seek some vengeance on someone that has mistreated you. The believer, in this way, will become part of the evildoer's problem, and he ends up sharing the evildoer's discipline, and that's dumb.

**Provide Things Honest**

So, the Word of God says, "Do not pay back to anyone evil treatment with other evil treatment. What should we do rather than that? "We should provide things honest in the sight of all men." The word "provide" looks like this in the Greek Bible: "pronoeo." This is made up of two words also. "Pro" is a preposition. It means "before." "Noeo" is a verb, and it means to think. So, what this word is saying literally is "to think ahead." It connotes making prior arrangements for something – to take thought in advance. And that's what Paul is saying. When he says, "Provide," it means you think ahead, and you set yourself up, and you see to it that you go out of your way to be prepared to do this. You don't just sort of stumble, and hope to do it on the spur of the moment.

This is present tense, which tells us that this is constant planning, ahead of time, on the part of the believer. And it is middle voice, which means: "If you do this, you will be benefited. You can't see that when you read the word "provide," but that's a very significant point that the Greek language tells us by the very middle voice – that if you do this, you are going to be such a beneficiary that you'll be glad that you did it. It's, again, a participle – a spiritual principle being stated, but this also is in such a way grammatically that it is a command. It is something that you are ordered by God to do and keep in mind as you act. To do what?

He says that you are to provide things that he calls "honest." The word is the Greek word "kalos." And this refers to what is well-suited to a purpose as a Christian's testimony – to do something that is external in the form of goodness that other people can see, and that is suited, therefore, to the situation. This word carries, in other words, an ethical meaning. He is saying do right by God standard. Instead of trying to give people back what they may indeed rightly deserve, because of their treatment of you, you turn around, and instead, you plan ahead of time to make provision for things that are good, and that are suited to the situation of that person's need. This is something that externally will be in the sight of all men, which means in the presence of everybody.

**Before All Mankind**

This is the Greek word "enopion." And this word means where everybody can see it. It refers to a Christian doing and saying things that, when others observe and hear it, they will commend it. And you do this, it says, "Before all men." And the word "men" is the Greek word "anthropos." This word "anthropos" means mankind. It doesn't mean men as male individuals. It means all humanity. The idea is everybody. Therefore, we have now branched over, here not only from the Christian community, but to all those unsaved people that you do business with; that you work with; that you associate with; and, that rub shoulders with you all day long. Whoever they are, you are to plan ahead to provide things that are commendable in the sight of (in the presence of) their observation for everybody.

**Personal Integrity**

This is a call for personal integrity in the Christian, and that's the word you should remember. The word is integrity. And it refers to avoiding, in any way (compromising) your integrity; your holiness; or, your godliness, however you want to describe being like God in any situation. "Integrity" is a good word for it. But you not only are to not compromise your integrity, but, in fact, it goes a little further than that. This is also telling us: "Don't look like you're doing it." Don't think it's cute for you to act in a certain way that makes people think you're something less than honest, or something less than reflecting the character of God, if there's any question about your integrity. Some people like to give the impression that they are real hip – they're cool cats. They're out there doing that which is held in esteem by our society, but which God does not esteem. And there are some Christians that think there is something commendable about being one of the in-crowd in the world system. 1 Thessalonians 5:22, therefore, tells us: "Abstain from all appearance of evil."

The Christian, thus, is not to profess belief in biblical morality on the one hand, and then demonstrate a lack of integrity by violating it on the other hand. The Christian is not to profess belief in God's standards of what is right and wrong, and then compromise it a little bit here and there, when it's to your advantage, and when you're in a tight spot, and you need to get out of a pickle. Whatever you do, you do not return evil for evil. But what you do in place of that is maintain the highest standard of personal integrity before God and man.

**Honesty**

This, I must remind you, is not just referring to honesty in financial matters. When we throw this word "honesty" in there, right away, we naturally, in English, think about financial matters – being honest relative to money. It's more than that. But on the other hand, we must say that that certainly is included. You should not be standing up in the assembly of believers and giving your testimony to the working of the grace of God in your life; you should not be gathering with the saints in prayer; and, you should not be sitting here in a worship service, and then refuse to pay the bills that you owe to the people for their products and services. And this compromising of integrity is so routine among Christians that it's appalling. Christians regularly are guilty of this kind of lack of integrity in the realm of financial dealings with other people.

**The Apostle Paul**

The apostle Paul, who's teaching us about integrity, was himself an example of integrity when it came to financial matters. On several occasions, he indicated the procedures and the efforts that he followed in order to be above reproach in the way he was handling the very funds that were given to him to be invested in God's work.

For example, in 1 Corinthians 16:3-4, Paul has been collecting a huge offering for relief of the saints in Jerusalem who are suffering from a drought and a famine condition. So, he's seeking money to assist Christians with a welfare program that they need, and under conditions which are beyond their control. And Paul has been gathering this money from churches all over the New Testament world. And he says here, in 1 Corinthians 16:3-4, "And when I come, whosoever you shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality onto Jerusalem." He says, "When I get to Corinth, I want you to have this offering collected. Make it as big and generous as you can. And then I will have an official statement from you, as a congregation, as to who your representative will be who will accompany me to see to it that I'm not out having a big party, and living a good life, and having fun and games, on your offering money; but that it is indeed going to the purpose for which you have given it." And verse 4 says, "And if it be suitable that I go also, they shall go with me." Paul says, "I hope to accompany them on that journey.

In Acts 20:33-35, Paul could say something that many Christians, including preachers, cannot say. And we've seen a lot of public examples of this kind of lack of integrity among religious leaders in recent months: "I have coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel." Can you imagine that in the mouth of some of the people you've been hearing about recently in the public media? "Yet you yourselves know that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me." Paul's own hands were used in employment, in practicing his own trade as a tent maker, to raise the funds for his own ministry, of all things. He dips into his own bank account to pay the ministry bills, and to sustain even other workers, whose salaries and needs had to be met. He takes out of what are his resources, as a result of his earnings, to sustain that need.

Verse 35: "And I have shown you all things, how that, so laboring, you ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus – how He said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'" And many a Christian says, "Amen to that, as long as he's on the receiving end of that blessedness. But God says, "It's good for the person who is the beneficiary of your giving, but it's going to be a lot better for those of you who gave it. And when you walk into heaven, you are going to be so glad that you believed that principle." The apostle Paul paid his bills. He didn't preach on the one hand to gain wealth, and to become wealthy, and to live in a luxurious style. And the people of the world noticed that.

I was talking to a few medical people this week, and they observed something about one of the great charismatic preachers in our local area, who is in a very big cathedral setting now, and very prominent. They remembered when he was a humble nobody, and he drove around in a humble car. And, now when he has become a famous personality, the humility has left him relative to his external lifestyle. You now recognize that he is a fat cat, and that he must demonstrate this before the world. And as one of the people there said, "And his wife drives that Mercedes Benz now – no longer those old humble Volkswagens." And these were people who are not in that system. They were just outsiders who were looking at it. And I said, "Well, I can tell you, in part, why that's done, so that you will understand the mentality. In the charismatic movement, I have often been with charismatic preachers in meetings of one kind or another, and I have listened to their speakers, and you can hear this yourself on television. Their principle is: "I am the preacher. If I do not live in a very gracious, financially opulent lifestyle, how can I stand up and tell you folks out there that God blesses those who believe His Word and obey Him? I must be an example to all the rest of you as to how God will bless those who are obedient to His Word. Therefore, I must live a very luxurious lifestyle."

(In jest:) I just wish that that doctrine was really in the Bible. I'd love it. Unfortunately, I have researched it. When I heard that, I immediately did extensive research. I went through the concordances, boy: "This is for me. I must be an example. I got to get rid of that 1961 Chevy, and move on up now. I mean this is too much." But this is the society in which we live. And the unbeliever sees it, and he takes that into account when you start talking about being a devotee of the poorest man who ever lived on the face of the earth – the Lord Jesus Christ, through whom all the rest of us have become the richest creatures that humanity could ever produce.

The apostle Paul did not minister to people in order to get their gifts; to make him wealthy; and, to give him a very luxurious, opulent lifestyle. In 2 Corinthians 12:14-18, Paul says, "Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you." This is to the church in Corinth. And you must remember that the church in Corinth was very nasty to the apostle Paul. They had a lot of bad things to say to him. They treated him in a very ugly way on several occasions, and they even had the gall (would you believe it?) to suggest that he was becoming wealthy at their expense, and that he was in the ministry for the bucks?

"Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you, and I will not be burdensome to you (and he's talking about money there). For I seek not yours, but you. For the children ought not to lay for the parents, but the parents for the children." Paul says, "I'm going to come to you the third time now to visit you, and I'm not going to be a financial burden to you any more than I've been before." And I am not coming in order to get anything from you. I'm coming to bring you something that you are going to be able to take into eternity. The poor paltry sums of money, at best, that you could give me are going to be left behind by me. But I'm going to give you . . . what you can take with you. I will very gladly spend, and be spent, for you. Thought the more abundantly I love you, the less I'd be loved." By that time, you'd think Paul should have washed his hands of this crowd. He says, "The more I love you, and the more I demonstrate that love, and the more I do for you, the less you react and love toward me – the nastier you are.

Here was the principle that these people deserved full evil treatment back. He did not do that. He did not demand anything of them. Verse 16: "But be it so. I did not burden you. Nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you by guile. Did I make gain of you by any of them whom I sent them unto you?" Now Paul is being sarcastic. He never went to seminary where they teach you: "Don't ever be sarcastic to the people you're ministering to." But Paul says, "I didn't come to you and create a burden, but you know I'm a sneaky devil." Paul says, "I tricked you. I sent those fellows who were helping you, my associates, and boy, they suckered you, and did they ever get the money out of you? You really made us wealthy." They were cringing when they read this because they knew that they have not helped them. They knew that even when Paul's associates came to minister to them, they were carrying their own load.

Verse 18: "I exhorted Titus and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? Didn't we walk in the same Spirit? Didn't we walk in the same steps?" Paul is indicating that when he sent Titus to minister to them, they didn't help him out either. But Titus took the ministry, and carried it on his own.

So, Paul could boldly challenge anyone to show that he never acted without integrity when it came to money. Paul even refused on one occasion to bribe a corrupt government official, which, if he had, would have gained him his release from prison. You can read about that in Acts 24:26.

So, what we are saying is, when Paul says, "Think ahead to make preparations for conveying a picture of integrity before all mankind," it does include how you deal with your financial obligations. And deadbeat Christians are an offense to God and man, and are wasting their lives out of temporal fellowship. That's the worst part about it. You may enjoy not paying somebody what you owe them, and you may think that you have gained an advantage. But by the very fact that you have not done that, even if they can't make you pay it (it's just the fact that it's an obligation), your integrity requires you to make it square, and if you do not do it, it costs you your temporal fellowship.

So, it is a sorry sight to see TV preachers who are making merchandise of the needs and the sincerity of God's people with false doctrines and emotional manipulations. They are doing all this before a watching world, which responds with contempt to the message of Christ, and to the work of the Christians.

**Speaking in Tongues**

The same group of medical people that I was speaking with immediately brought up one of the most prominent con artists on TV who was daily bringing money in as a seed that you will plant, so that God will return you, multiplied over. And they do about him. They recoiled with contempt on their faces as they described him, because they knew that, even when this character interjects his blabbering in tongues, that he is faking. And I gave them a few little insights from the second chapter of Acts where tongues appears, and I pointed out that they were the languages of real countries and of real people that spoke those languages. And one of these doctors was from the Greek Orthodox Church, so he could appreciate this. The wonderful Greek language uses the word "glossa," which means tongues (languages), but is never used of gibberish anywhere in the New Testament, not even in the Septuagint, which translated the Old Testament into Greek. It is always known languages. And then that's reinforced, I pointed out to them, by the fact that God the Holy Spirit, in that same passage, twice also uses the word "dialectos," from which we get our English word "dialect," but which in the Greek language can only mean known language.

So, in this passage God couldn't have locked it in any harder than to say, "I'm going to use the word 'glossa' that's used by the priest of the temple when they talk in gibberish, and say they are under the power of the gods. And I'm going to show you that, by that word, I am talking about real languages, because I'm going to associate it with the word 'dialectos,' and then I'm going to name these languages (something like 19 or 20 languages) that were spoken on the site. And people said, 'Hey, I can understand what these people are saying.'"

Now, you really have to be a fool indeed to know that about that passage, and then to pretend that the gibberish of the charismatics and the Pentecostalists is the same gift of tongues of languages of the New Testament. Well, these people had nothing but contempt, and if they were unbelievers, they're going to be tough to reach for the Lord when they see this kind of manipulation of drawing money in from sincere people who are reaching out for a contact with God. And instead of being here in Berean Church, sitting in this auditorium, where they could really get a contact with God, where nobody's trying to fleece them, they're out there, sitting ducks, being the patsies of these con artists.

However, we must not only limit this to our financial integrity. We must recognize that when we are to provide things that are right and good in the sight of all men, it does include other things for which we must have a personal integrity, and I think that would include the kind of music you listen to, with the accompanying lyrics that you will hear. Your personal integrity should not permit you to listen to a lot of rock-n-roll type of music, and with the words that are accompanying that singing. It should include the literature you read – the pornographic and degrading literature. It should include the language that you personally use – words that come out of your mouth that contaminate the minds of those who hear it. It should include the topics that you are willing to discuss, and things you are willing to talk about. Oh, it certainly should include the movies you will attend. Your integrity, and providing what is honest and right before all men, should include the movies you attend. It certainly would include the sexual conduct that you are engaged in. And it certainly would include all those numerous offensive personal habits that are degrading to a human being, and are destructive to your physical well-being. The world sees, and the world knows, exactly the quality of your Christian character.

What this verse is calling for is for a Christian to be outwardly attractive to everyone, and inwardly holy to God. Just don't disgrace your Heavenly Father. The Christian's integrity must be evident, as a matter of fact, even to the unbeliever who lacks any appreciation for biblical morality and values, and who actually does not like Christians or the Lord Jesus.

So, do what is right in the side of all reasonable people so that, in fact, when they do choose to pick on you, they will be ashamed of their conduct. 1 Peter 3:16-17 teaches that, when Peter says, "Having a good conscience, that whereas they speak evil of you as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good manner of life in Christ. It is better, if the will of God be so, that you suffer for well-doing than for evildoing. The life of a Christian should be a fragrance which exalts Jesus Christ, not a stench which will hinder the sinner from salvation.

The Christian, whose mind is filled with divine viewpoint from a full knowledge of doctrine stored in his human spirit, is going to be less inclined to act without integrity before other people. This is a great principle. Do not pay back people who treat you with evil with your own response of evil. On the contrary, prepare and plan ahead to provide a conduct that will be attractive, and which will maintain and project your integrity before all people.

**Peaceful Living**

Verse 18 talks about peaceful living. The apostle says, "If it be possible, as much as lie in you, live peaceably with all men. There is implied here a limitation of choice: "If" is the Greek particle "ei." This is introducing a condition. Unfortunately, in the Greek language here, we don't have any verb. In the Greek, there are two words: "if possible." Because we don't have a verb, we don't know whether this is a first- or a second-class condition. If it was first-class it would mean: "If it be possible, and it is possible." If it's second class, it is: "If it be possible, but it isn't." So, we don't know which one it is. In any case, there is a condition here that says, "There is a possibility, and that is a possibility: "as much as lies in you." And here, the language indicates that the extent is from what is within you as a believer – indicating a source of control within yourself. In other words, "If it's possible, as much as lies in you, to the extent that you have control of the situation (to the extent that you have a handle on the situation), then you are to act in a certain way."

What this is recognizing is that a peaceful Christian cannot always avoid doing battle, because sometimes we peaceful Christians come under attack. So, we would translate this somewhat in this way: "If possible, so far as it depends on you, then you are to do something." And what is that? Live peaceably. The Greek word looks like this: "eireneuo." "Eireneuo" means "to live without conflict with others." You and I, as Christians, cannot control what the attitude of others may be toward us, but we can control our own attitude and our own conduct. This is present tense. We are constantly to seek to live at peace with others. It is active. This is to be our way of life. It is a participle again – a spiritual principle being stated, but stated in such a way that it again is a divine command by implication.

**With All Men**

We are to do this peaceful living: "with all (every single one) men." And here again is the word "anthropos," which means mankind. So, here's something that is broadened from, again, the Christian community – to be at peace with not only believers, but with unbelievers as well. Discord in human relationships, Paul is saying, should not be traceable to some provocation from the child of God. Those who are controlled by the God of peace through the Holy Spirit will themselves, in the nature of the case, be ambassadors of peace.

For example, 1 Corinthians 14:33 says, "For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints." If God is running the show in your life, you are going to be a person who pursues peace. You're not going to be a troublemaker. You're not going to be a disruptor. You're not going to be somebody who always has some kind of cause that you think the world revolves around.

Ephesians 6:15 says, "And your feet (as a part of your Christian soldier's armor) are to be shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace." There it is referring to the fact that your own mind is at ease so that you can devote yourself to spiritual combat, because you know that your destiny is eternity in heaven with Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 puts it this way: "And the very God of peace sanctify you holy. And I pray God your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Here are the three parts of man. The spirit, soul, and body are mentioned in the context of the lifestyle of the Christian. He is to use those elements of his being the context of peace. The gospel, which we Christians proclaim, is one of peace, though it creates conflicts in those who are negative to it. So, we have a little modification of our desire to be peaceful Christians. When we start telling the gospel, we bring disruption of peace into the lives of people.

Luke 12:51-53 teach us that. Here are the words of the Lord Himself: "Do you suppose that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you nay. But rather division. For from henceforth, there shall be five in one house divided: three against two; and, two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; and, the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and the daughter-in-law against her mother in law." Why is there this conflict? Because they have a difference of viewpoint concerning doctrinal truth. Jesus says, "When you teach God's viewpoint, you are going to bring disruption to peace between certain elements of individuals. Christians themselves are to cultivate a peaceable disposition with a peaceable disposition. So, they proceed to give the benefit of the doubt to a person. They put the best light on everything.

The person who will not put the best light, and who will not give the benefit of the doubt, is the Christian who is always up in arms about how somebody has abused him. Peace between people, in other words, is the result of a forgiving disposition. If you do not have a forgiving and understanding disposition, you are going to be a person who is always in turmoil. The most peaceful, godly Christian, however, may be set upon by carnal, snarling, biting Christians, and unbelievers as well. Such attacks are part of the angelic warfare that we are in, and they must be met by leaving the battle with the Lord. Even when we are unjustly attacked as Christians, we act at least with peace to the extent that we try to leave the battle with the Lord.

Those of you who are mature Christians understand the fact that unjust antagonisms directed toward you are really being directed toward the Lord Jesus Christ. They are not attacks upon you. The individual may think that you are the focus of his attack, but he is mistaken as well. The Lord pointed this out in John 15:18-20. You and I need to remember this: "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore, the world hates you. Remember the Word that I said unto you. The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also."

So, the mature Christian knows that the attack is against the Lord. The Christian, however, who does disrupt the peace of God's people with false opinions, and with improper causes – I can guarantee you that that Christian is going to come under severe discipline like you wouldn't believe. The Christian who disrupt the peace among the people of God, because he's got a false cause or a misguided opinion, even if he thinks it's based upon the Word of God, is not going to be excused, because he is violating Ephesians 4:3, which says, "Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit and the bond of peace." You and I cannot break up the unity of God the Holy Spirit that has joined us together as one body in Christ. But we do have the possibility of disrupting the atmosphere of that unity. We cannot break the unity, but we can break the peace that's supposed to surround that unity. And if you choose to do that, you better be really very sure that you know what God is talking about to you, and that you understand what you are being called to do to make a disruption among the people of God, because you have been jerked out by your hair roots so fast, you won't know what happened to you. And you'll have all eternity to regret it.

However, having said all that, we must also caution ourselves that we have a biblical perspective on the fact that peace with others is never to be maintained at the expense of doctrinal truth. Hebrews 12:14 advocates Christians living in peace with all mankind: "Follow peace with all men. But notice the qualification. Yes, pursue a peaceful lifestyle with everyone: "But within the qualification of holiness, with which no man shall see the Lord." Peace with sanctification is the way it goes. Sanctification means being set apart to God's thinking in a situation.

Please turn to Matthew 10:34-36. The divine viewpoint truth that the Lord Jesus taught was not compromised so that he could maintain peace. He knew that if He was going to tell God's divine viewpoint truth, it would disrupt His peace with individuals. Matthew 10:34: here again, "Think not that I have come to send peace on earth. I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father; and daughter against her mother; and, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. A man's foes shall be they of his own household."

Do all of your relatives like you because of what you talk to them about, and express to them of your understanding of doctrinal principles? Have you ever had a relative that was not very kindly disposed toward you, and hates to see you coming, because he thinks that you're going to start talking religion, because you have learned what God really thinks, and that relative thinks you're some arrogant pup, especially if you're younger and they're older? "And who are you to be coming along and telling them what Almighty God thinks?" That's the time that you'll very quickly understand how it is to have to live with somebody without peace – even members of your own family.

However, by his born-again nature, the Christian is a pacifist. But as a soldier of Jesus Christ, he is prepared to answer God's call to spiritual warfare daily. And he does not avoid that spiritual combat by compromising the truth; by being careful not to tell people what God has to say that would upset those people if they heard it; and, by backing off and talking about the non-controversial. Any preacher who wants to build a huge congregation knows, and preachers teach each other this. They have learned from experience and observation. Any preacher who wants to build a large congregation must, first of all, decide to avoid all controversial subjects. Then anybody can come in; anybody can float around the place; and, anybody can live as he wants to be. You can always then take the position that you are not in favor of the things that God is for, and you're not against the things that God opposes. You can give the impression that you are just neutral.

The spiritual battles of a Christian, again, I remind you, are not against the human representatives. They are in fact against demonic forces. Ephesians 6:12 makes that clear when it says, "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities; against powers; against the rulers of the darkness of this world; and, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

The ministry of the apostle Paul, the good soldier of Jesus Christ, who proclaimed the gospel of peace throughout the New Testament world, that great soldier, that man proclaiming the gospel of peace, often had to do combat with the human viewpoint, carnal Christian; his fellow Jewish countrymen; and, with unbelievers in general. And as you go through the New Testament, and you look at this man of peace, proclaiming the gospel of peace, and you list all of these situations in which he was under attack, and in which he could not be a man of peace, but he had to turn and start fighting, it is fantastic. It is amazing. And you become indeed awed by the fact that we live in a world where we Christians are not going to be left alone, but we are called to be people of peace. And Paul is our great example of what to do when the world will not let you be a person of peace. If you come back for the next session, we'll show you those dramatic moments in the life of Paul, when he strapped on the sword, and he moved into spiritual combat, though his natural inclination was to be a pacifist in the Kingdom of God.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

[**Back to the Romans index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/romans.htm)

[**Back to the Bible Questions index**](http://www.christiandataresources.com/allarticles.htm)