

# Romans 12:17-21—How To Relate To Unbelievers And Deal With Conflict In A Godly Way

## Memory Verse

Romans 12:1-2 NKJV

I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. <sup>2</sup> And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

## Revision for Romans 12:9-16—let love be without hypocrisy

Love is so much more than being nice or doing what is considered nice. Love is not just “keeping the peace” by begrudgingly putting up with offences. Love is not a feeling, rather it’s a decision of the will. The Bible commands us to speak the truth in love (see Ephesians 4:15). Love considers both what is true *and* what is best for the other person, regardless of how it will make them feel, and then asks God to give wisdom as to how to best communicate that to the other person. Anything less than this is manipulation or brutality. We must both speak what is true, and also be honest about our motive for sharing something.

*“Whether or not we intend to, when we aren’t loving sincerely, we are actually lying and manipulating the other person so we can get what we want.”*

Paul says in Galatians 5:22 that the fruit (singular) of the Spirit is love. But what does love look like? “Joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup> gentleness, self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23 NKJV). The man through whom the Holy Spirit is producing the fruit of love will naturally be joyful, will naturally experience peace (the absence of anxiety and fear), will naturally be patient or longsuffering towards others, and will naturally be kind towards others etc. All these are attributes of genuine or real love.

Similarly Paul gives a command in Romans 12:9 to “**Let love be without hypocrisy**”, but again, what does this look like among believers in the church? How should those within the church relate to each other?

1. Hate what is evil and cling to what is good (v 9)
2. Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honour giving preference to one another (v 10)
3. Not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (v 11)
4. Rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation, continuing steadfastly in prayer (v 12)
5. Distributing to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality (v 13)
6. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse (v 14)
7. Enter into the feelings of others and help share their burdens (vs 15-16)

## Outline for Romans 12:17-21—How to relate to unbelievers and deal with conflict in a godly way:

1. Repay evil with good, because that is how God treats everybody (v 17a)
2. Demonstrate what is good and evil by the way we live (17b)
3. Live peaceably with all men as you are able (v 18)
4. Trust that God’s justice will prevail in the long run, and leave any wrath and retribution to God (v 19)
5. The upside-down way of thinking—demonstrate love for those who hate you by showing them kindness in practical ways (v 20)
6. How to avoid being overcome by evil (not becoming bitter because of unforgiveness) (v 21)

## Romans 12:17-21 NKJV

<sup>17</sup> Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*” says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> Therefore “*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*”

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

### 1. Repay evil with good, because that is how God treats everybody

## Romans 12:17a NKJV

### Repay no one evil for evil

Jesus taught on this subject quite extensively. Simply put, if someone hurts or offends us, instead of retaliating, we bless them instead—this is the Christian version of “counter culture”.

## Matthew 5:38–45 NLT

“You have heard the law that says the punishment must match the injury: ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ <sup>39</sup> But I say, do not resist an evil person! If someone slaps you on the right cheek, offer the other cheek also. <sup>40</sup> If you are sued in court and your shirt is taken from you, give your coat, too. <sup>41</sup> If a soldier demands that you carry his gear for a mile, carry it two miles. <sup>42</sup> Give to those who ask, and don’t turn away from those who want to borrow.

<sup>43</sup> “You have heard the law that says, ‘Love your neighbour’ and hate your enemy. <sup>44</sup> But I say, love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! <sup>45</sup> **In that way, you will be acting as true children of your Father in heaven.** For He gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust alike. <sup>46</sup> *If you love only those who love you, what reward is there for that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much.* <sup>47</sup> *If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that.* <sup>48</sup> But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect.

## 1 Peter 3:9 NLT

Don’t repay evil for evil. Don’t retaliate with insults when people insult you. Instead, pay them back with a blessing. That is what God has called you to do, and He will grant you his blessing.

Notice the reason that Jesus gives for us to bless those who hurt us—it’s the way the Father treats us (see v 45). Just imagine if the Father treated all of us sinful humanity as we actually deserved! There would not be one drop of rain and we would be living in utter darkness. But no, God continues to bless those who continue to curse Him. If we are going to accurately represent God in this world, then we need to treat others the way God does—He blesses and offers forgiveness to those who curse Him.

What about fairness you ask. Shouldn’t all sin be punished? Firstly, God has given us human government to keep evil in check, but both believers and unbelievers will face separate judgements where they will be held fully accountable for what they have done. In the meantime, God is showing mercy as He gives people as much time as is possible for them to repent.

## 2 Peter 3:9 NKJV

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise [to judge the world], as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Romans 2:4 AMP

Or are you [so blind as to] trifle with and presume upon and despise and underestimate the wealth of His kindness and forbearance and long-suffering patience? Are you unmindful or actually ignorant [of the fact] that God's kindness is intended to lead you to repent (to change your mind and inner man to accept God's will)?

## **2. Demonstrate what is good and evil by the way we live**

**Romans 12:17b NKJV**

**Have regard for good things in the sight of all men**

This is why it is so important for a Christian to practice what they preach. We can say what we want, but if we don't live it, "**in the *sight of all men***", then our words mean nothing, and we are hypocrites. Paul applied this to the way he handled money—he didn't want to give the world a reason to accuse him of impropriety and so he made himself fully accountable for the money that he was collecting for the saints in Jerusalem.

2 Corinthians 8:21 AMP

For we take thought beforehand and aim to be honest and absolutely above suspicion, not only in the sight of the Lord but also in the sight of men.

People should be able to look at our lives, and by both what we say and what we do, see what God is like, understanding both what He loves and what He hates. Looking around, it seems that the church at large is giving mixed messages to the world, and therefore the world is confused and bewildered as they look at all the different opinions coming from different pulpits. Here are some examples of these mixed messages:

- Does God hate Israel?
- Does God approve of homosexuality?
- What about the different biblical roles for men and women both at home and in the church?
- What about marriage, is it one man and one woman for life?
- What about godly contentment, do we need to be rich and healthy to be happy?
- Did God use evolution to create the world over millions of years?
- Is being a Christian just having an emotional experience at some happy clappy church meeting, or is it belonging to some church like you do a golf club, or is it something deeper and more profound?
- What was Jesus really like, and was He Palestinian or Jewish?

**v 17 All men:** It doesn't say, "*some men*". It's so easy to be a chameleon, to change priorities, values, and the way we talk, depending on who we are around just so we can fit in and be accepted. People will see right through our pretend lives and will quickly see that we are hollow and empty inside. To influence this world, to be salt and light, we must be consistent in our witness, and **have regard for good things in the sight of all men**. We must be men and women of substance, of character.

## **3. Live peaceably with all men as you are able**

**Romans 12:18 NKJV**

**If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men**

Christians should be known for being easy to get along with, but at the same time having strong and unchanging convictions concerning the truth found in the Word of God. We need to be both gentle and strong—gentle, loving, patient, generous, selfless, and kind in how we relate to people, but also strong in our stand for truth—we need to be "speaking the truth in love" (see Ephesians 4:15).

**v 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you:** So why is it that there will be contentions? The main application here is Christians relating to unbelievers, but it can also apply when relating to immature believers who are acting and thinking like the world (believers who have conflicts with each other should follow Matthew 18:15-17).

John 15:18-21 NKJV

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. <sup>19</sup> If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. <sup>20</sup> Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also. <sup>21</sup> But all these things they will do to you for My name’s sake, because they do not know Him who sent Me.

John 17:14 NKJV

I [Jesus] have given them [the disciples] Your word; and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.

Matthew 5:9-12 NKJV

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

<sup>10</sup> Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

<sup>11</sup> “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

It sounds like a contradiction that a peacemaker will be reviled and persecuted. However, the peacemaker is someone who seeks *to make peace between man and God*, and there will always be those who choose to reject God’s loving and generous offer of forgiveness and adoption. This rejection of God’s love often comes across as a prideful and angry rejection of the Christian who is sharing the good news of God’s great love for all mankind. If this is why the world is rejecting us, then we can rejoice because we are doing our job as “ambassadors for Christ” (see 2 Corinthians 5:18-21). However, if the world hates us believers because we are lazy, mean, gossipers, liars, cheats, selfish, etc, then that is cause for concern because we are blaspheming the precious and holy name of God by the way we live.

#### **4. Trust that God’s justice will prevail in the long run and leave any wrath and retribution to God**

Romans 12:19 NKJV

**Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.**

**v 19 Do not avenge yourselves:** This is a quote from the first part of Leviticus 19:18, “You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the Lord” (NKJV). Simply put, as the rest of Romans chapter 12 verse 19 goes on to say, vengeance belongs to the Lord, and not to us. We put ourselves in the place of God when we seek to get our own back on someone. It’s much better to leave the offenders punishment in the hands of God than have to worry about it ourselves. This is true for many reasons, some of them are:

- we cannot determine motive (only God knows everybody’s thoughts)
- we cannot have perfect knowledge and understanding of all the facts (only God has perfect understanding)

- we are not usually in a position to be able to exact proper judgement, and therefore will just feel frustrated that the other person is getting away with their sin because we can't do anything about it
- we are often guilty of the same sins, and so need to remove the plank out of our own eye before we can see clearly to remove the splinter from the other person's eye (see Luke 6:41-42)
- dwelling on wrath (choosing to not forgive) will consume and destroy us, making us bitter (see Hebrews 12:15)
- because of the sinful human nature we are born with, *"the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God"* (James 1:20 NKJV)

James 1:19-20 NKJV

So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; <sup>20</sup> for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

**v 19 But rather give place to wrath:** We choose not to give place to our own wrath, but instead give place or opportunity to God's wrath. This takes an enormous load of responsibility off our shoulders and leaves it with God.

**v 19 For it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord:** The fact that "vengeance belongs to the Lord" is a common theme in the Bible.

Deuteronomy 32:35 NKJV

I will take revenge; I will pay them back. In due time their feet will slip. Their day of disaster will arrive, and their destiny will overtake them.

Psalms 94:1-3, 22-23 NKJV

O Lord God, to whom vengeance belongs—O God, to whom vengeance belongs, shine forth! <sup>2</sup> Rise up, O Judge of the earth; render punishment to the proud. <sup>3</sup> Lord, how long will the wicked, how long will the wicked triumph?

<sup>22</sup> *But the Lord has been my defense, and my God the rock of my refuge.* <sup>23</sup> He has brought on them their own iniquity, and shall cut them off in their own wickedness; the Lord our God shall cut them off.

1 Thessalonians 4:6 AMP

That no man transgress and overreach his brother and defraud him in this matter or defraud his brother in business. For the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we have already warned you solemnly and told you plainly.

Hebrews 10:30-31 AMP

For we know Him Who said, Vengeance is Mine [retribution and the meting out of full justice rest with Me]; I will repay [I will exact the compensation], says the Lord. And again, The Lord will judge and determine and solve and settle the cause and the cases of His people. [Deuteronomy 32:35, 36.] <sup>31</sup> It is a fearful (formidable and terrible) thing to incur the divine penalties and be cast into the hands of the living God!

In summary: *It all comes down to a matter of trust—will I trust that God, the judge of the earth, is both willing and able to settle accounts with all men? When someone hurts me, will I trust that God is willing and able to protect me and defend me?*

## 5. The upside-down way of thinking—demonstrate love for those who hate you by showing them kindness in practical ways

Romans 12:20 NKJV

Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.”

v 20 Therefore “*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink*”: The opposite of seeking vengeance and wanting to get back at someone is to find a way to bless them in a practical way instead. The blessing God asks us to give to those who hurt us is not just words, but actions—*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink*. Many times we will not have the opportunity to say anything nice to someone who hates us—it would be casting pearl before swine—our nice words will be thrown back into our face, and the offending person will not believe that our kind words are sincere anyway. However, there is nothing stopping us from finding a way to practically bless that person. This will prove to them that we are not angry with them and we do actually love them—they will have nothing to say against us.

v 20 “*For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*”: There are two ways of understanding this phrase. “It most likely refers to a “burning conviction” that our kindness places on our enemy. Or, some think it refers to the practice of lending coals from a fire to help a neighbour start their own—an appreciated act of kindness.” (David Guzik)

“In Paul’s day, when a fire went out in a home, it was difficult to reignite it. Therefore, if someone’s fire went out, the women would carry live coals in clay jars upon their heads to share with the person who had no fire. *Thus, the implication here was not of burning one’s enemy, but of warming him in order to ultimately win him to the kingdom.*” (Jon Courson)

What Jon Courson says is so important “*Thus, the implication here was not of burning one’s enemy, but of warming him in order to ultimately win him to the kingdom*”. Our practical goal in life is to win people for Christ, to share God’s message of grace, righteousness and forgiveness, so that they will be reconciled to God. Do you remember how Jesus summarised the law? Love God and love your neighbour as yourself.

Matthew 27:35-40 NKJV

Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, <sup>36</sup> “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?”

<sup>37</sup> Jesus said to him, “ **You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.** <sup>38</sup> This is the first and great commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: **You shall love your neighbour as yourself.** <sup>40</sup> On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Remember that Jesus defines our ‘neighbour’ as anyone, including our enemies. Jesus also defines loving our neighbours as *showing them mercy, treating them with kindness even when they don’t deserve it*.

Luke 10:29-37 NKJV

But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, “And who is my neighbour?”

<sup>30</sup> Then Jesus answered and said: “A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. <sup>31</sup> Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. <sup>32</sup> Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. <sup>33</sup> But a certain Samaritan, as

he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. <sup>34</sup> So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. <sup>35</sup> On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' <sup>36</sup> So which of these three do you think was neighbour to him who fell among the thieves?"

<sup>37</sup> And he said, "**He who showed mercy on him.**"

Then Jesus said to him, "**Go and do likewise.**"

How are people ever going to receive the love of God and so come into the kingdom of God if there is no practical demonstration of God's love towards them from God's own people?

1 Corinthians 3:9a AMP

For we are fellow workmen (joint promoters, labourers together) with and for God.

We need to be, in a very real way, God's hands and feet. God loves this world in practical ways through creation, giving rain and sunshine to all men, even though none deserve it. However, God wants to demonstrate His love in a much more personal way, and that is through His people, His body the church. This is why practical ministry is so important. It is not more important than teaching the word, and it does not replace the in depth teaching of the word of God—but it does give credibility to what we say concerning God being a God of love, that He really does care about and deeply love all men.

## **6. How to avoid being overcome by evil (not becoming bitter because of unforgiveness)**

Romans 12:21 NKJV

**Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

*How is a believer overcome by evil and why is it so destructive?*

v 21 **Do not be overcome by evil:** *The warning here is that we can be overcome by evil.* How? *By refusing to forgive, that is, we refuse to give up our right to get revenge on that person for what they did to us.* We all know that unforgiveness is a prison without walls; it will rob us of our joy, our fellowship with God and God's people, and eventually our physical, emotional, and spiritual health.

Sin's desire has and always will be to control us, to make us its slave. A very clear example of someone in the Bible who allowed themselves to be overcome by evil is Cain, who became bitter towards his brother Abel.

Genesis 4:2b-8 NLT

When they grew up, Abel became a shepherd, while Cain cultivated the ground. <sup>3</sup> When it was time for the harvest, Cain presented some of his crops as a gift to the Lord. <sup>4</sup> Abel also brought a gift—the best portions of the firstborn lambs from his flock. The Lord accepted Abel and his gift, <sup>5</sup> but He did not accept Cain and his gift. This made Cain very angry, and he looked dejected.

<sup>6</sup> **"Why are you so angry?"** the Lord asked Cain. **"Why do you look so dejected?"** <sup>7</sup> **You will be accepted if you do what is right. But if you refuse to do what is right, then watch out! Sin is crouching at the door, eager to control you. But you must subdue it and be its master."**

<sup>8</sup> One day Cain suggested to his brother, "Let's go out into the fields." And while they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother, Abel, and killed him.

Angry, dejected, and bitter, and in Cain's example, all because of jealousy. The same applies to unforgiveness. Look what happened to Cain. He was personally warned by God Himself that if he didn't choose what was right—to *humble himself and have a soft heart before God*—then he would end up being dominated by the sin that desired to control him. And look at what he ended up doing—He murdered his own brother in cold blood. Truly, we do some very evil and cruel things to others when we allow ourselves to be overcome by evil.

*The danger of failing to receive the grace (help, strength and power) that God freely gives*

Hebrews 12:14-15 NLT

**Work at living in peace with everyone**, and work at living a holy life, for those who are not holy will not see the Lord. <sup>15</sup> **Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God. Watch out that no poisonous root of bitterness grows up to trouble you, corrupting many.**

The passage in Hebrews warns us that living in peace with everyone will not be easy, nor will it come naturally; its going to take work—**work at living in peace with everyone.**

It also warns us against choosing to *not* receive God's grace, which in this context is God's power and love which we need in order to live a godly life, a life that pleases God. Consider that God's grace is always available—“*Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need*” (Hebrews 4:16 NKJV). However, God's grace is not always received (**Look after each other so that none of you fails to receive the grace of God**). What a sad state of affairs. It's like a person is sick and in severe pain, and the doctor freely offers them the medicine that will certainly cure them, but the sick person refuses the medicine and continues to suffer—for *no good reason at all*.

Finally, Hebrews 12:14-15 warns us of the consequence of failing to receive God's grace so as to be able to **work at living in peace with everyone**. If we don't **watch out**, if we give up and grow tired, and give in to the sin of unforgiveness (like Cain did with the sin of jealousy), then in us will be a **poisonous root of bitterness** that **grows up to trouble you, corrupting many**.

Paul in Corinthians warns us that we can become Christians, but then not experience the benefits of having God Himself living in us.

2 Corinthians 6:1 NKJV

We then, as workers together with Him also plead with you **not to receive the grace of God in vain** [for nothing].

2 Corinthians 6:1 AMP

Labouring together [as God's fellow workers] with Him then, **we beg of you not to receive the grace of God in vain** [that merciful kindness by which God exerts His holy influence on souls and turns them to Christ, keeping and strengthening them—**do not receive it to no purpose**].

Becoming a Christian but choosing to not live like a Christian is like accepting an expensive gym membership but never going to the gym—it's a wasted gift—we receive no practical benefit and we will stay weak and unhealthy. As believers, we don't want our lives to be wasted. Yes, all believers will go to heaven (we are all members of God's family), but not all believers will receive a full reward: “*Look to yourselves, that we do not lose those things we worked for, but that we may receive a full reward*” (2 John 8 NKJV).



Peter makes it clear that it's when we are first saved that God gives us all we need to live a godly life—a life that pleases and glorifies God—but we must choose to respond to those promises: *“By his divine power, God has given us everything we need for living a godly life. We have received all of this by coming to know him ...He has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires. <sup>5</sup> In view of all this, make every effort to respond to God's promises”* (1 Peter 1:3-5).

*The root cause of unforgiveness—the dangerous and toxic underlying works based attitude that prevents us from receiving and also sharing God's grace*

Paul in Galatians warns us of the sinful attitude that causes us to reject God's grace (God's unmerited and undeserved help, strength, and power, in our lives).

Galatians 5:4 NLT

**For if you are trying to make yourselves right with God by keeping the law, you have been cut off from Christ! You have fallen away from God's grace.**

Earlier on in the book of Romans, Paul spent a lot of time describing the difference between a works or law based mentality (way of thinking), and a grace based mentality (way of thinking). Here's how they are different and how we can identify how we are thinking. Simply put, grace and works are mutually exclusive, they are polar opposites, and can't exist at the same time in the same person.

- **A works based mentality looks like this:** I'm good enough on my own, I don't need any help, my good deeds will earn me God's favour, and therefore I don't need to ask for or receive God's grace (His unmerited and undeserved favour, help, power, strength or forgiveness). A works based mentality or attitude make a believer live independently of God, relying only on themselves—their heart is hard and unthankful towards God.

**They also treat others with the same very toxic *earn and deserve thinking***—“if they treat me well then I'll treat them well”, they think. It's QUID PRO QUO; I'll only give you something if you give me something in return. The opposite is also true, *“If you treat me poorly, then I will treat you poorly—that's what you've earned, so that's what you deserve”*. The man with a works based mentality is not poor in spirit (humble), he are not aware of just how sinful he is, and so doesn't see his need for God's forgiveness. He therefore has no desire to forgive others—so instead of showing grace and forgiveness, he will only be thinking about what the other person deserves—again, the *earn and deserve*, or *works*, way of thinking.

- **A grace based mentality looks like this:** I'm a sinner who deserves eternity in the Lake of Fire, but, because of God's grace, His underserved kindness shown to me, He saved me, forgiving me of all my sins (see Titus 2:11-3:8). I know that without Christ I can do nothing, and I know that I deserve nothing. I am so thankful for all that God has done for me and so will continue to ask for His grace (God's love, help, power, and forgiveness) so I can live a life that pleases Him, and not live for myself.

When people hurt me, instead of becoming bitter, I remember the multitude of times that I have hurt God, how God has forgiven me, and so I choose to forgive others. I extend to others a little of the vast grace that I have received from God. My thinking goes like this: Since God forgave me when I hurt Him all those many times, it's only fair that I forgive others when they hurt me—I choose to show grace, I choose to forgive, I choose to **not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21)**.

## Summary of Romans 12:17-21 by Warren W. Wiersbe

“The believer who seeks to obey God is going to have his enemies. When our Lord was ministering on earth, He had enemies. No matter where Paul and the other apostles traveled, there were enemies who opposed their work. Jesus warned His disciples that their worst enemies might be those of their own household (Matthew 10:36). Unfortunately, some believers have enemies because they lack love and patience, and not because they are faithful in their witness. There is a difference between sharing in “the offense of the cross” (Galatians 5:11; 6:12–15) and being an offensive Christian!

The Christian must not play God and try to avenge himself. Returning evil for evil, or good for good, is the way most people live [law or works based thinking]. But the Christian must live on a higher level and return good for evil. Of course, this requires *love*, because our first inclination is to fight back. It also requires *faith*, believing that God can work and accomplish His will in our lives and in the lives of those who hurt us. We must give place to “the wrath”—the wrath of God (Deuteronomy 32:35).

A friend of mine once heard a preacher criticise him over the radio and tell things that were not only unkind, but also untrue. My friend became very angry and was planning to fight back, when a godly preacher said, “Don’t do it. If you defend yourself, then the Lord can’t defend you. Leave it in His hands.” My friend followed that wise counsel, and the Lord vindicated him.

The admonition in Romans 12:20 reminds us of Christ’s words in Matthew 5:44–48. These words are easy to read but difficult to practice. Surely we need to pray and ask God for love as we try to show kindness to our enemies. Will they take advantage of us? Will they hate us more? Only the Lord knows. Our task is not to protect ourselves but to obey the Lord and leave the results with Him. Paul referred to Proverbs 25:21–22 as he urged us to return good for evil in the name of the Lord. The “coals of fire” refer perhaps to the feeling of shame our enemies will experience when we return good for evil.

As children of God, we must live on the highest level—returning good for evil. Anyone can return good for good and evil for evil. The only way to overcome evil is with good. If we return evil for evil, we only add fuel to the fire. And even if our enemy is not converted, we have still experienced the love of God in our own hearts and have grown in grace.””