

LOVE OFFENDED **Romans 12:14-21**

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In Romans 12:9-13 we saw how genuine love reaches out to others. It is faithful, courteous, available, and generous towards others. Now we will discuss what should be done when love is offended. This supreme test comes when love is extended to another but is rebuffed. What are you to do when you extend genuine love to someone who believes that your motives are twisted and perverted, who doubts your sincerity, and who meets your goodness with malice and hate? Will you still exercise the love of Christ towards that person?

The biblical principle is that Christians are to love their enemies. This was first set down by the Lord Jesus Christ, and later put into practice by the apostles, especially the Apostle Paul.

“For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil” (Luke 6:32-35).

Anyone can love that which is lovely, but it is extremely difficult to love those who are unlovely.

Again it should be emphasized that these exhortations cannot be carried out in one's own strength. They find fulfillment only as one allows the life of Christ to flow through him to others. This is a supernatural way of life.

LOVE OFFENDED BY A CHRISTIAN — Romans 12:14-16

While these verses apply directly to the relationship of one Christian to another, they may also be applied to all men in general.

“Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.” This verse says that Christians are to speak well of (bless) those who persecute them; they are not to curse those who do them wrong. This begins with an attitude. How do you feel inside when

somebody does evil to you after you have done them a favor? Do you say to yourself, "Well, that's the last time I'll ever help him. I'll get even with that guy!"? Is there a tendency to run down, degrade, or curse the person who offended you? Do you not speak well to his face and evil behind his back? If you cannot say something good, say nothing at all!

Sometimes we are guilty of double talk. Have you ever been talking with someone about another person when the conversation became very derogatory, and then had the person being discussed walk up? You turn and say to him, "Oh, I'm so glad to see you. We've just been talking about you and what a wonderful guy you are." That is not love.

"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep." When our love is offended, do we withdraw and shut ourselves out from the one who refuses our love, or do we learn to weep and rejoice with him instead? Love does not withdraw, but attempts to enter into the world of the offender. If we say, "I'm not going to waste my time on that rebellious bird," we have lost the true meaning of love. When the person who has offended you has something in his life to rejoice about, rejoice with him. If he is in sorrow, weep with him. Send a note or speak a word of rejoicing or of consolation. If there is a tragedy, do not say, "It served him right; he had this coming!"

Notice that rejoicing with those who have joy is put first. It is a real mark of Christian maturity when one can rejoice with those God has blessed, for pride and jealousy are natural responses. When God has given someone wealth or talent or some other blessing, it is difficult to rejoice with him because of petty jealousy.

"Be of the same mind one toward another." Christians are to live in harmony with one another and esteem others better than themselves. The attitude of every Christian should be, "How can I be a blessing to other believers? What can I do to advance the interest of other Christians?" He should have an attitude of Christ first, others second, and self last.

"Mind not high things, but condescend to [associate with] men of low estate." The Christian is not only to associate with the well-to-do in the church, but with all brothers and sisters in Christ, no matter what their social standing.

"Be not wise in your own conceits." Conceit or snobbery of any kind is an abomination to the Lord: "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him" (Prov. 26:12).

In context, this has to do with showing love to a person who is unlovely. After patting yourself on the back, you say, "Am I not wonderful? I have really shown this person what a Christian is!" This is conceit and of the flesh.

LOVE OFFENDED BY THE NON-CHRISTIAN — Romans 12:17-21

Paul seems to widen his thinking to include the unsaved world, for we are also to love all people. However, these same principles can be applied to the love of one Christian to another.

“Recompense to no man evil for evil.” Paul seems to assume that somebody will at some time do the Christian evil. When this happens, the Christian is not to have a spirit of retaliation. He should never say, “I’ll get even!” He must learn to forgive and forget, and must not hold grudges.

I know from experience that this principle works! When I was a pastor in California, two of the young elders literally gave me fits, and at times I became very disgusted with their petty actions. When I felt it was time to leave that flock and go back to school, I gave the church a six-month notice. I am sure the two elders were glad God was leading me away. During this six months period, I determined before God that I would not say any evil thing, and that I would do my job faithfully and attempt to love these two men. In a few short weeks, the atmosphere changed and I began to see God do a great work in my heart and in the hearts of these two men. Love was conquering ill feelings. Time passed quickly and I went back to school. What a joy it was a year later to have one of these elders fly from California to Texas to ask me to come back and take the pulpit again. Love had melted all our hearts. But I could not go back because I felt the Lord was leading me to Roanoke.

“Provide things honest in the sight of all men.” This could be translated, “Give advanced thought to things that are noble in the sight of all men.” A believer should plan his conduct before unbelievers in order that it might be honest, not just honest according to the standard of the world, but honest according to the biblical standard. Honesty is a quickly vanishing virtue in our day.

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.” It is the solemn duty of the Christian, if at all possible, to live in peace with all men: “As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10). Paul indicates that there may be times when it is not possible to live peaceably with all men. There are some people who simply do not want to get along with others in spite of every attempt to be at peace with them. The Christian is never to be the initiator of a war-like attitude, although he may have to participate in war. It is not always possible for a Christian to be at peace with all men, but he can be a lover of peace, a giver of peace, and often a maker of peace

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves.” When someone does evil to a Christian, he is not to fight back or to try to vindicate himself in any way.

The foremost trait of human nature is self-defense. If someone thrusts an object toward your face, your eyes close immediately by instinct. If an object falls toward you, your arm rises to ward off the blow. By nature, when we are offended, we automatically put up a defense mechanism and want to fight back. God asks us to do something contrary to our natures: not to fight back when offended. A person may ask, "Don't I have the right to stick up for my rights?" The answer is no. God says the Christian is not to avenge himself; he is to act supernaturally.

"But rather give place to wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." The reason the Christian is not to avenge himself is that God will take care of the offender. Vengeance is God's job, so that when the Christian avenges himself, he takes authority that does not belong to him. God has subtle ways of taking care of those who oppose his children, and he promises to take care of those who offend us. When we avenge ourselves, it only makes things worse.

How many of us have heard through the grapevine a rumor about ourselves that has no validity? What is our natural reaction? To fight back! To straighten out the story! And often to straighten out the person who started it, too! The best thing to do is nothing. God will take care of those with an evil tongue, and he will bless the one who lets him take the vengeance.

"Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." The Christian is to do good when his enemy offends him. Jesus taught this same principle: "But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44). The only vengeance Christians can inflict on others is the red-hot coals of love. Love is the only antidote for hate! When the Christian loves his enemies, they are either melted into repentance or hardened even more.

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." The Christian can be overcome by evil, giving way to his sin nature, or he can overcome evil with good by allowing the life of Christ to flow through him. If genuine love is not showing up in your life, it may be for one of the following reasons:

1. You are trying to cling to your own life rather than abandoning yourself to the life of Christ.
2. You are insisting on being unloving and refusing to give up that attitude.
3. You are not facing what you really are in the flesh, for you are covering up or justifying that which God calls sin.

So long as the Christian clings to his old Adamic life, he will never have the love of Christ flowing through him. Only the life of Christ in us can teach us to love!

CONCLUSION

Only those who have experienced the love of God in Christ Jesus can give out the love of Christ in their lives. Do you know that God loves you? Have you experienced the love of God in Christ? If your answer is no, then you are not a Christian. How can you become a Christian and experience God's love? The answer is that you must receive Jesus Christ as your personal Lord and Savior. Then, and only then, will you know the God of love.