

You can imagine how this pastor's perspective was instantly changed. Suddenly, instead of an angry, irresponsible blast from an evil mind, the email seemed like a loud cry for help from a broken heart. Now instead of going on the warpath this pastor made peace. Instead of reacting in anger he was able to show compassion. Always take time to understand someone's anger. It can make the difference between love and failure.

The reasons God asks us to leave revenge to him are:

1. God is already doing it. We have no idea how God is working on people. He is so far ahead of us that when we take revenge ourselves it is a puny effort compared to what he's already doing.
2. God can do it so much better. When we don't return insult with insult we are allowing God to be God – it is an act of faith on our part to leave it to God. When we take revenge everybody gets hurt. When God does it the motives and the results are just right.
3. God wants to help us act positively. When we take revenge we are acting negatively and going against all that he has been developing in us. While we think we're tearing the other person down we are silently destroying ourselves from the inside out.
4. God knows it's the only way for us to actually win the battle. When we leave revenge to God we have already won. The only way to really destroy an enemy is to make him your friend. The only way to make him your friend is to leave revenge to God.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

## Conclusion

A. As we end Romans 12 we see the last line as a summary of the book of Romans. As men and women turned against the God who was revealed to them evil increased in the world. Praise God that through Jesus Christ we need not be overcome by that evil. By the power of God we can actually, literally overcome evil with good.

Do you remember Romans 1:16? The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes. I invite you to declare your allegiance to Jesus Christ this morning. As we sing, let the Spirit move you to declare that Jesus is your Lord and Savior. Sing to him, shout to him, pray to him, lift your hands to him, do something to signify that you belong to Jesus and that Jesus is living in you.

God planted you where you are like a tiny mustard seed to be an agent of his love. Let the power of God's love rule your life and touch those around you!

“The Power of Love”  
Romans 12:14-21

1/31/10  
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## Introduction

A. DVD – Love – as small as a mustard seed.

B. Romans 12:14-21 begs us to measure the level of our impact through the way we love – not those who are easy to love or natural to love, but those for whom we have to go out of our way to love. Where has God planted you? Could it be that you are currently placed in a strategic location (a job, a school, a business connection e.g.) to be a light reflecting God's love?

C. Here's the thing about being a Christian – it is often easier to act like a Christian than to react like a Christian. I read this week, “Anyone can put on an act. But your reactions reveal what is really in your heart.” You see, if God has really renewed our minds (Romans 12:2), and if we really love him with all our heart (Matt. 22:37), we won't just act like it. We will react like it too. Think about that as I read our text, Romans 12:14-21.

## Blessing Our Enemies vs. 14

A. There are a number of ways to break out this text. I'm doing something what we did with vs. 3-8, suggesting that the opening line reads like a heading. When Paul wrote, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse,” he reminded us that the ultimate expression of love is not found in loving those who love us. Even that isn't always easy, but it's a whole lot easier than the opposite – loving those who don't love us.

B. There is actually a fascinating word play between vs. 13 and 14 because the word for “practice” in vs. 13 is the same word as “persecute” in vs. 14. We learned that the word practice is literally “pursue.” Now I find that also is the literal translation of “persecute.” In God's way of changing our thinking we begin to chase those who chase us. It's almost humorous – Our “enemy” chases us to “put us to death” while we're chasing him to invite him to dinner. It's a Divine case of “Guess who's coming to dinner?”

C. When Paul wrote this to the Romans who do you think was their enemy? Who was persecuting them? Most of them were ordinary people without much influence so why would they have had enemies? The same reason we may have enemies. As they told the truth about Jesus, as they began to live as followers of the cross instead of followers of the Emperor, they challenged the worldly system around them. They lived in contrast to the idolatry of their day.

D. Here's the thing: Whenever you challenge the idolatry of your present culture you make enemies. Whenever the gospel is actually lived out it gathers both friends and enemies. As in Ephesus when the artisans of the goddess Diana were threatened, when you challenge the idolatry of a community people become afraid and when they are afraid they get angry and when they get angry they lash out and when the lash out believers are treated like enemies.

How many lawyers would be out of business if revival broke out and people started treating each other with love rather than hate? A lot of people would be out of work. This is why the early Christians had enemies. Do we have enemies? If we don't could it be because our brand of Christianity doesn't threaten anyone?

E. Now to be sure, if we have enemies it needs to be for the right reasons. Christians should never have enemies because of not keeping their word, doing poor work, being lazy on the job, or being a pain in the neck. If we have enemies it should be because our brand of Christianity was so real and deep that it affected not just us but exposed the idolatry of the community.

And that is when the rest of this paragraph shows up:

### **The Power of Love**

A. To "bless those who persecute you" is actually a very deliberate and meaningful act. For one thing, to bless is to pray. That is the way it reads in Matthew 5:44, ". . . pray for those who persecute you." That's the first step in "reacting" to pressure – Pray.

But here's something more: To bless someone is to ask that their life be flooded with good rather than evil. To bless someone is to pray for their prosperity. Now it takes all the grace of God in a life to do that for a persecutor or an enemy. I certainly won't do that on my own, by my basic nature. So I have to go back to my original question: What if God planted you where you are for the express purpose of being an agent of his love? When we get to that place we at least "have a shot" at living out the rest of this paragraph.

B. I'm going to summarize the list of commands that Paul gives in vs. 15-21. I've put them in three categories:

#### When you see a person's plight – show empathy vs. 15

We are taught to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. It's usually easier to weep with someone than to rejoice with them. When someone succeeds our fleshly nature typically raises its head and cries, "Why not me?"

A number of the prophets, Habakkuk in particular, asked God, "Why do the unrighteous prosper?" That's a natural question when someone against us not only gets by with something but

actually succeeds. It seems so unfair, and it is, yet from God's point of view it can become one of our greatest opportunities to demonstrate the love of God. When we enter into someone's plight, their joy or sorrow, we are an extension of the hand of God.

#### When you see a person's position – show humility vs. 16

The four commands in vs. 16 fit every situation. They symbolize the life of Jesus so many ways. Do you remember that when Jesus came to Jerusalem he didn't stay at the Holiday Inn? Instead he would leave the city and walk several miles back to the home of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. When Paul was in the Philippi jail he didn't make a nuisance of himself. Instead, when the earthquake shook him loose he went to the jailors home and led him and his family to faith in Christ.

I read this week that to remain humble, no matter how successful you are, keep the following three things in mind: First, we probably couldn't accomplish anything without the gift of health. Second, we would probably not be sane if at least one person had not loved us when we were young. Third, the single biggest factor determining how many people will attend our funeral is whether or not it rains that day. These three facts alone should be enough to keep us humble. And besides that – God asks that of us.

Don't just try to relate up the ladder – love willingly looks down the ladder too. Real ministry is always downstairs. Jesus demonstrated that so powerfully by reaching out to the outcasts of his day: the poor, the sick, and the marginal people of society.

#### When you feel a person's pressure – show dignity vs. 17-21

Persecution comes in a lot of forms. Sometimes it is simply an inconvenient pressure, and at other times it is an all out "full court press" (to use a basketball metaphor). Do you know that if you can understand the "why" behind the behavior it often makes it much easier to handle the pressure someone puts on you? Teachers know this – that when a student misbehaves at school it can very likely be the expression of a painful situation at home.

A pastor received a scathing email some time ago that was laced with insults and attacks on both his message and his ministry. And part of the pain for him was that he felt he had just presented one of his best sermons. He admits that he was more than a little ticked off and the temptation to fire back a strong "sermonette" to this man was pretty strong.

But just while he was feeling the pain of being cursed and wanting to curse back, by the grace of God he received an email from the father of the person who sent the hateful email. He learned that the son (who sent the email missile) had recently been in a terrible car accident that killed four of his best friends. He himself had barely survived.

## Introduction

Where has God \_\_\_\_\_ me? What is my \_\_\_\_\_ location?

As a Christian it is often easier to \_\_\_\_\_ than to \_\_\_\_\_  
If God has really renewed your mind you won't just \_\_\_\_\_ like it

## Blessing Our Enemies vs. 14

“Bless those who persecute you,” reads like the \_\_\_\_\_ of the rest of the text.

“Practice” in vs. 13 and “Persecute” in vs. 15 are both from the same word: \_\_\_\_\_

We are to \_\_\_\_\_ those who \_\_\_\_\_ us  
(hospitality) (persecute)

Why the Christians in Rome had enemies: Their brand of Christianity challenged the \_\_\_\_\_ of the culture

When the gospel is actually lived out it gathers \_\_\_\_\_ and

\_\_\_\_\_ We have few enemies when we take few \_\_\_\_\_

## The Power of Love

To “bless” is to \_\_\_\_\_; to pray \_\_\_\_\_ upon their life  
How to “bless” enemies:

1. When you see a person's \_\_\_\_\_ show empathy vs. 15

2. When you see a person's \_\_\_\_\_ show humility vs. 16

3. When you feel a person's \_\_\_\_\_ show dignity vs. 17-21

Four reasons to leave revenge to God:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.

A summary of the book of Romans: “Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.” Romans 12:21