

Sermon on Romans 12:17-21  
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## HOW TO DEAL WITH DIFFICULT PEOPLE Romans 12:17-21

### INTRODUCTION:

A. Studied as a separate unit apart from the foundation Paul lays in the verses prior to these in chapter 12, this teaching can seem like an impossible task.

1. It goes against our human/sinful nature in several ways.

a. It is our nature to selfishly expect/demand everyone to treat us.

b. It is our nature to like/love only those who *do* treat us well.

c. It is the tendency of our nature to think we should respond to others with the same kind of treatment that they give us. If they are nice to us, we think we will be nice back. However, if they treat us badly, we feel completely justified to retaliate with the same kind of treatment or to, at the very least, simply write them off and refuse to have any relationship with them whatsoever.

1) Let me tell you, this thinking seems very reasonable to the unsaved world and, I fear, to far too many Christians.

d. Dear friend, if Jesus would have had that philosophy you and I would be on our way to hell today with no absolutely no hope.

B. What Paul teaches in this section is rooted in the very heart of the Gospel and the example of Jesus Christ, Himself. ---Rom. 5:8.  
Christ overcame evil with good!

C. The Spirit wants to produce this same attitude in us.

## 1. Paul would describe it like this in Philippians 2.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves.

Phil. 2:4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Phil. 2:5 ¶ Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus:

Phil. 2:6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,

Phil. 2:7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Phil. 2:8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!

D. In Romans 12 Paul explains to us the thinking process that has to drive us so that we can honor Jesus Christ in all our ways, and particularly in our relationships, even with difficult people.

### I. UNDERLYING PRINCIPLE OF ROMANS 12.

A. Christians are to cease thinking and acting like the world.

1. Rom. 12:2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world,

a. *suskeematizomai*---conformed= to be molded or fashioned after. To adopt or imitate something.

B. How?

1. Rom. 12:2 but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

2. *metamorphoomai*---transformed=to change external appearance. English word “metamorphosis.” which refers to a striking change in physical structure.  
Example- caterpillar to a butterfly.

3. How is such an external change accomplished? True outer change always begins from within.

a. Rom 12...2 the renewing of your mind.

b. *anakainosis*---renewing= *kainos* means to make something new in its nature. *anakainosis*, then, is the work of the Spirit in changing the whole way that the mind of the Christian thinks. The Christian is to have a totally new outlook on how life is to be lived.

C. For what purpose?

1. Rom 12:2 Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is — his good, pleasing and perfect will.

2. The renewal of my mind by the Holy Spirit through God's Word allows me to find the real purpose and meaning of my life. That is to know how to live in a way that pleases God and brings honor to His name and a witness to the Lost. When my outlook is changed, when I no longer think as the world thinks, when I begin to see things through the eyes of the Holy Spirit, then I am able to look into and apply God's Word to live situations. I am able to know God's will on how to live and act, so that I might please and honor Him. This new outlook shows me that it is only in pleasing and honoring God that I find real joy, whereas my former worldly outlook deceived me into believing that that the key to finding real joy is getting people to behave and treat me the way I want them to.

3. Gaining this new outlook is crucial to being able to make verses 17-21, dealing with difficult people a reality in my life.

a. My old worldly outlook ties my happiness directly to how people treat me. It made me a frustrated victim of my circumstances, living my life going from one self-pity party to another.

b. My new spiritual outlook enables me to see that it is not as important how people treat me. What really brings me joy is to know I have pleased God in the way I have responded, no matter how they treat me.

c. One of those most striking ways that people see God's power is when a persecuted person responds to their persecutor with love and compassion. This is an awesome way to let your light shine.

## II. KEY ELEMENTS OF THIS NEW OUTLOOK.

### A. Remembering the mercies of God.

1. Rom. 12:1 ¶ Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship.

2. I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy.... What mercy?

a. What Paul has already presented in the first 11 chapters.

1) Our terrible sinful condition. 1-3:20.

2) The great rescue operation mounted by God Himself. 3:21-5:21.

3) The benefits we have because of it---

6---A precious union with Jesus Christ.

6-7---Our slavery to sin broken.

8---His precious Holy Spirit living in us giving us unbelievable resources and power.

9---This is all done because of His love and mercy. We did not even choose Him, but He choose us before the foundation of the world was ever laid.

9-11---The precious promise that His gifts and calling toward us are without repentance. He will never change His mind and take it all away.

b. This follows right up on the parable in Matthew 18 preached by Pastor last week.

1) Why should the servant have forgiven the debt? Because he was himself the recipient of unbelievable, infinite forgiveness by the King.

2) Why can we return good toward people who mistreat us? Because Paul has already taught us in Romans 5:8 that

Rom. 5:8 But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

c. The outlook of the Spirit teaches us that God has overcome our evil with His goodness and love. We, then, please Him and honor Him by responding to difficult people with the same goodness and love. And pleasing Him is what truly brings us joy.

d. You will never be merciful to others if you forget how merciful God has been to you.

B. Gratefully giving yourself to God as a living sacrifice.

1. People in this culture understood what a “sacrifice” to a god was. In the case of the O.T., an animal was taken a killed and placed upon the altar of God as a sacrifice. In other words, the very life of the animal was completely given over to God. The animal no longer had any personal say or control over itself.

2. In the same way, the Christian is to view him or herself as belonging completely to God. His/her very existence and reason for living is to bring honor to God.

a. Paul put it this way: 1Cor. 10:31 ¶ So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

b. In other words, in any situation the only thing that matters is not my personal comfort and that things went they way I wanted. The only thing that matters is this: “Did I bring honor to Jesus in the way I acted? Did my light shine before men?” If I can answer “yes” to that question, I am completely satisfied with the circumstantial outcome. This is the new outlook that the Spirit gives me.

c, My natural response to God’s great mercies is that I turn control of my whole life over to Him for the building of His kingdom, no matter what it takes, no matter how much it hurts, no matter what it costs me. That, my friend, is being a living sacrifice.

d. In view of God’s great mercies toward us, giving our lives completely over to Him is a very reasonable service. God is not being unreasonable.

### III. RESULTS OF THIS NEW OUTLOOK.

A. I realize the “preciousness of others.” 12:3-8.

1. I do not act as though I don’t need anyone else. I realize how much I need others and how valuable and important they are. 12:3-4

2. I realize I am part of a wonderful ministering family. 12:5.

3. I want to use my spiritual gifts for the good of the Body. 12:6-8.

B. I love with sincerity. It isn't an act or a show. I don't serve others grudgingly with a chip on my shoulder or a martyr complex. 12:9-16.

1. I am truly "others-centered" in my thinking. v. 10.
2. I serve God and others passionately. v. 11.
3. I am characterized in my dealings with others by hope, patience, and prayer. v. 12.