



## Lesson 17 ~ Love Keeps Us Together!

Romans 12:9-21

### Discussion Starter

- As a child, were you the trouble-maker or the peace-maker in your family?

### Introduction

If you like lists of things to do – tangible, practical commands to follow, the last half of **Romans 12** is for you! **Romans 12:9-21** reads like an extensive list of reminders of things to do and not to do by the one who follows Jesus Christ. In these verses, Paul gives us a *recipe for love* as he challenges us to examine our actions and attitudes towards others. We learn that for one who follows Jesus, love is to govern *all* relationships – not only with friends, but also with enemies.

Paul begins by saying that our love for one another must be sincere. We can't just *say* we

love a person – we must *really* love them, with the same love that Christ shows us. Sincere love is more than just speaking kindly, being careful of hurt feelings and occasionally helping each other out. Sincere love goes way beyond being nice and kind, for it is a love that requires effort, concentration and self-sacrifice. It is a love that invests in the lives of others, helping them become their best. It is a love that demands our time, money and personal involvement. And, it is a love that has the power to shape and mold *us* until we become like the Great Lover himself, our Father in heaven.

### Preparation

1. Before you read **Romans 12:9-21**, ask God to open your eyes so that you may see wonderful truths in his Word (**Psalms 119:18**). You may want to make the following prayer your own:

#### *Triune God – Father, Son and Spirit,*

*I admit that I cannot understand the truth found in God's Word with only my mind.*

*I agree that spiritual truth has to be understood with my heart as well as my head.*

*So I ask You to give me spiritual understanding as I do this lesson.*

*I pray that You would enable me to see, hear and understand,  
with my spirit, all that You want to teach me.*

*I ask this in the powerful name of Father, Son and Spirit.*

*Amen*

2. Read **Romans 12:9-21** slowly and thoughtfully. As you read and reread, *underline or highlight* any verses, phrases or words that are meaningful to you. Put a *question mark* beside anything you don't understand. Put a ✓ beside anything you would like more information about.

**You may also want to read the Scripture in another translation.** The Scripture handouts for these lessons contain the *New International Version* (NIV) and the *New Living Translation* (NLT). The questions are phrased to be answered from **either** of these versions. Other translations and paraphrases should only be used as supplementary texts to help your understanding.

3. Sum up the Scripture passage for this lesson in a short sentence, phrase or title.

## Questions

Read Romans 12:9-21.

1. As a way to acquaint yourself with this text, how many separate commands do you count in 12:9-21?

List at least three of the commands you know your heart needs to hear right now.

List at least three of the commands you would like to understand better.

List at least three of the commands that seem to be less of a struggle for you right now than the others. (This isn't pride, just an honest evaluation of yourself!)

- ♥ What one or two words would you use to sum up the theme or main point of 12:9-21. Why do you think Paul spends so much time on this theme, saying it in so many different ways?
  - ♥ Why do we need to be told all these things about how Christ-followers should relate to others? What does this imply?
  - ♥ According to Matthew 25:31-46, why is the way we treat others so important? How does knowing this help change your attitude toward others – even the undeserving?
2. Love must be sincere and not pretentious (12:9). What is the difference between sincere love and insincere love (1 John 3:16-18)?
    - ♥ Is love a feeling? Why or why not? What is the solution if you really find it difficult to love another Christ-follower? What do you think Jesus would advise you to do in this case?
    - ♥ In Luke 22:47-48 we find the epitome of pretend or hypocritical (insincere) love. Why is pretend or fake love especially hurtful and harmful? What would be its effects on a Christian community (church, small group, etc.)? What are some examples of insincere or pretend love among Christians?
  3. How do the three commands in 12:9 relate to each other (1 Corinthians 13:6-7)?
    - ♥ The Greek word for *devoted* (12:10 NIV) is a word used for the natural affection of relatives, typically the love of a parent for a child. *Brotherly love* (12:10 NIV) comes from the Greek word *phildelphia*, which denotes the love of brothers and sisters for each other. What would be the advantages of regarding and treating the others in your Christian community as if they were blood relatives? What, if any, might be the disadvantages?
    - ♥ Read 12:10 in *The Message*. Consider your present relationships. What are some ways you can *practice playing second fiddle*? How would this benefit both you and the other person?

4. What do the commands of **12:11** have to do with loving others?

- ♥ Share with your small group some practical ways of keeping your spiritual fervor or enthusiasm in serving the Lord. Why is this sometimes hard to do? What is the best solution?
  - ♥ When serving God and others, when have you become apathetic, discouraged, depressed or negative? What was the cause of these negative reactions? How can we guard against them?
5. In hard times, why are **all** of the instructions in **12:12** (NIV) important and needed? (*Hope* is the *confident expectation* of all that God has in store for you, but has not yet been received.)

- ♥ What is often our normal tendency when it comes to **hope**, **affliction** and **prayer**? What helps you be **joyful**, **patient** and **faithful**?
  - ♥ Why is it important to be patient (not quitting or giving up) in hard times (**James 1:2-4**; **Romans 5:3-4**; **Hebrews 10:36**)? Are these good enough reasons for you? Why or why not?
6. How did the first Christians live out the instructions found in **12:13** and why do you think they lived this way (**Acts 2:43-47**; **4:32-37**)?

- ♥ How are **sharing** and **hospitality** different from the other commands found in **12:9-13**? Why are they often difficult to practice? How can they be practiced today in the body of Christ?
  - ♥ It is said that **entertaining** focuses on the host(ess) while **hospitality** focuses on the guests. With this in mind, what would you say are some differences between social entertaining and biblical hospitality? How did Jesus distinguish between these two (**Luke 14:12-14**)?
  - ♥ How are **creation** and the **Garden of Eden** supreme examples of **sharing** and **hospitality**? How do these examples motivate you?
7. Consider the actions in **12:15-16**. Obviously these actions benefit the recipient, but how do they also benefit the giver?

8. Based on what you have learned in **12:9-13**, **15-16** write a one sentence definition of love.

- ♥ When has receiving one of the expressions of love described in **12:9-13**, **15-16** made a major impact on you? How does this help you extend love to others?
- ♥ Which of these expressions of love (**12:9-13**, **15-16**) do you regularly see in your Christian community? Which ones are rare? Which ones are most needed now? What can you do?
- ♥ How often do you see these expressions of love practiced in the world among people who are not Christ followers? From your experience, do you generally see Christians doing better at relationships or non-Christians? Which group *should* be better at relationships? Why is this important?

9. In the chart below, record how we are to respond to those who mistreat us.

12:14	
12:17	
12:18	
12:19	
12:20	
12:21	

10. According to Jesus in **Luke 6:27-32**, what are some ways we can “bless and not curse” those who mistreat us?

- ♥ How are some ways you might be tempted to “curse” someone who mistreats you (**12:14**)? Is blessing and not cursing for our benefit or for the one who is mistreating us? How so?
  - ♥ What are some reasons why we are to bless and not curse (**Luke 6:35-36**)? Are these good enough reasons for you? Why or why not? Can you think of other benefits?
11. What is the value of doing what is right and honorable, living at peace with everyone (**1 Peter 2:11-12; Matthew 5:16**)?

- ♥ What could make it *not* possible to live at peace with everyone (**12:18**)? Ultimately, what is more important than peace?
  - ♥ Why can God take vengeance and not us (**12:19**)? Will God avenge? When?
12. What would you have to know about your enemy in order to fulfill the command in **12:20** and what does this imply? Does your kindness excuse his misdeeds? Why or why not?

- ♥ What can you do this week, in a practical way, to honor someone who irritates you? What effect do you think this will have on the person - and on you?
- ♥ When was the last time you tried to make friends of an enemy? What did you do and what happened?
- ♥ How will kindness given to your enemy “heap burning coals on his head” (**12:21**)? Are these coals intended to hurt or heal our enemy? How so?

## *Response*

What relationship in your life most needs what you have learned in this lesson? In what ways have you been overcome by evil in this relationship, letting it get the best of you (**12:20**)? Ask God what you can do to overcome evil with good. How can **Romans 12:12** encourage you? In what will you put your hope?