

August 19  
Lesson 12 (NIV)

# LOVING AND JUST BEHAVIOR

DEVOTIONAL READING: [Matthew 5:38-48](#)  
BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: [Romans 12:9-21](#)

## ROMANS 12:9-21

<sup>9</sup> Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. <sup>10</sup> Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. <sup>11</sup> Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

<sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

<sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. <sup>19</sup> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. <sup>20</sup> On the contrary:

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;  
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.

In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

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



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## KEY VERSE

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.—Romans 12:9*

## LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Give three examples (drawn from the teaching in today's text) of overcoming evil with good.
2. Explain why God reserves vengeance for himself.
3. Correct a behavior in light of the loving and just standards stressed by Paul.

## LESSON OUTLINE

### Introduction

- A. The Wrong Seems Strong
- B. Lesson Background

### I. Relating with Fellow Believers ([ROMANS 12:9-13](#))

- A. Loving Behavior ([vv. 9, 10](#))  
*Does Your Faith Show?*

B. Just Behavior (vv. 11-13)

## II. Independent Exhortations (ROMANS 12:14-16)

A. Empathetic Behavior (vv. 14, 15)

B. Humble Behavior (v. 16)

## III. Relating with Unbelievers

(ROMANS 12:17-21)

A. Peaceful Behavior (vv. 17, 18)

B. Compassionate Behavior (vv. 19-21)

*Responding to Indirect Persecution*

## Conclusion

A. Overcoming Evil

B. Prayer

C. Thought to Remember

## Introduction

### A. The Wrong Seems Strong

It is easy to despair over the prevalence of evil. One result of expanded media coverage is that we seem to get extensive coverage of an endless parade of tragedies from all over the world. The stories range from cruelty to kittens to beheadings of Christians. Media outlets never seem to tire of presenting the latest in human depravity, so much so that we can become numb to its significance.

While we might imagine we have entered a new age of tragedy, the truth is that we have been in it for a long time. Maltbie Babcock, a nineteenth-century minister, knew this all too well. He and his wife, Katherine, had two sons, but both died as infants. Babcock found solace in taking long walks in nature and in writing poetry. These two came together in a public way when one of his poems was published and set to music after his death. The combination became the beloved hymn “This Is My Father’s World.” Often recognized for its appreciation of God’s creation, the lyrics also draw an important conclusion in stating “that though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet.”

We only escape the results of sin and evil when we get to Heaven. Even so, the apostle Paul, like Babcock, encourages us not to sink into despair. Evil will not prevail in the end. In our lesson this week, we see Paul address the problem of evil in a direct and practical manner.

### B. Lesson Background

The ancient Greek philosophers pondered questions of morality in their writings. In their discussions, they considered categories of *goodness* and *evil*. The authors of the Bible provided their own teachings on these subjects. The Greek word for *goodness* occurs five times in the New Testament: [Philippians 4:8](#); [1 Peter 2:9](#); [2 Peter 1:3](#), [5](#) (twice). The translations are “goodness” three times, “excellent” once, and “praises” once.

The philosopher Plato, writing 400 years before the New Testament authors, believed in four cardinal virtues: prudence, justice, temperance, and courage. These four were still held in esteem in the city of Rome in the century before Paul wrote Romans. This is clear from the writings of the Roman statesman Cicero (106-43 BC). We also find them in Wisdom of Solomon 8:7, a Jewish writing of the period: “If a man love righteousness her labours are virtues: for she teacheth temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude.”

For Paul, goodness, or virtue, was more than just a philosophical matter. Today’s lesson looks at a passage in Romans in which the apostle becomes intensely practical. [Romans 12](#) begins with Paul calling followers of Jesus to be “transformed by the renewing of your mind” ([12:2](#)). Transformed to what? What does a transformed life look like?

The first 11 chapters of Romans are filled with wonderful but heavy doctrinal instruction. With [chapter 12](#), Paul turns his attention squarely to the practical side of living the Christian life. The teachings in chapter 12, especially in the portion found in our printed text, are almost like proverbs: brief, self-contained statements. Many are similar to Jesus’ teachings as found in the Sermon on the Mount.

## I. Relating with Fellow Believers

(ROMANS 12:9-13)

### A. Loving Behavior (vv. 9, 10)

<sup>9a</sup>. **Love must be sincere.**

Paul begins this section primarily discussing behaviors between Christians within the fellowship of the church. Paul’s first virtuous teaching serves to define loving behavior among Christians: it *must be sincere* (compare [2 Corinthians 6:6](#); [1 Timothy 1:5](#)). This includes both speech and actions. We should not say we love when we don’t. We should not act like we love when we don’t. The solution, however, is not to quit talking about love or merely acting as if one loves. It is to love truly, to overcome barriers of resentment or distrust and love from the heart.

## HOW TO SAY IT

Apollos Uh-*pahl*-us.

Cicero Si-suh-row.

Corinthians Ko-rin-thee-unz (*th* as in *thin*).

Deuteronomy Due-ter-ahn-uh-me.

*What Do You Think?*

How do you know when your love is genuine?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Toward fellow Christians  
Toward unbelievers

**9b. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.**

Lest we think the previous line means that we ignore virtue or vice in others, Paul's second virtuous teaching presents two actions regarding our interpersonal approach.

This pair of commands does not focus on individuals themselves but on things they may do. It is the basis for the oft-quoted advice that we must "love the sinner but hate the sin" (although we realize that God sometimes hates both; see [Proverbs 3:32](#); [11:20](#); [12:22](#); [16:5](#)). Our love for others does not mean we encourage their sinful behaviors.

**10. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.**

The translation *in love* is "in brotherly love" in the 1984 edition of the *New International Version*. The Greek word behind this is the one William Penn used in naming the first capital city of his Pennsylvania colony: Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love.

We are to care for our Christian brothers and sisters with great affection. We are friends with our fellow Christians, but friends who are willing to make sacrifices for each other (as a parent would do for a son or daughter). We are to love each other deeply with the type of love a brother or sister would have for a sibling.

We demonstrate this kind of love when we quash our natural selfishness and elevate the needs of others over our own, *as we honor one another above ourselves*. Many Bible students are aware of the dozens of "one another" passages in the New Testament. Paul writes just over half of these. Imagine a community where every person is more concerned about the needs of others than his or her own! When we put others first, we honor them.

**DOES YOUR FAITH SHOW?**

When election campaigns heat up, pay attention to how candidates talk to and about their opponents. If the typical pattern occurs, candidates appearing together will shake hands and exchange smiles. But then they will launch into vicious attacks on the other's positions—and sometimes their persons!

U.S. presidential campaigns serve as examples. When two candidates are together in social settings, they appear fairly civil toward one another. However, their debates are characterized by scathing attacks on each other's integrity more than by a serious discussion of the issues that face the nation at the time.

People may disagree over whether the behavior of political candidates merely reflect the divided (and divisive) temperament of the nation or, on the other hand, fuel it. There is probably truth on both sides of that argument.

Regardless, the question for us as Christians is whether our own attitudes and behavior are any better than those of the world at large. Are *we* hypocritical? Do *we* hate what is evil and hold fast to what is good? Are *we* patient with those who disagree with us? Whatever the situation, whether in personal interactions with Christians or unbelievers, or in those tense moments that sometimes occur in the fellowship of the church, do we exhibit a godly spirit?

—C. R. B.

**B. Just Behavior (vv. 11-13)****11a. Never be lacking in zeal,**

In quick order, Paul offers eight brief descriptions of the life of goodness or virtue. All eight consist of an "in \_\_\_\_\_" category (although the word *in* is not explicitly used in every case), along with a command related to this category. *Lacking in zeal* has the sense of carelessness, even sloppiness. The Greek word behind the translation *zeal* is also translated "diligence" in [Romans 12:8](#), and that is the sense here (compare the translation "earnestness" in [2 Corinthians 8:7](#)). Paul is directing his readers' attention to those qualities that are important in their relationships within the church. Christians should not treat their responsibilities to others with carelessness or neglect.

**11b. but keep your spiritual fervor,**

This refers to a self-motivated excitement about living the kind of spiritual life that relentlessly seeks God. [Acts 18:25](#) uses a similar phrase to describe Apollos.

*What Do You Think?*

How do you keep your spiritual passion high?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

When discouragement starts to set in  
When complacency starts to set in  
When a Christian support system is absent  
Other

**11c. serving the Lord.**

When our desire to serve others grows weak, we should remember that we serve our Lord when we meet the needs of others ([Matthew 25:40](#)).

**12a. Be joyful in hope,**

The gospel offers *hope* in ways no other religion does. The church should be a place of joy and hope, even in the midst of tragic circumstances. We need never doubt God's love for us or that he is in control of our lives.

**12b. patient in affliction,**

Christians are not promised lives free of trouble and worry—quite the opposite! (See [Matthew 10:22](#); [John 15:18](#); etc.) There are times when our faith must carry us through, when we must wait on the Lord ([Isaiah 40:30, 31](#); [Micah 7:7](#)). Ignoring problems does not make them go away, but sometimes patient, hopeful endurance that is supported by others is the only answer we have.

**12c. faithful in prayer.**

The Greek behind this phrase is almost identical to that in [Colossians 4:2a](#), and the translation “devote yourselves to prayer” there is the sense here (compare [Acts 1:14](#)). To have patience in the midst of trouble does not mean we are inactive. We bring our needs, both spiritual and physical, before the throne of God in our prayers.

Remember that Paul is writing in the context of the church as a whole. While we should have times of private prayer, a healthy and committed church will have members praying for each other in an informed way. Sometimes just knowing that others are praying for you brings comfort.

**<sup>13a.</sup> Share with the Lord’s people who are in need.**

The idea here is that of mutual support based on need (see [2 Corinthians 8:14](#), last week’s lesson). It describes tangible actions such as taking care of needs for food, clothing, or shelter.

This is part of the joyful fellowship of the church. We are encouraged in knowing that others in the fellowship care about us. They wait on the Lord with us. They pray for us. And they step up when we need help in managing the day-to-day pressures of living, such as providing for our families (compare [Acts 2:42-47](#); [4:32-37](#); [6:1-6](#)).

**<sup>13b.</sup> Practice hospitality.**

This means much more than being willing to have friends over to watch the big game. It means opening our homes to those going through trying circumstances, who need a place to stay or a meal (compare [1 Peter 4:9](#); [3 John 6-8](#)).

All of these admonitions follow the idea of the more fortunate helping the less fortunate. Since the biblical idea of justice includes relief of the plight of the poor, the church is acting justly when it behaves this way ([Micah 6:8](#)). While Paul is primarily focused on relationships within the church in this section, he does nothing to forbid or discourage acts of compassion outside the body of Christ. The relationships outside the church are the focus of the next section.

*What Do You Think?*

In what ways can you be a role model in extending hospitality?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

In light of scriptural directives ([1 Timothy 3:2](#); [Titus 1:8](#); [1 Peter 4:9](#); [3 John 6-8](#))

In light of current possibilities and challenges

## II. Independent Exhortations

([ROMANS 12:14-16](#))

### A. Empathetic Behavior ([vv. 14, 15](#))

**<sup>14.</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.**

Historical evidence tells us that the church in Rome is suffering persecution at this point, but not from the Roman government. That affliction will begin about 10 years after Paul writes this letter. The persecutors at this time come from the non-Christian Jewish community. They target Jews who have left the synagogue for the church and who believe that Jesus is indeed the Messiah. Such persecution likely presents itself in social and economic ostracism: those Jews who choose to follow Jesus find themselves shunned.

When troubled by another person, our first impulse might be simply to endure, to weather the storm. Another reaction might be to return aggression with aggression, cursing the other and striking back. Paul disallows both responses. When attacked unjustly, he calls his readers to *bless* their persecutors. We don’t fight fire with fire. We respond with love and grace, in a manner consistent with Jesus’ teaching ([Matthew 5:43, 44](#)).

*What Do You Think?*

In practical terms, what could it look like to bless someone who is consistently aggressive toward you?

*Talking Points for Your Discussion*

When it’s a coworker

When it’s a neighbor

When it’s a family member

Other

**<sup>15.</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.**

Paul shifts the focus back to connections between Christians in speaking about the nature of Christians’ interdependence. Shared joy seems to multiply; shared sorrow seems to lighten the burden (compare [1 Corinthians 12:26](#)).

### B. Humble Behavior ([v. 16](#))

**<sup>16a.</sup> Live in harmony with one another.**

This is another of Paul’s “one another” passages; there are about 30 of them across all his letters. This particular one is fronted by one of the apostle’s hot-button issues: living *in harmony*, unified in thought. This challenge reverberates across his letters (see [Romans 15:5](#); [1 Corinthians 1:10](#); [2 Corinthians 13:11](#); [Philippians 2:2, 5](#); [4:2](#); compare [Ephesians 4:13](#); [1 Timothy 6:3-5](#)). Being able to “rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn” (just considered) is prerequisite to living in harmony.

slothful, proud,  
conceited,  
vengeful,  
immoral,  
impure,  
lustful,  
greedy,  
covetous,  
angry,  
malicious,  
slanderous,  
obscene, dishonest

NEW WAY

OLD WAY

love  
lowly  
compassionate  
humble  
long-suffering  
thankful

Sheet 1—Summer 2018, *Adult Resources*, Standard Lesson Quarterly® Curriculum

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Visual for Lessons 12 & 13. *Challenge learners to sum up the 14 entries on the left with a single word, then do the same with the 22 entries on the right.*

But we caution that the need for harmonious unity should not be interpreted to mean that church members are to be absolutely uniform in their thinking. There is room in the church for differing opinions on certain issues (examples: [Romans 14](#); [1 Corinthians 8](#)). The call is to have a shared attitude that springs from a transformed mind ([Romans 12:2](#)).

**<sup>16b.</sup> Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position.**

The enemy of harmonious unity is pride ([Philippians 2:2-4](#)). Thinking of oneself too highly will hinder, if not prevent altogether, relationships with those of *low position* (compare [Romans 12:3](#)).

**<sup>16c.</sup> Do not be conceited.**

Those guilty in this area become hardened against the possibility that their viewpoint may be wrong (see [Romans 11:25](#)). No one wants to be around an arrogant person. [Proverbs 3:7](#) connects a lack of conceit with fear of the Lord.

### III. Relating with Unbelievers

(ROMANS 12:17-21)

#### A. Peaceful Behavior (vv. 17, 18)

##### **<sup>17a.</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil.**

We do not take justice into our own hands when we are wronged, because it is not our prerogative to do so ([Proverbs 20:22; 24:29](#)). We are to respond to unjust treatment with kindness—a consistent teaching of the New Testament ([Luke 6:28; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9](#)). Paul has more to say on this subject two verses below.

##### **<sup>17b.</sup> Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.**

The opposite of doing evil is doing *what is right*. Our standard is always to act with unmistakable integrity and compassion (see also [2 Corinthians 8:21](#)). This is an important witness to unbelievers.

##### **<sup>18.</sup> If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.**

Here's how we can measure our progress in achieving the high standards at issue: the measure is the degree to which we are able to *live at peace with everyone*. Are you a troublemaker or a peacemaker? Do your actions provoke tense situations or calm them? Are you the person whom no one wants to cross because of your reputation for meanness, or are you one whom others trust and admire? We cannot control the behavior of others, but we can influence them by our lives of kindness, patience, forgiveness, and love (compare [2 Corinthians 13:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:13](#)).

##### *What Do You Think?*

What techniques have you used to attempt to de-escalate a conflict with unbelievers?

##### *Talking Points for Your Discussion*

Techniques that have worked

Techniques that had no effect

Techniques that backfired, making things worse

#### B. Compassionate Behavior (vv. 19-21)

##### **<sup>19.</sup> Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.**

The taking of personal revenge is forbidden because of the nature of God himself. Paul quotes [Deuteronomy 32:35](#) to assure his readers that injustice will not go unpunished (this verse is also quoted in [Hebrews 10:30](#)). There is a time and *place for God's wrath*. There will be repayment from the Lord himself for evil done to the people of God. God reserves *vengeance* for himself.

##### **<sup>20.</sup> On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."**

Paul continues to address proper behavior toward antagonists as he quotes [Proverbs 25:21, 22a](#). Jesus' teaching on love for enemies ([Matthew 5:44; Luke 6:27](#)) forms the basis for Paul's thoughts here, and the verses from Proverbs reflect this. What Paul and the author of Proverbs mean by the phrase *heap burning coals on his head* is not entirely certain. Figurative uses of "coals" and "fire" in the Old Testament are connected with God's judgment ([Psalm 18:8; 140:10](#); etc.). If this is the connection, then unrepentant enemies will suffer the vengeance of [Romans 12:19](#), just considered. The hoped-for repentance may come about from feelings of shame when the actions of evildoers are met with acts of kindness.

#### *RESPONDING TO INDIRECT PERSECUTION*

One could make a case that America was at one time a "Christian nation," if defined broadly enough. But various court decisions in the 1960s and 1970s have caused that designation to fall into disuse. These cultural shifts resulted in some Christians' referring to themselves as "persecuted." But this is, at best (worst?), what we might call indirect persecution, since it does not involve loss of livelihood, torture, and/or martyrdom that Christians have faced and are facing.

Decades after the 1970s, we experience the secularizing winds' blowing ever stronger. An example is a certain bill that was working its way through the California legislature a couple of years ago. Among other things, it outlawed so-called discrimination in any Christian college that received government aid for students: there should be no moral behavior codes for students; no doctrinal standards for their professors; no religious content in nonreligious courses; etc.

There may be no direct persecution in such legislation, but there is abundant indirect persecution in that the result is that the truths of the Bible in general and the gospel in particular are ever more marginalized. How do we put [Romans 12:20](#) into practice in such a context?

—C. R. B.

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

A two-step process is in view here. Step 1, resisting successfully being *overcome by evil*, is indeed a major victory! But wars are not won merely by being good at defense. There is also the absolutely vital nature of Step 2, *overcome evil with good*.

We see the good and do the good, thereby joining our Lord as the one who overcomes the world ([John 16:33](#)). Evil will not prevail, nor will the evil one, Satan ([1 John 2:13, 14](#)). At the final judgment, we will see the vengeance and justice of God prevail. The Bible promises it!

## Conclusion

### A. Overcoming Evil

A prevailing message in most cultures is that "might makes right." Usually *might* refers to physical power and intimidation, but it may also describe economic



power. The richest person often has lawyers who know how to win court judgments. *Might* can also be political power.

“Might makes right” is not Paul’s position. His position flips the phrase around: “right makes might.” When Christians do right things, the mighty power of God is behind them. God is in control, and his justice will prevail. To say that the good will overcome the evil is to say that God will overcome evil.

These are comforting thoughts for those who suffer affliction and injustice in a sin-broken world. We both depend on God and pursue his agenda for repairing the brokenness, using his principles and Jesus’ teachings. This is part of what it means to represent the kingdom “not of this world” ([John 18:36](#)).

### B. Prayer

Lord God, may we respond with love, not hate, to people who oppose you. May we demonstrate patience, not anger. May we be like your Son, who asked forgiveness for those who crucified him. We pray this in his name. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

*Do good to those who aren’t good.*

## INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

### Into the Lesson

Ask, “When you were sick as a child, how did your parents bring you comfort?” Responses may include blankets, soup, snuggling, etc. Continue: “Today we’ll work through a list of instructions to help sick relationships. Christians are sometimes accused of being all about crusty old rules. But let’s delve into directives that show otherwise.”

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Shirt and Shoes Required” activity from the reproducible page, which can be downloaded. Form students into groups with the task of adding to the list of seemingly nit-picky rules. Have them state why such rules exist.

Say, “Here’s another rule, from a tea station on a Chinese passenger train:

Walk steadily and slowly to the boiled water and pour it not too full as this can be scalding you or other passengers when the train is shaking and braking to get back to your seat.

“The writer needs a little help with English, but we get the point: don’t overfill cups of boiling liquid. Rules are everywhere. We’ll find today’s list refreshingly concise and universally important.”

### Into the Word

Cut out at least 30 paper squares (about 5” to a side) in a variety of colors. Give several squares and marking pens to students formed into groups. Say, “We’re making a patchwork quilt. We’ll summarize instructions in the text, using no more than three words per instruction.”

Give an example by reading aloud the first verse of the text then saying “You might write *love sincerely* on one square, *hate evil* on another, and *cling to good* on the third.” Divide the remaining 12 verses among the groups. Mount finished squares on the wall to form a patchwork “quilt.”

Possible entries on the remaining squares: live like family, honor each other ([v. 10](#)); don’t be lazy, be passionate, serve the Lord ([v. 11](#)); rejoice in hope, be patient, pray always ([v. 12](#)); be generous, practice hospitality ([v. 13](#)); bless your enemies, don’t curse persecutors ([v. 14](#)); share joy, share grief ([v. 15](#)); live in harmony, avoid snobbery, help the lowly, avoid conceit ([v. 16](#)); don’t retaliate, do right ([v. 17](#)); be peace-loving ([v. 18](#)); don’t seek revenge, let God judge ([v. 19](#)); care for enemies ([v. 20](#)); be an overcomer ([v. 21](#)).

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of “The Good News Post” activity from the reproducible page and follow the instructions.

### Into Life

If you made the “quilt,” say, “Imagine a life where everyone lives according to these descriptions, yourself included. Imagine a workplace where everyone is patient and passionate to serve. Imagine a home where joys and griefs are shared. This quilt reflects how the Holy Spirit guides us into love.” Let students take quilt squares home, especially squares that speak to heart-work needed.

*Alternative.* Ask, “If you hear a person say, ‘It’s not about rules; it’s about relationship,’ what would that person be referring to?” Jot answers on the board. Then ask the follow-up question: “Were you ever in a relationship with a person who followed no rules—no code of conduct, no respect for the law, no consideration of your feelings?” (Note: show of hands only; do not allow stories to delay the segment.) Continue: “Such relationships range from painful to impossible. Granted, our faith is absolutely in the Lord, not the law. *But our rules of engagement require daily attention.*”

Write the immediately preceding statement on the board and challenge students to reword it so it is more in line with the directives studied in today’s lesson (possible responses: My relationship with Christ sets my rules. / My Ruler guides my relationships. / It is about rules and the Ruler who made them). Ask whether any student has changed his or her mind regarding the usefulness of rules.