

# Romans 12:14-16

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[0:00] Good morning. It is good to be here with you all. For those of you who are newer, my name is Jake Rizner. I'm an elder here. And this is my very first sermon. Nonetheless, the Christ family, so prepare for impact.

My only objective this morning is that we would see the scripture a little more clearly. If we walk away with even an ounce of better understanding of what the Lord is communicating to us about himself through this text, praise the Lord. Mission accomplished.

So I trust that you all have been gleaning from our study in Romans. We are going to continue on into Romans 12, verses 14 through 16. So if you would, turn with me there to Romans 12, 14 through 16.

Our text reads, Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. This text falls in the middle of Paul's instruction for how the Christians ought to be conducting themselves.

[1:28] The ESV puts the header, marks of the true Christian, over these passages. So this is particularly within the context of the church, but not exclusively. Clay did a great job last week explaining how this chapter starts the practical instruction of self-sacrificial love.

So to best understand and apply our particular verses, we're going to consider and look back at two specific things within the larger arc of the book of Romans.

One, the sinful lifestyles present within the church. And two, the clarity given to the Jew and Gentile dynamic. So looking back at the end of chapter one, we find a host of unchristian behaviors and practices identified among the unrighteous.

But at the beginning of chapter two, Paul says, Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges, for in passing judgment on another you condemn yourself, because you, the judge, practice the same things.

So Paul establishes that he is privy to this misconduct and the hypocrisy within the church and paints the picture of what a selfish, self-seeking congregation looks like.

[2:38] But the second contextual item to recall is this Jew-Gentile dynamic. The Lord has uniquely used Paul to author this letter.

As a Jew born in a Roman province, he has dual citizenship. He has the cultural credit to speak to both of these people groups, even though he has not yet with them personally yet.

In his introduction, he is sure to include that Christ is a descendant of David, but that the gospel is for all nations. So then that would include the Gentile nations.

So then throughout the letter, Paul addresses the misunderstandings of the Jews and the Gentiles within the churches of the region. The Jews seem to think that they are special because they are the people of God, the ones who received the law and the prophets.

And the Gentiles seem to think that they are extra special since they got grafted in, despite the Jews being the firstfruits. And so Paul gives a lengthy theological address how in Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile.

[3:45] We are justified through faith alone, and the gospel is for all that would repent and believe, those that confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God rose him from the dead will be saved.

The ethnic descendants of Abraham were a foreshadow to the future chosen people of the faith. In chapter 9, Paul quotes Hosea, a Jewish prophet, in regard to the Gentiles becoming God's people who were not his people.

Before the foundations of the earth, God chose a people from every tribe, tongue, and nation to be his chosen race. And this is a glorious reality. And with this doctrine, how ought the mixed congregation do community with one another?

Are the Jews to preside over the Gentiles since they are the chosen people from the Old Covenant? Or should the Jews get on board with the Gentiles since they are in Rome?

Or should they create segregated churches to avoid the dissension? What do they do with these doctrines that Paul has laid out? As we have read and studied the past couple of weeks, they should be one body.

[4:56] Working in unison, being of the same mind in Christ, Christ is the head of the body. And additionally, they should not be affiliated with those kinds of sins referenced in chapter 1.

Envy, strife, gossip, slander, haughty, boastful. These are the antithetical prescriptions to what Christ would have his children be and do as they are adopted into the same family.

Those who act that way presume upon the kindness of God. So this contrast, starting in chapter 12, is not only for the Jew to Gentile relationship. It is for the member to member relationships within the church.

But it is drawn out in light of the ethnic differences. And so with these things in mind, we're going to look back into our decks. If I were to give the note takers an outline, it would be sympathy towards the unsympathetic.

That's verse 14, sympathy towards the unsympathetic. Verse 15, the two-sided coin of empathy. And lastly, humility produces harmony.

[5:59] And we're going to see through these three verses that the common denominator is an outward, self-sacrificial love. So starting in verse 14, we read, Bless those who persecute you.

Bless and do not curse them. Paul has uniquely experienced this kind of blessing. He was himself a persecutor of the Christians, but he has now been persecuted.

And so he knows exactly what he's addressing when he gives this command. He has been an example of this, sort of blessing your persecutors already.

And even in his post-conversion humility, he says back in chapter 9, I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers.

He has gone from intentionally cursing Christians to now having such a heart for the lost that he would be accursed in their place. He doesn't have that authority, but he expresses this heart change from persecutor to persecuted.

[7:05] And he knows what it is to suffer the wrath of evil men, yet he contends with the Romans to bless their persecutors. Those in Rome, especially the Jews, have already experienced a bit of persecution.

The Jews are a people accustomed to being taken captive, to being uprooted, turned to slaves, released back to their homeland. And over the span of their heritage, they have a lot of persecution represented.

More relevant to this letter, it is recorded in Acts 2, that Aquila and Priscilla had met Paul and Corinth after all the Jews were commanded to leave Rome under the rule of Claudius.

They were permitted back in a few years later, but nonetheless, they were driven out for their Christian beliefs. And this is a good image for the definition of persecute. It means to make, to run, to flee, to put to flight.

It can have other implications, but it's still in the framework of doing away with a certain people or a certain ideology. And perhaps the Jews have had in their mind that their enemies should suffer for the wrongdoing, as would be the case in the Old Covenant law.

[8:17] That is, if the chosen people are faithful to God, they would have relief from their enemies. Or maybe the Gentile believers have been susceptible to cursing the ones that banned the Jews originally out of brotherly affection.

Whatever specific reason for their persecution or their cursing, Paul is contending with them that instead of cursing them back, they should bless them. The command is not only to endure the persecution or to ignore your persecutors.

It's a step further than that. It's two steps away from the treatment that they have been receiving. They are to bless those who persecute them, who don't deserve it.

The word bless is the same word we get eulogy from. It means to praise, to speak well of, to invoke a blessing upon someone. In Luke 6.28, amidst the Beatitudes, Jesus says, Bless those who persecute you.

And immediately followed by that, he says, Pray for those who abuse you. Be reminded of when Stephen was being stoned to death. He prayed to God, saying, Lord, do not hold this sin against them.

[9:24] Or better yet, when Jesus was being executed, he says, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. The goal of Gentiles and Jews is alike, to know Christ, to make Christ known to all peoples.

Even amidst their persecution, they are to have sympathy and wish upon all men that their souls be turned to God in hope and faith that they would be saved. This would be a hot topic in the coming years when Nero would assume authority and literally burn Christians to serve as lampposts at his garden parties.

And thankfully, we serve a God who is sovereignly preserving his bride so that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. In light of this context, the Christians in Rome, how much quicker should we be to bless our persecutors?

Our suffering is futile to what many of our brothers and sisters over history, and even currently across the globe, suffer. Ours may look like being made fun of at work or being ignored or belittled at the family Thanksgiving.

We may not be the popular one at the dorms. I would not be surprised if some of us soon are called to suffer more severely. I haven't heard of much of that in the long ago yet, but maybe being fired from a job, being sued for what the world would call hate speech, or failing college courses for not submitting to the hive mind of the secular world.

[10:52] Nonetheless, the Christian will be persecuted, severe or mild, and when we experience it, we should bless our persecutors. We should pray for their salvation. We should see their sin ultimately against the Lord.

When you are persecuted for righteousness' sake, do not avoid the value of persecution by cursing those who curse you. We ought not curse our persecutors like perhaps the Jews were doing in Rome as they were driven out by the government, but we are to bless them.

And in doing so, you will show your persecutor there's a greater hope, hope in Christ. What good would it be to suffer for unrighteousness? That's no sacrifice at all.

That's getting what you deserve. But if you suffer for righteousness, the Lord may use it to reveal himself to the persecutor, and you will be blessed. What would our current status be if Christ had responded with cursing?

We all, before regeneration, are called enemies of God, and yet while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. He did not curse us. Christ himself became a curse so that those who cursed him might be blessed.

[12:04] Live as holy sacrifices, point others to Christ, and be sympathetic to the unsympathetic. Verse 15 is a two-part exhortation of empathy.

Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. Where Paul was calling the persecuted to be sympathetic to the persecutors, now he is calling the church to be empathetic. Empathetic is to understand and to share the feelings of another. The Jews and Gentiles come together to form a very diverse church with many differences.

They have different upbringings, different culture, different expectations. They are instructed to try and understand their brothers and sisters who have different experiences and predispositions so that they can be unified as they rejoice and as they weep.

In the previous passage in this chapter about the church being one body with different members, we read that the Lord uniquely gives different gifts to different people. Across the broader extent of the letter, the Lord has used the Jews and Gentiles individually to fulfill his various objectives.

[13:11] the Roman Christians need to set aside their envy and their pride from one another in order to rejoice in the things of God. They are on the same team. If the Gentiles have now received the gospel that was first presented to the Jews, that's something to praise God about.

If that means that they are grafted into the same root as the Israelites, they should praise God. As we spoke earlier, the promise of faith is not just for those of Abrahamic lineage.

The Gentiles have been welcomed into the covenant people and this calls for rejoicing. It doesn't say it specifically, but I assume that Paul is addressing dividing lines on when and how to rejoice with the other group.

They may be reluctant to rejoice with the opposite ethnicity and the presumption that their own kind will fulfill that duty. They have their own family to do life with. Why should I bother? Type of mentality.

But there is no other group. We are one body. There should not be cliques or posses of people in the church such that it would exclude rejoicing together.

[14:18] It is not wrong to have relationships, a deeper relationship with fewer people, but it would be wrong for a church culture to organize itself where the members are severed from the rest of the body such that it would exclude rejoicing together.

And this takes a lot of outward and selfless thinking. If you are jealous or envious or covetous over one another's success or blessing, you will not be able to rejoice with one another.

We have to be so content in the Lord with what He has given us and namely, salvation, that when we see others rejoicing, we can celebrate with them. We can praise God when someone else has received something that we have not.

Our hope is in Christ alone, not in our comforts, not in our family, not in our work, or our grades, or our roommates. If Christ is your treasure and the church is your family, rejoice like a family when one of their own has been blessed.

There are times, however, when it is not helpful to rejoice with those who rejoice. Pagans often rejoice. The pride marches bear many smiles and cheers of people in complete rebellion to our Lord.

[15:36] People who worship money instead of God rejoice when they deceitfully make money. Pro-choice activists rejoice when laws are passed in favor of murder. We ought not to rejoice in these things.

We ought to rejoice with the truth as Paul says elsewhere. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Jesus sets a precedent in Luke 10 of what we should rejoice in when he rejoices in the Father revealing the hidden things of the gospel to a specific people.

He commands his disciples in that same chapter to rejoice that their names are written in heaven. We are also called to rejoice in our sufferings as suffering presses on to hope that does not put us to shame.

Luke 15 says that there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 righteous persons who need no repentance. So we rejoice in the things of God and namely the Lord reconciling sinners to himself whether Jew or Gentile.

Isaiah puts it well, I will greatly rejoice in the Lord. My soul shall exult in my God for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation.

[16:46] On the other side of the empathy coin we are called to weep with those who weep. The call is similar to rejoicing.

We must be empathetic. We must put ourselves in their shoes and try to understand what they're going through and respond accordingly. Living in a fallen world there will always be instances of weeping and the Romans were not exempt from this.

As we mentioned earlier the Jews within the church have already been run out of town before. Rome at this time is filled with idols and false gods and this may cause weeping as they watch the dying world around them in rebellion to the one true God.

There could be Gentile family members that are still worshiping these false gods. Maybe some of the Jews are having a hard time being second class citizens away from their homeland. There are various things that the Gentiles and Jews could be weeping about that would differ from one another but they are called to empathy and not tribalism.

They can't sit around as a member weeps and ignore it. They are called to weep to feel the pain to recognize the hurt to get in the trenches with them. When one member suffers the whole body suffers.

[18:02] There's no room for prideful annoyance of another's suffering. You don't have to be a pastor or a counselor or to have experienced the same kind of trial to weep with someone.

If you don't have the words to say just weep. Christ again is our ultimate model and reason for this. If his spirit is within us we will walk in his ways.

Christ was a man of sorrows acquainted with deepest grief. We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are yet he was without sin.

He was born in the likeness of men. He and his loving kindness experienced what we experience as humans. During his ministry when Lazarus dies and some of the disciples are sad and weeping Christ wept.

He knew that he would bring Lazarus back to life but he stopped and he wept with his people anyway. He came to us and he got in the trenches with us. He could have stayed upon his throne comfort and ease but he forsook that to come and bear burdens with us and we are called to have that humility not to be arrogant or selfish but to go and to bear burdens with our brothers and sisters.

[19:22] Now Christ's mission was ultimately to bring about reconciliation not just to have the human experience but he did accomplish that mission through his earthly ministry. Being as we are yet without sin he would become the perfect sacrifice on our behalf.

like rejoicing there are also things we shouldn't weep about. Godly grief or sorrow is different than worldly grief. Christians grieve when we recognize that the fallen state of the world is not what it's supposed to be.

We see and experience the thorns wrapped around the beautiful terrains. The ground we work has been cursed. We also see and experience spiritual thorns wrapped around the heart.

By nature we do not seek for God. we sorrowfully battle with sin even as believers. And it can grieve us to see family and friends who reject the gospel.

Paul writes to the Philippians, for many of whom I have often told you and now tell you even with tears walk as enemies of the cross of Christ. Things are not how they ought to be.

[20:29] The result of sin causes things to be bad. Work is difficult. Our bodies wear out and expire. Childbirth and child rearing is painful.

Our flesh wants to indulge. Our emotions control us. And ultimately our hearts are wayward. When we see or experience this reality, we weep.

These are legitimate things to be sad about. And I want to be clear, we do not weep as if there is no hope. There will be an end to this suffering. As TJ brought up this morning at the Lord's Supper gathering, it is not worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed to us.

But it still hurts in the now. And we would do well to weep with those who weep. The world also weeps, but it does not weep in the same way. The world weeps when their flesh suffers, when they don't get their way, when their indulgences are withheld, when good and godly moral ideologies are recognized as good.

as the church weeps when God is not honored rightly, the world weeps when God is honored. And this ungodly weeping is a foretaste for the unrighteous.

[21:42] When God's common grace and his presence is withheld in hell forever, there will only be weeping and gnashing of teeth. So Paul is not committing us to weep with anyone for any reason, but we weep with those who weep in a godly way.

And the ethnic differences within the church of Rome there should not hinder that. Moving into verse 16. Live in harmony with one another.

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. We come to our final point, harmony from humility.

The end goal, living in harmony, is insulated with ways to achieve that goal. The first layer, as we just discussed, is empathy, and now secondly, forsaking ego and putting on humility.

These are the means to the end of achieving harmony. I want to recall back in chapters 1 and 2, at the end of the number of those listed sins that Paul sums up in chapter 2, verses 6-8, he will render to each one according to his works, to those who by patience and well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

[22:59] But for those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, there will be wrath and fury. So also remember that throughout the letter, Paul is correcting the Jews for boasting about their heritage, and to the Gentiles for boasting about their adoption into the spiritual family.

He just exhorted them to be selfless with a nuance towards action, but now he's exhorting them to be selfless with a nuance towards thought and perception.

Verse 16 in the ESV flows really well, but it doesn't quite hit the literary consonants between the first sentence and those latter two.

I think the NASB is helpful here. The NASB reads, be of the same mind toward one another. Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.

Do not be wise in your own estimation. So you pick up on the thread of like-mindedness a little more with that translation. And verse 3 is pretty similar. I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.

[24:14] And the word translated think there in verse 3 and mind here in verse 16 is the same root word. So it adds to that theme of cognition, perception, wisdom.

Verse 16 is not saying we all must have perfectly uniform theology. In fact, Paul permits different third, maybe second tier issues to be present within the church later on in chapter 14 when he concludes that each one should be convinced in his own mind.

That's regarding what is clean to eat and if we should esteem one day more significant than another. But these minds are different. The one in 14 and the one here in 12 are two different words being used.

The mind seen in chapter 14 is the same as verse 2 in chapter 12 when we studied the renewal of your mind. It is more specifically the intellectual aspect of your thinking and there is room for disagreement there.

the mind we see in chapter 12 is a little more emotionally driven. It is the thoughtful expression of how you feel about something. We see it depicted when Jesus tells his disciples that he is going to Jerusalem to suffer and die and Peter rebukes him and Jesus responds get behind me Satan for you are not setting your mind on the things of God but on the things of man.

[25:37] So Peter was thinking emotionally. Paul in our text is exhorting these two different people groups to have a unity of spirit.

Not just an intellectual common ground. That's a club. We are called to have a thoughtful brotherly affection for one another. When you consider the glory of God and saving the people to himself, it will cause you to reflect emotionally on your common inheritance with your brothers and sisters. there's no room for disagreement here in our text in heart or spirit. The church is a people with one voice that glorifies one God.

We weep together, we rejoice together, we endure persecution together, all for the sake of Christ. In Philippians 2, Paul says, complete my joy by being of the same mind, have the same love.

That is being of the same mind. That objective will not be accomplished if everyone is perceiving themselves as set apart from the rest. If the Gentiles or the Jews think that they are special because they're given position within the kingdom, there can't be unity or like-mindedness.

[26:55] The community of believers won't function well. The feet of the body will be stumbling over one another. You can't use both hands to write at the same time. Because the task before us is the same, to glorify God, to know Him, and to make Him known, there's no room for solo missions.

This is a team sport. God has called a people to Himself. If everyone is a quarterback, then who blocks the quarterback? And who retrieves? We have to be more concerned with the job getting done than with who gets the recognition.

And in fact, the text tells us to associate more with those not getting recognition. whether this is associating with people of low state or things, the principle is the same way to associate with the lowly.

Don't strive to associate with the high class, the ones who get the spotlight, but condescend to the lowly. If we are caught up in pursuing lavish lifestyle and high status, we end up worshiping ourselves instead of God.

That disunity and selfish desire contrasts the Lord's will for unity and selfless living. To quote from Philippians again, verses 5 through 7 shows us the glory in having a corporately humble mindset. [28:13] Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but he emptied himself by taking on the form of a servant.

This like-mindedness that we have is derived from and only from Christ Jesus. The Spirit of God dwells within the believer, causing him to do the kinds of things that Christ does, pursue the kinds of things that he pursues, because Christ stooped down to be a servant, suffering for the sake of his people, we put on humility and servitude for the sake of God's glory to the benefit of the church. So finally, we see in our text that to pursue harmony, we can't be wise in our own sight. Just because the Jews have studied the law, that doesn't mean they can't be taught the spiritual things that God has revealed to the Gentiles.

Conversely, just because we are not under the law anymore doesn't mean the Jews can't illuminate the beauty of God's grander arc of redemptive history throughout the Old Covenant. The individual can't be the smartest one in the room all of the time.

At least they're not supposed to perceive themselves as the wisest. Their goal should always be God's glory and not their own. When that is the true heart of the believer, it won't matter who reveals the Lord's will.

[29:39] It will mostly matter that the Lord's will is being exalted. The mixed congregation needs to praise God in giving insight to their brothers and sisters of the faith, regardless of their ethnicity.

The book of Proverbs is filled with exhortations to seek counsel outside of yourself, and one verse that ties particularly well into our text is a Proverbs 11, 14. It says, Where there is no guidance, a people falls, but in an abundance of counselors, there is safety.

Not one of us here holds all the wisdom of God in and of ourselves. The Lord has uniquely and preciously grown and matured some of us at different paces in different ways.

He has even concealed some things from all of us. So, we will never know all things as God knows all things. In fact, from now until eternity, we will be exploring the immeasurable riches of God's wisdom and glory.

So, as the creation, not the creator, we need humility and our self-perception to recognize only God's word is all true, is all authoritative, and all wise.

[30:51] In exemplary fashion, Paul boasts in his weaknesses so that God would be proven strong. He humbly exhorts the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. He says, Let no one deceive himself.

If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of the world is folly with God.

For it is written, he catches the wise in their craftiness. And again, the Lord knows the thoughts of the wise that they are futile. So, let no one boast in men, for all things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or save us, or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's.

Even the apostle Paul, well studied as a Jew and a Pharisee, miraculously saved on Damascus Road, he was granted much spiritual authority and power.

He humbly confesses that even his wisdom is nothing apart from Christ's. So, in order to glorify God as a church, we must be humble in recognizing all things come from him, we did not create ourselves, we came into the world to us, true wisdom that comes only from the Spirit.

[32:01] In closing, I want to leave you with a few reflections and some encouragement regarding application. the overarching instruction is to live selflessly.

Remember that before salvation, you too were an enemy to God, and had it not been for his grace and his mercy, you still would be an enemy. So, have sympathy for your persecutors.

Within the church, be of the same mind in such a way that you first know what's going on in the personal lives of your fellow members, and then respond accordingly. The body of Christ does not keep to itself.

We care for one another. We deny our own fleshly desires in order to serve one another. So, do not let jealousy withhold rejoicing. Do not let pride or insecurity withhold weeping.

In humility, strive to be of the same love with people who are different than you, with people who wouldn't be your friend on paper, per se, but are your family in Christ.

[33:04] Lastly, consider that you are created and sustained by God. If you have any wisdom, any wise thought, any understanding, give God the glory.

In doing so, you spur one another on to love and good works as you glorify God. As a means of encouragement, we elders have been very heartened by the way that you all serve one another in humility and empathy.

We see and we hear the compassion you have for one another regularly. I have personally experienced the rejoicing and weeping with you all. Our sentiment is that of Paul to the Thessalonians when he said, Now concerning brotherly love, you have no need for anyone to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another.

For that, and indeed, is what you are doing to all the brothers throughout Macedonia. But, we urge you, brothers, do this more and more.

Let's pray.