



**“Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep”
(Romans 12:15).**

The Social Life of the Believer

Central Truth: Christian duty extends from God, to other believers, to the world.

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Topic: Works: Of Righteousness.

The Christian is a citizen of two worlds; one in heaven and the other on earth. He must relate properly to each.

Normal human development is *“in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man”* (Luke 2:52). *“Wisdom and stature”* relate to personal development. *“Favour with God”* relates to spiritual development in relation to our heavenly citizenship. *“Favour with . . . man”* relates to social development in relation to our earthly citizenship.

God has not left us alone. He has given us guidelines to aid both our spiritual growth and our social growth. Christian duty extends from God to other believers and to the world.

Romans 12:9-21 offers nineteen principles to guide us in our social lives. Thirteen of those principles apply to our relationships with saints. Six of those principles apply to our relationships with sinners. Each is a terse, pithy statement. Each is a command, not a suggestion, to govern our conduct. Each is vital to our personal ministry and to our influence for good in the lives of others. Each must be followed if we would *“be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life”* (Philippians 2:15, 16).

I. LIVING WITH THE SAINTS (Romans 12:9-13. 16)

A. Develop sincerity. *“Let love be without dissimulation”* (Romans 12:9) means that love must be genuine, sincere, without hypocrisy. Sincerity and truth must be reflected in act and attitude (1 Corinthians 5:8) until Jesus comes (Philippians 1:10).

It is easy to pretend devotion we do not have, affection we do not feel, and service we do not render. But we can have no lasting and profitable relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ without honesty. Set II Corinthians 1:12 as your goal and you will meet this divine requirement.

B. Practice discernment. *“Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good”* (Romans 12:9). Love does not mean that we will accept any person regardless of the error that he may hold. Love does not mean tolerance with evil. We are to refrain from any evil (Psalm 34:14). We are to cultivate whatever is good and right (I Peter 3:11). The way to keep pure is to hate what is wrong and cling to what is good.

Sin disrupts relationships with God and man. How can we grow in holiness before God and cultivate goodness in men without the practice of moral discernment? We cannot. Do not follow what others claim to be right or wrong. Discern for yourself, in the light of God's Word, and follow holiness.

C. Exercise brotherly love. *“Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love”* (Romans 12:10). Tender affection should mark all Christian relationships. Jesus commanded us to love one another, saying that would be an evident mark that we are Christians (John 13:34, 35). Love must be able to *“reprove, rebuke, exhort,”* but it must do it *“with all longsuffering”* for we are dealing with brothers and sisters in Christ (II Timothy 4:2). Love can be tough and still be kind. *“Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently”* (I Peter 1:22).

D. Be unselfish. *“In honour preferring one another”* is the Lord's way (Romans 12:10). We honor one another by acts of humility by which the other person is given preference. We let that person speak first. We serve his best interests rather than our own. We respect his opinions even if they conflict with our own. We want him to have what is rightfully his, whether we get what is rightfully ours or not. And we do it without resentment or expectation of personal profit. We do it because we truly honor that person in our hearts. What a challenge!

E. Be industrious. *“Not slothful in business”* means never being lazy in our work (Romans 12:11). The Christian should never slack in earnestness or lag in his zeal. In secular labor or in spiritual ministry, the Christian must be diligent in giving his best effort. What a witness for Christ

it would be if this word circulated among employers: "Hire Christians. They are the most faithful workers available." Do not let up in your zeal in secular or sacred employments.

F. Exercise zeal. There is a question as to whether "*fervent in spirit*" refers to the Holy Spirit or to the human spirit (Romans 12:11). It might mean "have your spirits aglow," or it might mean "be on fire with the Spirit." The outcome would be the same for the Christian. Our English word *enthuse* comes from the Greek term *en theos*, which means "in God." The enthusiasm and zeal of the Christian should arise from his relationship with God. So to "be aglow with the Spirit" would be to "have your spirit aglow." The challenge is, "Be enthused in all areas because of your relationship to God." You will notice that a person who is backslidden in spirit loses his glow of spirit.

G. Perform a ministry. All efforts should be directed toward "*serving the Lord*" (Romans 12:11). The verb translated "*serving*" means to be a bonds slave. It describes one being a true bondsman for his master. It is the work of a slave of the Lord.

The term does not bemean Christian service. It points up the devotion of the servant of Jesus Christ: "*doing the will of God from the heart; with good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men*" (Ephesians 6:6, 7). Every service, even those rendered to people, must be done for the glory of God (Colossians 3:23).

H. Be optimistic. "*Rejoicing in hope*" means your hope can and should keep you joyful (Romans 10:12). Remember that "*hope*" means much more than wish or preference. It is the future tense of faith. Faith is looking up to God in assurance for things present. Hope is looking up to God in assurance for things future. "*I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness*" (Isaiah 61:10). Jesus gives us joy, even fullness of joy, by what He has told us of the Father (John 15:11). So we "*rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory*" (I Peter 1:8). If any person has reason for joy in the present and hope for the future, that person is the Christian. "*Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice*" (Philippians 4:4).

I. Be dependable. Being "*patient in tribulation*" manifests that dependability (Romans 12:12). Jesus gave a parable about seed which fell on shallow soil. It sprang up immediately, but wilted away when the sun's heat fell on it (Matthew 13:1-23). That pictures many who profess the name of Christ. The true Christian must be steadfast in suffering and patient under affliction. (Patience means staying under the load and bearing it.) That will

produce maturity in him (James 1:4) by making him more mature, more settled, stronger, and a better workman for God (I Peter 5:10). Jesus said, *"In your patience possess ye your souls"* (Luke 21:19).

J. Be prayerful. *"Continuing instant in prayer"* is both a great challenge and a precious privilege (verse 12). To continue instant in prayer means to persevere in praying, to steadfastly maintain the practice of prayer, to be unwearied in praying.

Do you grow weary in praying? Many do. But it is the best discipline of spirit and source of supply that the Christian will ever find. *"Seek the LORD and his strength, seek his face continually"* (I Chronicles 16:11). Jesus said, *"Men ought always to pray, and not to faint"* (Luke 18:1). So we should *"pray without ceasing"* (I Thessalonians 5:17).

K. Be benevolent. That involves *"distributing to the necessity of saints"* (Romans 12:13). The needs of God's people will be met when Christians provide generously for one another, as God has commanded. One practices true religion when he gives out of his resources to help another (Isaiah 58:7). Jesus taught us, *"It is more blessed to give than to receive"* (Acts 20:35).

L. Be hospitable. The committed Christian is *"given to hospitality"* (Romans 12:13). Benevolence involves giving to a person outside your home. Hospitality involves receiving one into your home. *"Use hospitality one to another without grudging"* (I Peter 4:9). *"Let brotherly love continue"* and manifest itself in hospitality (Hebrews 13:1).

M. Keep the unity. Being *"of the same mind one toward another"* involves living in harmony, having equal respect and full sympathy with one another (verse 16). That will *"keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace"* (Ephesians 4:3).

II. LIVING WITH SINNERS (Romans 12:14-21)

A. Exercise forbearance. *"Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not"* (Romans 12:14). Jesus commanded that same spirit (Luke 6:28). That may be the best testimony for Christ that you could ever give. By loving your enemies, doing good to them, blessing them, and praying for them, you show yourself to be a child of your heavenly Father (Matthew 5:43-48). The wicked return tit for tat; the righteous return good for evil. So endure the unpleasant situation; tolerate unpleasant people. Control yourself as a child of God and thereby give a good witness.

B. Develop sympathy. *"Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep"* (Romans 12:15). Enter into the sufferings of others as

if you were experiencing the same (Hebrews 13:3). Bearing the burdens of others fulfills the law of Christ and increases your witness (Galatians 6:2). Look at the effect that medical ministries have had in opening the hearts of many people to the gospel message.

C. Show humility (Romans 12:16). That can be done in three distinct areas. (1) Show respect for each person. *“Be of the same mind one toward another.”* (2) Serve anyone in need. *“Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.”* (3) Respect each one. *“Be not wise in your own conceits.”* A concerned witness given from a humble heart has the power of God in it.

D. Practice restraint (Romans 12:17, 18). (1) Do not retaliate. *“Recompense to no man evil for evil.”* (2) Live honestly. *“Provide things honest in the sight of all men.”* (3) Keep your temper under control. *“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.”* Since that is so contrary to the way the world lives, it testifies of Christ living in you.

E. Return good for evil (Romans 12:19,20). That involves two things. (1) Do not retaliate. If you *“avenge not yourselves,”* you will never take vengeance into your own hands. You will give God opportunity to set things right. (2) Do good instead of evil by feeding your enemy when he is hungry, giving him water when he is thirsty, and showing kindness to him always. Jesus said that shows you to be a child of your Father in heaven.

F. Experience victory (Romans 12:21). *“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”* You can conquer sin without dominating the sinner. You can have victory without demanding his surrender. Your good can turn his evil into good by the grace of God and you have gained a brother.

Live by these standards and you will be *“blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; holding forth the word of life”* (Philippians 2:15, 16). What a rewarding way to live!

Questions

1. What is involved in the social life of the believer?
2. How does Philippians 2:15, 16 relate to this study?
3. How can you practice the discernment called for in verse 9?
4. How can you practice the devotion called for in verse 10?
5. How can you obey the commands of verse 11 in your church life?
6. How can you rejoice and be patient in tribulation?
7. How can you develop benevolence and hospitality?

8. How can you develop forbearance when you suffer wrong?
9. How is humility taught in verse 16?
10. What part of this study can you put into practice this week?