

Overview

Biblical Passage Romans 12:9-21

Supporting Passages Deuteronomy 32:35; Proverbs 25:21-22

Memory Verse Romans 12:21

Biblical Truth Since we have been entrusted with the message of salvation, we must prove to be faithful in all of our actions, overcoming evil with good.

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Context *Crux* reminds us that the gospel is practical on every level. This fifth lesson basically reminds us that we have to practice what we preach. Because we are called to present the message of the gospel to the world, we also have to live purposefully in alignment with that message. We want others to look at our lives and be able to see what the gospel means instead of just hearing about it when we talk. Romans 12:9-21 isn't an exhaustive list of what this should look like, but it does remind us of the importance of doing good.

Learning Goals

- **Explore:** Students will understand that the message of the gospel should be made known through the way they live.
- **Transform:** Students will identify areas of their lives that both do and don't line up with the gospel and commit to living a life of good.

Prayer Suggestions

As you prepare to teach this lesson, pray for your students.

- Pray that your students will understand God's call to sincerely love others and not retaliate when they are wronged.
- Pray that your students will be convicted when they cause others pain.
- Pray that your students will follow Christ and live out His gospel daily.

Biblical Commentary

Investigation

Throughout Church history, from post-apostolic times to today, Christians have considered the book of Romans to have been written by the apostle Paul. In Romans 1:1, the letter even claims Paul's authorship. Also, the book includes many of the same ideas and the same terminologies that appear in Paul's other writings.

We know little about the founding of the church at Rome. According to Catholic tradition, Peter founded the Roman church. However, there is no solid proof to verify that tradition. While we know little about the church's founding, we can safely assume that when Paul wrote the Roman letter, he was writing to a church he had not founded and with which he had had no previous personal contact.

Paul wrote this letter for several reasons. First, Paul wrote Romans to prepare the way for his planned visit to the church (15:22-24). Paul evidently intended for Rome to become his base of operations and support for his missionary work in Spain and the western region of the empire that had not been evangelized.

A second reason for writing the letter seems to have been that as Paul looked toward returning to Jerusalem between his departure from Corinth and his arrival in Rome, he was aware of dangers that he would face (15:31). Paul may have written Romans so that he could present his teaching in case he did not reach Rome. Paul had little doubt that from Rome his message would spread to other parts of the empire as other people read it. Some have even said that Paul may have considered the book of Romans to be his last will and testament.

A final reason that Paul may have written this book was because he was at a transition point in his ministry. Paul's ministry in the Aegean region was solid, but it was coming to a close. He planned to leave that area and move deeper into new missionary territory in the west, living out the Great Commission as he did so.

Importance

This passage teaches the Essential Truth that [People are God's Treasure]. All of us are created in God's image and for His glory. We are the crowning work of God's creation. Yet all of us have failed God. Every one of us has willfully disobeyed God. This disobedience is an act known as sin. Because of our sin, we inherit both physical and spiritual death. Because all of us sin, we all have the need for salvation—which only God can provide for us. All human beings are born with a sin nature and into an environment inclined toward sin. Only by the grace of God through Jesus Christ can we experience salvation.

In Romans 12, Paul sets out to show that a believer's relationship to God is foundational and governs all daily conduct. In earlier passages (6:13, 6:19), Paul had already called for Christians to present themselves to God. He now repeats that call as a believer's most serious responsibility.

Interpretation

Romans 12:9-21 may be outlined this way:

- 1) 12:9-13—Paul deals with the importance of demonstrating love to fellow believers.
- 2) 12:14-21—Paul broadens this responsibility to include wider application to others.

Romans 12:9 love (*Agape*) is important in Paul's **epistle** (cf. 1 Corinthians 13). Not just any love will satisfy, though—it must be genuine (sincere) love, literally “love without hypocrisy.” Paul didn't always address love specifically in this section, but he did continue to come back again and again to love being the single most important criteria for Christian behavior.

Paul stated that a committed Christ-follower should hate evil and love what is good. After all, that was the example set by Jesus Christ Himself—in word, attitude, and action.

Romans 12:10 When we give recognition and appreciation to others, we are giving a concrete example of expressing genuine or sincere love. Here, Paul used the phrase “brotherly love” (*philostorgoi* in the Greek). The word suggests familial affection. We are to demonstrate to fellow believers the same kind of love that we do within our own family. Paul indicates that we are not strangers within the Church—we are brothers and sisters *in Christ* because of our common relationship *with* Jesus Christ.

Romans 12:11 Paul reminded Christians not to be lacking in “zeal.” This phrase is mentioned only here and in 2 Corinthians 7:7. At times, it may seem natural or common for Christians to slack off in zeal or diligence in serving the Lord when **hardships** or persecution comes—and they will come. But for a Christ-follower, the fire of enthusiasm should remain constant. Believers must remain committed to serving Christ no matter what the situation or circumstance may bring.

Romans 12:12 We should not lose sight of our hope of the future things that God has promised us. Remembering God's promises helped Paul overcome his struggles and doubts. Remembering also helps believers to be patient—think of other words like *endure* and *long-suffering*) in tribulation. Paul reminded his readers that **prayer** is the greatest resource when stress, strain, or difficulty is present in life. When we examine other passages in the New Testament, we realize that Paul experienced a lot of stress, strain, and difficulty in his life. That may be the reason for why he had previously talked about hope in Romans 5:2 and the importance of prayer in Romans 8:26-27.

Paul not only called on believers to pray—he told them that they were to be devoted (v. 10) to prayer. Paul stressed that prayer must be a high priority in the lives of those who follow Christ.

Romans 12:13 We should never become so self-centered or self-absorbed that we fail to reach out to help others who are in need. Instead of having that self-focus, generosity must be the most evident trait in a believer's life. We are to share (*[koinoneo]* in Greek, meaning “to share of one's property”). Not all believers will be able to give equal financial gift as they help others, but believers do have a responsibility of hospitality and helping others. What Paul challenges believers to remember is that our duty is not equal giving, but equal sacrificing.

Romans 12:14 Paul moved the discussion from focusing on believers to helping others in the community. Paul did not quote the exact words of Jesus but gave a paraphrase of His teachings found in Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:27-28. In those verses, Jesus taught that believers should love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them. Paul reminded believers that when a Christian is attacked or persecuted, he or she must follow the

example of Jesus. Christians must pray for their enemies rather than retaliate. The call of Christ is one of love, not hatred or revenge.

Romans 12:15 Believers will often identify with the joys and sorrows of others. This is not a new teaching from Paul. In 1 Corinthians 12:26, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, and Galatians 6:2, Paul offered the same admonition to Christ-followers. What Paul had in mind was not a flippant attitude or one that changed with every blowing wind. What Paul had in mind was that believers must follow the example of Jesus as He dealt with others.

Romans 12:16 Living at peace with other people is also not a new admonition from Paul (cf. Romans 15:5; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Philippians 2:2, 4:2) But apparently it was a lesson that had not yet been learned by the Roman church. While we do not have actual proof that there was strife or problems in the Roman church, there may have been tension between slaves and free or Jews and **Gentiles**. If there were such problems, then those believers had not fully grasped the teachings of Christ about living at peace with others. Paul reminded Christians that no believer should feel superior to another person. All people have been corrupted and marred by sin. All have failed in God's sight. For that reason, believers should not claim superiority over anyone. As a matter of fact, Paul reminded them that they must resist the temptation to be arrogant about anything that they had obtained. Instead, they should be humble as they approached the work given to them by God.

Romans 12:17 Paul moved toward the chapter's conclusion with a difficult lesson: how to love when we are wronged. Paul combined the teachings of Jesus and words from Proverbs to make an effective point (cf. Matthew 5:38-42, Proverbs 3:4) that Christians must regularly be concerned with the witness they give to others. When we take revenge into our hands, we set ourselves up as judge over someone else, and we do potential harm to God's Kingdom and to our witness with them.

Romans 12:18 While Paul strongly advocated being a peacemaker; he did not say that we must have peace at any price. For Paul, this truth applied both to believers and nonbelievers alike.

Paul taught that a believer should not instigate trouble under normal circumstances. Instead of starting trouble, believers should seek to reflect toward others what God has done for them, namely, forgive and love those who seek to hurt us.

Romans 12:19 If hostility does happen in a Christian's life, the believer must resist the temptation to retaliate. Instead of getting even, the believer must trust God to right the wrong. Deuteronomy 32:35 reminds us that God promised to take care of His people when others wrong them. For Paul and for us, we must remember that only God knows the big picture enough to fit the punishment to the wrong.

Romans 12:20 Instead of bringing harm to an enemy, a believer should do good toward the other person. By doing so, the door is left open for the enemy to repent and turn to God. Paul quotes Proverbs 25:21-22 to make his point. Paul tells us that being kind to your enemy heaps coal upon his or her head. In other words, being kind to an enemy may make him or her ashamed and may lead to repentance and a right relationship with God and the believer.

Romans 12:21 Paul concludes this section with a summary. When believers are overcome by evil, they are often tempted to pay back evil for evil. That may seem logical and expected. When people do wrong, they often expect to receive evil from those they have wronged. However, when they receive kindness instead, their heart often becomes softer. The best way to change an enemy is to make him or her your friend and shower that person with love.

Implications

As followers of Christ, we have become the hands and feet of God, entrusted with the Good News of salvation and God's love for us. Christians must make the message of the gospel known through the way we live daily life. We must learn to love fellow brothers and sisters who are in Christ. We must also learn to love those who hurt us or want to be our enemy. How have you set yourself up to be an example of this before your students? Do they see you living out the gospel in such a way that it leads people to Christ?

We live in very contentious times, when love is rarely extended across political party lines, hate is promoted through the media, and Christians are cast in the light of ignorance and wrongdoing. There is as much of a challenge today to live out the gospel through our actions as in Paul's day. Students need to learn by example how they are to respond to a world that is becoming increasingly hostile to their message. They need to know that their actions are as important as their words, if not more. Once others see their actions of peace and love extended toward them, they may yet open themselves to the words of the gospel.

Teaching Plan

Connect Activity

Review Questions: Getting the Word Out

(5–8 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will answer five review questions from the previous lesson.

(5–8 minutes, easy set-up)

Download the “Review Questions” activity sheet. Print one copy for your own use.

After greeting students, use the review questions to test what they can recall from the previous lesson as well as to provide context for today’s lesson.

Drama: Good Vs. Evil

(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will watch a drama that illustrates the battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil.

(5–10 minutes, easy set-up)

Download the drama script. Prior to the session, enlist two students to enact the drama. Give copies of the script to cast members ahead of time so that they will be ready to perform it.

Prompt students to perform the drama. Afterward, say: **It’s amazing how evil at work in the world can seem so strong until the power of love overcomes evil. The example provided in the drama kind of looks like the example Paul has provided in his list of how to live “the good life.**

Media Option: Clean?

(3–5 minutes, Reverb Media Pass required)

Your students will watch a video where a filthy man tries to sell laundry detergent to passersby.

(3–5 minutes, Reverb Media Pass required)

If your church has purchased the Reverb Media Pass or the Reverb DVD, preview and arrange to show the “Clean?” video. (If your church has not purchased the Reverb Media Pass, you can purchase this single video through the “Media” tab.)

Show the “Clean?” video to your students. When you have finished, have someone summarize the video for you. Then ask students for their reactions. Ask: **Why wouldn’t you buy detergent from a guy covered in dirt? Yet, we expect people to listen to us talk about faith when our lives do not**

match up with our beliefs. Explain that today's lesson is about how our lives must match up with the message of Christ.

Explore Activity

Master Teacher Key Study: The Good Life

(10-15 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will study Romans 12:9-21 to understand the value of doing hard things.

(10-15 minutes, easy set-up)

Download the Master Teacher Key Study. Print one copy for your own use. Also download the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Print a copy for each learner. Also provide pens.

Pass out pens and copies of the Master Teacher Student Worksheet. Then use the Master Teacher Key Study to teach Romans 12:9-21.

Transform Activity

Deeper Discussion

(5-10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will discuss the experience of extending kindness to people who hurt them.

(5-10 minutes, easy set-up)

Use the following prompts to begin a discussion concerning living a good life:

- Share an example from a popular TV show, movie, book, or current news story of someone who paid back evil with good.
- Was it easy or difficult to come up with an example? Explain your answer.
- Have you tried extending kindness to those who hurt you or tried to hurt you? What was the result?
- Do you think that it would make a real difference in your attitude toward both Christians and non-Christians if you made this a practice?
- How difficult do you think that it would be to begin to live in this way?

Creative Prayer

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Students will pray through Romans 12:9-21.

(10 minutes, easy set-up)

Download the “Praying Through Romans 12:9-21” activity sheet. Print a copy for each student.

Hand out a copy of the “Praying through Romans 12:9-21” activity sheet. Point out to students that this is a list of many of the challenges that Paul brings up in this Scripture passage. While it may seem overwhelming to incorporate them all at one time, maybe taking the “bite-sized” approach will help students understand and seek to live them out more realistically.

Say: **Let’s start by taking the first bite as we close today.** Note that they will not be actually eating the paper but instead choosing one challenge on the list to pray about today. Invite group members to share which challenge they will be praying over and maybe even invite others to commit to praying for them through the rest of the day. An alternative is to make this an individual activity by encouraging students to put a small mark by the challenge that they will begin praying through in class. Give students a few moments to get alone or with a partner to pray over their first choice (bite). Close the time with a prayer that reminds them to allow the Holy Spirit to be the one working out the change in their lives.

Reverb Student Book: Do This, and This, and This . . .

(10 minutes, Reverb student book required)

Students will complete an activity about the witness offered by the daily Christian life.

(10 minutes, Reverb student book required)

If your church has purchased the Reverb student book, preview the activity on page 228. If possible, provide a copy of the book to reference as you mention the activity to students.

As students work through pages 226-231 in the *Reverb* student book this week, challenge them to take about 10-15 minutes and read through “Do This, and This, and This . . .” on page 228. Then say:

Sometimes it’s hard to know how we’re supposed to live out our everyday lives as Christians. Paul has given us a list of things that tell us what our lives should look like. That doesn’t mean that it’s easy, but with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us, it’s possible!

Crux 5, "The Good Life"

Review Questions

1. According to Paul in Romans 10, salvation comes to those who _____.
 - a. confess with their lips that Jesus is Lord
 - b. believe in their hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead
 - c. keep the Law
 - d. both a and b

2. According to Romans 10:10, a person believes with the _____.)
 - a. soul
 - b. mind
 - c. heart
 - d. mouth

3. According to Romans 10:13, who can be saved?
 - a. Jews who call on the name of the Lord
 - b. Greeks who call on the name of the Lord
 - c. everyone who calls on the name of the Lord
 - d. Romans who call on the name of the Lord

4. According to Romans 10:14–15, what is one way in which people should learn about God's love?
 - a. through the prayers of believers
 - b. through other people telling them about God's love
 - c. through the guidance of the Holy Spirit
 - d. through unbelievers reading Scripture

5. What does Scripture say is beautiful about those who share the Good News of God's love with others?
 - a. their hands
 - b. their mouths
 - c. their prayers
 - d. their feet

Crux 5, "The Good Life"

Answers

1. According to Paul in Romans 10, salvation comes to those who _____. (*Lesson 4*)
 - a. confess with their lips that Jesus is Lord
 - b. believe in their hearts that God raised Jesus from the dead
 - c. keep the Law
 - d. both a and b**

2. According to Romans 10:10, a person believes with the _____. (*Lesson 4*)
 - a. soul
 - b. mind
 - c. heart**
 - d. mouth

3. According to Romans 10:13, who can be saved? (*Lesson 4*)
 - a. Jews who call on the name of the Lord
 - b. Greeks who call on the name of the Lord
 - c. everyone who calls on the name of the Lord**
 - d. Romans who call on the name of the Lord

4. According to Romans 10:14–15, what is one way in which people should learn about God's love? (*Lesson 4*)
 - a. through the prayers of believers
 - b. through other people telling them about God's love**
 - c. through the guidance of the Holy Spirit
 - d. through unbelievers reading Scripture

5. What does Scripture say is beautiful about those who share the Good News of God's love with others? (*Lesson 4*)
 - a. their hands
 - b. their mouths
 - c. their prayers
 - d. their feet**

Crux 5, "The Good Life"
Drama

Good vs. Evil

Characters:

Evil
Good

Props: None needed

Costumes: They can either be dressed in regular clothes or dressed to represent their characters in some way.

Creative Note: Stage this sketch very simply and let the contrast between the characters speak for itself.

(EVIL and GOOD come on stage and face each other.)

EVIL: You're ugly.

GOOD: You're pretty.

EVIL: You stink.

GOOD: You smell like roses.

EVIL: I can't stand you.

GOOD: I accept you.

EVIL: You're a loser.

GOOD: You're a winner.

EVIL: No one cares about you.

GOOD: You matter.

EVIL: You'll never amount to anything.

GOOD: You can do anything you set your mind to.

EVIL: You're an idiot.

GOOD: You're a genius.

EVIL: You're weird.

GOOD: You're special.

EVIL: You're terrible.

GOOD: You're wonderful.

EVIL: You're pathetic.

GOOD: You're awesome.

EVIL: You're the worst.

GOOD: You're the best.

EVIL: You're completely unlovable.

GOOD: You're very endearing.

EVIL: You couldn't dress worse if you tried.

GOOD: You always look so fashionable.

EVIL: You couldn't get things right if your life depended on it.

GOOD: Everything always comes so easily to you.

EVIL: You make me sick.

GOOD: You make me glad.

EVIL: I hate you!

GOOD: I love you.

(This one finally catches EVIL off guard.)

EVIL: You do?

GOOD: Yes. I do.

EVIL: You mean it?

GOOD: Yes.

EVIL: Why?

GOOD: Because you're you.

EVIL: But I'm bad.

GOOD: Me too.

EVIL: No. You're good.

GOOD: You can be too.

EVIL: I'm sorry.

GOOD: I forgive you.

EVIL: Thank you.

GOOD: I'll help you.

EVIL: I trust you.

(Pause. Then EVIL and GOOD exit together.)

(The End)

Master Teacher Key Study THE GOOD LIFE

(15–20 minutes, easy set-up)

Use this outline and any of the corresponding activities to share the Biblical Truth with students.

Intro: In what area(s) of life do you wish that more was expected of you?

Description: Romans 12:9–21 looks like a summary of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, which is recorded in Matthew 5–7. In the Romans passage, Paul outlined what it looks like to live Godly lives and show the gospel in action as well as through words. It's not easy because it goes against our nature. But Paul outlined the very nature and character of Christ, who lived out His life in these very ways.

Illustration: A pair of teenage twin brothers started a "rebellion." Alex and Brett Harris believe that culture has "dumbed down" today's teenagers by not expecting them to do more than merely coast through their high school years. They started an Internet blog, wrote a book titled *Do Hard Things*, and now they are traveling around the country challenging their peers to be a part of this rebellion against low expectations.

1. It's a hard thing to put others' feelings and needs in front of our own (Rom. 12:9–13).

Description: How can someone tell a Christian from a non-Christian? Consider Paul's grocery list of attitudes and actions that set true believers apart from the world around them.

Illustration: St. Francis of Assisi, a devout follower of Christ and founder of the Order of Franciscan Monks in the 12th century, once said, "Preach the Gospel always; if necessary, use words." St. Francis was influenced by Matthew 10:9 to go into the world and proclaim the gospel—while taking nothing with him. He was, therefore, sworn to a life of poverty, just as the Franciscan Monks are today. His life became an example of the gospel of Christ.

Application: Paul's list of behaviors can seem overwhelming. But when we place our lives in the hands of Christ, His transformational power can gradually change us to the extent that His character becomes part of who we are. As the scholar Robert Mounce said, "What God seeks in the believer is not so much a single worthy act as it is a continuing quality of life."

2. It's a hard thing to walk alongside someone in pain (Rom. 12:14–16).

Description: Our sinful nature wants to persecute and curse, as well as express pride and conceit. Paul called on believers to do the exact opposite of what our nature defaults to.

Illustration: Tell students that you are going to call out a word and that you want them to shout back a word that describes something opposite to what you call. Some examples: *day* and *night*, *white* and *black*, *happy* and *sad*, *cold* and *hot*. Make sure that you end with *bless* and *curse*.

Application: Remind students that being a God-follower is not only about lock-ins and summer camp. Rather, we are challenged to do some hard things that are the opposite of what we really want to do.

3. It's a hard thing to leave revenge in God's hands (Rom. 12:17–21).

Description: God is the final judge. He will repay all evil done against Him according to His righteous judgment. In fact, revenge doesn't belong to us at all. We are called to show the grace and peace of God.

Illustration: Many years ago, during a Knicks-Bullets NBA basketball game, one of the Bullets came up from behind the great Walt Frazier and punched him in the face. Strangely, the referee called a foul on Frazier. Frazier didn't complain. His expression never changed. He simply called for the ball and put in seven straight shots to win the game, an amazing display of productive anger. "Do not be overcome with evil but overcome evil with good." For Walt, this translated into a winning game. Where can you put this challenge into action in your life?

Application: In verse 18 we read, "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." The scholar F.F. Bruce wrote, "The best way to get rid of an enemy is to turn him into a friend." We are responsible for keeping our actions and attitudes in line with God's Word.

Conclusion: Many times, the right thing to do is the hardest thing to do.

Description: Obeying the directives in this passage puts believers on track for "the good life." These reflect a life that has been transformed by the power of Jesus Christ through a relationship with Him.

Application: These verses, full of instructions on how to live "the good life," only apply to believers as they seek to be obedient to God's Word in their lives. It's hard enough being good—but to be good for nothing? Impossible! Instead, we have to focus our hearts and minds on allowing God to transform our lives. The changes will come!

REVERB::CRUX::lesson five**THE GOOD LIFE****biblical passage:** Romans 12:9–21**memory verse:** Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good..**THE GOOD LIFE**

1. It's a hard thing to put others' _____ and _____ in front of our own (Rom. 12:9–13).
2. It's a hard thing to _____ someone in pain (Rom. 12:14–16).
3. It's a hard thing to leave _____ in God's _____ (Rom. 12:17–21).

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Share an example from a popular TV show, movie, book, or current news story of someone who paid back evil with good.
- Was it easy or difficult to come up with an example? Explain your answer.
- Have you tried extending kindness to those who hurt you or tried to hurt you? What was the result?
- Do you think that it would make a real difference in your attitude toward both Christians and non-Christians if you made this a practice?
- How difficult do you think that it would be to begin to live in this way?

REVERB::CRUX::The Good Life::lesson five

PRAYING THROUGH ROMANS 12:9–21

Below is a list of the challenges from these verses that Paul presents to believers as they seek to live in a way that reflects the character of Christ. Choose one challenge a day for the next week (or longer) and pray about how God will make this real in your relationships with friends, family, and beyond.

- Love must be sincere.
- Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.
- Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.
- Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.
- Be joyful in hope.
- Be patient in affliction.
- Be faithful in prayer.
- Practice hospitality.
- Bless those who persecute you.
- Live in harmony with one another.
- Be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.
- Do not repay evil for evil. . . . Overcome evil with good.