

WHEN YOU ARE HATED...
ROMANS 12:14-16

Like you, I've had relationships where I've known the other person didn't like me. Those are hard relationships. You know that and have experienced that. But I don't know that I've had anyone ever *really* hate me — hate me to the point of working against me, to persecute me, and to destroy me.

Guido de Brès was the author of the Belgic Confession of faith and a faithful follower of Christ. He was imprisoned for his faith and sentenced to death. In April, 1567, he wrote to his wife to encourage her in her faith, even while death awaited him. Among other things he noted this:

I am held in a very strong prison, very bleak, obscure and dark...On my feet and hands I have irons, big and heavy. They are a continual hell, hollowing my limbs up to my poor bones. The chief constable comes to look at my irons two or three times a day, fearing that I will escape. There are three guards of forty men before the door of the prison.

I have also the visits of Monsieur de Hamaide. He comes to see me, to console me, and to exhort me to patience, as he says. However, he comes after dinner, after he has wine in the head and a full stomach. You can imagine what these consolations are. He threatens me and says to me that if I would show any intention of escaping he would have me chained by the neck, the body and legs, so that I could not move a finger; and he says many other things in this order. But for all that, my God does not take away his promises, consoling my heart, giving me very much contentment.



When you are hated — hated to the point of persecution, what do you do? That's the issue Paul addresses in the last portion of **Romans 12**. He tells us at the beginning of the chapter that because of all that we have in our salvation (chs. 1-11), we should be renewed and transformed (12:1-2). And that renewal will overflow in the use of our spiritual gifts that we have been given (vv. 3-8). And as we use our gifts, we will cultivate relationships in the church body that are loving (vv. 9-11), even in the face of hardship (vv. 12-13). But what about hard relationships — the relationships when people are out to harm *you*? What then?

Paul answers that question in **Romans 12:14-16** by saying,

WHEN PEOPLE ARE PERSONALLY OPPOSED TO YOU, BE A BLESSING TO THEM.

In this passage, Paul provides us with **six priorities** when people are against us:

1. When *You* are Persecuted: **LOVE** and Don't **HATE** (v. 14)
2. When Others are Joyful: **REJOICE** (v. 15a)
3. When Others Grieve: **GRIEVE** (v. 15b)
4. In Every Relationship: Be **IMPARTIAL** and **UNITY**-minded (v. 16a)
5. In Every Relationship: Be a **SERVANT** to the needy (v. 16b)
6. In Every Relationship: Be **HUMBLE** (v. 16c)

1. When You are Persecuted: **LOVE** and Don't **HATE** (v. 14)

- There seems to be a clear transition between vv. 13 and 14. Those with whom we are in relationship in these verses are primarily antagonistic and adversarial, something inconsistent of believers. How will we respond to such actions?
- It is important to learn to suffer well. Every believer needs to learn to see God's goodness in the midst of our hardships. But Paul is talking about more than suffering; he's talking about animosity and **persecution**. This persecution is the same word as **pursuing** in v. 13 — it is an intensive desire and seeking after something — in this case, seeking out people to do harm to them.
 - ✓ There is no particular evidence that the Roman church was being persecuted (though Jewish believers had been expelled from Rome in A.D. 49 and later returned), but part of Paul's regular teaching was that believers should expect persecution (**Phil. 1:29**; 1 Thess. 2:14-15; 2 Tim. 3:12). How to respond?
 - ✓ Twice in this verse he says to **bless** those who persecute us. This means that we ask God to bless those who **persecute** and harass and have animosity for us. They want destruction for us and we want God's blessing for them — which seems also to be an expression of love (vv. 9-10ff).
 - To **bless** our persecutors is not referring to mere words offered on their behalf.
 - To **bless** our persecutors is to desire good for them. We want God's goodness for them, we actively do good for them, and we treat them as our friends. *This is radically against the flesh.*
 - And what is notable is that Paul seems to be emphasizing the personal nature of the persecution — it is persecution and it is against **us**. It is not just that the world is opposed to Christians; it is that particular people are opposed to us personally. And under that personal attack, we **bless**.
 - ✓ The tendency when harassed is to want to **curse** — to seek their condemnation and destruction. It's easy to pray an imprecatory Psalm when someone is persecuting us. E.g., **Ps. 69:20-28**.
 - ✓ Seeking justice from God takes no act of moral courage or evidence of redemption. What takes the work of the Spirit of our God in our lives is to pray ("call down") blessing on those who seek our downfall. Yet that was our Savior's example for us (**1 Pt. 2:21-23**). When hated, don't hate.
 - ✓ To bless someone when we are suffering and to refrain from complaint and defensiveness and bitterness is to be humble — to say, "even if I suffer, I want God's best for that individual."
 - ✓ This also echoes the very words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (**Mt. 5:44-45**). It also echoes His words on the cross (**Mt. 23:34**). To bless our persecutors, then, includes asking God to save them.
 - ✓ Before breaking the relationship with my enemy, I need to ask if God has me there for gospel reasons.
- There are a couple of lessons to learn about persecution:
 1. We need to learn to rejoice when suffering (**Rom. 12:12**; **Mt. 5:11-12, 44**; **2 Thess. 1:4-5**).
 2. But even more, we need to learn to **bless** and seek good for our persecutors when suffering.

2. When Others are Joyful: REJOICE (v. 15a)

- There is a question about whether Paul is still talking about evil people (unbelievers) in v. 15 or if he is turning back again to believers (as in vv. 9-13). I tend to think that he is still thinking about unbelievers because he is clearly talking about unbelievers in vv. 17-21. I believe he is maintaining that theme. But even if he is talking again about believers, the principle he is making still applies — when others get gain (and the implication is that you don't have "happy" things), what do you do? How do you respond when you see others — even wicked and evil people — prospering?
 - ✓ Superficially, this verse seems easy to do. But let's put a different twist on it. We usually read it as "rejoice when your friends rejoice and weep when your friends weep."
 - ✓ But let's try this: "Rejoice when your *personal* enemies rejoice in their prosperity..." Paul puts no limitations on those with whom we are to rejoice and weep — **those who** means "whomever..." (It does not mean we need to rejoice in their sin, if it is their sin that is giving them happiness.)
 - ✓ The Psalmist says that we are not to worry or be envious of the seemingly easy life of the wicked (Ps. 37:1). Paul takes it another step — **rejoice** with them in their joys.
 - ✓ "The point of the exhortation is that we are to enter into this rejoicing as if the occasion for it were our own. If we love our neighbour as ourselves, if we appreciate the community within the body of Christ, the joys of others will be ours (cf. I Cor. 12:26b)." [Murray]
 - ✓ As an aside, please notice also that Paul is commanding us to control our emotions. We think joy and sorrow are things that happen to us; Paul says they are expressions of involvement with others that can be commanded and controlled. Our emotional expressions should be (and can be) consistent with the circumstances in which God places us (cf. 1 Cor. 12:25-26).
- Let's be honest, when our enemies have success and are joyful, we are prone to jealousy and resentment. And when they are sorrowful, inwardly we are happy because they received their due. The temptation and inclination of the flesh is that if they rejoice, we weep; they weep and we rejoice.
 - ✓ Paul says it should be just the opposite. Their joy should be our joy. This verse is something of a test of verse 14 — can we bless our persecutors to the point that we rejoice and weep with them?
 - ✓ Paul obeys this counsel himself — Phil. 1:12-18 — some *believers* rejoiced at Paul's circumstances in prison; Paul rejoiced in the advance of the gospel that came through those who hated him.
 - ✓ Think about your opponents (who may hate you); can you rejoice when they experience blessings and favorable circumstances? That's our calling as followers of the Savior — and when we don't rejoice, it reveals the lack of sanctification of our own hearts.
 - ✓ Even more importantly, our rejoicing and weeping appropriately with our enemies may be the best means we have of sowing the seeds of the gospel into their lives.
 - ✓

3. When Others Grieve: GRIEVE (v. 15b)

- Just like we are to rejoice with others (even our enemies) when benevolent things happen to them, we also should **weep with them** when hard and sorrowful things happen to them.
 - ✓ Weeping is what we do when we experience suffering and death.
 - ✓ That we weep over others' griefs means we are not "indifferent to the sorrows of others." [Morris]
 - ✓ When we weep for others, we are demonstrating the compassion of God, who cares about the sufferings even of sinners (even as He cared for our suffering, and saved us; Lam. 3:22; Jonah 4:2).
- Notice something else in this verse — Paul doesn't just say that we rejoice and weep *for* them (which is what I've been saying so far), but that we rejoice and weep **with them**.
 - ✓ We are *personally*, actively, intentionally engaged with them. This is "the ministry of presence."
 - ✓ We are in their presence and holding them and talking with them and rejoicing and weeping.
 - ✓ We are with them, weeping with them as if their sorrow was our own sorrow.
 - ✓ Why does God give us emotions like laughter and tears and fear and "loneliness" and anger? They, along with every emotion, reveal something about our heart.
 - ✓ Why does God have us to rejoice and weep with others? To cultivate empathy and involvement — to demonstrate that our hearts are filled with compassion for the other person. They might hate us, but we love them and yearn for their best.
 - ✓ And when we rejoice and weep with them, it gives us an avenue to speak whatever truth is needed in that moment into their lives — and because we are appropriately rejoicing and weeping, they know it is an expression of love for them.
 - ✓ If we want to be evangelistic, this might be one of our best tools and opportunities.
- So rejoice with rejoicers and grieve with grievors, and see how the Lord might give you an opportunity to give His grace to them, even when they are your enemies.

4. In Every Relationship: Be IMPARTIAL and UNITY-minded (v. 16a)

- If we are going to be humble with others, we are going to have to win a battle in our minds. We are going to need renewed and transformed minds to maintain humility.
- **Be of the same mind** means to have an attitude or opinion or thought about something. To have the same opinion of others means that our attitude towards others (believers and unbelievers) is uniform — we don't assume a position of superiority for ourselves and don't assume that others are inferior to us.
 - ✓ To be of the same mind is to be impartial (Phil. 2:2; Js. 2:1ff).
 - ✓ When we are impartial, we exemplify the character of God who is impartial (Rom. 2:11; 1 Pt. 1:17)

- Notice also that this single-mindedness is given **toward one another** — anyone with whom you are connected and anyone in your circle of influence. Obviously this is particularly true for believers; but it also applies to our relationships with unbelievers — we were all in the same position (Rom. 1-3). When someone hates me, they are doing the very same things I did before I was redeemed. So I don't need to act as if they are doing something I'm incapable of doing. I can, and apart from Christ, I would.
- The result of being of the same mind and impartial is that it promotes unity. We are together.
 - ✓ Unity is essential in the church because the Triune godhead is unified (Jn. 17:22ff).
 - ✓ Unity is essential because it is our testimony to the world.
- Like so much else in our lives, being impartial is the result of renewing our minds and thinking rightly.
 - ✓ Sanctification is the result of a renewed mind (v. 2).
 - ✓ Unity and impartiality is the result of having the same mind — thinking rightly. In fact, the root word for “mind” occurs 3x in the verse — “same mind,” “haughty in mind,” and “wise.”
 - ✓ If we are going to treat others well — both “friends” and “enemies” — we need to change our thought patterns. We need a new way to think.
 - ✓ And the new way to think is “I am not pre-eminent; we all have the same needs...”

5. In Every Relationship: Be a **SERVANT** to the needy (v. 16b)

- To be of the same mind also means we **are not haughty**. We don't think highly of ourselves and we don't think too lowly of ourselves, either.
 - ✓ This is akin to **v. 3** — we have rightly evaluated our position — neither over- or under-estimating.
 - ✓ We are not concerned about protecting ourselves or our reputation. We are concerned for others.
 - ✓ In this verse, Paul means we don't think that there is anything that is beneath our ability to do.
- Paul creates a contrast to make his point — **but**. Instead of being haughty, we **associate with the lowly**.
 - ✓ We accommodate ourselves to and willingly affiliate ourselves with those who are undistinguished.
 - ✓ We look for those whom others overlook. We seek those who are “beneath our station.”
 - ✓ Our example of this is our Savior, who was the friend of sinners: **Mt. 9:11; 11:19**.
 - ✓ Our tendency is to think that we are worthy of being associated with those who are more influential than we are; God says we are worthy to associate with those who are less influential than we are.

“There is to be no aristocracy in the church, no cliques of the wealthy as over against the poor, no pedestals of unapproachable dignity for those on the higher social and economic strata or for those who are in office in the church (cf. I Pet. 5:3). How contradictory to all such pretension is the character of the church's head: ‘I am meek and lowly in heart’ (Matt. 11:29).” [John Murray]

6. In Every Relationship: Be HUMBLE (v. 16c)

- To be of the same mind also means we are ***not wise in our own estimation***. Don't assume that you are shrewd and wise and perceptive and capable. Cf. **11:25** — don't think your salvation is deserved and that you are special because you have been saved. Cf. **Prov. 3:7**.
 - ✓ This verb ***do not be*** is also a present imperative — don't have the habit of being conceited. In other words, there is a real temptation to cultivate the habit of conceit.
 - ✓ As you relate to others, particularly unbelievers, be humble towards them because you are no different than they are. You and I do not have what we have because of our own abilities. We have what we have only by grace. **Jer. 9:23-24**.
 - ✓ When we are thinking humbly about ourselves in relation to others (even our persecutors), we will recognize that we don't deserve better treatment.
 - ✓ In fact, when we suffer ill treatment from sinners, we have a taste of what we have been spared. What we deserved because of our sin is the infinite wrath of God — which is infinitely worse than anything anyone on earth can inflict on us. So when we suffer, we can say, "I deserve much worse — thank you, God, for your grace to me..."
 - ✓ Our relationships with unbelievers will improve when we understand that we are no better than they are. We are simply graced by God's kindness. Be humble in your thoughts.
- To not be wise in our estimation also means that when we see unbelievers doing foolish things and suffering the consequences of them that we aren't arrogant and prideful — "how could you be so stupid?" Brothers, apart from Christ, we did the same things and we would have continued. Don't assume you couldn't have also been a hating persecutor (**1 Tim. 1:13**).

CONCLUSION:

The hardship of relationships is not just that they can be difficult. The hardship includes what God calls us to be and do in the middle of the difficulty. God calls each of us to be humble, patient, kind, persevering and forgiving. God calls us to speak with grace and to act with love, even when the relationship lacks grace and we have not been treated with love. Because of this, your relationships will take you beyond the boundaries of your normal strength. They will take you beyond the range of your natural abilities and beyond the borders of your natural and acquired wisdom. Relationships will push you beyond the limits of your ability to love, serve, and forgive. They will push you beyond you. At times they will beat at the borders of your faith. At times they will exhaust you. In certain situations, your relationships will leave you disappointed and discouraged. They will require what you do not seem to have, but that is exactly as God intended it. That is precisely why he placed these demanding relationships in the middle of the process of sanctification, where God progressively molds us into the likeness of Jesus. When you give up on yourself, you begin to rely on him. When you are willing to abandon your own little dreams, you begin to get excited about his plan. When your way has blown up in your face again, you are ready to see the wisdom of God's way. [Lane & Tripp, Relationships..., p. 111.]

Relationships are not easy. But they are a necessity. And they are worth the effort we put into them because all that work reflects the reality that we have been saved and redeemed by Christ.

When we follow the pattern given in this passage, our relationships will be distinctively Christian and Christlike. And those relationships may not be an easier, but they will honor Christ. And when we honor Christ, we will be satisfied.

BENEDICTION: Romans 11:33-36