

Our Witness among the World # 43
Romans 12: 9-21

After laying a solid foundation regarding salvation, Paul has focused his attention on the everyday life of the believer. Being born again in Christ results in a total transformation. Our lives are much different than before. Having been placed within the body of Christ, we are now called to live a life that honors the Lord and present a positive, influential witness to the world.

Paul has spoken of the need for complete surrender to Christ and the transformation that accompanies such a surrender. He has addressed the unique gifts we all possess and the need for us to be active and supportive within the body of Christ. As we close out this chapter, we discover Paul's admonition regarding our interaction with the world around us and the witness we are expected to present. Let's consider these [admonitions](#) as we think on: [Our Witness among the World](#). We find Paul speaks of:

I. The Character of Believers (9-13) – These verses deal specifically with our Christian character. We find we are expected to:

A. Be Genuine (9) – [Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.](#) Our love for one another and those around us is to be genuine and without hypocrisy. We are to love others as Christ loved us. We are to literally hate and detest that which is evil, holding firmly to that which is good and right.

B. Be Gracious (10) – [Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another.](#) The affection spoken of is within the context of family. We are to love fellow believers and those around us as we would our own families. This love is always aware of, and sensitive to, the needs of others. We are to be gracious and considerate of their needs, being willing to place them above our own.

C. Be Fervent (11) – [Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord.](#) Paul admonishes fervency in all we do, being committed to putting forth every possible effort to achieve our goals. We are not to be lazy in our work and business dealings. Laziness reflects negatively on the body of Christ. We must also be fervent in our desire for the Lord and service to Him. This literally means to “*seethe or bubble*” and paints the picture of boiling water. Our passion and service for the Lord ought to generate energy and passion that is easily noticed by those around us!

D. Be Steadfast (12) – [Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer](#). Here we find practical instruction regarding our daily character. We are to be joyful and rejoice through the blessed hope we have in Christ our Lord. Being mindful of such hope allows us to be patient in the midst of adversity; and as we face difficulties and trials, we must remain consistent in prayer. These characteristics are revealed in the lives of those who are steadfast in their faith, keeping their eyes upon the Lord rather than the circumstances of life.

E. Be Compassionate (13) – [Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality](#). The believer whose life has been transformed in Christ ought to be compassionate toward others. We are never more like our Lord than when we possess the love He has for humanity, love that moves us to action in regard to the needs of others. We are to provide for their needs as we can, being given to hospitality. [Gal.6:2 – Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ](#). James 2:15-16 – [If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, ^{\[16\]} And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?](#)

II. The Cooperation of Believers (14-17) – As Christian character is developed and expressed openly, it leads to cooperation among believers, even when it is difficult. Paul speaks of:

A. Restraint (14) – [Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not](#). Our Christian character allows us to practice restraint as we deal with others, even those outside the faith. Rather than cursing them, wishing ill will toward them, we are to bless those who persecute us. This has the idea of “*speaking well of.*” That doesn’t mean we condone or encourage their sinful ways, but instead of slandering them, we hope for their wellbeing, and eventual salvation. This isn’t always easy, but it is expected of those who are transformed in Christ.

B. Empathy (15) – [Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep](#). Paul declares we are to be empathetic toward others, sharing in their feelings. If we will be honest, both of these are a struggle at times. Often jealousy or pride will hinder our rejoicing in the accomplishments or blessings of others. At times we fail to share the pain and sorrow others face. We must be willing to share in their joy and their pain. We are all one body, and each member should feel the emotion experienced by other members within the body.

C. Humility (16) – [Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits](#). We must be mindful of the entire body as we

serve the Lord. We must share the same vision and desire with fellow believers. We are all in this work together, striving to obtain a common goal. We must never place ourselves or others on a pedestal, but cherish and encourage the participation and contributions of every member. We are not called to exalt ourselves, but through a humble spirit, serve the Lord and others!

D. Retribution (17) – *Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*

Here we find instruction concerning our actions and behavior toward others. Our human nature has a tendency to “return the favor” or behave in like manner to others’ behavior toward us. We are not to return wrongs committed against us with the same attitude or action. We are to walk upright before all, even those who have wronged us. We must bear in mind the great forgiveness we received in Christ. Had He dealt with us according to what we deserved, we would yet be condemned in sin without hope. We are called to love and serve others, even those whom we perceive are unworthy of such devotion.

III. The Constraint of Believers (18-21) – As we close our study today, Paul addresses the constraint we are to show, even in the face of adversity and abuse from others. We are to:

A. Be Peaceful (18) – *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.* The Lord desires that we live peaceably with all men, if that is possible. We are to make every effort to avoid conflict and live in harmony with others. This will require going the extra mile, being willing to seek forgiveness and reconciliation, even if we feel as if we have been wronged by an aggressor. We are to make every effort to ensure peace within our lives. (I believe Paul realized this would not always be possible. Some have no desire for peace and harmony, and will seek to counter every attempt we make to obtain a peaceful situation. We may have to avoid those to keep peace, but the lack of peace should never be because we have not made every effort to secure it!)

B. Be Patient (19) – *Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.* This goes hand in hand with the retribution we spoke of earlier. No doubt we have all been hurt or wronged by others. The flesh wants to avenge the hurt we experienced. As followers of Christ, we are to leave that in His hands. We must never seek to repay and evil committed against us. We are to trust the Lord, while patiently waiting for Him to right the wrongs we have experienced. We may never receive an apology, and the matter may never be addressed by the aggressor, but we must leave that in the Lord’s hands!

C. Be Proactive (20) – *Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.* This speaks of making every effort to do the right thing, even when we feel our actions are undeserved by others, in order to be faithful to the Lord and bear witness of Him among the world. We must constantly seek ways to make a difference and be a positive influence in the lives of others. We will not be accountable for the actions and behaviors of others. God will deal with them according to their deeds, just as He will deal with us according to our deeds. Kindness and compassion cannot be ignored. If we argue and fight with those who have wronged us, we provide legitimacy to their position. However, if we repay evil with goodness and kindness, they have no ammunition to use against us!

D. Be Pure (21) – *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.* Here we discover a summary statement that practically envelopes all we have spoken of today. We must not allow the evils and adversities of life to dictate our existence. Rather than being defeated by the world and all it brings against us, we are to overcome all of this with goodness. We must maintain a desire to serve the Lord, revealing the change that has taken place within us. We must consistently portray the grace and love of God to all we meet, regardless of their treatment or acceptance. We must do all we can to live upright and pure before a world that desperately needs a godly witness!

Conclusion: These have been very simple admonitions, easily understood, but they are often hard to put in practice and consistently live out. I will admit there is room for improvement in my life. How about you? Has the Lord spoken to you in regard to needed change? Are you living in a way that pleases Him? He has called us to live this way before the world, and He will never call us to a specific task without providing the means to fulfill it.

These characteristics and behaviors are difficult enough for the believer, and impossible for those apart from Christ. Have you received Christ by faith as your Lord and Savior? Have you responded to the call of salvation made available through His grace? If not, I urge you to look to Him by faith and be saved.