

One Another, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 3: Live in Harmony with One Another

Romans 12:14–21

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson continues Paul's portrait of the gospel-shaped life that began in Romans 12:1. Having called the saints to sincere, devoted love within the body in verses 9 through 13, he now widens the circle to include those who oppose us, and he confronts the most stubborn enemy of harmony, the human craving for revenge. What is doctrinally at stake here is large. Paul is teaching Christians to live by an entirely different ethic from the world's, an ethic of blessing instead of cursing, of empathy instead of indifference, of humility instead of pride, and of overcoming evil with good rather than answering evil in kind. Help students see that this is not natural human wisdom but the way of the cross.

The doctrinal center of the passage is verse 19: "Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord." Make sure students grasp that the refusal of revenge is not a denial that justice matters. It is the opposite. We hand vengeance to God precisely because we believe he is the righteous Judge who sees every wrong and will repay perfectly. The Christian does not absorb evil because evil does not matter, but because God himself has taken responsibility for justice, supremely at the cross where sin was judged and mercy offered. Releasing our right to revenge is an act of faith in God's justice, not a surrender of it.

At the same time, keep the lesson pressing into the heart and hands. Paul does not let us stop at not retaliating; he commands positive blessing, feeding the hungry enemy, pursuing peace as far as it depends on us. This is costly, specific, and against the grain. Do not let the class admire these verses from a safe distance. Press each truth toward an actual person who has wronged the student, and toward a concrete step of blessing. The aim is that students would walk out not merely understanding the ethic of the cross but beginning, by the Spirit, to live it.

Question 1

Student Question:

Paul writes, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse" (Romans 12:14). Why would the gospel call Christians not merely to endure their persecutors but actively to bless them, and where do we see the Lord Jesus himself living this out?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by letting the difficulty of this command stand. Paul does not say merely to tolerate persecutors or to grit your teeth and avoid retaliation. He says to bless them, to actively desire

and speak good over the very people who are doing you harm. This is one of the hardest commands in all of Scripture, and we should not soften it. Help students feel its sharpness before moving to apply it.

Show that this command comes straight from Jesus. In the Sermon on the Mount he taught us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, so that we may be children of our Father in heaven, who sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:44–45). Blessing our persecutors is not an optional heroic extra; it is the family likeness of those born of God. We bless because our Father blesses, and we want to look like him.

Then point to the cross, where Jesus did exactly this. As the soldiers drove the nails, he prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34). Peter tells us that when Christ suffered he did not retaliate or threaten, but entrusted himself to him who judges justly, leaving us an example to follow in his steps (1 Peter 2:21–23). The Christian who blesses a persecutor is walking the very road the Savior walked.

Bring it home gently. Most students will not face violent persecution, but all of us face the smaller cuts: the unfair criticism, the cold shoulder, the slander, the relative who mocks our faith. Ask them what it would look like to genuinely speak and seek good toward such a person, in prayer and in word, rather than returning the cut. Blessing is not pretending the wrong did not happen; it is choosing, in Christ, to want good for the one who wronged us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Blessing persecutors as the command of Christ himself and the mark of God’s children (Matthew 5:44–45)
- Christ’s example on the cross, praying for his executioners and not retaliating (Luke 23:34; 1 Peter 2:21–23)
- The family likeness of those born again, reflecting the Father who blesses the just and unjust (Matthew 5:45)
- The difference between merely enduring an enemy and actively seeking his good
- Blessing as an act of faith and will, not a denial that real wrong has occurred

Discussion Prompts

- What is the difference between tolerating a persecutor and genuinely blessing him?
- How does the example of Jesus on the cross shape the way you hear this command?
- Who is one person you find it hardest to bless, and what would blessing them actually look like?

Question 2

Student Question:

Be honest about your own reactions. When someone wrongs or belittles you, what actually rises in your heart and onto your tongue, a blessing or a curse? Name one recent moment where you cursed, in word, in thought, or in silent wish, rather than blessed.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, and the goal is honesty rather than guilt. We like to think of ourselves as gracious until someone actually wounds us; then we discover what is really in the well by what comes up in the bucket. Help students look honestly at their gut reactions, the muttered word, the sharp reply, the silent wish that the other person would get what is coming to them.

Draw out that cursing is not only the spoken word. Paul's command reaches the heart. We curse when we replay the offense and wish ill on the offender, when we hope they fail, when we savor the thought of their comeuppance. Many of us would never curse aloud, yet we run a quiet stream of cursing thoughts. Encourage students to name a specific, recent moment rather than confessing in vague generalities.

Turn toward grace and a real next step. The point of naming our cursing is not to despair but to bring our wounded, retaliating hearts to Christ, who blessed his enemies and can change ours. Often the first step is simply to replace a cursing thought with a prayer of blessing for that person. It feels impossible at first, but obedience here is the path along which the heart is slowly reshaped to look like Jesus.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The heart revealed by our reactions when we are wronged (Luke 6:45; Matthew 12:34)
- Cursing as a matter of the heart and thought life, not only of speech (Matthew 5:21-22)
- Self-examination as a healthy part of the Christian walk (2 Corinthians 13:5)
- The transforming grace of Christ as the remedy for a retaliating heart

Discussion Prompts

- What does your gut reaction to being wronged reveal about what is really in your heart?
- In what ways do we curse others in thought even when we never curse them aloud?
- Name one recent moment where you cursed rather than blessed, and what blessing could have looked like.

Question 3

Student Question:

Paul says, "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn" (Romans 12:15). What does it reveal about the nature of the church as one body that we are commanded to share both one another's joys and one another's sorrows?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin with the picture of the body that Paul develops elsewhere. In one body, if one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it (1 Corinthians 12:26). Verse 15 is that truth in everyday clothes. Because we are genuinely one body in Christ, your joy is my joy and your grief is my grief. We are not separate individuals who happen to meet; we are joined members of a single living thing.

Notice that Paul commands both directions, and both are hard in different ways. Mourning with those who mourn requires us to enter another's pain without rushing to fix it or explain it, simply to weep alongside. Rejoicing with those who rejoice requires us to celebrate another's blessing without envy, even when their good fortune highlights something we lack. The selfish heart resists both; it would rather stay comfortable and undisturbed.

Show that this empathy flows from the gospel and from love. Because Christ has so joined us to himself and to one another, we cannot remain indifferent to a brother's wedding or a sister's funeral. Indifference to one another's lives is a sign that we have forgotten what we are. The command to rejoice and mourn together is the command to actually live as the family and body we have been made.

Apply it concretely. Ask students whether they are present in one another's high and low moments, the hospital room, the graveside, the celebration, the new baby. This kind of shared life takes time and intentional presence; it cannot be done from a distance. Encourage them to think of a brother or sister whose joy or sorrow they could deliberately enter this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The church as one body whose members share suffering and honor together (1 Corinthians 12:26)
- Empathy and shared emotional life as a fruit of genuine union in Christ (Romans 12:15)
- Envy as the enemy of rejoicing with others, and self-protection as the enemy of mourning with them
- The call to costly, present, time-giving love within the body
- Christ's own compassion, who wept with those who wept (John 11:33-35)

Discussion Prompts

- Why is rejoicing with someone sometimes harder than mourning with them?
- What does it require of us, practically, to actually mourn with those who mourn?
- Whose joy or sorrow could you deliberately enter into this week, and how?

Question 4

Student Question:

Search your heart honestly. Which is harder for you, weeping with those who weep, or rejoicing with those who rejoice when their blessing exposes your own envy? Name one person whose joy or sorrow you have kept at arm's length.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question lets each student locate their own resistance. Some of us find weeping with others hard; the pain of others makes us uncomfortable, so we keep our distance, offer a quick word, and move on. Others find rejoicing harder; another's blessing stirs up envy, and we manage a thin smile while something sour turns in us. Help students name honestly which way they tend to fail.

Press gently on the matter of envy, because it often hides. When a brother gets the promotion, the house, the healthy baby, the answered prayer we are still waiting for, the heart can feel a small protest. Rejoicing with those who rejoice means killing that protest and genuinely delighting in their good. Encourage students to see envy not as a minor flaw but as a failure of love that needs to be confessed and surrendered.

Turn toward grace and a concrete step. The aim is not to feel condemned but to let the Spirit grow a fuller love. Ask students to name one specific person whose joy or sorrow they have held at arm's length, and to take a step toward closing that distance, a visit, a card, a genuine word of celebration, a prayer of thanks for the other person's blessing. Often the action precedes and reshapes the feeling.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Envy as a work of the flesh that resists rejoicing with others (Galatians 5:19–21)
- Self-protection and discomfort as obstacles to mourning with others
- The call to contentment that frees us to celebrate another's blessing (Philippians 4:11–13)
- Self-examination and confession as the path to a fuller, more present love

Discussion Prompts

- Which is genuinely harder for you, weeping with others or rejoicing with them, and why?
- How does envy quietly keep you from celebrating a brother or sister's blessing?
- Name one person whose joy or sorrow you have kept at a distance, and one step toward them.

Question 5

Student Question:

Paul commands, "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position" (Romans 12:16). Why does Paul make humility the path to harmony, and what does this teach us about the real cause of division in the church?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Start by clarifying what harmony is and is not. To “live in harmony” is literally to be of the same mind toward one another, to have our hearts tuned to one another and to Christ. It is not uniformity of opinion on every matter or sameness of personality. It is a settled, shared disposition of love and unity. And the very next words tell us how it is reached: not by everyone being right, but by no one being proud.

Show that pride is the great divider. Paul connects harmony directly to humility because pride is what shatters peace. Pride insists on its own way, looks down on others, keeps score, demands recognition, and refuses the lower place. When Paul adds “be willing to associate with people of low position” and “do not be conceited,” he is naming the proud heart that draws lines between itself and those it considers beneath it. Help students see that most division in a church is not finally about doctrine; it is about pride wearing doctrine as a costume.

Connect this to the mind of Christ. The Lord of glory associated with the lowly, ate with sinners, washed feet, and took the form of a servant (Philippians 2:3–8). The path to harmony in the body is the downward path he walked. Where we are willing to take the lower place, to count others more significant, to associate gladly with those the world overlooks, peace grows. Where we grasp for position and preference, peace dies.

Apply it to congregational life. Ask students where pride has crept into their relationships in the church, the insistence on being right, the unwillingness to apologize, the quiet ranking of people by status or usefulness. Then point them to the concrete cure Paul gives: deliberately associating with the lowly, refusing conceit, and choosing the humble path. Harmony is not negotiated; it is the fruit of humbled hearts.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Harmony as oneness of heart and mind in Christ, not uniformity of opinion (Romans 12:16)
- Pride as the root cause of division, and humility as the path to peace (Proverbs 13:10; James 4:1–6)
- The mind of Christ, who associated with the lowly and took the servant’s place (Philippians 2:3–8)
- The call to honor and welcome those of low position rather than ranking people by status (James 2:1–4)
- Unity in the body as the fruit of humbled hearts tuned to Christ (Ephesians 4:2–3)

Discussion Prompts

- Why does Paul tie harmony so directly to humility rather than to agreement on every issue?
- How does pride disguise itself in church conflicts and divisions?
- Where do you need to take the lower place to make peace possible in a strained relationship?

Question 6

Student Question:

Consider your own circle in the church family. Are there people of “low position,” whether socially, economically, or in the eyes of others, that you quietly avoid or overlook? Name one person you have kept at a distance because associating with them felt beneath you.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question turns verse 16 into a mirror. Most of us, if we are honest, gravitate toward people who are like us, who are useful to us, or who make us look good. We may not consciously rank people, but our patterns reveal it: who we sit with, who we invite, who we genuinely engage and who we merely nod to. Help students examine those patterns without defensiveness.

Name the subtlety of this sin. It rarely announces itself. We do not think, “That person is beneath me.” We simply find them awkward, or boring, or needy, or not our kind, and we drift away. James warns sharply against showing favoritism, seating the well-dressed in honor and the poor in the corner (James 2:1–4). The proud heart sorts people, and the gospel commands us to stop.

Turn toward grace and a concrete step. Remind students that Christ associated with us when we had no position before God, nothing to commend us, nothing to offer him. He drew near to the lowly, and we are the lowly he drew near to. Ask each student to name one specific person they have kept at arm’s length because associating felt beneath them, and to take a deliberate step of welcome this week, a conversation, an invitation, a seat saved, a genuine interest taken.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The sin of favoritism and partiality in the body of Christ (James 2:1–9)
- Christ’s pattern of drawing near to the lowly and the outcast (Luke 15:1–2; Matthew 11:19)
- The gospel reminder that we ourselves had no standing before God apart from grace
- Active welcome of the overlooked as the cure for proud, sorting hearts

Discussion Prompts

- How does the heart quietly sort people without ever admitting it is doing so?
- Why is it significant that Christ drew near to us when we had no standing before God?
- Name one person you have kept at a distance, and one deliberate step of welcome toward them.

Question 7

Student Question:

Paul writes, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil” and “do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath” (Romans 12:17, 19). How does trusting God as the just Judge who will repay free a Christian from the burden of avenging himself?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by clearing up a common misunderstanding. Paul is not saying that the wrong done to us does not matter or that justice is unimportant. He is saying the opposite. The reason we can refuse revenge is precisely that justice does matter and that God himself has guaranteed it: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.” We leave room for God’s wrath because we trust that the Judge of all the earth will do right.

Show how this trust sets us free. When we appoint ourselves as judge and avenger, we take up a burden we were never meant to carry. We become consumed by the offense, rehearsing it, nursing it, plotting how the other person should pay. Revenge enslaves us to the very person who wronged us. But when we hand the case to God, we lay the burden down. We do not have to balance the scales; he will. That release is a profound freedom.

Anchor this at the cross. God’s justice is not theoretical. At Calvary, God dealt with sin in full, either it was judged in Christ who bore it for the repentant, or it will be judged in the one who refuses him. Because the cross proves God takes sin with utter seriousness, we can trust him with every wrong done to us. We are not excusing evil; we are entrusting it to the One who has already shown how seriously he treats it.

Apply it pastorally. Help students see that releasing revenge is not weakness or passivity but an act of deep faith. It says, “God, I believe you see this, you care about it more than I do, and you will deal with it justly, so I lay it down.” Ask students what specific offense they have been clutching, and what it would mean to genuinely hand it over to God and stop being its prisoner.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God as the righteous Judge who will repay all wrongs justly (Romans 12:19; Deuteronomy 32:35)
- The refusal of revenge as an act of faith in God’s justice, not a denial of it
- The cross as the proof that God takes sin with full seriousness (Romans 3:25–26)
- The slavery of nursing offenses versus the freedom of releasing them to God
- The proper place of human government as God’s servant to administer justice (Romans 13:1–4)

Discussion Prompts

- How does believing that God will repay actually free you from the need to avenge yourself?
- In what way does revenge enslave us to the very person who wronged us?
- What specific offense have you been clutching, and what would handing it to God look like?

Question 8

Student Question:

Think of a specific wound you are still carrying. Where are you secretly serving as judge, jury, and executioner in your own heart, rehearsing the offense and plotting how the other person should pay? What would it mean to hand that case over to God?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question makes verse 19 personal and specific. Most of us are carrying some wound, an old betrayal, a cutting word, a relationship that broke, and in the courtroom of our hearts we keep the case open. We play prosecutor, replaying the evidence; judge, pronouncing them guilty; and executioner, deciding how they should suffer. Help students recognize this private courtroom for what it is.

Press gently on what this costs us. The wound we keep rehearsing keeps us bleeding. Bitterness, Hebrews warns, is a root that grows up to cause trouble and defile many (Hebrews 12:15). The person who wronged us may be living free and untroubled while we are still imprisoned by the offense. Naming this honestly is the first step toward laying it down.

Move toward the concrete act of release. Handing the case to God is not a vague feeling but a deliberate act: naming the wrong before him, acknowledging that we want the other person to pay, and then consciously surrendering our right to be the one who makes them pay. It may need to be done many times. Forgiveness does not mean the wrong did not matter; it means we trust God to handle it and we step out of his chair as Judge. Ask students to name the specific case they have been holding and what surrendering it would look like this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The danger of a root of bitterness that defiles the one who holds it (Hebrews 12:15)
- Forgiveness as releasing the offender to God rather than excusing the offense (Romans 12:19; Ephesians 4:31–32)
- Our calling to forgive as we have been forgiven in Christ (Colossians 3:13)
- The repeated, deliberate nature of releasing deep wounds to God

Discussion Prompts

- What does the private courtroom in your heart cost you when you keep a case open?
- How is forgiving someone different from saying that the wrong did not matter?
- What is the specific wound you are still carrying, and what would handing it to God look like?

Question 9

Student Question:

Paul concludes, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Romans 12:21), and even commands feeding our hungry enemy. How is overcoming evil with good rooted in the cross of Christ, and why is returning good for evil a victory rather than a defeat?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson, so give it room. Paul presents two ways to respond to evil. We can be overcome by it, which happens whenever we answer evil in kind and so become what we hate, letting the evil reproduce itself in us. Or we can overcome it, conquer it, by refusing to return evil and instead returning good. The Christian does not merely resist evil; the Christian defeats it with good.

Show how concrete Paul is. Quoting Proverbs, he says, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head” (Romans 12:20). However we understand the burning coals, the action is unmistakable: meet your enemy’s real, physical needs. Overcoming evil with good is not a sentiment; it is a hungry enemy fed, a thirsty enemy given drink, a wrong answered by an active kindness.

Root this in the cross. This is exactly what God did with us. We were his enemies, and rather than destroying us he gave his Son for us; while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8–10). On the cross, evil did its very worst to Jesus, and he overcame it not by retaliating but by absorbing it and pouring out forgiveness and life. Returning good for evil is the gospel pattern. When we do it, we are walking in the way of the cross and reflecting the God who overcame our evil with his good.

Show why this is victory, not defeat. The world thinks repaying good for evil is weakness, letting the other person win. But it is the opposite. Revenge lets evil win by spreading itself into one more heart. Returning good breaks the chain; it refuses to let evil multiply, and it has the power, as nothing else does, to melt and even win the enemy. The cross looked like defeat and was in fact the greatest victory in history. So is every small cross we take up when we overcome evil with good. Ask students where God is calling them to break a cycle of evil with a deliberate act of good.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Overcoming evil with good as the gospel pattern set by Christ (Romans 12:21; 1 Peter 3:9)
- The cross as God overcoming our evil with his good while we were enemies (Romans 5:8–10)
- Concrete, practical good toward enemies, meeting real needs (Romans 12:20; Proverbs 25:21–22)
- The deceptive nature of revenge, which lets evil win by reproducing itself in us
- The apparent defeat yet true victory of the way of the cross (Colossians 2:15)

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean to be “overcome by evil,” and how does retaliation make it happen?
- How does the cross show that returning good for evil is victory rather than weakness?
- Where is God calling you to break a cycle of evil with a specific act of good?

Question 10

Student Question:

Look back across Romans 12:14–21 as a whole: blessing persecutors, weeping and rejoicing together, pursuing harmony through humility, refusing revenge, and overcoming evil with good. Name one specific way you sense Jesus calling you to grow through this passage, and what concrete step you will take this week.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone question gathers the whole lesson into one concrete commitment. Resist the urge to let it stay general. “I want to be less vengeful” is a wish, not a step. Help students name a specific theme from the passage, a specific person, and a specific action they will take this week.

Encourage them to connect their answer to whatever pressed on their heart most. For one student it may be “bless those who persecute you” and a call to pray blessing over a specific opponent. For another it may be “mourn with those who mourn” and a call to enter a grieving friend’s pain. For another it may be “do not take revenge” and a call to finally hand an old wound to God, or “overcome evil with good” and a call to a concrete kindness toward someone who has hurt them. Let the text drive the application.

Close by lifting their eyes back to Christ. The goal of this study is not behavior modification but becoming like Jesus, who blessed his enemies, refused revenge, and overcame the world’s evil with the good of the cross. Remind students that the same gospel of God’s mercy that opens Romans 12 is the power that produces this radically different life in us. Send them out not with a heavy burden but with a clear next step and a confident hope that Christ, who walked this road first, is forming them to walk it too.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gospel of God’s mercy as the source and power of the cross-shaped life (Romans 12:1; 5:8)
- Growing conformity to Christ, who overcame evil with good, as the goal of the Christian life (Romans 8:29)
- Personal, specific obedience as the proper response to God’s Word (James 1:22)
- Christ as both the pattern and the power of the peace and good he commands

Discussion Prompts

- Which part of Romans 12:14–21 pressed on your heart most, and why?

- What is the one specific step you will take this week, and toward whom?
- How will you rely on Christ, who walked this road first, rather than your own willpower?