



Being Good News for Our Community - Spring 2017

Study 6 - Do Not Spread Negativity



Romans 12:14-21; Matthew 18:21-35

(sermons on Feb 26th)

Romans 12:14-21 Responding to Negativity

In Romans 1 to 11 Paul explains the basis on which, as Christians, we are forgiven, accepted, and are being changed, by God. In chapter 12 Paul challenges the Roman Christians to live out their faith. We looked at some earlier verses of chapter 12, about using our gifts to serve the body, two weeks ago. These verses apply both to our personal relationships and to the way we act as a church.

- v.14 those who persecute you – in Paul's time this could mean losing trade or a job, being excluded from community activities (for Christians who had broken from their Jewish background or would no longer join in pagan temple activities), even false accusations (eg of disloyalty to the Emperor) leading to imprisonment, or even the death penalty*
- v.14 do not curse – a formal curse, or wishing that bad things will happen to someone who has hurt us*
- v.16 live in harmony – includes the idea of 'thinking along the same lines', sharing a viewpoint/outlook*
- v.19 the quotation is from Deuteronomy 32:35; there the context is God's warning of judgement on the Israelites who have gone astray, rather than personal revenge – but all judgement is God's prerogative*
- v.20 the quotation is from Proverbs 25:21-22. The 'burning coals' may be a picture of God's judgement, which we shouldn't try to anticipate (as Psalm 18:8), or they may refer to the red face of embarrassment of the person whose hostility is met with underserved kindness. This could also refer to an Egyptian ritual: a person carried a plate of burning coals on their head to show repentance.*

1. How do we feel when other people treat us unfairly, or damage our reputation, even if it doesn't amount to 'persecution'? How do we resist the temptation to get our own back?
How can we 'bless' those who have treated us in such ways?
Does this also apply to criticism, or hostility, towards the church?
2. What do *verses 17 to 20* add about how we can respond positively to other people's negative attitudes?
What can be the effects of such a refusal to retaliate?
Does *v.18* imply that we sometimes cannot avoid conflict, or confrontation? What should we do then?
How can we promote reconciliation amongst families and within communities?
3. How, in practice, do we '*rejoice with those who rejoice*' and '*mourn with those who mourn*' (*v.15*)?
As a church, how can we provide opportunities for people to share both joyful and tough times?
4. '*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*' (*v.21*)
How does negativity take control of us, if we respond with threats, curses or retaliation?
How can God help us, and how can we help each other, to '*overcome evil with good*'?

Matthew 18:21-35 The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Remember this is a parable to teach one main point about forgiveness; some of the details are there to make the story more vivid, rather than to give a complete picture of the character of God.

v.22 seventy-seven times – or seventy times seven times; in either case it means 'always'

5. Who do the master, the first servant and the wicked servant stand for in this parable?
What does it teach us about how much we should forgive and *why* we should forgive?
Why is forgiveness so important? What does it show about ourselves if we can't, or won't forgive?
How can the church be a community of forgiveness, whilst still upholding God's perfect standards?