

Title: A Portrait of a Genuine Christian (Part 2)

Text: Romans 12:14–21

Introduction

Imagine you're driving on the highway, and someone cuts you off. Your initial reaction might be to honk your horn, make a rude gesture, or even speed up and cut them off in return. But what if you took a different approach? What if you prayed for that person instead?

Maybe they're rushing to the hospital to see a loved one who's sick. Maybe they're dealing with a difficult situation at work or at home. Maybe they're just having a really bad day. By praying for them, you're not only showing them love and compassion, but you're also changing your own heart in the process.

Or imagine you're in a conflict with a friend or family member. It's tempting to get defensive or to try and prove that you're right, but what if you took a step back and listened to their perspective instead? What if you asked questions and tried to understand where they're coming from?

By doing this, you're not only building harmony and unity in your relationship, but you're also showing that person that you value and respect them as a human being.

In [Romans 12:14-18](#), Paul exhorts us to bless those who persecute us, to live in harmony with one another, and to not repay evil for evil. But how do we actually live out these commands in our daily lives?

Like any other community, the church can experience interpersonal conflicts between members or leaders, which can cause divisions and even lead to the formation of new denominations or factions.

As Christians, we are called to love and serve others, even those who mistreat us. We are to be a shining example of the fruit of the Spirit...

Galatians 5:22–23 ESV

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Those inside the church and those outside the church should see the church through the lens of the fruit of the Spirit.

In [Romans 12:14-18](#), Paul gives practical instructions on how to respond to evil with love.

Let's walk through these verses and see how we can live counter to the culture and actually be people of peace...

Main Idea: In a World of Conflict, be a Peacemaker

How can I do this?

Clearly, only through the power of the Holy Spirit.

But there are steps we can take as we walk in the Spirit to be the kind of people that are pleasing to Christ.

In fact, Paul gives five ways we can be peacemakers.

And the first way is....

1. Be a Peacemaker by Blessing Those Against You (v. 14)

Romans 12:14 ESV

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Remember, there will always be conflict in the church.

But the word used here is “Persecute.”

διώκω diōkō - to harass someone, esp. because of beliefs, persecute.

And while there might be persecution from within the church (see 2 Peter and Jude), the vast majority of persecution for the believer comes from outside the church.

Paul understood this kind of persecution well...

2 Corinthians 11:22–28 ESV

²² Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they offspring of Abraham? So am I. ²³ Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. ²⁴ Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; ²⁶ on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; ²⁷ in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. ²⁸ And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.

And what was Paul’s attitude?

Paul blessed those that persecuted him and instructed others to do likewise.

1 Corinthians 4:12 NIV

¹² We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it;

And certainly, our Lord understood what it was to be persecuted.

And what was His beautiful response?

Luke 23:34 ESV

³⁴ And Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” And they cast lots to divide his garments.

Jesus blessed those that persecuted them.

What is Paul's point as he paints the portrait of a believer in Christ?

As a Christian, you and I have the glorious privilege to take the abuse of those who do not know Christ for the purpose of the gospel.

What do I mean? Simply this, if you are persecuted because of your faith in Christ, it is a badge of honor, and you ought to thank God for the privilege and the persecutor for the opportunity to suffer for Christ.

In 2006, a man named Charles Roberts entered an Amish schoolhouse in Nickel Mines, Pennsylvania, and took several young girls hostage. He killed five of them before committing suicide. In the aftermath of the tragedy, the Amish community displayed an incredible act of forgiveness and love toward Roberts and his family.

The Amish families of the girls who were killed reached out to Roberts' widow and children, expressing their condolences and offering forgiveness. They attended Roberts' funeral, and many of them hugged and comforted his widow and children.

This act of forgiveness and love towards someone who had caused them such great pain and suffering is a powerful example of [Romans 12:14](#) in action. The Amish community chose to bless those who had persecuted them, instead of seeking revenge or harboring hatred in their hearts. Their response was a testimony to the transforming power of the gospel and the ability of forgiveness to break cycles of violence and hatred. (AI)

You have a choice to make to live out your faith boldly in front of the world. In some cases, this will result in persecution. How will you respond when you are persecuted for the sake of Christ? The very strong temptation you will have is to respond in kind. To be angry and hurt. Instead, there is a better path. Bless them. Bless those who mock you, abuse you, and say all kinds of things against you.

This is what Jesus said in [Matt 5:11-12](#)

Matthew 5:11–12 ESV

¹¹ "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. ¹² Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

I would argue that this **mindset** will fuel your ability to bless those who oppose you and the gospel.

Are you getting much opposition about the gospel? As a point of application. Talk to people this week about Jesus. If they hear you, great! If they shut you down and mock you, make sure you bless them for the great privilege for suffering for Jesus.

Review - In a World of Conflict, be a Peacemaker

Be a Peacemaker by Blessing Those Against You

2. Be a Peacemaker by Being Present in the Good Times and the Bad (v. 15)

Being present is a phrase you hear a lot these days.

What does it mean to be present?

“Being Present means being fully conscious of the moment and free from the noise of internal dialogue. It's often associated with feelings of stillness and peace.” - <https://manhattanmentalhealthcounseling.com/what-does-it-mean-to-be-present/>

Doesn't sound too bad. But I would suggest that believers should apply this idea not only to themselves but to those whom God has entrusted to our care and compassion.

I think Paul, in verse 15, wants the Church in Rome to be PRESENT with one another.

Take a look at the text with me...

Romans 12:15 ESV

¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Paul wants Christians to live and move through both ends of the spectrum of emotions together.

Life is full of emotions. I know it's sometimes hard for us in West Michigan (because of our stoicism) to admit this, but our lives are full of joy and sorrow with everything in between!

Somehow, we got the idea that showing our emotions is a sign of weakness. I would suggest showing our emotions is a sign of our **humanity** and a sign that we are created in the image of God.

After all, God is an emotional God...

Think about it, how did the Jews express their varied emotions in the Old Testament?

The Jewish people expressed a wide range of emotions in the Old Testament, from joy and thanksgiving to grief and lament (sackcloth and ashes). They show that it is normal and healthy to express our emotions to God, whether they are positive or negative.

Joy, Sadness, Anger, Fear, Surprise, Disgust, Anticipation, Trust, Love, Guilt, Shame, Envy, Jealousy, Hope, Excitement, Boredom, Anxiety, Nostalgia, Empathy, and Compassion.

The point Paul is making is that we are to know one another so well that we can engage in empathetic emotions with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is how our Lord Jesus is...

Psalm 34:18 ESV

¹⁸ The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit.

Psalm 42:6 ESV

⁶ and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar.

Even Jesus at the death of his friend, Lazareth.

John 11:33–35 ESV

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled. ³⁴ And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ Jesus wept.

And, to the point of this verse, people should be present with the person experiencing these emotions to the place where they are experiencing them as well.

Pastor Adam from Second Church here in town last year stopped by my office...

Do you have strong bonds within this church to where you can express your emotions with someone without fear of judgment? If you don't, you need to. This is where our Connection Groups come in. In these groups, people can share what's going on in their life and lift one another up in prayer.

Two things here -

- You need to be willing to sit down with people and listen to their hurts and their joys.
- You need to be willing to sit down with a trusted friend and share you hurts and your joys.

By the way, you all should get into a connection group. It's a beautiful place to form close bonds with others.

Review - In a World of Conflict, be a Peacemaker

Be a Peacemaker by Blessing Those Against You

Be a Peacemaker by Being Present in the Good Times and the Bad

3. Be a Peacemaker by Being Humble Instead of Haughty (v. 16)

Romans 12:16 ESV

¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

Go to the piano and play Amazing Grace nicely and then with disharmony...

Harmony is a beautiful thing.

Cacophony and discord are not beautiful at all! Notes crashing into each other is irritating.

Why do you think Paul immediately follows his admonition of living in harmony with one another with, *"Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight."*

Because it is the proud person who elevates themselves over everyone because they think they know best that ends up crashing into everyone else, causing discord!

It is proud people that cause disharmony, it is humble, servant-minded people that create sweet harmony within the church because they are not demanding their own way but attempting to die to themselves and to serve one another.

And, by the way, you may be the smartest, most talented person in the room, but you should also be the humblest.

By the way, when you associate with the lowly, it develops patience and grace in you.

Remember Paul's exhortation in [Romans 12:3](#)

Romans 12:3 ESV

³ For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Imagine two people trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle. One of them is convinced that they know the right way to do it and insists on doing it alone, while the other is more open to collaboration and input. The first person becomes frustrated and starts to feel arrogant and superior, thinking that the other person is not as skilled or knowledgeable as they are. But in the end, the proud person realizes they need help to get the job done.

This scenario illustrates the truth of [Romans 12:16](#). Living in harmony with one another means recognizing our own limitations and valuing the contributions of others, even those who may seem "lowly" or less skilled. It means being humble and open to learning from others, instead of always thinking we know best. (AI)

Do you want to be used of God to be a peacemaker? Be humble.

How can I put on humility?

Three steps to take toward humility from Dr. Stuart Scott's "From Pride to Humility."

1. **See yourself as no better than others.** A humble person understands the sinfulness of his own heart. He would never see himself as better than others. This is true no matter who the other person is. He understands that he, in and of himself, is capable of the worst sin. He agrees with John Bradford who said, "but for the grace of God, there I go" ([Romans 12:16](#); [Ephesians 3:8](#)).
2. **Be thankful and grateful in general toward others.** Humble people thank God and others often. They expect nothing, so anything that is received is greatly appreciated. ([1 Thessalonians 5:18](#)).
3. **Be overwhelmed with God's undeserved grace and goodness.** The humble person sees himself as truly deserving of hell. He is immensely grateful to God for forgiving him of so much ([Psalm 116:12-19](#)).

4. **Be gentle and patient.** Humble people want to act like God, and they are not focused on what they want. They also want to love others the way God loves them. They are willing to wait and are not easily irritated ([Colossians 3:12-14](#)).
5. **Focus on Christ.** The humble see Christ as their life and their first love. There is no other thing or person that they must have. Through the day they talk to and worship Him often ([Philippians 1:21](#); [Hebrews 12:1-2](#)).

Scott, Dr. Stuart . The Exemplary Husband: A Biblical Perspective (p. 242). Focus Publishing. Kindle Edition.

Review - In a World of Conflict, be a Peacemaker

Be a Peacemaker by Blessing Those Against You

Be a Peacemaker by Being Present in the Good Times and the Bad

Be a Peacemaker by Being Humble Instead of Haughty

4. Be a Peacemaker by Not Getting Even (v. 17)

Romans 12:17 ESV

¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

My mom used to say two wrongs never make a right. And do you know what? Mom was right! And, as it turns out, Mom was biblical.

Paul is not interested in the church using evil to get back at someone. Honestly, even as I say this, the idea of getting back at someone by the use of evil actions sounds terrible. Turn the other cheek! ([Matthew 5:38-39](#)).

Imagine that you're walking down a crowded street, and someone accidentally bumps into you, causing you to spill your coffee all over your shirt. Your first instinct might be to lash out in anger and demand an apology or compensation. But what if you chose to turn the other cheek instead?

Turning the other cheek means choosing not to retaliate or seek revenge when we've been wronged. It means responding to hostility or aggression with love and forgiveness, instead of anger or violence. In the coffee spill example, turning the other cheek might mean simply forgiving the person who bumped into you and moving on, without seeking retribution.

This can be a difficult concept to put into practice, especially in situations where we feel that we've been deeply hurt or wronged.

A.W. Tozer - 5 VOWS FOR SPIRITUAL STRENGTH:

(3) NEVER DEFEND YOURSELF.

“We’re all born with a desire to defend ourselves. And if you insist upon defending yourself, God will let you do it. But if you turn the defense of yourself over to God, He will defend you.”

I'm telling you, this is a difficult thing. Try going through a week where you never defend yourself. I don't mean physically but in your communication with others. Don't justify why you did what you did. Don't rationalize yourself in front of others. Just own what you need to own and allow God to be your defender!

Review - In a World of Conflict, be a Peacemaker

Be a Peacemaker by Blessing Those Against You

Be a Peacemaker by Being Present in the Good Times and the Bad

Be a Peacemaker by Being Humble Instead of Haughty

Be a Peacemaker by Not Getting Even

5. Be a Peacemaker by Being Peaceful (v. 18)

Romans 12:18 ESV

¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

We should do everything in our power to live at peace with everyone, even if it means sacrificing our own desires or preferences.

This can be difficult, but it is an important way to show the love of Christ to others.

This is called deference.

Notice that Paul understands this isn't always possible.

Notice you have to work at this by the denial of self.

Notice the goal - to live peaceably with all (particularly with those who are part of your church.)

Remember what Jesus says,

Matthew 5:9 ESV

⁹ "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

In order to be a peacemaker, you need to be at peace with God - this only happens through the gospel.

And once you have peace with God, you can learn to become a person of peace.

I have struggled with anxiety my entire life. Once I became a follower of Christ, I actually started to understand that anxiety and worry were an attempt by me to usurp control from God. I was trying to control the circumstances I faced (most of which were not even close to being in my control). And because of my attempt to control everything, I would grow worrisome, and my anxiety would grow and grow until it would become unbearable.

As I grew in my faith, I would hang onto two passages of Scripture...

Matthew 6:25–34 ESV

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? ²⁷ And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? ²⁸ And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, ²⁹ yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. ³⁰ But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? ³¹ Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. ³³ But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. ³⁴ “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

Philippians 4:4–8 ESV

⁴ Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice. ⁵ Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; ⁶ do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ⁸ Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.

With the unmatched power of the Holy Spirit, these two passages started to rewire my brain, and I began to change from an anxious person to a peaceful person.

Now, I still wrestle with worry and anxiety, but not like before.

I simply remind myself that my God can be trusted to care for the lilies of the field, He certainly can and will care for me and my problems.

And I also follow the 7 steps that Paul prescribes in [Philippians 4:4-8](#).

1. I rejoice twice.
2. I force myself to be reasonable.
3. I remember the Lord is right here with me.
4. I replace anxiety with prayer and supplication with thanksgiving.
5. I trust the promise that the peace of God will come.
6. I believe that Jesus will guard my heart and mind
7. I think about that which is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely., commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise.

And when I get done with all of this, I can't even remember what I was anxious about in the first place. Haha!

And when I am at peace like I am supposed to be, I can see life clearly to love God and others the way He has designed me!

Living at peace with others means making a conscious effort to avoid conflict and promote harmony in our relationships. It means choosing to respond to others with kindness, respect, and understanding, even in situations where we feel that we've been wronged or mistreated.

Review - In a World of Conflict, be a Peacemaker

Be a Peacemaker by Blessing Those Against You

Be a Peacemaker by Being Present in the Good Times and the Bad

Be a Peacemaker by Being Humble Instead of Haughty

Be a Peacemaker by Not Getting Even

Be a Peacemaker by Being Peaceful

Conclusion

Living out [Romans 12:14-18](#) isn't always easy, but it's essential if we want to be people who reflect the love and grace of Jesus Christ to the world around us. By choosing to bless, love, and live in harmony with one another, we can be powerful witnesses to the transformative power of God's love.

Imagine if you were a peacemaker instead of a peace taker? How would your life change?

How would this church change if you purposed to be a peacemaker.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, and one sure way of peacemaking is to let the fire of contention alone. Neither fan it, nor stir it, nor add fuel to it, but let it go out by itself." - Spurgeon

"To be a peacemaker, you must know the peace giver." Billy Graham

Connection Group Reflection Questions

1. This world is full of conflict. What are ways believers can bring peace?
2. What is the most challenging part about blessing those who are against you?
3. What steps do you take to walk in humility?
4. Revenge is sweet. Why is being a peacemaker sweeter?

5. How have you learned peace in your life?