

## HOW CHRISTIANS RELATE

Romans 12:13-21

By Raymond White

How do Christians relate to one another? Paul gives us a long list of virtues that we should pay attention to.

### 1. *Romans 12:13 Distributing to the necessity of saints...*

Saints should help needy saints. That's pretty clear. Catholics have their poor box, Mormons have a fast offering — every church has some way of encouraging those who are well off to minister to the needs of those who are less fortunate.

But it is not only for the well off to offer help, but also for the less fortunate to offer what they can so that they also are (so to speak) “on the team.” Small gifts from people of small means are just as important as big gifts, and perhaps even a bit more sacred.

What impresses me most about the story of the Widow's Mite (*Luke 21:2-4*) is that Jesus was impressed. It's hard to imagine someone who gave so much as Jesus did to be impressed by anyone doing anything. But he was impressed — by two mites. *Luke 21:3 And he said, Of a truth I say unto you, that this poor widow hath cast in more than they all.*

I think it's wonderful — don't you agree? — that whatever you do, be it big or small, God notices, and in some way is impressed.

### 2. *Romans 12:13 ...given to hospitality.*

In ancient times, inns were notoriously dangerous places. So when saints traveled, they found safety in the homes of other saints. That's not so true today; wherever we travel in our wonderful nation, we are safe in whatever hotel or motel we choose to stay at. But there is still room for hospitality. When saints today travel, be it business or vacation or some other reason, they will of course attend church in that new and far city. It is always a nice feeling to be noticed as a visitor and paid attention to. When my wife and I vacationed to Canada and attended church in Newfoundland among strangers who were friends, our biggest problem was deciding which lunch invitation to accept. We accepted the first, of course. And it was fun.

### 3. *Romans 12:14 Bless them which persecute you: bless and curse not.*

This was personal for Paul. Saint Augustine wrote: “The church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen.” It seems so. *Acts 7:60 Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.* As Stephen died, he left a blessing on Paul and not a curse. Had he instead said, “God, avenge me,” God would have, and how much the church would have lost.

### 4. *Romans 12:15 Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*

Jealousy is unbecoming to a Christian. When people are happy, we shouldn't resent that they have received some blessing, but be happy with them. Share their joy. And on the flip side, share their sorrow.

At the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus had nothing to be sorrowful for. He knew that in a few moments he would bring Lazarus back to life for a glorious reunion. But it says: **John 11:35** *Jesus wept.* And we have to wonder, why? Because —

**John 11:32** *Then when Mary was come where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell down at his feet, saying unto him, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. :33*  
*When Jesus therefore saw her weeping, and the Jews also weeping which came with her, he groaned in the spirit, and was troubled.*

That's why Jesus wept. Not for Lazarus' sake, but for Mary's. When Mary came to Jesus she was filled with anguish, grief, and depression for her dead brother. Her tears were overflowing, and Jesus felt her sorrow to the core of his own soul. Why did he feel her pain? Because he let himself feel her pain. There is nothing quite like sharing pain to bond two souls together in love.

**5. Romans 12:16** *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.*

Someone once said, "Anyone can be polite to a king. It takes a gentleman to be polite to a begger." We are surrounded by celebrity worship. We have high regard for high people and low regard for low people. Paul advises us to avoid that temptation and treat everyone with the same respect. The fact is, celebrities, politicians, and other people of high station are not any more worthy of your esteem than anyone else. Paul is just saying, don't be so easily impressed. Remember who impressed Jesus: a widow who gave two mites. We should be impressed by goodness, not station.

**6. Romans 12:17** *Recompense to no man evil for evil.*

Vengeance accomplishes little. In family quarrels, all it accomplishes is turning a battle into a war. In most cases (though not in every case; see **Romans 13:2-4**) the best response to evil is to simply let it be. In very practical terms, one might ask themselves this question: "Is this the hill I want to die on?" Sometimes, you need to make your stand, as Jesus did when he cleansed the temple. But most of the time, it's best to just cool down and let it pass.

**7. Romans 12:17** *Provide things honest in the sight of all men.*

In the *sight* of men. We don't want to make a show, a public display of our virtues as we imagine them, but Jesus did say (**Matthew 5:16**) *Let your light so shine...* What we do is important of course. It's first about integrity. But what people see of us is also important. If your honesty is conspicuous (not because you make it conspicuous but because it just is), your good example helps to make the world a better place.

And on the flip side, you can do almost as much damage by *appearing* to do something wrong as actually doing it. **1 Thessalonians 5:22** *Abstain from all appearance of evil.* A man might be very innocent in helping a stranded woman by giving her a ride, but it doesn't look right. He should take a moment and think of a better way to help. Remember, people do see.

**8. *Romans 12:18*** *If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*

Just being a Christian draws fire. That can't be helped. But that is no excuse to be a troublemaker. Wars may be declared on us, but that doesn't mean we should declare wars on others.

**9. *Romans 12:19*** *...avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath...*

It's God's right to judge. Let him. However, we must be sure we don't misunderstand this verse. "Give place unto wrath" means allow the courts and the legal system to do their job. You don't have to be a vigilante reeking you're your vengeance. Vengeance, or justice, is the special domain of the justice system. And the judges, policemen, prison guards, and, yes, executioners are (***Romans 13:4***) *...minister[s] of God to thee for good*. Allow it to be so. That's Paul's point.

**10. *Romans 12:20*** *...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.*

Some people need to feel the shame of being helped by someone they've injured. That is often a life changing experience. It can indeed feel like coals of fire to feel the guilt or the embarrassment of a neighbor you yelled at stop to help you fix a flat tire. Assuming of course that it's the other way around, it can feel really good to have a new friend who once was an enemy, who changed their opinion of you because you sincerely helped when they needed it. They might even miss having you for an enemy. Too bad, they're your friend now.

**11. *Romans 12:21*** *Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.*

Here is the summary: Evil must eventually succumb to persistent good. That is our hope and our trust.