

## Christian attitudes towards enemies 12:17-21

**v17** Someone may have done something wrong to you. But do not do something wrong yourself in order to punish them. Do the things that everyone knows to be right. **v18** If possible, be friendly with everyone. **v19** My friends, when your enemy hurts you, do not try to punish him. Leave it to God's anger. God says, 'I will \*judge people who do evil things. I will punish them.'

**v20** Instead, 'If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat.

If he wants a drink, give him something to drink.

Then he will feel as if you have given him hot coals for his fire! (In other words, your kindness will make him ashamed.)'

**v21** Do not let evil things defeat you. But defeat evil things by your good behaviour.

Paul had been a witness of Stephen's death. At that time, Paul was among Stephen's enemies. But Stephen prayed for the people who were killing him (Acts 7:60). Stephen asked God to forgive them. Paul also knew Jesus' words from the \*cross (Luke 23:34). He knew what Jesus taught about enemies (Matthew 5:38-48). So Paul urges Christians not to behave wrongly. Even when someone hurts a Christian, the Christian must not hurt that person.

Verses 17-18 Christians must refuse to do what is wrong. But they must also show that their actions are good. They must do everything possible to encourage \*peace. It may not be possible always to live in a quiet manner. Enemies may oppose Christians, even when the Christians are behaving well. And sometimes it is right for Christians to protest against wicked acts. Especially, a Christian should protest if other people are suffering rather than himself. But the Christian must do everything possible to avoid quarrels.

Verses 19-21 A Christian must not attack back when someone has hurt him. Paul gives three reasons why.

1. Only God has the right to punish actions. Paul uses words from Deuteronomy 32:35. In the present, human law courts have the responsibility to show God's \*wrath (Romans 13:4). In the end, God himself will show his fair judgement (Romans 2:5).

2. If an enemy receives kindness, he may be sorry for his actions. He may change his ways. Paul uses words from Proverbs 25:21-22. 'Hot coals' means that the enemy will be very ashamed.

3. A Christian must not hate someone who hates him. Such behaviour only makes the situation worse. And a Christian who hates is not behaving in the proper manner. A Christian should show love, not hate. The enemy will have succeeded if the Christian starts to behave in a wicked manner. Evil deeds cannot defeat someone who is evil. Instead, Christians overcome evil powers when they do the right things. They do the things that God wants them to do. And that is the only way to defeat \*sin.

## Chapter 13

### A Christian's duty to the state 13:1-7

**v1** Everyone ought to obey their rulers. No government has authority unless God has allowed it. God has appointed the people who are ruling now. **v2** So when you oppose the rulers, you oppose God's rule. People who do that must expect punishment. **v3** Honest citizens have no reason to be afraid of their rulers. But people who do evil things should be afraid of their rulers. You want to be free from fear of the person in authority. So do what is right. Then the ruler will approve of you. **v4** The ruler is God's servant who will do good things for you. But if you do evil things, you ought to be afraid. The ruler carries a sword for a good reason. He is God's servant. He is acting for God. He will punish anyone who does evil things.

**v5** Therefore you must obey the rulers. This is not merely because an evil person will receive punishment. You must also obey them because it is the right thing to do. **v6** You should pay taxes for the same reason. The rulers are God's servants who give all their time to govern. **v7** Give to everyone what he ought to have. So pay national and local taxes to the people who collect them. And show fear and honour to the people whom you should respect.

Paul may have had several reasons to write about Christians' duty to the state.

1. The \*Jews hated to pay taxes to the \*Romans who had occupied their country. Some \*Jews felt very angry that the \*Romans were in their country. Those \*Jews would attack the \*Romans wherever they could. Possibly some \*Jewish Christians also had the same thoughts about the \*Romans. The \*Romans had considered that Christians belonged to the \*Jewish religion. But Paul was teaching the Christians not to oppose the government.

2. Paul believed that the state existed to protect its citizens against attack and crime. The state punished people who did wrong acts. And it rewarded people who did right acts. Paul himself had received protection from angry \*Jews (Acts 18:12-16).

3. The state gives benefits, which its citizens enjoy. Paul was able to travel on good \*Roman roads on his journeys to \*preach the \*gospel.

4. Those who govern are God's servants (Daniel 4:17).

A few years after Paul wrote this letter, the \*Roman government began to fight against the Christians. The \*Romans were very cruel and the Christians suffered greatly. Many Christians died during those troubles. The Christians who lived in Rome suffered especially.

But although the \*Romans attacked the Christians, the Christians did not fight back. Jesus had explained how they should behave in such situations (Luke 21:12-19). Paul does not mention such troubles here. But in fact, he was teaching them about the same subjects.

Paul told the Christians to respect and to obey the rulers. Christians should try to be ideal citizens. They should pay the taxes and they should obey the law. They should even consider their rulers to be God's agents on earth.

The Christians in Rome followed this advice. And they continued to do so even when the \*Romans attacked them. Of course, the Christians could not obey the \*Roman laws that ordered them to serve false gods. And the Christians did not obey laws that ordered them to insult \*Christ. And they did not obey when rulers ordered them not to tell people about Christ. But the Christians obeyed all the other laws. They obeyed all the laws that did not oppose the Christian \*faith.

The result was that their confidence in God impressed everyone. It is true that those Christians suffered in the most awful manner. But God helped them to be noble and brave. Even while they were dying, they continued to speak about God's goodness. They were not afraid to die because they were glad to go to a better home, in heaven.

Many people who saw their attitudes wanted to become Christians too. The \*Romans thought they could destroy the Christian \*faith. But in fact, the numbers of Christians in Rome actually increased. Three centuries afterwards, the \*Roman government decided that the Christian religion would become their official religion.

Verses 1-2 Christians should obey the rulers to whom God has given power. To oppose people who have authority is to oppose God. But, if a powerful ruler or state does something wicked, Christians do not have to agree with it. Paul does not mean that. Jesus said that we must pay taxes to our rulers. But we must also give to God everything that belongs to him (Mark 12:17). When Christians have to choose between these two duties, they must 'obey God rather than men'. Peter said this when the \*Jewish authorities told the \*apostles not to speak about Jesus (Acts 4:18-20). Daniel was also unable to obey a law. He risked his life. He continued to pray to God when the king told him not to (Daniel 6:10).

Verses 3-4 Rulers have a duty to punish people who are wicked. Good citizens have no reason to be afraid of them. People who do wrong acts must expect the rulers to punish them. So they have reason to be afraid. A sword was the sign of a judge's power over life and death. He carried it himself or someone carried the sword in front of him. It showed that he had real power to punish people.

Verse 5 Christians must obey the rulers for a better reason than the fear of punishment. Their conscience should tell them that it is the right thing to do.

Verses 6-7 Because the \*Romans were the rulers, the \*Jews had to pay taxes to them. They had to pay a tax on their grain, wine and fruit. Each person between the ages of 14 and 65 had to pay a personal tax. There was also a tax on income. In addition to these, people had to pay local taxes. There were customs taxes on the import and export of goods. There were taxes to use roads, markets and harbours. Paul believed that Christians must pay all these taxes to the state and to the local government. In this verse, he uses a word for 'servants' that can also mean a priest. Officials are doing a public service and Christians should respect them.

## Love and the law 13:8-10

**v8** So pay all your debts. The only debt that you should have is the duty to love each other. If you do this, you will be obeying the other laws completely. **v9** The law contains many commands. 'Obey your marriage promises.' 'Do not murder.' 'Do not steal.' 'Do not be jealous of other people.' These and any other \*commandments together make this one rule, 'Love other people as much as you care about yourself.' **v10** Someone who loves other people does not do evil things to them. So, if you love, you are obeying the law completely.

Verse 8 Paul has spoken about a Christian's debt to the state. Now he says that Christians should be careful to pay their personal debts. The duty to love other people is like a debt. But Christians always have that duty. It is not like a debt that someone can pay off. Christians should always love other people.

Verses 9-10 Paul mentions the 5 \*commandments that deal with \*relationships in human society. He does not mention them in the same order as in Exodus 20:13-17. Some \*manuscripts include (in verse 9), 'You must not tell lies about other people.' The \*sin of \*adultery ruins families. But a person who loves does not want to spoil anyone's life. People may steal, or they may be jealous. But the person who loves does not rob anyone. And the person who loves is not jealous. In fact, the person who loves wants to give to other people. Jesus said about the law, 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' It was one of only two laws that were necessary (Matthew 22:37-39). Paul repeated those words in his letter to the Galatians (Galatians 5:14). He urged the Christians to 'serve each other in love'. If Christians show real love for other people, they are obeying the law completely.

## Be ready 13:11-14

**v11** When you do these things, remember the importance of the present time. The present time is like the early morning, when people should awake from sleep. So you need to be aware of what is happening. Our final \*salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. **v12** It is as if the dark night is nearly over. The day when \*Christ will return is almost here. So we should free ourselves from all evil activity. Such activity is like the darkness. Instead, we should prepare ourselves as soldiers who dress for battle. Then we will be ready for the daylight. **v13** And we should behave as people ought to behave during the day. We should not have wild parties, where there is excess alcohol. We should not \*sin in relation to sex. We should not have jealous arguments. **v14** As you choose your clothes for the day, choose also to live for the \*Lord Jesus \*Christ. And do not make plans to satisfy your wrong human desires.

Verses 11-12 Paul describes someone who is asleep. This person needs to wake up in order to dress for a very important occasion. Christians should realise that \*Christ will return soon. They must eagerly expect that time because then they will receive their new \*resurrection bodies. Their \*salvation will be complete. Nobody knows when \*Christ will return (Matthew 24:36). So everyone must be like servants whose master has gone on a journey. Until the master returns, the servants must carry out their duties \*faithfully (Matthew 24:45-50).

Paul tells the Christians to think about how people should behave during the day. When the night has ended, people should wake up in order to work. In the same manner, Christians should not be lazy as they wait for \*Christ to return. God has given them important duties to carry out.

Paul compares the work of Christians to the work of soldiers. A soldier cannot behave in the manner that he himself would choose. He must be loyal and he must obey his captain. Christians too cannot behave in any manner that they themselves might prefer. Instead, they must behave in the manner that pleases God. Soldiers need to put on special clothes for a battle. Those clothes will protect them as they fight. And Christians too need to prepare in a special way to do God's work (verse 14; 1 Thessalonians 5:8; Ephesians 6:11-18).

When Paul writes about the 'dark night', he is thinking about the power of the devil and the power of \*sin. John used a similar description in John 1:5. (Job 24:13-17 explains this idea. Many evil people would wait until nightfall before they carried out their wicked schemes. For example, most thieves prefer to steal by night. They are afraid of daylight, because people may recognise them.) But Paul writes that the dark night is nearly over. So the opportunity for people to do evil things is nearly over. \*Christ defeated the power of \*sin and the devil when he died for us. And our \*salvation will be complete when he returns.

Verses 13-14 When St. Augustine read these verses, they changed him. He became a Christian and he began a new life. Paul writes a list in verse 13 to show how people should not behave. He mentions some evil activities that often happen by night. People have parties where they are greedy. They drink so much alcohol that they cannot even control their own behaviour. They have sex with the wrong people and in the wrong manner (Romans 1:26-27). They argue. They are jealous.

People do such things by night. Then they feel sorry when the next day begins. They feel ill because they ate too much. They are ashamed because the alcohol caused them to do stupid things. They have upset their husbands or wives. They have made their friends angry.

But Christians should not do such things. It is as if those activities belong to the night. But Christians do not belong to the night, if 'the night' means \*sin and the devil. Christians belong to \*Christ. 'The day when \*Christ will return is almost here' (verse 12).

So Christians must always choose right behaviour. They must live in the manner that pleases God. They must live as \*Christ wants them to live. They must not even think about things that would satisfy their \*sinful human desires.

## Chapter 14

### Christian freedom 14:1-12