THE CHRISTIAN AND RELATIONSHIPS

Romans 12:13-21

Not Ashamed (Romans) – Week 35

By Andy Manning

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The most important thing in life are your relationships – with God, with your spouse, with your children, with your neighbors, with your classmates, with your coworkers, with church family, etc.
2. People are more important than money and possessions. God created people in His image. Jesus died on the cross for people. Therefore, what makes you a success in life is not money, education, awards, or possessions. It's about relationships. How have you treated the people in your life? How have you impacted the people in your life? How have you positively influenced the people in your life? How have you invested in the people in your life?
3. Many Christians have a lopsided view of Christianity. All they focus on is moral purity – they don't get drunk, or do drugs, or steal, or lie, or cheat, or commit adultery. At the same time, they struggle with relationships. The people close to them would say they are unloving and unkind, rude, mean, grumpy, hard to get along with, hard to work with, hard to live with. Those Christians forget that Christianity is not just about moral purity, but also relational maturity. Being a Christian is not just about loving God; it's about loving others. It's about relationships.
4. At the same time, the toughest thing in life is relationships. Dealing with people is difficult. People are fragile and delicate. They are emotional. They are prideful. They are insecure. They are sinful. Relationships are hard.
5. The good news is that God's word is filled with wisdom about how to have healthy relationships. How to treat people – at home, at work, at school, etc.
6. This morning, we are going to look at a passage that tells us how God wants Christians to relate to people.

7. Remember, this entire sermon series through Romans 12 is all about how to become more like Jesus. Today we are going to learn how to treat people the way that Jesus would treat them.

II. TEXT

1. **Romans 12:13-21**

13 Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. 18 If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.
19 Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay,, says the Lord. 20 But

If your enemy is hungry, feed him.
If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
For in so doing
you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.,

21 Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

2. This passage gives us eight relationship principles for Christians. Some of them will apply to our relationship with fellow believers, some to everyone, and some to our enemies.

III. EIGHT RELATIONSHIP PRINCIPLES FOR CHRISTIANS

1. **Help believers who are in need.**
    i. **Romans 12:13** Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.
    ii. The first principle has to do with our relationship with other church members.
    iii. "Saints" refers to all believers.
    iv. In the Roman Catholic Church there is a caste system, with several classes of Christians. At the top you have the Trinity, and then Mary, and then the saints, and then the pope, and then priests, and then normal Christians. Near the top of the ladder are saints, and becoming a saint entails a lengthy legal process

called canonization. The process can't begin until you've been dead for five years. After you've been nominated, they investigate you and if all goes well they will declare you a servant of God. Then after further investigation they will declare you venerable. After further investigation they will declare you blessed. And after still investigation, if you pass the tests, they will declare you a saint.

v. But the Bible doesn't have a Christian caste system. It teaches that all Christians are saints.

vi. The word "saint" means "holy ones."

vii. The word "holy" means set apart. A saint is one who is set apart. God has set you apart for Himself, and from sin.

viii. As a saint, you are holy by condition and by calling. Your condition is holy because God set you apart for Himself the moment you were saved. And your calling is holy because God has commanded you to conform to His character and commands. In other words, as a saint, you are already holy in your position, because God has set you apart for Himself. But God all wants you to be holy in you practice – in your character, conduct, and convictions.

ix. Some Christians say, "Well, I'm no saint, but I try to be a good person." That's not true. All Christians are saints. All Christians are holy ones. The question is, are you acting like it?

x. The command in Romans 12:13 is to share with the saints in their needs. That means that when fellow believers are in need, God wants you to help them. When you see another church member in need, God wants you to get involved and help.

xi. The early church in Acts demonstrated this better than anyone.

xii. **Acts 2:44-45** 44 Now all the believers were together and held all things in common. 45 They sold their possessions and property and distributed the proceeds to all, as any had need.

xiii. In the second part of this verse Paul gives a practical example of meeting the needs of believers – hospitality.

xiv. **Romans 12:13** Share with the saints in their needs; pursue hospitality.

xv. He says to pursue hospitality. Hospitality is opening your home up to someone who needs a place to stay. This was a common need in the early church. Many Christians were on the run from persecution. They lost their home, their job, they were rejected by friends and family; as well, Christian leaders and missionaries were traveling from town to town, and they needed a place to stay. This was a command to open up your home to fellow believers.

xvi. An example of this in the Bible is a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth. After Paul and Silas led her to Christ and baptized her, she invited them to stay at her house (Acts 16:14-15).

xvii. That's what church is supposed to be. Not just gathering once a week to worship; but getting involved in each other's lives and meeting each other's needs.

2. Pray for God to bless your persecutors.

i. **Romans 12:14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

ii. Persecution was a very real danger to the early church. At the time of this writing, Christians were being hunted down by the Jews. Paul told them how to respond to their persecutors – bless them.

iii. The Greek word here for "bless" is eulogeo; it literally means to speak well of; it's where we get our English word *eulogy*, which is an address at a funeral in which you speak well of the deceased. In the Bible the word bless as different meanings. When we bless God, we praise Him. When God blesses us He gives us blessings. When we bless persons we are praying for God to bless them. That's the sense here.

iv. To bless your persecutors is to pray for God to bless them.

v. That's easier said than done. Think about it. Your spouse, Stephen, has just been stoned to death; not for doing something wrong, but for preaching about Jesus. What does God want you to do about it? Don't seek revenge. Don't hate them. Don't

pray that God would smite them. But pray for your persecutors, that God would bless them.

vi. You may be thinking, "Surely that's not what God wants us to do!" But Paul didn't make this up. He got this from Jesus.

vii. **Matthew 5:43-44** "You have heard that it was said, Love your neighbor, and hate your enemy. But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

viii. Jesus didn't just preach this, He demonstrated it. When Jesus was hanging from the cross He prayed for his killers, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do (Lk 23:34)."

ix. You might say, "Yes, but that was Jesus. Surely we can't be expected to do that!" But Stephen, the first Christian martyr, did the same thing. As Stephen was being stoned to death he prayed, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them (Acts 7:60)!"

3. Be sympathetic to everyone.

i. **Romans 12:15** Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.

ii. If you want healthy relationships, you have to develop sympathy for others, and this verse gives us a beautiful definition of sympathy. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.

iii. The idea is that when someone else is rejoicing about something good in their life, we are to enter into their rejoicing with them as if the victory were our own. And if someone is weeping because life is hard, we are to enter into their weeping as if the trial were our own. It is to feel what they are feeling. To identify with their feelings.

iv. The opposite of this jealousy. Jealousy is so wicked that it weeps when someone else rejoices, and it rejoices when someone else weeps. When someone has a victory, jealousy is miserable on the inside. And when someone has a trial, the jealous secretly celebrates.

v. Jesus displayed this kind of sympathy. When His friend Lazarus died, Jesus went to visit them. By the time He arrived Lazarus had been dead for four days. When Jesus saw Mary, Lazarus'

sister and the others crying, it says that "He was deeply moved in his spirit and trouble…. And Jesus wept (Jn 11:33-35)." Now mind you, Jesus knew that He was about to raise Lazarus from the dead. There was no reason to cry, except to be sympathetic. His friends were weeping, and so He entered into their sorrow and wept with them.

4. **Pursue unity in the church.**
   i. **Romans 12:16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.
   ii. Here Paul commanding the pursuit of unity in the church.
   iii. In music, harmony is when two different notes work together to produce a beautiful sound. For example, you can have two vocalists singing different notes at the same time, but instead of clashing, they produce beautiful music.
   iv. Paul us saying you to get along and work together in the church. The opposite of unity is division, discord, dissension, and strife.
   v. It's important to pursue unity for two reasons:
      1. If we can't get along, we can't get things done. If we can't agree on anything, then we won't accomplish anything. If the walls need to be painted, but we can't agree on the color, then the walls won't get painted. As a church we have a mission, and the mission is too important for us to not be unified.
      2. If we can't get along, then it brings reproach upon the church. The world is watching us. And if they see a bunch of Christians fighting and mistreating each other, then they won't want anything to do with us.
   vi. In his book, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, Thom Rainer told the story of Derek, who had been the pastor at Redeemer Church for eight years. Things were going great and the church loved him. At some point he had the idea to change the pulpit. It was a huge, wooden, old fashioned pulpit, and he wanted to get something more sleek and modern. So one Friday he told the two custodians to replace the old pulpit with the new one. Then

Sunday came along. The service seemed to go great. But things began to unravel Sunday afternoon. "First, there were a series of emails. Al of them were negative, though the tone varied in intensity. One member of five years kindly suggested, 'You should have given us a bit of forewarning.' On the other extreme, a seventy-something member went right at the pastor. 'What you have done is heretical! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. I think we need to call a vote of confidence about you.' The rest of the email was another eight hundred words, but you get the point… Derek lost count of the emails, the meetings, an the phone calls that week. There was not a supportive voice among them. He stopped looking at Facebook after he saw several posts blasting him." The next Sunday, Derek entered the worship center for church. People were gathered in huddled conversations. There was tension in the room. Many eyes were glancing at the pulpit. But when he looked up at the pulpit he was shocked to see that his new pulpit was gone, and the old pulpit was back. Without thinking the pastor wailed, "Who moved my pulpit?" (Rainer, *Who Moved My Pulpit?*, p. 5.)

vii. It's sad that so many churches fight over matters like this, and over even pettier matters. There's no way the church can advance with that kind of disunity. We must live in harmony.

viii. In the second part of this verse Paul gives some insights about how to live in harmony, and it comes down to avoiding pride.

ix. **Romans 12:16** Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

x. It's as if Paul is saying, "If you want a united church, you need to kill pride."

xi. Paul gives us two ways to avoid pride:

1. Associate with the humble.
    a. Other bible versions put it like this:
        i. ESV: associate with the lowly
        ii. NIV: be willing to associate with people of low position

iii. NLT: Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people
iv. LB: Don't try to get into the good graces of important people, but enjoy the company of ordinary folks.
v. MSG: Make friends with nobodies.
vi. NCV: Make friends with those who seem unimportant

b. Prideful people are snobs; they are stuck-up. They like to form cliques. They only like to hang out with people who are close to their intelligence, and their education, and their age group, and their socio-economic status. They look down on people who are not as good as them.
c. There's no room for that in the church. The church must be the one place where all earthly distinctions are gone – race, income, age, education, physical attractiveness, intelligence, career, etc. Associate with the humble and lowly.

2. Do not be wise in your own estimation.
   a. This is the person who is so full of himself that he thinks he knows it all, he knows best, and he doesn't respect anybody else's input. You can't be unified when someone has that attitude.
   b. Be humble. Realize that other people are smart; other people have good ideas; you are not all-knowing and all-wise.

5. Don't try to get even when you are wronged.

i. **Romans 12:17a** Do not repay anyone evil for evil.
ii. This command is repeated over and over in Scripture.
iii. **Leviticus 19:18** Do not take revenge or bear a grudge against members of your community, but love your neighbor as yourself; I am the LORD.

iv. **1 Thessalonians 5:15** See to it that no one repays evil for evil to anyone, but always pursue what is good for one another and for all.

v. Our instinct when someone hurts us is to return the favor. Get them back. Payback. Revenge. Get even. Even the score. But God forbids such behavior. Do not repay anyone evil for evil.

vi. The story of Frank and Elizabeth Morris beautifully illustrate this principle. It was two days before Christmas in 1982, in Peddie, Ketucky. Their son Ted was home from college for the Christmas break, and that night he was working at his old high school job to earn a little Christmas money. Frank and Elizabeth got a call that said, "Ted has been in a car accident. Come quickly." They hurried to the hospital where they learned that a drunk driver by the name of Tommy Piggage had hit him. The next day, on Christmas Eve, Ted Morris died. This was not the first time that Tommy had been arrested for drunk driving. Once again he got off with probation and community service. They were Christians and knew that they should forgive, but it was incredibly hard, so they prayed for strength. One night Elizabeth went to hear Tommy speak at a student gathering and was impressed with how sorrowful and sincere he seemed to be. She prayed and mustered up the courage to approach him after the meeting to compliment, and when she reached out to touch him she smelled liquor on his breath. Still, Frank and Elizabeth invited Tomy into their home, let him sleep on Ted's bed, and eat at their table. They forgave him, loved him, led him to Christ, and Frank baptized him.

6. Try to earn the respect of everyone.

i. **Romans 12:17b** Give careful thought to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes.

ii. Often when we are making a decision we ask the wrong questions. We ask, "Is it legal? Is it sinful? Is there a verse against it?" If there's no law or verse against it, then we assume with have the right to do whatever we want.

iii. But you have to remember that as a Christian you represent Christ. Your behavior will either make Jesus look good or bad. If you win people's respect, then you will make Christianity look more attractive. If you lose people's respect, then people won't be interested in Christianity.

iv. And so a better question to ask when deciding to do something is, "Will this cause people to lose respect for me?"

v. As Christians, we should do everything to the glory of God (1 Cor 10:31). Everything to make Christ look good; to cause others to be more attracted to Jesus.

vi. Christians should be the best students, the best teammates, the best employees, the best neighbors because in all that you do, you are trying to earn the respect of everyone so that you can enhance Christ's reputation.

7. Try your best to live at peace with everyone.

i. **Romans 12:18** If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

ii. The Greek word for peace is *eirene*, which is where we get the name Irene.

iii. To live at peace means to work hard to get along with others; work hard for right relationships; work hard to avoid strife and conflict and fighting.

iv. Relational peace is usually a means to an end. It is not the ultimate goal, but it is necessary to reach the ultimate goal. For example, in the church you want more than peace, you want harmony and unity; but you can't have harmony and unity without peace. In marriage you want more than peace, you want intimacy; you can't get to intimacy without peace. With your children you want more than peace, you want friendship; but you can't have a friendship without peace. To have a healthy relationship you have to start with peace. You have to stop the fighting, the conflict, the strife, the warring against one another.

v. Notice that it says, "If possible, as far as it depends on you." That means if ever you are not at peace with someone, don't let it be your fault. You need to do everything you can to live at

peace. Like what? We have to reparative and preventative work. We have to repair relational breakdown, and prevent relational strife.

1. If someone hurts you, don't wait for them to apologize; you go to them and seek reconciliation (Mt 18:15).
2. If you see that someone is upset with you, don't wait for them to confront you; you go to them and seek reconciliation (Mt 5:23-24).
3. When people sin against you, don't hold a grudge; forgive (Eph 4:32).
4. When you learn that a particular behavior offends or bothers your neighbor, then stop. To do the opposite is rude and selfish, and the Bible says that love is not rude or self-seeking (1 Cor 13:5).

vi. Let me give you an example of peacemaking from our church. One time a man in our church was offended by a decision I made. When I heard he was offended, I didn't wait for him to come to me, I called him and set up a meeting. Rather than refuse the meeting, he agreed to me. When we met, we didn't shout at each other or get in a fist-fight; we stayed calm and kind. I apologized, he forgave, and he is still an active member of the church today. We are closer today than we were before that incident.

8. Treat your enemy with kindness rather than vengeance.

i. **Romans 12:19-21** 19 Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for God's wrath, because it is written, Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay,, says the Lord. 20 But

If your enemy is hungry, feed him.
If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
For in so doing
you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.
21 Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.

ii. Paul has spent a lot of time in this passage on relating to enemies.

1. **Romans 12:14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
2. **Romans 12:17a** Do not repay anyone evil for evil.
3. And then here in vs. 19-21.

iii. Obviously your relationships with your enemies will be the toughest relationships that you have.

iv. The command here is simple: Treat your enemy with kindness rather than vengeance.

v. Paul gives us three reasons for this:

1. Vengeance belongs not to us but to God.
    a. **Deuteronomy 32:35** Vengeance belongs to me; I will repay. In time their foot will slip, for their day of disaster is near, and their doom is coming quickly.
    b. God wants to be the one who rights the wrongs; who gets even; who balances the scales of justice.
    c. One of the ways that God takes vengeance on evil people is through the civil government. In the very next chapter, Romans 13, Paul explains this.
    d. **Romans 13:4** "For it is God's servant, an avenger that brings wrath on the one who does wrong."
    e. In our interpersonal relationships, we do not have the right to take revenge. That's God's business.
2. Kindness will possibly move our enemy to repentance.
    a. **Romans 12:20** But If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.
    b. The phrase "you will be heaping fiery goals on his head" means that when you repay good for evil, your enemy will be ashamed of himself and stop mistreating you. This doesn't always work out, but it can.
    c. The ultimate goal here is not merely to get your enemy to stop mistreating you, but to influence them to turn to Christ, and the best way to do that is to repay good for evil.

3. To resort to vengeance is to be conquered by evil.
    a. **Romans 12:21** Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.
    b. You may be a victim of evil, but you don't have to be conquered by evil.
    c. To be conquered by evil is to
        i. To allow the enemy to get you down; to discourage you so that you lose the joy of the Lord and the energy for serving Him.
        ii. Respond to evil with evil.
    d. To conquer evil is to
        i. Keep loving God and people, including your enemy.
        ii. To treat your enemy with kindness in hopes of leading him to Christ.

vi. When Elisha was the prophet of Israel, the king of Aram sent his army to kill him. When he woke up early in the morning, he saw that the entire city was surrounded. So, he prayed for the Lord to strike them with blindness. Then Elijah went out and led the army into the middle of Samaria, the capital city of their enemy Israel. When they were in the middle of the city, God opened their eyes and they realized they were in the middle of the city of their enemy. Their doom was certain. So the king of Israel asked, Elijah, "Should we kill them?" But Elijah said, "Don't kill them… Set food and water in front of them so they can eat and go back to their master." They a prepared a big feast for them, and then sent them back to Aram. And the Arameans never attacked Israel again (2 Kings 6).

IV. CONCLUSION

1. On the night before Jesus died, He gave His followers some final instructions.
2. **John 15:12** "This is my command: Love one another as I have loved you."
3. Christianity is not just about you and God; it's not just about your relationship with God. It's about your relationships with others. It's

about how you treat people. As Christians we should treat people with the same love, and grace, and concern that Jesus treats us.