Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Brick by Brick, Part 4
Scripture: Romans 12:14-21
Code: 45-96

Let's open our Bibles to Romans chapter 12 and do a little practical study of God's Word tonight. I thank you for coming to be with us on this night. I know these are busy days with all of the holiday activities and all of the anticipation of friends and trips and visits and things like that and I...I cherish so much our time together in the Word because I think the world wants to crowd that out of us. And I'm so refreshed when you come with a hungry heart to study God's Word.

We're looking at Romans 12:9 to 21 and we've been sort of taking our time going through this text because of its great importance. And as I've tried to point out to you, although most people who study the epistle of Romans feel that it is the earlier part of Romans that is really the major point of the book, the great theme of justification, the actual purpose of the book is to bring the believer to this very point. Everything else is a buildup. That's not to say it's less important, the doctrines of justification and the doctrines of sanctification and those great truths regarding Israel and the Gentiles that we learned in chapters 9 to 11 are essential, monumental, glorious truths. But all of that, in a sense, is foundation for the way we live, for the way we act, for the way we talk, for the way we think, for the way we behave in every situation. And so it's not really until you enter chapter 12 and on then to chapter 16 that you come to the real purpose of the writing of this epistle, and that is to set the foundation for Christian living. And now we've come with our foundation laid to these matters of practical Christian living. And he gives us, first of all, the general look at this matter of practical Christian living from verse 9 through 21. It all begins, of course, with dedication in verses 1 and 2. We've gone over that. With a recognition of your special place in the body of Christ, verses 3 to 8. So first, we want to be ready to give ourselves to the Lord, and then to give ourselves to the church.

And then he comes to this practical instruction as to how we are live our Christian life. And from verse 9 to 21 it's as if he has a circle and that circle sort of embraces a theme and at certain intervals the circle widens to take in a wider group of people. It starts in a very personal way with verse 9, speaking only of the individual Christian who is to have love without hypocrisy, who is to hate what is evil, and hold fast to what is good. Practical Christian living begins with some priorities in your life, an honest love, a hating of evil, and a commitment to what is right. That's just simple basic truth.

And then we noticed in verse 10 that the circle widened to go beyond the personal to include the Christian family. And the Apostle Paul in verses 10 through 13, you'll remember, says the Christian is not only called to love with a pure love, to hate evil and stick to what is good, but to be tenderly affectionate to other believers and then to seek above all things to honor other Christians rather than

to be honored himself. And then he goes in to talking about our service in verse 11 and says our service to Christ is to be total, enthusiastic, wholehearted, zealous, obedient, diligent service. As a result of that, verse 12 indicates we're going to have some trials and we need to rejoice hopefully in those trials, be patient during those trials and continue diligently in prayer through those trials anticipating the glory that awaits us and being sensitive not only to our own trials, but to the fact that others are having trials too. Verse 13 says we are distributing to the necessity of the saints and we're given to loving strangers.

So those verses sort of embrace the family, if you will, making sure we care for them, show love to them, meet their needs, serve them as we serve the Lord and so forth. So we've looked at the personal circle and the family circle.

And now tonight I want to come to a third and then a fourth circle, the third one sort of embraces everybody, it's sort of the all-people circle, if you will, in verses 14, 15 and 16. And here he widens the circle to discuss how we are to live in relationship to everybody unqualified whether they be believers or unbelievers. And he starts out with the worst of people that we may meet and he says in verse 14, "Bless them who persecute you, bless and curse not." And now he's gone just to a general statement, not particularly about the family of faith, but just in general. Anybody who persecuted you, you bless them and do not curse them. Now that's the way we ought to live. We are to live by blessing the people who treat us with evil intention.

That's not a new principle, by the way, that's a rather old principle in Scripture. It goes all the way back to the teaching of our Lord Jesus, do you remember it in Matthew 5:44, where Jesus said, "But I say unto you, love your...what?...enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you and pray for them who despitefully use you and persecute you." And that verse is really a combination of Matthew 5:44 and Luke 6:27 and 28 sort of brought together from differing manuscripts and placed in our particular Authorized version. But it's a teaching that was commonly given by our Lord, bless those who persecute you, do good to those who are doing evil against you. And that is a very important principle.

Just for a moment we might look at the passage in Luke because it is a very important passage. Chapter 6 and verse 27, "I say unto you that...here He says...love your enemies." And the love here would be what kind of love? A genuine love, a heartfelt love that is not hypocritical, not a phoney love, not a fake love, not a superficial love, but a genuine one, the kind that all of us are to have as verse 9 of Romans 12 told us. "Do good to them who hate you. Bless them that curse you and pray for them who despitefully use you and unto him that smites you on the one cheek, offer also the other, and him that takes away your cloak, forbid not to take away your coat. Give to every man that asks of you and of him that takes away the goods, ask them not again. And as you would that men should do to you, do you also to them, for if you love them who love you, what thanks have you for sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to them who do good to you, what thanks have

you for sinners also do even the same."

In other words, the world is going to respond to goodness with goodness. The world is going to respond to love with love. To show the distinctiveness of being Christians, we need to respond with love to those who hate us and with goodness to those who do evil to us. That is our distinctiveness. I remember, of course, not long ago when our nephew Tim Rea was murdered, a wonderful young man that many of you knew, loved the Lord with all his heart, was committed to serving the Lord and he went, of course, to work in the market...some of you remember the story...where he was employed. And a man came in to rob because of his need for drugs and when Tim came over to try to help the checker he was robbing, the man pumped bullets into him and took his life. And I remember the response of Duane Rea, his father, my brother-in-law, who's now pastoring in Washington, was then with us, and Duane had a great concern to see the man who killed his son come to know Jesus Christ, and that has ever and always been his prayer. And when he came down here some months ago for what was to be some legal activity regarding the case which is at this point still unresolved, his great concern was to get an opportunity to share Jesus Christ with his son's murderer. That is distinctively Christian, you understand that? That is distinctively Christian. The world does not respond to the murder of its loved ones with love, that is unique and that is what is called for in the Word of God.

Recently we had the unenviable experience in our home of being robbed. Patricia came home one day to our house and one of the kids had forgotten to set the alarm system. And she came into the house, we don't forget that anymore, this was a couple of weeks ago, and came into the house and she not only walked in the door but no sooner had she come in the door that she realized something was wrong because things were all over everyplace. She went into the kitchen and saw the window had been pried open and things were thrown around and she said to Marcy, "Let's go right out the backdoor, somebody's in the house." Went out and the police were called and we found out the house had been ransacked. And in their haste to go out the window wondering perhaps if they went through a door they might set off the alarm, not knowing what the system was, they went back out the window and on the way out they dropped a butcher knife that they were carrying in the event they had run into one of the children. And it had been just not long ago, in fact the very day before at the same hour that Melinda had been home by herself for a brief period of time and they were ready had that happened. By God's grace it was the day after that. And, of course, your initial reaction to that is very human, isn't it? And you go into your room and your privacy has been invaded and everything that you count dear is thrown all over and many things that are irreplaceable are taken. We don't have anything of earthly value but we do have some things that sentimentally mean something to us. And much of that was gone. Then all of a sudden something in your heart says, "But this is exactly where your Christianity is tested," isn't it? And can you demonstrate love for those who have invaded your privacy who have taken what is not theirs, who have done evil against you?

And that essentially is what is behind the thought of verse 14. The ones who come against you whether it's a spiritual persecution or whatever, the idea here is the word *dioko*, it's the verb *dioko*and it basically means to pursue someone with the intent of doing harm. And we are to respond to those who pursue us with the intent of doing harm with blessing, that is wishing them the best...wishing them the best, blessing them, desiring that God would pour out upon them His goodness and His grace and His mercy. It's what Jesus did on the cross when He said, "Father...what?...forgive them for they know not what they do," and magnanimously wanted grace to be bestowed on those who were taking His life. It is the spirit of Stephen in Acts chapter 7 verse 60 who laying beneath the bloody stones that are crushing out of his life...out his life, looks to heaven and says, "Lay not this sin to their charge." Don't hold them accountable for this, God.

And you'll notice it says "bless," it's in a present tense, it's the idea of constantly blessing. And to bless means to celebrate with praise to wish good will upon. It's a wonderful thing to see the example of Christ in this because it's such an unhuman and unnatural reaction. Peter writes about it in 1 Peter 2:21, he says, "Even here unto were you called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps...here it comes...who did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth, who when He was reviled, reviled not again. When He suffered, threatened not, but committed Himself to Him that judged righteously." In other words, when they came against Him, He never retaliated. And there's to be no mixture. He says, "Bless them who pursue you with intent to do harm." And then he says, "Bless and curse not." In other words, there's no mixture of blessing and cursing to be tolerated. It isn't bless them in addition to cursing them, it is bless them and do not curse them at all. This is distinctively Christian living.

I read an interesting article last week that my wife gave me that comes to our home from the Berkeley...it's kind of a Berkeley paper, comes out of the University of California. And it is full of the latest discoveries of all the departments of the University of California, and all the science and all the studies they're doing on personality and psychology, and sociology, and so forth. And it was very interesting to me to note in there an article relative to the fact that people today have high blood pressure and they have all kinds of anxiety related diseases, and the study has shown that most of that high pressure kind of thing and most of that anxiety that comes out of the stress...and they use the word stress a lot...has nothing to do with long-term assignments. In other words, it isn't because you're overworked on your job, it isn't because you have a lot to do and a lot on your mind. Most people's severe stress is related to little things like you can't find your car keys, somebody takes a parking space in the mall parking lot that you wanted, standing in line to buy something, somebody cuts in front of you in traffic. Those are the things that precipitate stress that precipitates severe physical illness. It isn't the long-term difficult task. It is that short fuse. And that's all related, I believe, to an escalating egotism where people are literally consumed with their rights and have come to the point now where if you get in someone's way, they're just as likely to kill you as look at you.

I was driving home, I think I may have told you, and a man tried to punch out the windows of my car. Did I tell you that? Oh... He thought that I took his space on the road. So he pulled me over, had the whole family in it, it was after a Sunday morning service three weeks ago, and I was just...we were just talking and he thought I crowded his space on the road. And so he just pulled over and angled in front of me and so I just thought...well, I'll...I'll stop. I don't know what he's going to do, but I'm not going to argue with him and I'll try to be a peacemaker. And he walked to the car, didn't have a shirt on, I think he had something to prove about his macho image and he came back to the car and he said, "Roll the window down." So I did about that far.... I mean, he was violent and I could see it. And he started pouring out profanity that would curl your hair and I just looked him in the eye. And when he was all done, I said, "Do you feel better?" I said, "I don't know what this is all about but if I've done anything to offend you, I'm sorry." And then he reached back his fist and with all the power in his fist he hit the window as hard as he could and left a layer of skin on the window. And, of course, then he went, "Ohhh," and grabbed his hand. I mean, he was absolutely out of control because he thought somebody had invaded his space. And I just sort of blessed him by saying, "I'm very sorry and I wouldn't have inconvenienced you in anyway," and left it at that. And I said, "Maybe you ought to just get in your car and go on home," which he did with a very sore hand.

But that is the world's reaction and I'm telling you, people, it is frightening to be alive in this world today because you don't know what people are going to do. Egotism has come to the point where you can't invade anybody's territory without hostility breaking out. Is it any wonder that marriages don't survive, or any other relationships, for that matter? But Christians are distinctly unearthly and we do not give back that way. We respond entirely different. When we are pursued with intent to do harm, we do not retaliate.

Somebody might have said to me, "Why don't you get out of the car and deck the guy?" Or, "Why don't you do like they do in the cops and robbers and wait till he gets by the door, open it and kick it right into him, knock him down, do the whole number, right?" I haven't practiced that, you know, so I don't really... But I wanted to be sure that since I was studying Romans 12 I put it into operation when I was given opportunity. The Lord has had a way recently of giving me the opportunity to live through this passage. I will be very happy when I get out of this passage. I am anxious to get on to verse 15, if you don't mind.

In verse 15 he says, "Rejoice with them that do rejoice." And that's another distinctively Christian thing. That is that we enjoy someone else's joy. That is the absence of any jealousy, isn't it? I mean, that is a distinctly Christian characteristic, to rejoice at someone else's prosperity. In fact, in Proverbs 17:5 the ungodly are described as those who are glad at the calamity of others. Contrast that with what Paul said, I think it's 2 Corinthians 2 verse 3, where he says, "I rejoice with the joy of all of you." It is distinctively Christian to be blessed at someone else's joy, to be able to rejoice with someone else. What a beautiful characteristic that is. I think Paul has that in mind one other passage I might just mention to you, it's...I think it's the right one, 1 Corinthians 12:26...yes. "Whether one member

suffer, all the members suffer with it, one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it, now ye are the body of Christ and members in particular." And so it is distinctively Christian to rejoice at someone else's honor, to rejoice at someone else's joy.

And then he says in verse 14...pardon me, 15, verse 15, "Weep with them that weep." It is also distinctively Christian to be sympathetic, not indifferent. The world is becoming more and more callous, more and more indifferent. By the way, the word "weep" there is an interesting word in the Greek, it's the word *klaio*and it means to shed tears...to shed tears. It's a strong word. It's the evidence of the Christian sympathy. And so we are to be marked then as those who are very sensitive to those around us. As they have cause for rejoicing, we fully and totally enter into their joy and that's because we love them so much, we care so much and because we're so happy that they are so blessed that we can't restrain our joy. It isn't that we laugh because we're supposed to. It isn't that we're happy artificially. It is that we're truly Christian and true Christians respect so much the blessing that comes to others and are so thankful that they should be blessed that they too enjoy vicariously the same thrill. And Christians too are those who in sympathy know what it is to share the tears of a friend, tears of a fellow member of the body of Christ who is in sorrow. That too is distinctively Christian in an everly...an ever-increasingly indifferent, dull and insensitive kind of world.

And I think about that man Jeremiah in the Old Testament who really had a whole life of weeping which had very little to do with anything happening to him. You know that, don't you? I mean, Jeremiah was blessed and Jeremiah was a man full of joy, he said, "Thy words were found and I did eat them, and Thy word was in me, the joy and rejoicing of my heart," remember that in Jeremiah 15:16? So for him he had joy. But he couldn't really live that joy on the outside unmitigated because he was so sensitive to the problems of his people. And in Jeremiah 9:1 he says something that really expresses the depth of his heart, "O that my head were waters and mine eyes a fountain of tears that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people." He had such a burden for the salvation of Israel that he wished himself to be literally a fountain of waters who could weep night and day to pour out the anguish in his heart for those people who were perishing without a right relationship to God. A beautiful expression of pure sensitive love.

So, when we are pursued by someone who wants to do us harm and we all face that, whether in a minimal way related to some earthly circumstance, or whether for the cause of Jesus Christ we be persecuted and perhaps...perhaps some of us in a more public ministry sense, more of that persecution, but you may be getting it at your level too, you may be receiving it because you're trying to live a certain way, because you're trying to be faithful to a certain biblical standard, because you're trying to uphold that which you know to be the truth of God, return that with blessing. And then another general principle on both sides, "Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those that weep."

Now Paul has another essential thing in mind in the way we treat other people and that basically has to do with three things stated in verse 16. And here's another part of that sort of general behavior toward all people. Verse 16 says, "Be of the same mind one toward another," be of the same mind one toward another. That's a very simple thought, it just means think about everybody the same, don't be a respecter of persons, don't play up to certain kinds of people. Don't sort of plan your strategy to reach the elite level, think of everybody the same, treat everyone equally. In chapter 15 of Romans, verse 5, we'll get to that in the future, "Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus." Same idea. We're not to prefer each other over each other. Philippians 2 is the key passage, you know it. He says, "If there's any consolation in Christ, if there's any real fellowship in Christ, if there's any real common participation and if we are common partners, then we need to treat each other the same, having the same love one for another." And in order to do that he says in Philippians 2, "We have to look not on our own things but on the things of others and consider others better than ourselves...better than ourselves." And James 2 in verses 1 to 9 James says you don't want to respect persons, you want to love everyone the same and if a man comes into your congregation and he has a gold ring and he's very wealthy, don't give him the best seat and say to the man who's poor, "Here get under my footstool and out of the way where you belong," that's not the way the Christian responds. The Christian distinctive in life style is to treat everyone the same. And that...that is a very important pattern of life. It's easy for us to become social climbers, it's easy for us to want to find ourselves always around the rich and the famous and the mighty and whatever. That is not distinctively Christian. Distinct Christianity desires to treat all the same.

In Philippians 1:27 Paul says, "I want you to stand fast in one spirit with one mind, striving together for the faith of the gospel." In 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul says, "I want you to be knit together in such a way," and the words here are beautiful, "that you all speak the same thing, there be no divisions among you, no cliques, no social strata, but you be perfectly knit together in the same mind and the same judgment." And if you haven't noticed, all this flows out of love, all of this flows out of humility. That's essential.

Now he goes to a second statement in verse 16, he says since you're to treat everyone the same, there are two things that will help you to do that. Number one is this, "Don't concentrate on high things, but condescend to men of low estate." Don't think or concentrate on high things, *hupsela[?]*, lofty...lofty, high. Don't pursue the high place and the high people and the high position and that which is highly esteemed, but condescend. Now "condescend" here is not intended to be a patronizing word. We think of condescension in our English vocabulary today in sort of condescending, you sort of condescend to someone, you patronize that person. But condescend here means simply to come down. It literally means to be carried away with. In other words, don't pursue the high things but be carried away with people of low estate. And the word of low estate is really low, *tapeinos*, does not rise above the ground, get down on the ground with the lowly. It doesn't mean you ignore those who are high, it means you don't pursue that, you don't chase that, you don't

concentrate on that. I praise God for those in our church fellowship and those who are friends of mine who are people of high position, or high office, or high estate, significant in the world of men, significant in the Kingdom of God. I also praise the Lord for friends of mine who are right down on the ground level, who are equally rich enriching my life and who mean as much to me as any others, and that is distinctively Christian. And that's what Paul is saying.

Our feelings are to be so much in line with lowly things that we are perfectly at home with people who are not rising above the ground. The point is, there's no place for aristocracy in the church. There's no place for an upper crust. We are to be at home with the lowly as well as the rest.

I think that's so beautifully illustrated in Luke. Would you look at Luke 14 for a minute, Luke 14 verse 13? Verse 12 rather, "When He said to them, 'When you give a dinner, or a supper, don't call your friends or your brethren, or your kinsmen, your relatives, or your rich neighbors lest they also bid you again and a recompense be made.'" You know how it is, they've got to have you then. So you tell them to come over, they have to have you over. "But when you give a feast, call the poor and the maimed, the lame and the blind and you'll be blessed for they can't recompense you."

You want to know something? You bring over the rich, the rich will pay you back. You bring over the poor, guess who will pay you back? The Lord will pay you back, "For you shall be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."

So, who do you want it from? The rich or God? The rich or the richest? It's nice, you know, when you have folks over and they respond and have you over, or give you a gift. But their gift can't match what the Lord will give so next time you have a dinner, call the poor and the maimed and the lame and the blind who could never have you over, who could never pay you back. And learn to be at home, to be carried away with those people who are of low estate by the world's standards. The truth of the matter is the idea of low estate has nothing to do with spirituality. It is not to say they are low-level spiritual, it is to say that on the social scale they're at the bottom rung. And I have found very often that some of those people who are low on the social scale are very, very high on the spiritual one, haven't you?

And then he says, furthermore, if you are to live this life of humility that has everybody the same, treats everybody the same, you not only must not concentrate on high things but come down and be carried away with those on the lowest level, but secondly, "You cannot be wise in your own conceit." In other words, don't become wise with yourself thinking you know everything. In other words, don't be satisfied that everything begins and ends with you. "Lean not on your own...what?...understanding."

So what is he saying? If you are to treat everyone equal there are two things you're going to have to realize. In the church there is no social aristocracy, and there is no intellectual aristocracy. Don't say

to yourself, "Well, I'm so wise I wouldn't want to have a whole house of fools over, what would I say to them?" Right? That's his point. "I need to have people who are at my level." There is no social aristocracy, there is no intellectual aristocracy, there are no castes in the body of Christ. That's the way it ought to be.

There's a theory running around in the circles that are called "church growth," a lot of theories in that area of church growth, philosophical theories about why churches grow, and one of the theories is called "Homogenous Units," and that is the idea that churches grow along the lines of homogenous units. In other words, if you have a church where everybody is blond haired, blue eyed, works at the same social level, that is a major contributor to your growth because those people attract equals and it grows that way. If you have a church where everyone is black and comes out of a sort of a ghetto experience, that church tends to grow because everybody has common or homogenous kind of ties. And one of the threats to church growth is a non-homogenous heterogenous conglomeration. And the theorists tell us that a church like that is likely not to grow.

Well for many years the people who taught this were bringing groups of their students that they were teaching this to to Grace Church. They brought them here for three or four years when they would come into town for the seminars. And then they stopped. And so we found out why they stopped, they said, "We don't bring them there anymore because your church doesn't fit the theory." That's what they said. It doesn't seem to bother them that that ought to blow their theory sky high. But they just eliminate the problem by not letting the students see a church that violates the theory. But I thank the Lord that our church while to some extent perhaps it's homogenous, we all speak English, you know, and we live in a certain perimeter of society here in Southern California, but in many, many ways our church is representative of a wide, wide range of social and intellectual strata.

I was called on Thursday, you can watch for this, by a writer for U.S. News and World Report, which, of course, is a very well-known national magazine. And he said, "We're writing a special feature on great independent churches in America and your church is one that we've selected." Now I don't know what in the world they're doing writing an article on independent churches in U.S. News and World Report, but I think that's great. And I don't think he even knew we were being sued, which was nice, because everyone who written anything on us has written about a law suit. And he wanted to know about our church. And he wanted to know if we had a ministry to Spanish people, if we had black people in the church, did we have Asian people in the church. And I began to tell him about all these ministries and I...and he said, "Why do they come to your church?" And I said, "Because we stand for the Word of God, and that's our common ground and that's where we're one in Christ, around the Savior and around His Word.." And I went on to describe that. And I said, "We just believe the Bible."

And we were talking and he said, "Yeah," he said, "And what's the genius of your independence?"

I said, "Well we're not..."

He said, "Why don't you belong to a big denomination?"

And I said, "Because so many big denominations are embroiled in all kinds of things that we don't think are biblical."

But I was really excited to be able to tell him that our church is a wide spectrum of people because I think that's the way the church ought to be, don't you? Because our ministry is not socially oriented. It is not intellectually oriented. It is spiritually and biblically oriented and everybody can plug in on the Word of God. So there's no aristocracy.

And it even goes beyond that, even outside the church. I think we are to reach down to the people who are lowly and up to the people that are high and not pursue either one, but be available to both.

Now again the circle widens one final time in verse 17. First it was personal in verse 9, then it was family in verses 10 to 13. Then sort of everybody got in it in verses 14 and 15 and 16, and that did include also the Christian family. As I said, the circle widens so it's all inclusive. Now finally there's one other element of it and it was sort of introduced in verse 14 and that is circle phase four is personal enemies. And now he talks about personal enemies and I want you to listen carefully to this, then I want to illustrate it and I want to finish it because next week is concerts and then it's the Christmas season and then it's the New Year's and we won't get back to this for too long, so hang on to your seatbelt, here we go.

Keep in mind that these circles widen and now it's widening to take in our personal enemies in a very direct sense. And verse 17 says, "Pay back no man evil for evil." And we're right back to kind of what we saw in verse 14, only verse 14 was sort of positive, "Bless the one who persecutes you, who pursues you to do harm." Here he says, "Don't give anyone evil when they give you evil." It is a very natural reaction to do that.

You say, "Well now wait a minute, John, what about the Old Testament where it says in Exodus 21, Leviticus 24, Deuteronomy 19, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth?"

That is talking about public law. That Mosaic prescription has to do with the nation, a nation is to have a system of justice that retaliates against evil. Right? So that where there is a murder there should be the execution of a murderer, where there is a theft there should be retribution brought upon the thief. There is an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth in a society as ruled by men in a government that is ordered by law. But that is not to be for private revenge, that's the point. What is God's design for the society is not vigilante law. We know, according to Romans 13 which we're

going to be studying very soon, that police and soldiers of a nation do not bear the sword in vain, they are the ministers of God, it says in verse 4, who are avengers to execute wrath on them who do evil. So there is built into society the avenging. And I'll tell you this, when a society doesn't do that, I believe it puts itself in the judgment of God. You read the Old Testament you will find out God demands blood for blood. And we in our society allow crime to go unpunished, I mean we have allowed it all the time. There are murderers running around unpunished all over the place, loopholes in the law, this and that and I believe our society bears the responsibility for that because we have not reciprocated against evil by the judicial process, the law of God, which is ordered for a society. So our society bears the guilt of failing to punish evildoers and I believe it puts us in a position to be judged by God. But as far as private revenge, there's no place for that, no place. So he says, "Pay back no man evil for evil." That is not our place. We do not retaliate. We do not have that kind of spirit.

In 1 Thessalonians 5:15 Paul says it again, "See that none of you render evil for evil unto any man." Don't ever give back evil for evil for any man, "But follow what is good both among yourselves and to all men." In 1 Peter 3 basically verse 9 follows the same idea. Don't ever give back evil for evil, but rather provide things that are honest in the sight of all men, or literally that are good. It's the same as 1 Thessalonians 5:15, almost an exact quote. Instead of giving back evil, give back...what?...good...give back good. "Providing" is kind of an interesting word. Provide good things, the word means to take thought in advance, to plan to do that, to premeditate your goodness so that you're not caught unaware.

Let me give you the scenario. When somebody does something evil to you, if you're just set up for momentary reaction, you're going to react with evil against evil, right? That's your natural reaction. So you have to premeditate and predispose yourself to do good when evil comes. It is a preparation process. And we're right *back to*where we were last week. What were we talking about last week? Self...what?...self-discipline. A disciplined life is an ordered mind where all reactions are premeditated so that when something comes I am not left to react with my bare and raw emotions humanly but I have already thought it through, perceived it beforehand, prepared for it in advance and should it happen I am ready to respond with goodness. That's the premeditated ordered disciplined life. He's saying premeditate your goodness. Don't be caught unaware. And when he says, "Provide things honest," the word "honest" is *kalos*, visibly good, outwardly good, overtly good, tangibly good. In other words, when someone really does you evil, do good to them in a way they can see it and it's visible. It isn't just a thought, it isn't just a private emotion, it is a visible act of goodness so that we return something good and something kind and something gracious to them.

I've tried to do that through the years and I get a lot of interesting mail where people really are mad at me. I heard today that someone said I was a heretic. And I get a lot of mail and a lot of people I don't know why they get upset at me but they do, and I have learned through the years, I hope, to premeditate all of that so that when it comes I have sort of a standard response and it is a response, I

trust, of kindness that just basically reaches out and says, "Thank you, thank you for your concern, pray for me. If I've done anything to offend you, forgive me. I want to be all that God would have me to be and I want you to keep praying for me that I might be the man He wants me to be." That's the way to respond to evil. And if it's even possible, to give someone to the person, something that is tangibly expressive of your kindness to them.

And so our behavior should commend us to those who do evil against us, very basic principle. The Christian then is to think through his responses so that when he is confronted with an evil situation, he has premeditated a right response so that he rightly represents the God he belongs to, so that like Titus 2:10 says he adorns the doctrine of God.

Now Paul adds another kind of thought here including our personal enemies in verse 18. "If it is possible as much as lies in you, live peaceably with all men." Now I like that statement. It's practical. He says, "I want you to live peaceably but I recognize a few things, do it if it's possible." There are some people you try to make peace with, it's not possible. You found that? You can't do it. You can't do it. I mean sometimes you just don't know what is left to do and you have tried everything there is to do and you can't seem to do it. And so you're comforted that it says here, "If it's possible." And even the Holy Spirit knew it wasn't always possible. "As much as lies in you." Why? Because it takes two to make peace, doesn't it? So if it's possible as much as comes on your end, never the let the conflict come from you...never. Always make peace. And I don't care whether they're right or wrong about their condemnation, make peace. From your side, make peace, don't choose conflict.

Now it says, "As much as lieth in you." Now that's a very important statement to me because sometimes it's very difficult to know how far to go. You say, "Well if I really want to make peace here I'm going to have to compromise the truth. I'm going to have to pull back on the truth. This guy's going to be furious with me unless I change my doctrine, or unless I say I'm wrong, you're right, whatever." So you have to come back to that little phrase, "As much as lieth in you." And there are some points in me where you come to the bottom line and it's non-negotiable. And we'll have peace, we'll...I'll do everything I can to have peace, except compromise what I believe to be the truth, right? I won't do that...I won't do that. And if that's what you're asking me to do, I won't do that. But as much as lies in me, as much as I can do, and the one thing I can't do is violate the Word of God, but as much as lies within me to do, that's what I'll do. And even Jesus said, "Look, I came Prince of peace, but not to bring peace but a sword. I know that while I bring peace to some, I bring a sword to others." And then He said, "I came to set a man at variance against his family, mother or daughter, father or son," you know the passage, Matthew 10:34 to 36. Jesus said, "I know that they're going to come times when even though I come in peace, I can't bring peace and I will not compromise truth." So as much as lies within you to the point of not compromising, and if it's possible...here comes the main thought...live peaceably with all men...live peaceably with all men, seek to be a peacemaker.

You know, the world is full of troublemakers, isn't it? Just plain troublemakers, irritating people, really, just irritating. But the wisdom that is above, James 3:17 says, "The wisdom that is from above is first...what?...pure and second...you know it?...peaceable." I love that. Right next to purity is what? Peace. Are you a peacemaker? Or are you a troublemaker? Don't be a troublemaker, seek peace....seek peace.

I want to give you an illustration. Turn in your Bible to Judges 14. You're going to enjoy this, I hope you've enjoyed it up to here, but you'll enjoy this. I'll tell you a story of Samson. Judges 14...Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges. And I just want to give you an insight into a man who didn't know what it was to be a peacemaker and what happened. He returned evil for evil, it's an incredible story.

There was a small town in the land of Israel right on the border of Dan and Judah, a town called Zorah...Z-o-r-a-h. Zorah is about 15 miles west of Jerusalem, located in The Shephelah. And in that little town lived a man named Manoah. Manoah's barren wife was given a son, a son by the name of Samson who was to be a Nazirite, that is Nazir, separated to be separated all his life. He was not to cut his hair, he was not to drink wine, strong drink. He was to live a very circumspect life. He was not to touch a dead body. All those things that were part of that Nazirite separation vow. He was to deliver Israel from the Philistines.

Now the Philistines had really crowded Israel. Zorah was an Israelite village, an hour's walk was a Philistine village called Timnah, about four miles away. So the Philistines had invaded that land to the degree where they were four miles away from this village and about...well less than 20 miles from Jerusalem the Philistines occupied the land. They were a great threat to Israel. Even though there was a certain peace at the time, their threat was great and so God raised up this man Samson to judge the Philistines.

Now notice verse 1 of chapter 14, "Samson went down to Timnah," that was his first mistake, he shouldn't have been messing around in that Philistine village, but he had a problem, he had eyes for women. "And he saw a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines." He saw this girl down there and from what I understand about the way people dressed down there, you couldn't see much but whatever he saw he liked. "And he came up and told his father and his mother, and said, 'I have seen a woman in Timnah.'" Now this guy's got a problem. He just goes down, sees a woman and he gets all concerned about this. Goes home and reports, "I want you to get her for me as my wife." Pretty strong, right? But maybe if your son is Samson you don't hassle the kid, right? "Then his father and his mother said to him, 'Is there no woman among the daughters of thy brethren, among all my people that thou shouldest go to take a wife of the uncircumcized Philistines?'" I mean, you can't find a nice Jewish girl, you've got to go marry a Philistine? You've got to violate tradition? You've got to mess up the family? How we going to get together with the in-laws? What kind of a deal is that? Well he's a persistent guy and Samson said to his father, "Get her for me for she pleases me well."

So Samson saw a Philistine woman and he wanted her.

Verse 4 says, "His father and his mother knew not that it was of the Lord that he sought an occasion against the Philistines for at that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel." Now there's a really unique twist in the story. It is not of the Lord that Samson lusted after a Philistine woman. It is of the Lord that the Lord was going to overrule Samson's lust for His own goals. And out of the lust of Samson and the chaos that he brought, God would ultimately bring about the destruction of the Philistines, which is to say that whether it is righteousness or unrighteousness, God is going to fulfill His task. Much better had it been that Samson acted righteously and judged the Philistines on behalf of God and been blessed rather than to have acted unrighteously and been crushed to death as a blind man. But he made his choice.

So verse 5 says, "He went down and his father and his mother to Timnah and came to the vineyards of Timnah and there was a young lion roaring there and the Spirit of the Lord came mightily on him and he tore him as he would have torn a little goat and he had nothing in his hand." He just grabbed that lion in mid-air and ripped it up and he didn't tell his parents. They must have been somewhere else and he went off on the trip down there and it happened and he tore that lion to pieces. And then he went down and talked with the woman and she really pleased him well. And then in verse 8, "And after a time he returned to take her and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion." He went back the same way, the four miles down to the little village of Timnah where the Philistine girl was. He went down to take her and there he saw the carcass still there and by now a swarm of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion. These bees had occupied it. Of course, he took it in his hands, violating his Nazirite vow, touching a dead body. He started eating all the honey. Came to his mother and father, gave some for them and they ate it. He didn't tell them he had taken it out of the carcass of the lion.

So his father went down unto the woman also, went down with the thought of aborting the thing. But when he got there he made a big feast, that's the way young men used to do it. "It came to pass when they saw him, they brought 30 companions to be with him." They brought in 30 men, I guess they figured he needed to be guarded. It may have been that his stature was great. "When they saw him they brought 30 companions to be with him." They may have been sort of guards to make sure that Samson didn't wreck the place. He must have been a massive guy.

"And Samson says, 'I'm going to give you a riddle." And riddles were a big part of entertainment in those days...you told...what else was there to do, no TV, no nothing? So you told riddles, like jokes, like when people used to talk, you know. And so you told riddles. "And he says, 'If you can certainly declare it to me within the seven days of the feast and you give the answer to the riddle, I'm going to give you 30 linen garments and 30 changes of raiment.'" Now what that means is an inner and an outer garment and the terms used indicate that it was really high-class super-dressy kind of expensive clothes. He says I'll give you guys all a wardrobe if you can guess this riddle. Very costly

risk. "And if you can't, you're going to give me the whole wardrobe, 30 changes of it." And they said, "Give us the riddle. We can handle that." They figured they've got a whole week to work on it. "And the riddle was, Out of the eater came forth something to eat, and out of the strong came forth something sweet. And they tried for three days, they couldn't explain it."

Well what happened was on the seventh day after the whole week had transpired, weddings were a week long, remember we've said that many times. On the final day everything sort of came together, everybody left and the marriage was consummated. "And so they said to his wife, 'Entice your husband that he may declare unto us the riddle, lest we burn thee and thy father." We're going to burn you up if you don't get that answer out of him.

Now that's a lot of pressure on a young girl. She's scared. Now we don't know, she probably...they said this to her on the seventh day, but they may have been saying it to her all along. The text seems to indicate they were saying it all along to her and finally on the seventh day they said, "We're going to burn you," that's the part they added. Get him...they answered, "Get him to answer on the seventh day," he said, "We're going to burn you if you don't."

And so she went in there and she wept all the time, "You hate me, you don't love me," you know, you can hear that whining deal like a dripping faucet. And Samson, he's going to marry the girl, he wants to have a happy honeymoon, he doesn't want all this whining going on, "You don't love me or you would tell me your riddle. You put a riddle out and you won't tell me." And he says, "I haven't even told my own father and mother, nobody knows, why should I tell you?" That only makes it worse. And she cried, and she cried for the whole time. Can you imagine...what a drag.

So at the end of verse 17 she told him, told him the answer. They were going to burn her up with her father because he finally gave in, he told them, she told them. He had to tell her. Why? He couldn't stand this. A whining woman is worse than an army assaulting. "And the men of the city said, 'We know,'" And they gave him the answer and, boy, he was really mad. He was so mad verse 19 says, "He went to Ashkelon and that strength that was upon him came and he slew 30 men and took their clothes." Ashkelon is 28 miles away, he just took off, went 28 miles away. Why? Because he didn't want to do it there, they'd know where he was. So he went to another town, just killed 30 guys, packed up all their clothes and brought them back and gave them out. But you know what happened while he was gone? Here's his poor, whining wife-to-be standing at the altar, he's gone to kill 30 guys. He's gone 28 miles. I don't know how long he was gone, a long time. So she's at the altar and her father's embarrassed, so he marries her off to the best man. That's right. Verse 20 says, "He gave his wife to the companion whom he had used as his friend." I mean, she just can't stand there pining away at the altar. They've got all the festivities. You can't go through this again, it's too expensive, so marry her off. So they marry her off to the best guy.

He came back. He comes back at the time of wheat harvest, and he says, "Ah...he brings along a kid, you know, and he says, 'I will go in to my wife, into the chamber, honeymoon at last.'" Her father says, "No, you can't go in. I thought you hated her so I gave her to your companion. Here, take her younger sister."

You say, "Why did he say that?" You forget who this was, this is Samson. You don't want him angry at you. So if you've got another daughter, "Here, here, here..." he just, you know, slaughtered 30 people so he says, "Take her...take her."

Well now he's very mad. He's not only mad at the guys about the riddle, he is now mad about the Philistines and the pressure they had put on the girl and her father. And so he is so furious he goes to get 300 foxes, verse 4, and ties them all together and puts torches between their tails. Talk about cruelty to animals. And he lights all the torches and sends them through the fields. By the way, this was a rather common thing for people to do in those days. If you wanted to do something to your enemy, you burned his standing corn, or you burned his grain and this is revenge. And now the revenge is really going. He revenged for the..for the riddle by taking 20 Philistine lives. They gave his wife away so now he burns down the Philistine fields. The guy is on a...on a revenge trip, unthinkable what those poor foxes went through. And down in verse 6 the Philistines said, "Who did this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite," which, of course, he never really was, "because he was mad about his taking his wife and giving her to his companion. So the Philistines were so mad at what he did to them, they went up and burned the father and daughter." It just has no sense. Why didn't they get Samson? Don't be silly... The closest they could get to Samson was to burn this woman and her father. So they burned them. And Samson says to them, "You have done this, yet will I be avenged of you and after that I will cease. And he smote them hip and thigh." That's an old Hebrew expression meaning total slaughter, top to bottom. And when he got done slaying them, he went to a rock. Why? Because he needed to lay low again. And then the Philistines came against him. Boy, the revenge is really escalating.

And you know what happened. He came up to the rock, three thousand men came to the rock where he was in verse 11. And he just came out of there and he says, just kind...they said in verse 13, "We will bind you securely and deliver you into their hand but surely we will not kill you. And they bound him with two new cords and brought him out of the rock and when he came to Lehi, the Philistines shouted against him. And the Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon him and the cords that were on his arms became as flax burnt with fire, his bands loosed from off his hands. He found a new jawbone, a moist one so that it wouldn't be brittle of a recently, I guess, dead jackass, put forth his hand, took that jawbone and massacred a thousand Philistines. And then he sang a little song. With the jawbone of an ass, heap upon heap, with the jaw of an ass have I slain a thousand men." A little...nice little ditty about a massacre. And all of this whole thing is because of vengeance. This whole thing is nothing but retaliation.

"It came to pass when he was finished he just threw away the jawbone." Just threw it away. "And called the place 'The hill of the jawbone, Ramath-lehi.' And he was very thirsty and said, 'I'm going to die of thirst.'" You get thirsty killing a thousand people, that's a lot of work. "And the Lord gave him some water and he judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years."

You know what happened after that? He saw another woman. You know the rest of the story? He liked her too. And the Philistines wanted him dead so badly that they knew they had him because his weakness was women. And so they got to Delilah and they said, "Find out where his strength is." And finally he confessed, didn't he? You know the story. But before that he...he really did some amazing things. I don't have time to tell you the whole story. He picked up the gates of one city and marched away with them in his hands, huge massive gates, I mean made out of huge beams of wood, overlaid with metal and he walked 38 miles up a hill with them. That's chapter 16. But that woman got him to confess and the Philistines came and said, "We've got him," and they jabbed out his eyes and made him blind, cut his hair, made him pull a grain mill. Finally his hair grew, you remember, he went back into the Philistine temple and said, "Put my hands on the pillars so I can stand up." He pushed the pillars down, probably 20,000 Philistines, including himself too, were crushed to death in that. The point is, revenge never ended until everybody involved was dead. It is the...it is the single greatest illustration of the idiocy of revenge recorded on the pages of holy Scripture.

Now with that in your mind, go back to Romans. In Romans chapter 12 and verse 19 Paul says, "Dearly beloved," and it is a pensive and sensitive cry, "Dearly Beloved," he says, "Avenge not yourselves," don't do that...don't do that. "Don't you execute justice." The word literally means "to punish," *ekdikeo*, don't you go around punishing people for their evil, you are not called to do that. But look at this, "But rather give over to the wrath." What does that mean? The wrath of God. "But rather give over to the wrath of God for it is written, Deuteronomy 32:35, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' saith...whom?...the Lord." Let the Lord do it. Don't you do it. Don't you return evil for evil. Don't you avenge. Don't you punish someone. You give place to God's wrath, for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. Let the Lord do it. This is God's promise. He will deal with sin. No sinner, believe me, will ever escape His just reward, true? I don't feel any need to do vengeance. I don't feel any need to punish anybody. I don't have to retaliate. God does that. God takes care of that. God is a just God, read Nahum chapter 1, Habakkuk chapter 1, Psalm 37, Psalm 94. God will repay evil. But rather, verse 20, "If your enemy hungers...what?...feed him. If he thirsts, give him drink." Whew...don't give him vengeance, give him help....give him help.

You say, "Why?" "For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." That's a fascinating phrase. You want to know where it comes from? Kind of obscure, had a little difficulty finding it and not many commentators talk about it, but there's an old Egyptian ritual that was known in the Old World. When a man in the Egyptian culture wanted to demonstrate his public shame, his public guilt,

when he wanted to show his spirit of repentance he would carry on his head a pan of burning coals which were supposed to represent the burning pain of shame, the burning pain of guilt. And Paul is saying when you treat an enemy with love and you feed him and quench his thirst, you put on his head a burning shame for the evil done. You understand that? You make him feel shame, a burning shame.

So, verse 21, "Be not overcome by evil but overcome evil with...what?...with good." That's distinctively Christian...that is distinctively Christian. The word "overcome" is *nikao*, we get Nike...the Nike missile, the Nike shoe which means victory. Be the victor, be the conqueror, overcome evil by doing good. Don't be a victim, be a victor. Pretty practical, isn't it?

Let me sum it up, and you've been very patient tonight. Let me sum it up with just a quick review. Listen carefully and watch the flow of this.

What is a Christian and how distinctively are we to live? Here it comes, we begin with pure love, hating evil, holding fast to what is good, humbly, affectionately being concerned with others, enthusiastically, fervently with maximum effort serving the Lord. And when the inevitable resistance to that service comes, we face it with hope and joy and believing prayer. And when we see others who are in the same kinds of trials, we reach out to them and share our possession and our homes with all who have need. And when we are opposed in our service to Christ, we bless those who oppose us and who persecute us. And we reach out to enjoy the joy of others and to endure the pain of others. We have no desire for personal prestige, we seek neither position nor office. We do not regard only those who are high people, but we love to fellowship equally with those on the lowest level and we are marked by a humility that knows no intellectual or social aristocracy. And even those who personally harm us, we do not return evil against them but we desire to overpower them with good, no matter what they have done and we assign any vengeance and any judgment and any punishment to God. And in the end, we're the overcomers. We're the winners. And that is how Paul says justification touches life. Let's bow in prayer.

O Father, thank You for our refreshing time in the Word tonight. Thank You for these precious people who come with eager hearts to listen and learn, bless them. And we pray, O God, that in a very special way these things might be applied to each one of us that we might live them out to Your praise and Your glory for Christ's sake. Amen.

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