

Payback

July 14, 2019

I Thessalonians 5:15-24

Please find with me the Book of Romans chapter twelve.

Romans is just one of Paul's thirteen epistles. And here's what you will find in nearly every one of his letters; mainly his letters to the Churches. They've all got counsel in them; some very practical admonitions. You might even call them this; practical Christ-likeness. And this is especially evident in the twelfth chapter of Romans, where you find 21 of these practical ways a Christian shows the life of Christ.

And they *are* practical. You'd spend your day, maybe all day, expressing your self-centeredness; except for the fact that the LORD lives in you and He tells you here how to treat other Christians. He's also got some things you can apply when you deal with everybody in your life. But, what should you do with your enemies? What can you do? Should you fight them? Should you curse them? Should you ignore them?

Has anyone here heard of the "50th Law"? It's found in a book by Fifty Cent and Robert Green. And this "supposed" law that tells you that at times it's a waste of time to be good; and because of the way you've been treated, you *need* to be bad. So, "You need to know when to stand your ground. You need to know when it's OK to be bad."

Here's how one advocate puts it. "You will always find yourself among the aggressive and the passive aggressive who seek to harm you in some way. You must get over any general fears you have of confronting people or you will find it extremely difficult to assert yourself in the face of those who are more cunning and ruthless. Before it is too late, you must master the art of knowing when and how to be bad --

using deception, manipulation, and outright force at the appropriate moment. Everyone operates with a flexible morality when it comes to their self-interest. You are simply making this more conscious and more effective." (Patrick Sheridan, 50th Law advocate; found on <http://lucernare.blogspot.com/>). So, basically, Mr. Patrick Sheridan say "Get even. Fight fire with fire."

What do you think? Do you follow this man's advice? Should you follow it? And, if not? Why not? How *do* you deal with people who are rude, unkind, impolite, or even derogatory towards you?"

Let me begin today with the seventeenth verse of this twelfth chapter of Romans.

The passage, folks, has to do with two things. One, your response to people who hurt you; those who do you wrong. And two, God's call to do the exact opposite of what we feel when you've been hurt. Actually, it's a very practical, but almost a seemingly impractical passage. Today I want you to think about those who oppose you. And from Paul we've got seven words of practical Christ-likeness here. I've titled today's message "Pay Back." Shall we pray?

I was speaking to someone this week who was telling me how frustrated he was with the way things were going in his life. The man said "I'm doing everything the way I'm supposed to. Why is this going on for so long?" Did he really think I had the answer? Sometimes people say things just to express their feelings.

Now, if we'd be honest, some people have had to endure some very hard things; like emotional abuse and physical abuse. Some have to endure an abusive spouse. Some people have to listen to verbal abuse every day in their home. Some people have been cheated out of lot of money. Some have even been a victim of violent crime. Now, shouldn't they pay

back their abusers? Shouldn't they be the ones who apply the "50th Law"?

Well, let's see if this is what God says we should do.

Romans 12:17 *"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. (18) If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. (19) Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*

(20) Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. (21) Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Now, here's a story you might be able to relate to. "In California, we had a collie that was a good dog, except that whenever the neighbor drove by in his truck or whenever the UPS truck went by, our dog would go into a frenzy of barking. It must have really bugged our neighbor, because one morning when our daughter Christa, who was about 12, went out to feed the dog, the neighbor came outside and started yelling at her, with a lot of profanity, to keep our dog quiet.

I was inside. But I could easily hear what was going on and it made me mad that he would use such foul language on my sweet twelve-year old daughter. So I went outside and yelled back at him to keep his filthy mouth shut around my kids. He yelled back at me and I went back inside.

This was *Sunday* morning and I had to preach God's Word in half an hour!" [Found on www.bible.org in a sermon by Pastor Steven J. Cole "Doing Right When You're Wronged"].

Wouldn't you love to find out what happened next?

"The Church was only about a quarter mile away, so I walk to Church. As I came out of the house with my tie on and my briefcase in hand, the neighbor and his daughter's live-in boyfriend drove by. My dog was going crazy. I raised my hand to signal my neighbor to stop. He and the boyfriend

looked like they were ready to pile out of the truck for a fight. Before they did, I said to the neighbor, "I'm really sorry that I yelled at you, and I'm sorry about our dog. I ask your forgiveness. I don't know how to get him to stop barking at your truck." His countenance changed instantly. He apologized for yelling at our daughter. And from then on, we always exchanged a friendly wave whenever we crossed paths." So, yes, in this case, an apology led to a much friendlier neighbor.

Now, what is the practical meaning of this passage here in Romans twelve? Do you think the LORD will always be testing you with people who pile on the grief? Well, among the most difficult tests of life is this. "Is it worth it to treat people with kindness when they've clearly done you wrong?"

Here's the answer.

First, how does God deal with evil?

This entire passage can be summed up in one line; verse twenty-one. *"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."*

Ten words; and easy to memorize; and yet, not so easy to implement.

God's answer to evil is to do the opposite of what you'd at first like to do. Do the opposite of what your enemy expects you to do. Consider Jesus before you start yelling at your neighbor. And, by the way, **Who** has the power to do anything He wants to His enemies?

Listen to Jesus because Paul is certainly not going to contradict the LORD. Rather, he's continuing what He says. Matthew 5:43 *"Ye have heard that it hath been said [by the Pharisees, not Moses and not the Old Testament], Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. (44) But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you;*

(45) That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust."

Patience, mercy, love, blessing them, praying for them; that's what Jesus said to do.

So, how does the LORD deal with evil? His answer is the total opposite of the "50th Law." Overcome evil with good. He constantly extends mercy over and over and over again.

Folks, we've all got our problems. But, dealing with your enemies from the words of the Bible might just be the most difficult thing you've ever had to do. As one man puts it. It's not even common sense to treat your enemy like this.

But did you know, Christian, that you belong to Someone who gave His life to save His enemies?" Colossians 1:21 *"And you, that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled (22) in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreproveable in his sight: ..."*

And here's Romans 5:10 *"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."*

Who did Christ die for? Whose sins did He take on Himself when He died on Calvary? Wasn't it for the sins of His enemies? Not one of you here today would be saved if it hadn't been for Jesus loving His enemies. And, not only did Jesus give His life for His enemies; He made His enemies His Righteous Friends on the very day His enemies nailed Him to that Roman cross.

So, when it comes to finding an answer as to how to deal with your enemies, go to the Cross and see what happened there.

First, how does the LORD deal with evil? He does the opposite of what He *could* do.

Second, Christians are called to trust God in the face of injustice and evil.

Have you ever noticed what anger does to you? How many of you have felt really good after you retaliated? Look again at the passage; verse seventeen.

Romans 12:17 *"Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. (18) If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. (19) Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."*

God provides opportunities every day for you to apply the principle of overcoming evil with good. To "recompense" means "to pay back." This is the very same word Paul gave to his friends in the Thessalonian Church. I Thessalonians 5:15 *"See that none render [pay back] evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men."*

Here's *how* to overcome evil with good. Jesus, of course, is your best Example. Here's what He did. I Peter 2:23 *"Who, when he was reviled [abusively insulted], reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: ..."*

He didn't throw back an abusive insult. He didn't threaten. But, what did He do? He trusted Himself to His Father's care. He trusted His Father to properly judge those who said and did those things.

Has anyone had this happen to them? Proverbs 16:7 *"When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him."* You see, the LORD promises that He will take on your enemy and become his or her enemy. And what have you done? You've committed yourself to Him and you are responding to the insult and evil behavior with faith in the LORD.

Folks, the Bible *is* practical. But, some of you think God's ways are impractical; especially when you've had to endure things like this from somebody in your life; someone who decided that you're the enemy. So, let's be honest. These words are among "the most difficult to apply" verses in the entire Bible. My question isn't "how long?" My question is "Why?" "Why should we even have to deal with evil?" And, "Why do *you* think the LORD allows you to experience hard-hearted people and truly evil things?"

One writer tells the following true story. "In January, 1999 Graham Staines, a missionary to China from the country of Australia. He and his two sons, Phillip (age 10) and Timothy (age 6) were mobbed by radical Hindus, trapped inside their vehicle in East India, and then burned alive. Three charred bodies were recovered clinging to each other. Graham Staines had spent 34 years serving the people of India in the name of Jesus as a medical doctor treating people with leprosy. He was the director of the Leprosy Mission in Baripada, Orissa.

An Indian newspaper reporter decided he wanted to make a name for himself. So, he wrote a false story, saying that this doctor was paying people to evangelize Hindus; a total untruth. But, as a result of the story, a mob met Dr. Staines on the road, stopped him, poured gasoline on his car and burned him and his two young boys inside of it.

Dr. Staines left behind his widow Gladys and their daughter Esther. ... And his wife's response was in every paper in India to the glory of Christ. She said this a few days after the martyrdom of her husband and sons. "I have only one message for the people of India. I'm not bitter. Neither am I angry. But I have one great desire: that each citizen of this country should establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who gave his life for their sins ... let us burn hatred and spread the flame of Christ's love."

Everyone thought Gladys should move back to Australia. No. She said, "God had called them to India." And she would not leave. She said, "My husband and our children have sacrificed their lives for this nation; India is my home. I hope to be here and continue to serve the needy." Then, perhaps most remarkable of all—her daughter Esther was asked how she felt about the murder of her dad, and the thirteen year old, said, "I praise the Lord that He found my father worthy to die for Him." (From a sermon by Pastor John Piper).

Just four months ago, this past February, a movie was released about this man's life. It's called "The Least of These: The Graham Staines Story."

Now, the LORD doesn't ask this of all of us, though, does He?

First, God does the opposite of what He could do.

Second, Christians are called to trust in the face of injustice and evil.

Third, do what is possible; you are not yet perfect; verse eighteen. Romans 12:18 "*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*"

There was a story about a truck driver who dropped in at an all-night restaurant in Broken Bow, Nebraska. The waitress had just served him when three swaggering, leather-jacketed motorcyclists—of the Hell's Angels type—entered and rushed up to him, apparently spoiling for a fight. One grabbed the hamburger off his plate; another took a handful of his French fries; and the third picked up his coffee and began to drink it. The trucker did not respond as one might expect. Instead, he calmly rose, picked up his check, walked to the front of the room, put the check and his money on the cash register, and went out the door. The waitress followed him to put the money in the till and stood watching out the door as the big truck drove away into the night. When she

returned, one of the cyclists said to her, “Well, he’s not much of a man, is he?” She replied, “I can’t answer as to that, but he’s not much of a truck driver. He just ran over three motorcycles out in the parking lot.”

Folks, there’s a better way. Some of you have become exasperated with someone in your life. So, in order for you to deal with that person, you need to put verse eighteen into your heart and into your situation.

The following is a true story. It’s a story about how one man had to deal with a difficult person in his life. “Years ago I knew a man who constantly belittled everyone and everybody. He was very well-known in our town. And I had to often be in the same meeting with him. Many times he would berate me as well as lots of other people we both knew. He was malicious. And he was a Christian.

For years, I tried to get along with him. But, I was always exasperated with him. I hated to see him or even to speak with him. And I began to think it was just that our personalities were so different. But, the man simply had no people skills whatsoever.

I finally decided I needed to look to the LORD for help for myself. I found this passage in the Bible; Romans 12:18 “*If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.*”

And immediately I saw one word that changed my whole approach to him. It was the little word “if.” I realized that God didn’t expect me to live peaceably with him if it wasn’t possible. Then I saw “as much as lieth in you.” And, since there was no negotiating with him and since I couldn’t fix an unfixable situation, I was sure that I could apply this verse to my relationship with this difficult man “as much as lieth” in me. And last I noticed the word “peaceably.” Peaceably meant that I had to find a way to maintain peace with him as much as I could.

So, that’s exactly what I did. I applied the verse to my life. Once I realized that I didn’t have to be his best friend, I began to change. Then, my attitude towards him changed. I discovered I could pray for him because I was no longer angry at him.” It worked. I am now living peaceably with him.

You may have someone in your life that you have to apply this passage to. So, are you going to apply it? Or will you stick with the “50th Law”?

First, God does the opposite of what He could do.

Second, Christians are called to trust in the face of injustice and evil.

Third, do what is possible; you are not yet perfect.

Last, whenever you face someone who’s decided you’re his or her enemy, always remind yourself that the LORD writes the last chapter; verse nineteen. Romans 12:19 “*Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*” (20) *Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.*”

This is one of the many Old Testament quotations used by Paul to support his statements. But, what in the world does Paul mean by this quote from the Book of Proverbs? Here’s what it is. Whenever possible, find a way to help. Find a way to be kind to the one who has chosen to make you his enemy; even if they don’t know it’s you being kind. It might be they will need something someday; food or it might be drink. But, find a way to show him or her kindness on the day they need it.

The result, according to some people, is that you’ll be benefiting them in some way. “Either our enemy will be softened by kindness, or, if he is so ferocious that nothing may assuage him, he will be stung and tormented by the

testimony of his conscience, which will feel itself overwhelmed by our kindness.” (J. Calvin).

That’s what one commentator says about it. But, in this case, I’d rather you see what the Old Testament says will happen when you are doing a kindness to your enemy.

Go back with me to the original statement found in the Book of Proverbs.

Proverbs 25:21 *“If thine enemy be hungry, give him bread to eat; and if he be thirsty, give him water to drink: (22) **for thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head, and the Lord shall reward thee.**”*

Usually you heap more coals on a fire so that it will burn higher and brighter. Paul is clearly referring to the Day of Judgment here. You see, when the Judge, the LORD, metes out His justice, He’s going to consider whether or not *you’ve* shown them kindness.

Solomon, here in the Book of Proverbs, tells us that there are two results when you show kindness in the face of your enemies. One, your enemy will have a more severe judgment. You’ll have heaped coals upon his head for worse judgment. And two, the LORD will reward you.

You see, when it comes to enemies, do not avenge yourself. Instead, give place to wrath. Let the LORD dispense wrath and judgment as He sees fit. He *will* write the last chapter.

Folks, there certainly will be those in this world who will be your sworn enemy. But, your place is to be kind. And, if they are hurting, help them because, when you do, you will be displaying your trust in the LORD. And you will be holding back on avenging the wrongs done to you.

You see, the LORD is your Vindicator. So, bless the ones who spitefully use you. Bless and curse not because vengeance belongs to the LORD, the True Judge.

First, God does the opposite of what He could do.

Second, Christians are called to trust in the face of injustice and evil.

Third, do what is possible; you are not yet perfect.

Last, always remind yourself that the LORD writes the last chapter.

Pastor Charles Spurgeon tells the following story about two neighbors. “William Ladd had a farm in one of the states of America, and his neighbour, Mr. Pulsifer, was a great trouble to him, for he kept a breed of gaunt, long-legged sheep, as active as spaniels, which would spring over almost any sort of fence. These sheep were very fond of a fine field of grain belonging to Mr. Ladd, and were in it continually.

Complaints were of no use, for Mr. Pulsifer evidently cared nothing for his neighbor’s losses. One morning Mr. Ladd said to his men, “*Set the dogs on those sheep, and if that won’t keep them out, shoot ‘em.*” After he had said that, he thought to himself, “This will not do. I had better try the peace principle.”

So he sent to his men and countermanded the order, and rode over to see his neighbour about those troublesome sheep. “Good morning,” said he, but he received no answer. So he tried again, and got nothing but a sort of grunt. “Neighbor,” said he, “I have come to see you about those sheep.” “Yes,” Mr. Pulsifer replied, “I know. You are quite a neighbor to tell your men to kill my sheep! You a rich man, too, and going to shoot a poor man’s sheep!” Then followed some very strong language, but Mr. Ladd replied, “I was wrong, neighbor, and I am sorry for it. Think no more about it. But, neighbour, we may as well agree. It seems I have got to keep your sheep, and it won’t do to let them eat all that grain, so I came over to say that I will take them into my homestead pasture and I will keep them all the season; and if any-one is missing you shall have the pick of mine.” Mr. Pulsifer looked confounded, and then stammered out, “Now,

Sir, are you in earnest?” When he found that Mr. Ladd really meant to stand to the offer, Mr. Pulsifer stood still a moment and then said, “The sheep shan’t trouble you anymore. When you talk about shooting I can shoot as well as you; but when you speak in that kind and neighborly way I can be kind too.” The sheep never trespassed into Mr. Ladd’s lot anymore.” [Found on www.spurgeon.org “Overcome Evil With Good” by Charles H. Spurgeon October 8. 1876].

Your situation will certainly be different than the one between Mr. Pulsifer and Mr. Ladd. But, what, then, will you do in light of what His Word says? Will you apply the 50th Law or will you apply the teaching of this passage? What will you do with Romans twelve? Will the Bible make any difference to you this week?

Who will pray this pray? “LORD, so-and-so is my enemy. I wish he wasn’t. But he is. Show me how I can help him this week. And help me to apply these words to my situation. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.”

And remember these words of Jesus when you come to the LORD. *“Well done, thou good and faithful servant. Enter thou into the joy of thy LORD.”*

Hymn # 691 “Surely Goodness And Mercy”