

Tuesday Evening Bible Study at Tokyo Baptist Church
Paul's Letter to the Romans – Chapter 12, Verses 14-21
Notes from Tuesday April 5, 2011
Last Revised on April 5, 2011

Songs

Opening Prayer

Introduction

This evening we continue our study of the Letter of Paul to the Romans.

Last week we read and discussed through **Verse 13, of Chapter 12.**

I expect to **finish** Chapter 12 this evening.

But first lets **review** a little.

Review

As we have repeatedly reminded ourselves,

the **overall** theme of Paul's letter to the Romans is the **gospel**:

God's good news concerning his **son** Jesus Christ

Who died in **our** place as a propitiation for sin.

And who then **rose** from the dead,

as will **all** who follow Him.

This great good news is expounded in the **first four (4) chapters** of this letter.

Next, in Chapters 5 - 8, Paul looks at some of the **implications** of the gospel,

for those who are being **saved** by it.

Then in the third main section of this letter, consisting of **Chapters 9 through 11,**

Paul examines the **sad** situation of the Jews who have **rejected** the gospel.

He speaks of great mysteries: of how the **Jews** have been made to stumble,

in order that the **gentiles** might be saved,

and how the salvation of the gentiles will turn the **Jews** back to God

so that finally **all of Israel** will be saved.

The sum and substance of the first 11 chapters of Romans is, I think, that God is **fundamentally** gracious,

however **difficult** this may sometimes be for us to fathom.

In the face of God's glory,

Paul ends Chapter 11 with an outpouring of **praise** and **worship**,

which serves as the basis for what follows in the **next** section of this letter,

which begins with **Chapter 12** and continues through the beginning of **Chapter 15**.

This section, which we are now studying, has primarily to do with Christian **behavior**.

As we tarry in this world,

while looking forward to being made perfect,

and united with Christ in the world to come,

how are we supposed to live?

Please turn with me to the beginning of Chapter 12, and follow along as we review quickly what Paul has already written in this chapter.

As we have already noted, the first 11 chapters of Romans are basically about God's mercy,

and Paul now bases his appeal to the brothers in Rome on "the mercies of God,"

asking them to dedicate the living of their lives to God from now on (12:1).

They are not supposed to allow themselves to continue to be conformed to this world.

Instead they are to allow God to transform them, by the renewing of their minds,

and by testing to discern what God wants for them to do and to be (12:2).

In verse 3 Paul sounds a note that will be repeated again and again:

we should not think highly of ourselves.

By ourselves we are nothing.

However as members of the body of Christ, we each have our proper place.

This idea is developed in verses 4-8 of Chapter 12.

Then Verses 9-21 speak of things that we, as believers, should and should not do.

These things are not, I believe, presented in any very particular order.

And they are all consistent with the teachings presented throughout the whole Bible.

And I think those of us who have spent any time in church **understand** these things.

But the fact is that we don't **do** these things.

Not well. Not consistently. Which explains why Christians **need** to be admonished,

by God, by the prophets, by Paul and the other apostles, by ordinary pastors and teachers.

But as Kyoko-san pointed out last week,

we very often see **non**-Christians behaving **better** in this world than Christians do.

Q. And how shall we understand this sad fact? (this is a real question)

A. **Nobody** is good. This is **why** Christ came. Christians are the ones who understand these two things. We understand also that we are being transformed and finally will be perfected by God. But we don't make so much progress in this world that it is always easy to spot us.

A. There **are** no "good Christians"

This seems, to me, to be an important part of Paul's message.

Last week we read and discussed Verses 9-13

Where Paul begins with the key statement: “*Let love be genuine.*” (12:9a)

Christians may not even be very good at **pretending** to be love,

but **pretending** to love, is not something that God is after.

He wants our love to be genuine, which is **impossible** for us.

It is only possible as the Spirit of **God** works in us.

Our job is not so much to **be** good, as to yield ourselves to **God’s** goodness.

Some of the manifestations of the Spirit of God at work in us are listed here by Paul:

we **abhor** what is evil (9b)

we cling to what is **good** (9c)

our **love** for the brethren resembles **brotherly** love, (10a)

we show honor to **others**, rather than seeking it for **ourselves**. (10b)

we are **diligent** and **zealous** in service to **Christ**,(11a)

as is only **possible** when led by His **Spirit**.(11b)

we are **joyful**, **hopeful**, **patient**, and **prayerful** when times are tough (12)

and we are **generous** and **hospitable** with others, especially other **Christians**. (13)

Once again, looking back to the first part of Verse 9,

these are things that one should hope to **see** in Christians,

but not as things which they **pretend** and put on **display**,

but as things which are **expressed** naturally (really supernaturally)

as the outworking of the Spirit of **God** in them.

These are the things we discussed **last** week.

Are there any **questions** or **comments** before we read on?

Paul's Letter to the Romans, Chapter 12, Verses 14-21

Will someone please read Romans, Chapter 12, Verses 14-21, in Japanese.

Thank you. Will someone please read those same verses in English.

14. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

15. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

16. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

17. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

18. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

19. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

20. To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

21. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Thank you. Verse 14 begins

(Verse 14a)

Bless those who persecute you;

Christ himself was persecuted, in life and in death and beyond, until this day.

Please turn to Acts, Chapter 9, the first six verses. Let's read that:

(Acts 9:1-6)

But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest² and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.³ Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven

flashed around him.4 And falling to the ground he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?"5 And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.6 But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do."

Christ was persecuted, yet throughout his life and even from the cross he prayed that God would bless those who persecuted him.

Christ's followers were later persecuted, many of them even unto death,

yet even one of the greatest persecutors of Christians, Saul of Tarsus, was finally blessed by God, and became, the Apostle Paul, the author of this letter we are studying.

Paul also suffered persecution for the sake of the name of Christ, and died a martyrs death, at the hands of those whom he had been dedicated to saving.

This is the way of the cross: to rejoice that we are allowed to share in Christ's suffering,

and to follow his example and join him in praying for those who persecute us.

Q. Why? Why do we pray for those who persecute us?

A. Salvation...that they may be forgiven as we were and become our brothers.

As strange as it seems, we are truly blessed by those who persecute us.

They are sent by God. They are instruments of his blessing of us.

When we understand this we can more easily bless them back, and thank God!

Hopefully they will be saved and become our brothers. Anyway Christ will be glorified.

It would therefore be irrational for a Christian ever to curse someone who persecutes him.

In fact to curse those who persecute us, is to curse God, Who sent them to persecute us.

The latter part of verse 14 makes this clear:

(Verse 14b)

bless and do not curse them.

Clearly Paul does not mean simply to rule out verbal cursing.

Because Paul is nowhere preaching any form of pretense or hypocrisy.

We are suppose to actually refrain from cursing our persecutors in our hearts.

We are supposed to actually pray sincerely from our hearts that God will bless them.

Absolutely we are not supposed to pray that God would harm our persecutors.

There is, so far as I am able to tell, only one form of cursing we are allowed.

We are allowed to curse and to refrain from blessing those who are enemies of God.

Everyone else we can only bless.

(Verse 15)

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Christ Himself wept with those who wept and rejoiced with those who rejoiced.

He came down from heaven to do that.

His Spirit remains with us, and in us, to do that.

How would we who are redeemed by Christ and filled wit the Holy Spirit not do likewise?

Love must be sincere, we were told in Verse 9

It must be brotherly we were told in Verse 10

Such love is never distant, dissociated, or condescending.

It identifies with the joy and pain of others as if it were our own joy and pain.

It is not conditional on the objective merits of the loved one whose pain or joy we share.

It is a sharing of pain or joy despite our brother's worthiness, limitations, or weaknesses.

We are happy simply because he is happy.

We are sad simply because he is sad.

That is reason enough for us.

In this way dogs are better than most people!

Verse 16 begins

(Verse 16a)

Live in harmony with one another.

Jesus Christ was **God** incarnate.

He came down from **heaven** to dwell among us.

Among people who were **weak** and **doubtful, disrespectful, hurtful**, even **murderous**.

He could have been **rough** with them, summoning legions of angels, setting things straight.

Indeed Satan suggested as much during the **temptation** of Christ in the wilderness.

Later Peter suggested that Christ turn **aside** from the inglorious path leading to the cross,

and this earned Peter a sharp **rebuke** from the Lord.

Which is, perhaps, an instructive **example** for our purpose.

The Spirit of Christian **harmony** is not without **rebuke**.

The Spirit of Christ brooks no compromise with Satan. **Zero!**

It **abhors** what is evil, as has already been said.

But **otherwise** the Spirit of Christ, Who is the Spirit of God, Creator of All Things,

was and is surprisingly **humble!**?

Seemingly those who are **led** by his Spirit exhibit the same behavior.

Moses we are told was the **humblest man who ever lived!**

So were other prophets and Apostles. Not perfectly but generally.

I especially recall John the Baptist saying, "***I must decrease that the Lord may increase!***"

These men of God are “**contentious**” sometimes ... but only when contending **for** the Word of God **against** those who oppose it.

They do not often seek to establish names for **themselves**, or to put **themselves** forward, or to lift **themselves** up.

Any Christian who contends with others and seek to make a name for **himself**,

is probably on the wrong track. May God forgive and help me; I do that often enough.

Likewise any Christian **church** or other organization that puts **itself** forward or lifts itself up,

is probably doing something strange and inappropriate.

Verse 16 continues

(Verse 16b)

Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.

If God himself is humble...

If God incarnate, Jesus Christ, associated with the lowly...

How can we, knowing how terribly sinful and foolish we all are, dare to look down on anyone?

How can we **think** ourselves good or wise?

Here again we are not talking about the **appearance** of humility.

This is something that all Christians soon learn to pretend to some extent...

We say to ourselves, today I have **decided** to be humble

But as C.S. Lewis has pointed out one cannot **decide** to be humble.

If you “**decide**” to be humble, that just makes you **sneaky**.

You will be easily **offended** if others do not notice you: your **wisdom**, your **goodness**, your **humility**!

Such slights are usually **reciprocated**.

When we think that people don't pay enough attention to **us**,

we generally **return** the favor.

But Verse 17 says

(Verse 17)

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

This is **so** difficult.

The world says "turn about is fair play," "what goes around comes around," "what's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander," and etc.

Even Jesus says, judge not, lest ye be judged. And one understanding of this saying is the earthly wisdom that you shouldn't dish it out unless you can take it and etc.

Reciprocity is, indeed, the way of the **world**.

But Paul, here, and the Bible consistently and in general teach us that we should **expect** the world to treat us badly, and that we should **not** treat the world badly in return.

Turn the other cheek. Walk the extra mile. Give the man your cloak also. Etc.

We are supposed to do what is **right**, though **everyone** else in the world does what is **wrong**.

And we are suppose to do this out in **plain sight**, where all the world can **see**.

We are to be the **salt** and the **light** --- and **expect** to be **persecuted** for it!

This is obviously **not** a commandment to do what the **world** things is right.

It is a commandment to do what **God** things is right, in the **sight** of the world, and contrary to the **way** of the world!

One result of passive behavior will be that we, **for our part**, will not disturb the peace.

God sometimes uses his **people** to disturb peace of the kingdom of Satan,

but we for our part are generally **not** encouraged to foment rebellion,

 even against **wicked** rulers and etc.

 But let's see...

 Verse 18 reads

(Verse 18)

If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

It is to be our **objective**, as genuinely loving Christians, to promote **peace** in the world,

 but this is not an **unlimited** objective, and Paul is quick to qualify it.

 Living at peace with others --- n.b. **all** others, not just Christians --- is something we must aspire to (a) if **possible** and (b) so far as it **depends** on us.

 There are, in other words, certain things that Christians **can** not or **may** not do or refrain from doing.

 And there may be **external** factors in a situation that are quite beyond our control.

 For example, someone might threaten us with violence of some sort if we do not agree **to do** something which is immoral or ungodly.

 It would then not be possible for us to diffuse the situation by agreeing with their demand.

 And so we might suffer violence at their hands.

 Similarly someone might threaten us with violence if we do not refrain from doing something that we believe we must do in accordance with God's will

 As has been said, our general leaning as Christians is in the direction of peace,

 but this is not an unqualified objective and we may sometimes find that some form of rebellion or resistance is actually the right thing to do.

 But when we find ourselves in unpeaceful circumstances, it should **never** be because we are in any way seeking **revenge**.

 This is God's business, not ours.

Verse 19 reads

(Verse 19)

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Before Paul reminded us not to "trade punches" with the world....not to fight evil with evil.

Now he tells us that, when we are injured, we must not to plan any sort of subsequent revenge.

This is also so difficult.

When we are the innocent victims of something... whatever it is.

We may be able to refrain from paying our persecutor back in kind.

But to bypass other opportunities to settle the score, can sometimes be so difficult.

Verse 19 is actually requiring us to extend the hand of friendship to those who have harmed or slighted us, even if they remain unrepentant, or unaware of what they have done to us!

To withhold our love and assistance is also a kind of revenge.

And payback is not our right, God says.

Only God has this right.

And please remember that God has exercised this right eternally in Christ.

On the cross at Calvary all of God's wrath against the unrighteousness and the ungodliness of men has been poured out on Christ.

Those who belong to Christ, are forgiven by God, and who are we to assert any rights in the matter.

Those who do not belong to Christ, are doomed, and what can we add to their punishment?

There is truly no place for us to act rightly in the arena of vengeance. It all belongs to God!

Thus the behavior of the redeemed in Christ is strange in the eyes of the world.

Verse 20 reads:

(Verse 20)

To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

This follows from what was said before.

All men have an equal claim on our love, even our enemies.

To withhold our love is to seek revenge is to sin against God!!

Q. But what is meant here in verse 20? How does being kind to your enemy heap coals on his head?

A. It makes him feel guilty.

Q. What is the point of that?

A. Redemption.

The whole point of everything is redemption.

We save the souls of our enemies by loving them and blessing them!

Verse 21 reads:

(Verse 21)

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The only way that we can be overcome by evil,

is if respond to evil with evil.

In this case, evil triumphs twice!

But when we respond to evil by doing good,

evil scores no victory. The good we do overcomes it.

In fact the evil which was intended is completely overcome when it has the effect of causing

us to respond by doing what is good.

The evil is an opportunity for good to come of it.

Questions?

Closing Prayer