

Romans 12:18-21

PREVIOUS

NEXT

ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
Romans 1:18-3:20	Romans — 3:21-5:21	Romans — 6:1-8:39	Romans — 9:1-11:36	Romans — 12:1-16:27
SIN	SALVATION	SANCTIFICATION	SOVEREIGNTY	SERVICE
NEED FOR SALVATION	WAY OF SALVATION	LIFE OF SALVATION	SCOPE OF SALVATION	SERVICE OF SALVATION
God's Holiness In Condemning Sin	God's Grace In Justifying Sinners	God's Power In Sanctifying Believers	God's Sovereignty In Saving Jew and Gentile	Gods Glory The Object of Service
Deadliness of Sin	Design of Grace	Demonstration of Salvation		
		Power Given	Promises Fulfilled	Paths Pursued
Righteousness Needed	Righteousness Credited	Righteousness Demonstrated	Righteousness Restored to Israel	Righteousness Applied
God's Righteousness IN LAW	God's Righteousness IMPUTED	God's Righteousness OBEYED	God's Righteousness IN ELECTION	God's Righteousness DISPLAYED
Slaves to Sin	Slaves to God			Slaves Serving God
Doctrine				Duty
Life by Faith				Service by Faith
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Our Responsibilities Under Grace - Part 8

by Dr. Wayne A. Barber

There are three difficult things in verses 18-21. Now it moves outside the church walls. The word "all" is brought up in verse 17 and I think it holds on all the way through verse 21. Now we are talking about all men, not just those in the body. We are talking about the body and outside the body, lost people and saved people.

There is going to be a lot of pain down on this earth because there are people down here. I am one of them and you are one of them. We are all a part of it. So therefore, get ready. There is going to be pain. There is going to be anguish. There is going to be tribulation. There is going to be persecution. But here is how we respond when we are surrendered. Verse 1 of chapter 12 tells us how our minds are renewed and how we are being transformed in our walk. This is how we respond. Don't separate what we are doing in the bottom part of chapter 12 with what started us off. Keep the context, the flow. You have to be surrendered or you don't understand what we are talking about.

The first thing is found in verse 18. Verse 18 says,

"If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men."

That word "**all**" means all. It is the generic form, men or women, mankind, whether they are in the church or outside the church. Now, the first thing is, we are to do everything we can to maintain peaceful relationships.

That little phrase, "if possible" is a powerful phrase. There are two words for "if" in the Greek language. There is the word **ei**, and

there is a little word **ean**, pronounced "yon." Now, **ean** is objective. It means absolutely. It could be translated "**since**". But the little word **ei**, this little word that is used here, is a **hypothetical**. By Paul using this word he shows you something: there are going to be times when it is not.

You say,

"I have broken relationships in my family and I don't know what is going on. Is there sin in my life?"

Now hold on. First of all, check yourself. Remember, we are to do whatever is required to be at peace with all men. That is what our requirement is. But there are going to be times when they will not be at peace with us. Please understand that. There are times when you can forgive them, but they won't receive that forgiveness. There are going to be those situations in life, but the check is with us not with them.

He says,

"If possible, so far as it depends upon you."

The word "possible" there means "if you have the ability", if there is an ability to do it. In the phrase "so far as it depends on you," the little word **ek** is used. It means **out of**. As far as what is coming out of you, make sure that you are trying to do everything that you know how to do to be at peace with your brother. Peace is two-sided. But Paul is saying, "Be sure to check your side." **Love without hypocrisy** will not allow you to be at enmity with anybody, from your side. You may be in a situation of conflict, but it is because of the other person, not because of you. We are responsible for how we see other people.

Now, be careful. Paul is not saying to compromise your convictions or God's truth for the sake of peace. That is not what he is saying at all. As a matter of fact, when you stand on truth that generally initiates the conflict. But make sure your motive towards someone else is pure, that you are filled with the Spirit of God. We must forsake grudges. We must seek to build bridges that we can between us and those who harm us, those who hurt us.

You say,

"Now, wait a minute. How do you do that?"

Well, hang on. Remember the context. I am surrendered to God. It is not something you have to sit down and worry about. You just get before God on your face and say,

"God, is there anything in my life that is causing the problem?"

Don't worry; the Holy Spirit will bring it to your attention. Don't worry about that. If you don't want to know, don't ask Him. He will let you know in a hurry. When you see it, you immediately move to correct it in the enabling power of the Holy Spirit of God.

Turn to [Proverbs 16:7](#) a critical verse to fit into the context because I think Paul has a lot of this on his mind. He quotes from Proverbs in another place in this text and I think he has this on his heart. Whose responsibility is it to change the person who is at enmity with you? God can change you, and you can assure yourself that God's love is in your life, but how do you change the other person? You don't.

Proverbs 16:7,

"When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, He [God] makes even his [the man] enemies to be at peace with him."

"Are you kidding me? Do you mean to tell me that I am not to worry about this individual as much as I am to be concerned with my walk with God? And if my ways are pleasing to God, if my body is surrendered and presented to Him as a living sacrifice, as Romans tells me, if my mind is being renewed and my life is being transformed, then it is God's responsibility to change the other person?"

That is what he is saying. I can't change other people. I can be responsible so that God can change me. That is the key.

In the book **Lord, Change Me**, Elizabeth Elliott said she tried to change her husband for years and couldn't change him. So finally she just said,

"God, I am tired of praying. Just use my husband to change me."

She said that overnight it clicked and when she changed, he changed. It is amazing how that works, isn't it?

We are responsible for us. We are not responsible for them. God is responsible for them. Remember that. Are there situations that you are aware of right now where you have sought to be at peace with someone and they will not receive it and enmity comes back

at you and pain is inflicted towards you? Are you in a situation like that or know of one like that? The key is, don't beat yourself up. Get in the presence of God and let God convict you of where you are wrong. And if He doesn't convict you, don't convict yourself. Remember, there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ. Don't convict yourself. Conviction is very clear, very specific. The condemnation comes from the devil. So make sure that you are on the right side, that you have done what God has asked you to do.

Now every one of these verses fit together. As I understand that I have absolutely no recourse, I cannot take revenge. That is what he begins to lead us into the second thing which is:

We cannot forget that we never have the right to seek revenge. We don't have that right. Now, I want to tell you that my flesh does not like these verses. I would like for my flesh to take revenge. Wouldn't you? I have thought about that many times.

"Lord, if I could just take the person out behind the building for about ten minute, we can solve this thing. No big problem."

Sometimes you want to use that, but you have absolutely no excuse whatsoever. There is never a reason to seek revenge. We can never seek revenge. Look at verse 19. It is very clear.

"Never take your revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

Now, the word **"never"** is a little relative word and it means "absolutely not" in certain contexts. In this context it means absolutely not. You never have the opportunity or the right to take revenge on anybody.

The word **"revenge"** is the key. It is the word **ekdikeo**. It comes from the word **dike**. Now **ek** means out of, and **dike** means rights, so put together they mean **out of your rights**. Sometimes when someone bothers you and hurts you and causes you pain, they have inflicted pain upon you. I have the right to stand up for myself. Isn't that what the world says? God says, "No. You do not have the right to punish them the way they have punished you." You have no right to do that. That is what the word **ekdikeo** means.

Now Paul is not saying that the wrongs that are done to us will never be corrected. No, he is not saying that. God will do that. We will see that in the verse. But he is saying, you are not to be part of carrying out the revenge because God keeps the record on the injustice done to God's people. We are not to seek revenge.

Look at what he says as he goes on. He says,

"but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord."

God will repay every injustice done to us. Oh, how wise of God not to allow us to be part of the process. Do you know why God won't allow us to be part of the process? Because we don't know how to **repay**. The word **"repay"** means to accurately and correctly repay exact that which is owed. We don't do that, do we? We have to help it out just a little. We do more than is necessary, and for that reason, we take revenge. That is never our responsibility or right.

The words **"leave room"** mean to give opportunity or to give place. For what? He says, "for the wrath of God." Whoa! The word for **"wrath"** there is the word **orge**. It is that state of anger of mind. It is something that can build. In other words, when you have a situation with your children sometimes a little anger starts, but you don't punish them and yet that anger is building.

I remember when I was growing up, I was sitting in the kitchen and my Mama and I were having a fight. She was right and I was wrong. I knew that, but my flesh would not admit it. I was going to fight to the death. I was sitting on the stool there in the kitchen and I said, "I just wish I had never been born." Don't say that. Let me warn you, young people! Do you want to get your parents in the flesh? Do you want to get your head knocked off? Don't say that.

When I said that I wish I had never been born, I knew that would get her. My Mama looked at me and I could tell she was mad. I could tell because her eyes were red and they were swelling up. So then I said, "Why don't you just go on and hit me." That was dumb! She hauled off and hit me with her fist. She didn't slap me, she hit me with her fist. Boy, when she did I was thinking to myself, "My nose. She's broken my nose." I think my mother was thinking, "Man, I have a great right hook. I didn't know I had one like that." We laughed about it before she went on to be with the Lord. That anger started in the kitchen and it began to build. It began to build and build and build.

Remember back in Romans 1:18 what it says about the anger of God? It says,

"For the wrath of God is revealed in heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness."

The word "revealed" is present tense. Folks, I want to tell you something, it has been going on for a long time. God's anger towards

sin is building in heaven. He loves righteousness but has a perfect hate for unrighteousness and it is building continually.

But thank God, in this age His wrath and anger are mixed with mercy. That is what one of the prophets said, "In Thy anger and in Thy wrath remember mercy." And He does. But there is going to come a day, folks, when there is no mercy. The last three and a half years of this age, the great time of wrath, the great day of wrath, the great day of our Lord, that is when it is going to explode. The word used for that day is thumos, no mercy. Boom, when God deals with sin.

The Apostle Paul is saying,

"Hey, guys, don't you revenge anything. You have no right to do that. You leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.'"

Now he is quoting out of the Mosaic law in Deuteronomy 32:35. It says,

"Vengeance is Mine and retribution, in due time their foot will slip, for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them."

He also is quoted again in 2 Samuel 22:48,

"The God who executes vengeance for me, and brings down people's under me."

Nahum 1:2 says,

"A jealous and avenging God is the Lord; the Lord is avenging and wrathful. The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserves wrath for His enemies."

Then in Hebrews 10:30 is the last time it is used,

"For we know Him who said, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.' And again, 'The Lord will judge His people.'"

I want to say one more time, the word "repay" is a very sobering word. It means that God is going to repay back exactly that which was given out. God knows exactly how to do it. He is a righteous judge and will do it that way. But I don't think Paul's intention here is to say, "You know what, this is better. I don't have to take out revenge on my brother. God is going to get him." That is not what he is saying. You know, sometimes you think that, don't you? "I don't have to worry about it, God will burn him." That is the way we feel.

I think about James and John, the sons of thunder in the New Testament. They were just like that. They wouldn't let Jesus into a village one day because it was a Samaritan village, and one of them said, "Do you want us to call down fire on them? Let's just kill every one of them." That is kind of like the mentality we have sometimes, isn't it? We don't really understand what he is saying here. He is saying the day of wrath, folks, is what you and I have escaped because of Jesus Christ. You either receive the wrath of God or the Lamb of God. The wrath fell on the Lamb. If you reject the Lamb, you get the wrath. There is a fearful day coming. Don't ever take revenge on your brother because by the grace of God, you would be in his shoes. Pray for him. Pray for him that somehow God would bring him to repentance and that he wouldn't have to go through this wrath that is coming one day for all those who have treated others unjustly, you see.

It is very important that you understand that. This is not, "God, you get him. I will be nice to everybody else. You get him." That is not what he is saying at all. He is saying that wrath is coming. I tell you what, folks, you need to understand that sinners don't know anything but sin. That is all they know. When somebody who doesn't know what you know, who doesn't know the Lord who has saved you, treats you that way, don't be quick to get revenge. No, you have no right to do that. Back off and say, "God, thank you for saving me. I am praying for this one. He doesn't understand what he is doing."

Stephen stood there in the book of Acts and they stoned him to death. Right before he was stoned he cried out and said, "Father, forgive them. They don't know what they do." You see, wrath is coming, folks. And what we are on this earth to do is to get the love of Christ to as many as we can. Some of those people are going to be very vengeful and cause us great pain along the journey. Never revenge yourself. Never. We never have the right to do that.

Well, what do we do then? The final thing is found in the last couple of verses here. We are to express our love for our enemies. You know, you almost want to laugh. This is totally contrary and ridiculous as far as the world is concerned. Where would you find this kind of love? "What do you mean, treat my enemies with kindness? Are you kidding me?" No, I am not. When you are surrendered to God, friend, the fog is lifted. You don't see as you see. You see as God sees.

Look at verse 20:

"But if your enemy is hungry, feed him." Feed him? Shoot him would be better. That is the way we think. No, he didn't say that. He said, "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in

so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."

Now if you read that wrong, you will say, "Oh, good. I understand now. I am going to feed him now. I am going to put burning coals on his head. I will get that rascal." No, no, no. He is quoting from out of Proverbs. Let me read it to you out of Proverbs 25:21-22. Paul really knew the Old Testament, didn't he? He was a man who had knowledge of the scriptures. "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; for you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."

Now wait a minute, wait a minute. Don't read it wrong. "Do you mean to tell me if I do good to him and heap burning coals on him, God is even going to reward me for it?" No, careful. Understand the character of God. That is not what it is saying. How is He going to reward us? He is quoting from an Egyptian custom. When an Egyptian man wanted to show his repent heart, his contrition over sin, he would take burning coals and put it on his head to reflect the burning pain and shame that he had for what he had done.

When you do good and feed the one who treated you wrongly, you will shame him, yes. But pray that God will reward you by leading that man to repentance because of that shame and bring him to contrition, bring him to understand what he has done.

You see, it is amazing. It takes two to fight. When somebody is coming at you trying to fight you and all you are doing is returning love back to them, it doesn't take long to figure out who is initiating the conflict. Are you with me? That is what Paul is saying. It is two-sided. Make sure you understand that the love of Christ in you loves those people who even treat you the wrong way. The love without hypocrisy is incredible. Now, without the love that the Holy Spirit produces, it would be absolutely impossible. This is God working through us.

Look at Verse 21. He sums the whole thing up. Every relationship we have is summed up right here, whether we are in the church or outside the church. He says,

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

The word "**overcome**" is nikao. It means victory. It means that we are not to be defeated by evil. The word for evil tells us everything. It is kakos, the inherent evil.

Now careful, don't let me lose you. My flesh is capable only of one thing. Remember back in Romans 7 it says that there is nothing good that dwells in my flesh. There is evil within me. The evil there is the same word. Inherent evil is in this body. That is what Romans 6:6 says. I have a body of sin. Now, whether I am lost or whether I am saved, my flesh acts the same way. It will hurt you when you are walking after the flesh or you will hurt me.

When that evil springs up, whether within the church or whether it is without the church, saved or lost, don't let it defeat you. Don't ever let it overwhelm you and prevail over you. Well, how do you do that? He turns it around. He says, "Overcome evil with good." That sums up everything he has been saying.

The word for "**good**" there is **agathos**. In Romans 7:18,

"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh."

In other words, I have absolutely no choice here. I have got to run to the cross. I must be presented to my Savior because if I am not, I am going to be suspicious, vengeful, critical and divisive. I am going to be a detriment to the body of Christ. I must run to the cross. I died with Him. I reckoned myself to be dead. Then the flesh is put back in its place and the Spirit of God gives me a perception that I never had before. I see even the people who treat me wrongly differently and He gives me a love for them.

I can actually overcome the evil that they give to me with the good that the Holy Spirit produces through my life. That is the secret of remaining sane in an insane world, folks. It is to do it God's way.

Let me show you something as we close out. I want to take you over to 2 Corinthians 2. I want to show you something. Before we read it, I want to tell you a story and show you how it relates.

There was a famous preacher who went to visit a friend of his who raised roses. All the roses, different colors, different kinds of roses were blooming. And the fragrance of that garden of roses was just magnificent. He was there two or three hours with his friend. After he left there, he went to a Pastors' Meeting. He walked into the room and when he sat down, somebody said,

"Whew, there is a beautiful smell in this room. There is a fragrance in here."

It dawned on him that having been in the presence of those roses, they had left a fragrance on him that he carried with him to other people. The thought hit him,

"You know, when I am in the presence of God, the Lord Jesus, the Rose of Sharon, He leaves a fragrance in

my life that goes with me wherever I go."

Now with that thought in mind, I want you to read 2 Corinthians 2:14. He says,

"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in His triumph in Christ."

Now that is not really translated the way we understand it. What he is saying here is actually we are chained to His chariot. In their culture when an army would go out to battle and have a victory, they would send a runner back and the runner would go to each doorstep and he would shake some incense on the door which had a beautiful fragrance to it. Everybody knew that fragrance, and when they smelled it, they said,

"Oh, we have had a victory. We have had a victory."

They would go out and line the streets. They didn't have telephones or telegraphs. They just waited for the army to come home.

The first thing they would see when they looked out in the distance was the commander of that army riding on his chariot coming in with all of his troops behind him. And chained to his chariots were all the ones he had conquered in battle. The generals, the commanders of the armies were all chained to his chariot.

The Apostle Paul says basically when you have been conquered by Christ, when your will has been broken to His will, then you are chained to His chariot. And He always leads you in triumph. When He leads you in triumph it brings about something else. Look at the last part of verse 14:

"And manifests through us [those who are chained to His chariot], the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things?"

When you are filled with the Spirit of God, never take verse 20 of chapter 12 apart from verses 1 and 2. As a matter of fact, as we close the chapter, let me finish by summarizing it.

Coming out of chapters 1-11, the grace of God, the majesty and the wonder of salvation, you just fall down on your face before God with a deep appreciation for what God has done. That leads you to have a loving presentation of verse 1 of chapter 12. That presentation is a preparation for something else in verse 2, for a renovation of your mind in the Word of God. You cannot have your mind renewed if you are not presented to Christ, if you are not surrendered to Him. Then that renovation results in a transformation of your character. And that transformation brings you to the fresh realization. You never had it before. All of a sudden your eyes are opened and you see that the church is not an organization. The church is an organism that by necessity organizes itself. It is the life of God. It is His body on this earth. But you start seeing the congregation differently. A love without hypocrisy begins to be developed in your heart. You see others differently. But not only that, even the ones who cause you pain you see from His eyes and not yours. Not only inside the church, but outside the church.

Well, you have all heard of the teacher who wanted to get even with her class. She told them to take all the books off their table and take out a clean sheet of paper. Don't you hate those words? What are they doing? We are going to have a pop test. We have preached it. Now you take and see if it says it. Be a Berean. Don't take my word for it. See if it says it. And if it says it, I want to promise you, before this week is over, maybe before this day is over, God is going to say, "Okay, did you hear that?" "I heard it, Lord."

"Okay, good. Take all the books off your desk, take out a clean sheet of paper. I am about to drop somebody in your life you didn't know existed. I want to see if you really believe that this is right, if you really love Me."

Folks, I am telling you, relationships are the telltale sign of whether or not you are walking right with God. "No," you say, "it is some gift, speaking in tongues." Are you kidding me? You can fake any of the gifts, but you can't fake the fruit. And the fruit of the Spirit is love. It is in your relationships that it is going to be expressed, especially with those who treat you poorly and won't give you the time of day. That is where it is tested the most.

I just want to praise God for the fact that He lives in me. If I am surrendered to Him and you are that way, then we already have the victory. We don't have to worry about passing that test. He has already passed it for us. When I am dead to myself, boom, the test is passed in Christ.