

Romans 12:1 by Brian Bill

PREVIOUS

ROMANS SERIES

(Note: Exposition not available on some passages)

NEXT

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Romans 12:1 Worship is a Verb - 9/9/07

There are a lot of hot topics to choose from today. Last week we focused on "Lessons from a Lockdown" as a result of what happened at PTHS and this week Dwight Township High School was evacuated because of a bomb scare. A day later there was a serious school bus accident in our county. These incidents all involved students and parents who attend PBC. The threat of violence and tragedy is very real in small-town America. Immigration, Iraq, the environment and the upcoming election are hot topics in our culture today. And with the anniversary of 9/11 in just two days, our country will once again be on high alert.

In the church today, there may be no topic hotter than worship. Some churches break out into worship wars while others try to avoid the topic altogether. I want to propose to you that our worship of God is of supreme importance because worship matters to the Almighty. We know from John 4:23 that the Father is seeking those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. If that's the kind of people He is looking for, then that's who we better be, right?

My aim in this series is to not only help us understand what worship is all about but for us to be all about worship. If in the process I stir you up a little bit, that's fine. If we're all stretched a bit, that's great. If I make you mad, I think I can handle it...though that remains to be seen. It is my prayer however; that we don't allow what is so important to God to divide God's people. If that were to happen, Satan would have the victory.

Let's just put it out on the table and admit that we all have some pretty strong preferences when it comes to how we praise God. We're going to talk more about this next week in a message called, "The Place of Music in Worship" and in two weeks our topic will be "The Real Worship Wars." I am so impressed with how this church has always responded to biblical teaching and so I'm going to ask you to listen attentively, to study the Scriptures yourself, and then to ultimately ask yourself this question: *Am I worshipping God with all that I have in response to all that He is?*

à Skit. [Transition from Jessica by taking piece of wood from her hand]

This skit reminds me of what Abraham said to his servants in Genesis 22:5 as he and his son Isaac made their way to the mountain where he was asked to make the ultimate sacrifice. This is the first mention of the word "worship" in the Bible: **"We will worship and then we will come back to you."** Right from the very beginning, worship is connected with obedience to God and the offering of a life to Him.

Our text for today is just one verse. Let me make two preliminary comments. First, it is very popular and well-known. Because of that you may be tempted to say, *"I know that verse"* and just check out. Second, while this verse is popular it is extremely profound. Because of that I want us to look at it phrase-by-phrase. Romans 12:1:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship."

I see five ways to worship from this verse.

1. Allow your behaviors to flow from your beliefs.

Whenever you see the word **"therefore"** in the Bible you should always ask what it's there for. When we come to chapter 12 of Romans, Paul is making a shift from doctrine to duty, from creed to conduct, from principles to practice, from the indicative to the imperative and from beliefs to behavior. We spent many months roaming through the first eight chapters of Romans. While the study was good we must not simply embrace it. As one pastor put it, *"the truth we believe must at some point embrace us."* Have you heard people say that it doesn't really matter what you believe? It does matter because what we believe ultimately determines how we behave.

Paul follows a similar pattern in the books of Galatians, Ephesians and Colossians when he establishes doctrine in the first part of the letter and then moves to application in the second half. Theology is never meant to be cold and lifeless. It must always have a

practical application. It's as if he's saying, *"Based on everything that I've just said, this is what you now need to put into practice."* Incidentally, the first two letters of "doctrine" form the word "do."

The immediate context is the wonderfully deep doxology found at the end of Romans 11 (Have someone read from congregation):

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond finding out. 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?' For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory! Amen.

It's as if Paul just breaks into an outburst of adoration for God's inscrutable wisdom. After spending so much time discussing doctrine, he's overcome by the depth of God's glory. It's in this context that we read Romans 12:1. Actually, this is an awkward place for a chapter division because we should move right from the indescribability of the Almighty to God's expectations of us.

2. Answer God's urgent appeal.

Based on all that God has done, Paul says, ***"I urge you, brothers..."*** This means "to call to one's side" in order to persuade someone to do something. I like how the Amplified Bible renders this:

I appeal to you therefore, brethren, and beg of you...

Even though Paul could have used a command here, he instead makes an appeal from love, not law. He does a similar thing in Ephesians 4:1:

I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received.

Notice that he refers to them as "brothers," indicating his affection for them as members of God's family. This is a term of warmth that literally means from "one womb." He's begging brothers and sisters, not unbelievers, to *do* something that has not yet been done – it's a decision that disciples need to make. And yet, it seems as if Paul is leaving it up to each of us individually.

3. Be motivated by God's mercy.

Paul makes this plea ***"in view of God's mercy."*** The original word used here for "mercy" is actually plural and refers to God's multitude of mercies. Listen to 2 Corinthians 1:3 in the King James Version:

Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort.

It sure was neat to have a float in the Thresherman's Parade again this year. I wasn't in the crowd because I was handing out PBC brochures but many of you were there watching everything go by. Imagine if you will, that God has a parade and He's putting it on for you and for me. As we sit and watch, a "parade of mercies" goes by not just for a few minutes, but for hours and days and years and decades and centuries and stretches into eternity. Close your eyes right now and just thank God for the mercy he has put on display in your life.

Pastor Mark Batterson says that the prerequisite to worship is mercy: *"And the prerequisite to mercy is doing something wrong. So if you've done something wrong you qualify for mercy. And if you qualify for mercy you qualify for worship...don't let what's wrong with you keep you from worshipping what's right with God."*

God is not merciful just once but again and again. He is consistently and constantly full of mercy. John Calvin once said that we will never worship with a sincere heart or serve God with unbridled zeal until we properly understand how much we are indebted to God's mercy. God has demonstrated so much mercy to us that we can't help but respond by fully surrendering our lives to Him. In Isaac Watt's amazing hymn, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross," we read these words: *"Love so amazing, so divine; demands my soul, my life, my all."*

Many of us get this wrong. We think we have to sacrifice or perform to get God's mercy. We have it backwards. God gives a multitude of mercies apart from anything we do – this should cause us to surrender everything we are and sacrifice everything we have. One pastor hit this right on when he said: *"Indeed, the extent to which we do not offer ourselves to God reflects the extent to which we do not understand the depth and significance of God's mercy."* Most of us know that we've been forgiven, but many of us overestimate our goodness while underestimating the amount of mercy we have received. I love the words of Jesus in Luke 7:47: ***"But he who has been forgiven little loves little."***

It's interesting that Paul doesn't say, *"In light of God's grace"* but instead focuses on mercy. Why is that? God's grace is demonstrated when we get what we don't deserve, whereas His mercy is what keeps us from getting what we *do* deserve. Micah 7:18: ***"Who is a God like you, who pardons sin and forgives the transgression of the remnant of his inheritance? You do***

not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy.” Lamentations 3:22: ***“Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not”*** (NKJV). John Piper argues that we will never praise Jesus until we prize Him. His mercies have been multiplied to us; let’s praise Him for this.

Louie Giglio offers this helpful definition:

**Worship is our response
to what we value most.**

If we value God’s mercy we’ll be motivated to give Him our very lives. He then writes: *“So how do you know where and what you worship? It’s easy. You simply follow the trail of your time, your affection, your energy, your money and your loyalty. At the end of the trail you’ll find a throne; and whatever, or whomever, is on that throne is what’s of highest value to you. On that throne is what you worship”* (“The Air I Breathe: Worship as a Way of Life,” page 13).

4. Offer your body on God’s altar.

We are urged, in view of the many mercies of God ***“to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.”*** This word “offer” is a technical term that was used to describe the bringing and presenting of an animal for sacrifice on an altar. It means “to present once and for all” by placing oneself at the disposal of another and has the idea of relinquishing one’s grip. In the Old Testament a live animal was brought to the priest and the owner would lay hands on the beast to symbolically say, “This animal takes my place.” The animal was then killed and the blood was sprinkled upon the altar.

This idea of a “living sacrifice” must have been a novel idea to the Jews of that day because they were used to offering dead sacrifices. Once a sacrifice is offered to God, you can’t take it back. When we are called to present our “bodies” to the Lord, we are exhorted to offer our total being to Him, not just bits and pieces. 1 Corinthians 6:20: ***“You were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.”*** God does not just want to be a “part” of our lives; He wants us to be completely committed to Him. Romans 6:13 tells us to offer every part of our bodies to Him as instruments of righteousness. God isn’t interested in beasts today; He’s looking for bodies of believers who will be sold out to Him.

You’ve no doubt heard the story of the pig and the chicken walking down the road together when they come upon a sign advertising a breakfast to benefit the poor. The chicken said to the pig: *“We should donate to that worthy cause. How about if I give an egg and you provide the ham?”* To which the pig replied, *“Not so fast. For you that would be a contribution, but for me it would be a total commitment.”* Too many of us have made some contributions but we resist total commitment

Paul continues by saying that our life offering is to be ***“holy and pleasing to God.”*** Sacrifices were to be without blemish or defect. In like manner, we are to offer to God our best. When we give our best to Him, it will be pleasing, or agreeable to Him. Leviticus 1:9: ***“...And the priest is to burn all of it on the altar. It is a burnt offering, an offering made by fire, an aroma pleasing to the LORD.”*** God is delighted when His people are fully devoted to Him. Having said that, as we’ve learned in Romans, we are already pleasing to God since Jesus died in our place. We have been declared righteous and holy because the holiness of the Son has been credited to our account.

Brothers and sisters, the question is not, *“Did I like the music today and did the service please me?”* The real question is this: *“Is my worship, both here and outside this room, pleasing to God?”* Our purpose is *always* to please God, not to please ourselves.

The Amplified Bible adds color with this paraphrase: ***“...Make a decisive dedication of your bodies...”*** This dedication should be both a duty and a delight because worship is a verb. Adoration must lead to action. This is something that some of us have yet to do so I want to give you that opportunity in a few minutes.

5. Live a lifestyle of “service worship.”

We’re so accustomed to equating worship with what happens in this room on Sunday mornings. We call this our “worship service” when this phrase is never even used in the Bible. In fact, nowhere in the New Testament are we commanded to “go to worship.” Actually, for many of us we equate “worship” with the singing we do together for 20 minutes each week. Let me visually demonstrate how inadequate this understanding of worship is by using this wall. Since there are 168 hours in a week, I’m going to put one line here and then I’m going to walk along the wall and put another line here to show how long a week is. Now, this yellow post-it note represents one hour in that week. Do you think that’s all God wants from us? Or to carve it another way, there are 10,080 minutes in a week. Does God just want 75 of those, or just the 20 minutes or so that we sing? 20 minutes is just 2/10th of 1% of our week. Or for the math-challenged like me, that’s just 2 out of every 1,000 minutes.

If we just have 75 minutes together on Sundays, we should make it the best it can be, right? We’ve been working on some adjustments to make sure that what we’re doing during this time is the most God-honoring that it can be. I’ll talk more about that

next week. But what can each of us do to get ourselves ready for this short period of time that we have for corporate praise and adoration? I listened to part of a message this week by James MacDonald, pastor of Harvest Bible Chapel in Chicago (www.walkintheword.com). He shared four principles that I found to be very helpful.

- ☐ **Prepare yourself.** Get yourself ready Saturday night. Confess any sins. Read your Bible before you arrive. Come with a holy expectation.
- ☐ **Be punctual.** I know this is not easy but there are places around the world where the doors are locked if you are not on time.
- ☐ **Work on your posture.** Don't slump down and settle in for a long-winter's nap. Don't write notes to each other and don't check out if you don't like a song or the sermon. We are not customers or consumers, we are participants. God is the audience.
- ☐ **Ignite some passion.** Come ready to fully participate, knowing that God is seeking worshippers who have their hearts and their heads engaged.

Friends, we can't just be spectators here. Someone described a football game as twenty-two men on the field badly in need of rest being watched by seventy-two thousand spectators badly in need of exercise. Christianity is not a spectator sport and worship is never meant to be something we just watch, applauding when we like it or booing in our hearts when we don't.

I turn to Giglio again: *"Most of my life, I thought that you went to church to worship. But now I see that the better approach is to go worshipping to church"* (page 115). While our time together on Sundays is extremely important, I want to suggest that God is less concerned with how this service goes and more concerned with how our service of worship goes outside these walls. This then is our **"spiritual act of worship."** The phrase "spiritual act of worship" or "service of worship" was familiar to those who understood the Old Testament sacrificial system. The word "service" refers to any ministry that priests and Levites did. Check this out. As believer-priests, when we offer our bodies we are involved in the sacred service of worship.

We actually get our word "liturgy" from this passage. Harold Best, who teaches at Wheaton College, points out that this word was originally a secular term signifying work to be done or a service to be performed by a carpenter or other tradesperson. We must therefore be at "work" worshipping while we walk with Christ in our homes, in our jobs and wherever else.

Worship Service or Service Worship?

Worship is not just what we do here on Sunday mornings. True worship is the presenting of our bodies as living sacrifices to Him and living holy and pleasing lives, every day of the week. We gather together to worship God on Sundays and then scatter the rest of the week to worship Him wherever He has placed us. We could call this "everywhere worship" or worship as a way of life. Let me say it this way: *We were not designed to operate on a weekly worship cycle but rather to run on a 24/7 worship lifestyle.*

Instead of just thinking "worship service" I'd like us to change the order of these words to "service worship." Since God's desire is to make us into the image of His Servant-Son it makes sense for us to serve like He served. Pick up the towel. Look for needs. Serve in secret. Give without anyone knowing what you're doing.

I won't take the time to point this out but I do want to give you an assignment to read the rest of Romans 12 this week because after the challenge to not be conformed but to be transformed by the renewing of our minds in verse 2, the rest of the chapter defines worship as service – both to believers and to unbelievers. I want to also point out that these commands are best lived out in a small group context and then in a ministry that is a match for who God has made you to be. Once again we see the PBC Pathway – we move from Sundays to small groups to serving – that's our spiritual act of worship.

In the Old Testament, believers made a sacrifice that was slaughtered; in the New Testament, believers are to become the sacrifice that is allowed to live. I like how J.B. Phillips paraphrases Romans 12:1:

With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give Him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him.

God's Altar Call

We want to close today with what I'm calling "God's Altar Call." That's really what Romans 12:1 is all about. It's a personal time for us to present our bodies as sacrifices to God. This verse literally says,

You, all of you, present yourselves to God.

This is what God wants from everyone. The Message reads this way:

So here's what I want you to do, God helping you: Take your everyday, ordinary life—your sleeping, eating going-to-work, and walking-around life—and place it before God as an offering. Embracing

what God does for you is the best thing you can do for Him.

God doesn't want us to lie on the altar as a dead sacrifice but rather to live out our lives selflessly for Him as living sacrifices. He's urging us right now to first surrender and then worship through serving.

As we sing the song "Lord I Give You My Heart" I want to invite you to the altar for a time of dedication and surrender. When you come, take a piece of wood to remind you that your life is no longer your own and that it is your desire to honor Christ. Give him your heart and give Him your body and allow Him to have His way in you.

Romans 12:1-5 Knowing God's Will - 9/6/09

An older lady came out on her porch every morning, and would raise her arms to the sky and shout, *"Praise the Lord."* One day an atheist moved next door and over time he became very irritated with this worshipping woman. So every morning after he heard her exclamation of praise, he would shout out, *"There is no Lord!"* This went on for several months, then one morning in the middle of winter the lady stepped onto her front porch and shouted, *"Praise the Lord! Lord, please reveal your will to me because I have no food and I'm starving. Please provide for me, O Lord!"*

The next morning, when she came out on her porch there were two huge bags of groceries sitting there. *"Praise the Lord!"* she cried out. *"He has provided groceries for me!"* Just then the atheist jumped out of the bushes and shouted, *"There is no Lord. I bought those groceries!"* Without skipping a beat, the lady threw her arms in the air and shouted, *"Praise the Lord! He has provided me with groceries and He made the devil pay for them!"*

We've all asked questions like these at one time or another: *How can I know God's will? Is He really interested in me as an individual? Is there a master plan for my life?* We're beginning a six-part series that we're calling "Living Life on Purpose" and our topic today is "Knowing God's Will" from Romans 12. One of my classmates from my Bible College days posted something on Facebook this week that caught my attention: *"If I could give a Christian only one chapter to live by it would be Romans 12."*

Please turn in your Bibles to the twelfth chapter of Romans where I want us to notice the very first word in verse 1: ***"Therefore..."*** Whenever you see the word ***"therefore"*** in the Bible you should always ask what it's there for. When we come to this chapter, Paul is making a shift from doctrine to duty, from creed to conduct, from principles to practice, and from beliefs to behavior. We must not only know, we must grow and instead of just filling our heads, God's Word must also affect our attitudes and actions. It's as if he's saying, *"Based on everything that I've just said, this is what you now need to put into practice."*

I love what Martin Luther said about this book that literally changed his life and became the rallying cry for the Reformation:

Romans is the chief part of the New Testament, and the very purest gospel, which, indeed, deserves that a Christian not only know it word for word by heart but deal with it daily as with daily bread of the soul. For it can never be read or considered too much or too well, and the more it is handled, the more delightful it becomes, and the better it tastes."

This past week at our elders meeting we had the privilege of meeting with PBC member Jeremy Leacock. Jeremy has been sensing that God may be leading him to serve as a lay pastor in some church and asked us to consider licensing him to the ministry. One of the questions we asked him was this: *"What's your favorite book in the Bible?"* Without hesitation he told us that it was Romans. After meeting with him and asking him a bunch of questions, we have decided to license Jeremy for the ministry.

We've spent over three years and 44 different sermons roaming through the first eleven chapters of Romans. While we've taken breaks during this time, we always come back to this incredible section of Scripture and it's my prayer that Romans will become more delightful the more we study it. At this pace, we should be finished in another year or so (or not). I encourage you to reread some of the sermons in order to more fully understand Romans 1-11.

There are at least four "therefores" in the book of Romans that help unlock its teaching and provide a summary of where we've been.

Ro 3:20 is the "therefore" of condemnation: ***"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin."***

Ro 5:1 is the "therefore" of justification: ***"Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."***

Ro 8:1 is the "therefore" of assurance: ***"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."***

And Romans 12:1 is the “therefore” of surrender.

The immediate context for our text today is the wonderfully deep doxology found at the end of Romans 11:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and His paths beyond finding out. 'Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?' For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory! Amen.

After spending so much time discussing doctrine, Paul is overcome by the depth of God's glory and His marvelous mercy and it's as if he can't help but break out into an unbridled exclamation of praise. It's in this context that we read the very next verse in Romans 12:1:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God-this is your spiritual act of worship.

I want to pause right here to say that for some of us, this verse is so well-known that we're already starting to check out. I understand. As I went back and looked at our sermon archive this week, I found at least four sermons from this verse, including an exceptional message preached by Dr. David Wong back in 2002. Stay with me today because I want us to see that Romans 12:1 must be linked to all that comes before it *and* it cannot be fully understood unless the verses that come after it are included. I want to propose that *if you're serious about knowing God's will, then you can't say no to God's will.* Ephesians 5:17 says, ***“Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is.”*** In order to know God's will, Romans 12 teaches that there are at least three conditions that must be met.

1. We need to be saved (Ro 12:1a).

The message last week was very clear on this point: *Prepare for a delay, but be ready today.* I called Robert Guth this week and we chatted for awhile. When we were finished I reminded him that Jesus is coming soon. To which he replied, *“Not soon enough!”* At the end of the services we gave a call for conversion and around 10 people raised their hands, indicating that they had prayed to receive Jesus Christ into their lives!

Based on all that God has done, Paul says here in verse 1, ***“I urge you, brothers...”*** Even though he could have used a command, he instead makes an appeal. This word means to “call near” or “to invite.” Notice that he refers to them as “brothers,” indicating his affection for them as members of God's family. The baseline for knowing God's will is belief. The question becomes, *“Are you saved?”* Until you are, you won't be in a position to know God's will. In John 10:4, Jesus makes this interesting statement: ***“his sheep follow him because they know his voice.”*** Those who are in relationship with the Shepherd have the ability to follow because they are tuned into the Shepherd's voice.

This plea is made ***“in view of God's mercy.”*** The original word used here for “mercy” is actually plural and refers to God's multitude of mercies. He is not merciful just once but again and again. He is consistently and constantly full of mercy. John Calvin once said that we will never worship with a sincere heart or serve God with unbridled zeal until we properly understand how much we are indebted to God's mercy.

It's interesting that Paul doesn't say, *“In light of God's grace”* but instead focuses on mercy. Why is that? God's grace is demonstrated when we get what we don't deserve, whereas His mercy is what keeps us from getting what we *do* deserve. Lamentations 3:22: ***“Through the LORD's mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not”***(NKJV). One of the best motivations to live for Christ is a good memory of all the mercies we've received.

I met with someone this week and she was so moved by God's mercy that she prayed to receive Christ. I wonder if there's anyone here today who needs to make that same decision. *If you're serious about knowing God's will, then you can't say no to God's will.*

2. We need to be surrendered (Ro 12:1b-2).

First, we need to be saved and second, we need to be surrendered. Paul gives us two ways to fully express our surrender to God.

Give Him your body. We are urged, in view of the many mercies of God ***“to offer our bodies as living sacrifices.”*** This word “offer” is a technical term that was used to describe the bringing and presenting of an animal for sacrifice on an altar. To “offer” means, “to present once and for all.” This idea of a “living sacrifice” must have been a novel idea to the Jews of that day. This was something they had not heard of before, except perhaps in the case of Abraham offering Isaac upon the altar. When we are called to present our “bodies” to the Lord, we are exhorted to offer our total being to Him, not just bits and pieces. God does not just want to be a “part” of our lives; He wants us to be completely committed to Him.

Paul continues by saying that our life offering is to be ***“holy and pleasing to God.”*** When we give our best to Him, it will be

pleasing, or agreeable to Him. This then is our **“spiritual act of worship.”** Worship is not just what we do here on Sunday mornings. True worship is the presenting of our bodies as living sacrifices to the Lord and living holy and pleasing lives, every day of the week.

Give Him your mind. Verse 1 calls for a decisive commitment to fully surrender. The first part of Ro 12:2 tells us how we can maintain that commitment: **“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind...”** The tense of this verse indicates that we must stop conforming, implying that this is something that we’re prone to do. The word “conformed” is the word that we get our English word “scheme” from. It’s sometimes translated “fashioned.” Paul is urging us to stop being pushed into the fashion of the world. J.B. Phillips offers this paraphrase: **“Don’t let the world squeeze you into its mold.”** Sometimes we are so conformed to the world that there is little noticeable difference between Christians and non-Christians.

Some of you are facing some incredible temptations right now. You feel yourself being pulled to conform, to go along with the way your friends are leading you. Don’t give in! Unfortunately, some of us have internalized the world’s values and fashions so much that we don’t even recognize it anymore. It’s like walking into a dark theater in the middle of the day. When you first go in, everything is really dark. But after a while, you can see normally, that is, until you walk back outside. If you spend enough time conforming to the world, you become so accustomed to the darkness that you think it’s now normal.

We’re to *stop* being conformed and *start* being transformed. The word **“transformed”** refers to an inner change. We get the word “metamorphosis” from this Greek word. There’s a story told of a very ugly man with a hideous face. He was good and kind, but people were terrified of him and would not stay in his presence. As you can imagine, he was very lonely. The thing he wanted most was to marry one of the women in his town. Because of his frightening face, he decided to wear a mask of a handsome face so that he could win her love. He kept this mask on 24/7. Soon he was married and living the happy life he had always wanted.

After awhile his wife noticed that he was wearing a mask and asked him to show her his true face. He slowly took it off, bracing himself for the gasp of horror he knew would soon be coming. But instead of screaming, his wife just smiled. The man ran to a mirror and realized that the years of wearing the disguise had transformed his face into the features of the mask.

When we put on Christ and wear his face, we find our lives transformed into his likeness. 2 Corinthians 3:18: **“And we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.”**

I’m greatly challenged by what William Booth, the founder of the Salvation said near the end of his life:

God had all there was of me. There have been others who had greater plans, greater opportunities than I; but from the day I got a vision of what God could do, I made up my mind God would have all there was of William Booth.

Notice the last part of Ro 12:2: **“Then we will be able to test and approve what God’s will is - his good, pleasing, and perfect will.”**

God will not force us into anything. Do you see the conditional clause? Give Him your body and your mind and don’t be conformed but be transformed, *then* you will find God’s good, pleasing and perfect will. Some of us want to know what God’s will is before we’ll do it. Like when someone asks, *“Can you help me with something?”* and we respond with, *“It depends what it is.”* God wants our will and then He’ll show us His will.

If you’re serious about knowing God’s will, then you can’t say no to God’s will.

But it’s no use sitting around waiting to have the will of God revealed to us. This is an active verb. We learn His will by doing. When you wonder what God’s will is for your life, the first place to start is by living out Romans 12:1-2. Until you offer Him your body and your mind, you won’t understand His good, pleasing, and perfect will.

We tend to focus God’s will on the *what* – our occupation, or the *where* – our location, but God is more interested in our transformation. Have you presented yourself to Him in complete surrender? The answer to this question will determine your ability to tap into God’s limitless resources. Think of it this way. Why should God reveal His will to you if He doesn’t think you’re all that interested in doing it anyway? Someone put it like this: *“Each of us need to decide if we want to go where God is leading.”*

Actually, we’re prone to view God’s will from a human perspective. I want to know the will of God that is good, perfect and acceptable *to me*. But Romans is teaching that God’s good, acceptable and perfect will has to do *with Him*. Further, the emphasis is

not so much on discovering God's will as it is in doing His will.

And so, make sure you're saved and then make sure you're surrendered. There's a third condition that we must meet if we're serious about knowing God's will.

3. We need to be sharpened by others (Ro 12:3-5).

As we move into the rest of Romans, we come face-to-face with the truth that we are designed to live out God's will in the context of relationships.

Denounce pride (3).

For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you."

Thinking more highly of ourselves than we should is one of the greatest deterrents to knowing and doing God's will. How does it feel to be around someone who boasts and brags about his or her abilities? Never forget this truth: *Faith is a gift from God and He uses us simply because He wants to.* We're to avoid thinking too highly of ourselves and we're to avoid thinking too low of ourselves. Don't be like Diotrephes who was called out in 3 John 9-10: "

wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us. So if I come, I will call attention to what he is doing, gossiping maliciously about us. Not satisfied with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers. He also stops those who want to do so and puts them out of the church."

In C. S. Lewis' classic "Screwtape Letters," he captures an imaginary conversation between two demons as they consider how best to attack a Christian:

I see only one thing to do at the moment. Your patient [the Christian] has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact? Catch him at the moment when he is really poor in spirit and smuggle into his mind the gratifying reflection, 'By jove! I'm being humble,' and almost immediately pride – pride at his own humility – will appear" (chapter six).

Celebrate differences (4).

Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function." We must also remember that just as the different parts of our bodies have different functions, so too, in the body of Christ, each of us have been given different gifts and roles. We can't do it alone. If God's purposes are to be accomplished and His church is to grow, every one of us is important. Nobody is a nobody in the Body of Christ. While no one can do everything, everyone can do something. We'll talk more about this next week.

Embrace dependency (5).

So in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others." While we're uniquely designed, we've been made to function in community with one another because each of us belongs to one another. I might be strong in the area of my gift, but I am weak in the areas where others have been gifted. When tempted to use the word "me," inject the word "we" instead.

I read a fascinating new book this summer by Kevin DeYoung and Ted Kluck called, "Why We Love the Church." In it they discuss why so many people are "church-leavers" who believe that spirituality is hot, but religion is not. Increasingly we hear talk of a "churchless Christianity," where some want God but not the church, and fellowship without commitment. The authors quote Chuck Colson who perceptively points out: *"We live in a therapeutic age where everything is measured by how much I get out of it. The church ought to be measured by what we put into it for God and others"* (page 145).

If we're serious about knowing and doing God's will, then we must stop thinking individualistically and begin to think corporately. A letter to the editor in "Christianity Today" this month hit it on the head: *"He exposes the unchecked individualism that permeates the evangelical church and too often diminishes our witness to a whimper"* (September 2009). We cannot look at ourselves as an island, independent of all others. We must see ourselves as fully functioning members of the body of Christ, with certain gifts that are necessary to the equipping and ministry of the entire church. There is individuality within the body, because there are many members, all with a different role to play. But there is no room for individualism, for we are inter-dependent. We must rely on other members of the body just as they must rely on us.

I can think of three ways to live out our dependency on others. First, live out your faith at home, in the context of family. Second, if you're ready to align yourself with this church, our next membership class begins on September 20th. Third, as a matter of stewardship and as way to demonstrate our connectedness to each other, let's refrain from bringing food and drinks into our newly renovated auditorium.

I came across something called, "This is My Church." *"My church is composed of people just like me. It will be friendly if I am. It will do great work if I work. It will make generous gifts to many causes if I'm generous. It will bring others into the fellowship if I bring them. Therefore, with God's help, I dedicate myself to the task of being all these things I want my church to be."*

This is similar to an article written by Mavis Williams called, *"The Perfect Church."*

If you should find the perfect church
Without one fault or smear,
For goodness sake!
Don't join that church;
You'd spoil the atmosphere.

But since no perfect church exists
Made up of imperfect men,
Then let's cease looking for that church
And love the church we're in.

Did you know that you belong to the person sitting next to you? We're on the same team with each of us playing different roles. Don't get puffed up by your own importance and don't take yourself out of the game by thinking you don't matter. We need each other because we belong to each other.

If you're serious about knowing God's will, then you can't say no to God's will. Make sure that you're saved, make sure you're surrendered and make sure you're being sharpened by others.

After World War II, a group of German students volunteered to help rebuild an English cathedral that had been severely damaged by German bombs. As work progressed, they became concerned about a large statue of Jesus, whose arms were outstretched and beneath which was the inscription: *"Come unto Me."* Because of the extensive damage they had difficulty trying to restore the hands, which had been completely destroyed. After much discussion, they decided to let the hands remain missing and changed the inscription to: *"Christ has no hands but ours."*

What a great reminder as we transition into communion. The night before Jesus died, he wrestled in prayer and then said these words: ***"Yet not my will, but yours be done."*** Jesus went to the cross for us because He faithfully followed His Father's will. Let's remember what He did for us as we determine to be his hands and his feet in our world.

MISSING Romans 12:6-8 Serving God with Your Gift

Romans 12:11 The Deal With Zeal - 8/29/10

Have you heard about the traffic jam in China that has reached 60 miles long and lasted more than two weeks? Instead of hustling down the highway, cars have come to a crawl and in some places, no vehicles are moving at all. Some drivers have given up and have been playing cards with other stalled citizens and a few have just gotten out of their vehicles and taken naps on the pavement.

Likewise, some Christians have stalled out and have either become spiritually sleepy or taken to just playing games. Are you spiritually stuck today? Are you in a spiritual standstill? Do you wonder where all your passion has gone?

Over the last several years, I've tried to take popular spiritual slogans and analyze them from the perspective of Scripture. Let me tackle another one: *"Let go and let God."* Now, I understand the heart behind this. For many of us controllers, we're holding on to way too many things when God calls us to surrender to Him. But in another sense, this phrase is way too passive. We can't just sit kick back on our couch and hope to grow in character or in Christ-likeness. The Bible speaks of an imperative urgency and the

need for disciplined diligence. We can't be spiritual slackers.

Many of us are way too passive either because we no longer care or maybe we think that somehow we'll just become this super Christian with the passing of time. I have a friend who refers to this as the "Phantom Christian Life." This is the belief that there's a victorious, problem-free life out there somewhere for me and someday I'll somehow get there, I just don't know when. It's a life filled with bliss and beauty and all things spiritual.

This idea of passivity has crashed into our pop culture as well. Google's CEO Eric Schmidt, in a recent interview with the Wall Street Journal, predicted that in the future, Google will know so much about its users that the search engine will be able to help them plan their lives. Using profiles of its customers and tracking their locations through their smart phones, it will be able to provide live updates on their surroundings and inform them of tasks they need to do. Here's what Schmidt said, *"I actually think most people don't want Google to answer their questions. They want Google to tell them what they should be doing next."* ("Google and the Search for the Future," August 14, 2010: <http://online.wsj.com/article/>).

I listened to a sermon podcast this past week from Wayne Cordeiro. He made a statement that I haven't been able to shake and I hope it sticks with you as well: *"Life will not give you what you want, neither will it give you what you think you deserve, life will give you what you're willing to settle for."*

He used an illustration to make his point. A college freshman named Smitty became the field goal kicker for the football team. At the end of a game he was called on to go in and kick a game-winning field goal but Smitty wanted to make his mark so he changed plays in the huddle. The ball was hiked directly to him and he started running and was clobbered and fumbled the ball. The ball was picked up and the opposing player started running toward the other end zone. The other players couldn't catch him and then out of nowhere someone starting gaining ground on him. He was running like a streak of lightning. It was Smitty! He caught up to the other player and tackled him before he could score.

The assistant turned to the head coach and remarked, *"Did you know Smitty had wheels like that? He beat our best athletes and made the tackle!"* The head coach replied, *"I'll tell you why. The other guys were running because they were supposed to. Smitty was running because his life depended on it."* Friends, you and I must live like our life depended on it. And we must live wholeheartedly for Christ because the lives of others depend on it.

I've been contemplating something for quite some time and I want to address it this morning. I think in general, though certainly not across the board, PBC has lost some of its passion. And since PBC is made up of people like you and me, if my assessment is correct, then many of us have lost our zeal. Let me get more personal. My own zeal has wavered.

I want to propose that *if you know that you lack, and you want to get back, then you can't slack.*

Please turn in your Bible to Romans 12:11: ***"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."***

I recognize that Pastor Jeff preached on our passage less than a year ago but I can't think of another verse that so captures our condition. I encourage you to go back and read his sermon from 9/27/09 at www.pontiacbible.org. One of my goals today is to have us memorize this short verse so that it sticks in both our heads and in our hearts and then works its way out into our hands. Let's say it together: ***"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."***

Our outline today comes right from this verse.

1. Never be lacking in zeal.

This is a warning about not being a spiritual slacker. I like how Pastor Jeff put it: *"The literal translation is 'in zeal, do not be lazy.' The word 'zeal' carries with it the idea of intense effort and motivation, doing something whole-heartedly, or with great enthusiasm. It is an attitude that leads to action..."*

One commentator put it like this: *"Whatever is worth doing in the Christian life is valuable enough to be done with enthusiasm and care."* This is reflected in Ecclesiastes 9:10: ***"Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might..."***

I need to say that sometimes crazy things are done in the name of zeal. It's easy to become zealous about a whole bunch of things like brats and cheese but we're cautioned in Proverbs 19:2 to make sure our zeal is tied to truth: ***"It is not good to have zeal without knowledge, nor to be hasty and miss the way."***

Literally the first part of Romans 12:11 reads this way, ***"In the diligence not slothful..."*** Let me list some words that go along with diligence to help open up the meaning: speed, haste, passion, seriousness, urgency, eagerness, readiness, and dedication. One pastor offers a super definition: *"The persistent and passionate pursuit of divine directives in spite of discouraging difficulties."* The word *"lacking"* can be translated as slothful and has the idea of hesitating, delaying, idle, and lagging behind or being as slow as a

sloth. Did you know that slothfulness is one of the seven deadly sins?

Derek Kidner, in [his commentary on Proverbs](#), identifies four signs of the sluggard. A sluggard is an idle, slothful person. See if you have any of these tendencies.

(1) He will not begin things.

He does not commit himself to a refusal, but deceives himself by the smallness of his surrenders. So, by inches and minutes, his opportunity slips away. We see this in Proverbs 6:9-11:

How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest - and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.

(2) He will not finish things.

The rare effort of beginning has been too much and the impulse dies. So his quarry goes bad on him (Ro 12:27) and his meal goes cold on him (26:15). One of my favorites is found in Proverbs 19:24:

The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he will not even bring it back to his mouth!"

(3) He will not face things.

The sluggard comes to believe his own excuses, rationalizes his laziness, and makes a *habit of the soft choice*. We see this in Proverbs 20:4:

A sluggard does not plow in season; so at harvest time he looks but finds nothing.

We know that we're being a spiritual sluggard if we keep putting off dealing with habits and sins that are harmful to our spiritual lives.

(4) Consequently he is restless with unsatisfied desire according to Proverbs 13:4:

The sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the desires of the diligent are fully satisfied.

Kidner concludes: "The sluggard is no freak, but, as often as not, *an ordinary man who has made too many excuses*, too many refusals and too many postponements. It has all been as imperceptible, and as pleasant, as falling asleep."

God calls out his watchmen who were supposed to be alert in Isaiah 56:10: "...***They lie around and dream, they love to sleep.***" Jesus spoke strong words to the one who did not use what was given to him in Matthew 25:26: "***You wicked, lazy servant!***"

Someone has defined laziness this way: "*The tendency to remain where we are in life instead of moving to where we could and should be.*" With that definition, who among us is not lazy? What are we going to do about it?

If you know that you lack, and you want to get back, then you can't slack. Let's take a shot at quoting our verse again. Romans 12:11: "***Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.***"

2. But keep your spiritual fervor.

If we're urged to "keep" our fervor that means that we can lose it, right? We need to fight against our tendency to head south spiritually. I was really challenged by what our missionary Rebecca Cox said last Sunday about how she puts on her "spiritual armor" every day because she knows she's in a battle. This past week in my morning Bible reading, I came across this passage from 1 Chronicles 28:9-10. David wants to make sure that his son Solomon does not become a spiritual slacker:

And you, my son Solomon, acknowledge the God of your father, and serve him with wholehearted devotion and with a willing mind...Be strong and do the work.

There's nothing passive about this, is there? Oh, to hear dads plead with their children like this today!

This second phrase in Romans 12:11 literally reads, "***In the spirit boiling over.***" I turn to Pastor Jeff again:

The Greek word 'fervor' means the sound that water makes when it comes to a boil. It can also refer to the glow of metal when it is super-heated. Jesus is interested in followers who boil in the depths of their souls for Him.

I was in a church recently and picked up one of their hymnals. When I opened it up I came across John Wesley's seven instructions for singing from 1761. These directions were given because at that time the hymns were brand new and even daring and some

people didn't like how they sounded. As a result, they stopped singing. I wonder if we have anything like that going on here. I think we can work more diligently at our singing so that our spirit boils over in profound praise.

Listen to #4: *"Sing...with a good courage. Beware of singing as if you were half dead, or half asleep; but lift up your voice with strength."* I also like his seventh instruction: *"Above all sing spiritually. Have an eye to God in every word you sing. Aim at pleasing Him more than yourself or any other creature."*

This last one makes me think of Phinehas from the Old Testament because he was known for his zeal for God's honor. Here's what God said about this man who aimed to please God more than himself or anyone else in Numbers 25:11:

Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them."

God is still looking for men and women and boys and girls to be zealous for His honor. Will you be that person?

Before you answer too quickly, Psalm 119:139 says that if you do have zeal for the Lord, you will probably be lonely and people's apathy will get under your skin: ***"My zeal wears me out, for my enemies ignore my words."***

A fire broke out in a small-town church building. When the fire brigade arrived, the minister recognized one of the men as a long-absent church member. *"Hello there, Jim. I haven't seen you in church for a long time,"* he chided. To which the man replied, *"Well, it's been a long time since there's been any FIRE in this church."* Our zeal should be noticeable and verifiable as illustrated in 2 Kings 10:16: ***"Jehu said, 'Come with me and see my zeal for the Lord...'"***

I want to be more like Jonathon Edwards. When he was a young man, he wrote seventy resolutions. His sixth one captures the essence of Romans 12:11: *"Resolved: To live with all my might while I live."* We could say it like this: *Wherever you are, be there!*

If you know that you lack, and you want to get back, then you can't slack. Let's quote our verse again. Romans 12:11: ***"Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord."***

3. Serving the Lord.

Our attitude will eventually spill over to action. Zeal must be in our hearts and then work its way out through our hands. We need to be eager *and* active, passionate *and* practicing, feeling *and* focused. If we are fervent for the Savior we will be faithful in serving Him. And it also works in reverse. If we have stopped serving it may be because we have lost some of our love for the Lord. The word "serving" is in the present tense, which means it should always be our lifestyle or habit to serve. There is no room to say, *"Yah, I used to serve but now I don't do anything."* Our serving assignments may change but our serving identity doesn't. A Christian who is not serving is a contradiction in terms.

It's helpful to come back to what the word "serve" really means. It comes from the Greek word *doulos*, which refers to a slave or one who is in bondage or bound to another. It was used of someone who dutifully obeyed the master's commands. A bondservant was surrendered wholly to the Master's will and devoted to Him to the disregard of his own interest. We are not simply "volunteers" signing up for an hour or two of our time; we are servants who are bound to our Master and what He wants. Look at how our verse ends – "serving the **Lord.**" Jesus is referred to some ten times as Savior and some seven hundred times as Lord. He is supreme in authority. Jesus reframes our anemic understanding in Luke 17:10: ***"So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"***

Let me say that God is not interested in us just getting all excited or pumped up spiritually with some ecstatic experience. Spiritual energy is meant to be unleashed in serving the Lord, not to make us feel good. It's not about us. It's all about Him. We need sold-out servants who don't just do enough but go way beyond like Baruch in Nehemiah 3:20. After finishing his work, he went on and tackled others' jobs: ***"Next to him, Baruch son of Zabbai zealously repaired another section..."***

By the way, this is the nickname I gave to Robert Guth after watching all he did pouring concrete for our parking lots! It makes me wonder who will take leadership in our church in the next 5 to 10 years. Where are the Robert Guth's today? It was D.L. Moody who said: *"The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to him. By God's help, I aim to be that man."*

I don't know who came up with this but it messed with me this week: *"We're doing little of eternal significance and calling it enough. We put in our token time and call it commitment."* I love the picture found in Psalm 123:2. The servant doesn't take his eyes off the master's hands so that when he motions for anything the servant is ready to spring into action:

As the eyes of slaves look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maid look to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look to the Lord our God, till he shows us his mercy.

The first question to settle is the servanthood issue. Let's get it straight once and for all. He is our Master and we are His servants. That's my identity. The second question is this: *"What is it that He wants me to do?"* That's my job description. Like Pastor Jeff challenged us a couple weeks ago, it's time to get out of the boat. How is that we can serve the Lord? The possibilities are endless. Titus 2:14 tells us that we are to be actively, energetically and passionately serving, **"...eager to do what is good."** Here are some ways to serve...

- **Serving in small groups.** We're challenging each of our small groups to find a service project this fall.
- **AWANA.**
- **Sunday School and Nursery.**
- **Corporate prayer.** Next Sunday morning at 8:10.
- **Growing in your giving.** If you're looking for a giving guideline I like to say that a tithe (10%) is a good place to start. 2 Corinthians 9:6-7:

Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will also reap generously. Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

Yesterday was the anniversary of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Without minimizing what he stood for and recognizing that we still have a long way to go to see all races as equal, I thought I'd share a two-part dream with you this morning.

- **I have a dream for men to minister.** I believe that there are way too many mediocre men...and sometimes I'm one of them. One of the ministries I follow is called "The Resurgence." They recently hosted a conference called an "Event for Men Who Aren't Boys." In their write-up they said this: *"We live in a world full of males who have prolonged their adolescence. They are neither boys nor men. They live suspended between childhood and adulthood, between growing up and being a grown-up."* They've even developed a new name, *ban*, which is a hybrid of boy and man. It continues: *"Ban doesn't like responsibility so he extends his adolescence and sets his focus squarely and supremely on himself. Half of American males between the ages of 18 and 34 play video games every day – for almost three hours."* Guys, it's time for us to man-up, to be real men. 1 Corinthians 16:13: **"Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be men of courage; be strong."** I like this prayer that they suggest: *"God make me a man with thick skin and a soft heart. Make me a man who is tough and tender. Make me tough so I can handle life. Make me tender so I can love people. God, make me a man."*
- **I have a dream for parents to disciple and discipline their children** If you've been here for the past year, you no doubt have picked up on the fact that we're serious about helping our families live out their faith at home. In the past 10 months, almost 35% of our sermons have dealt with faith in the family and marriage matters. Pastor Jeff is working on something for this fall that we're not quite ready to announce yet but we're serious about giving parents the tools they need to connect and equip their children to be growing and faithful followers. Check out the admonition for passive-free parenting in Deuteronomy 4:9: **"Only be careful, and watch yourselves closely so that you do not forget the things your eyes have seen or let them slip from your heart as long as you live. Teach them to your children and to their children after them."** Do you need to step up your discipline? Need to establish better boundaries? Proverbs 13:24: **"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him."** If you don't disciple and discipline your children, who will?

The Wheel Illustration

When I first became a Christian, I was introduced to the "Wheel Illustration." I've come back to this again and again over the years and have used it as a way to evaluate how I'm doing in my walk with Christ. Some of you have been through the 2:7 Discipleship Program and you'll recognize it from there (see www.navigators.com). Let's take a look...



The Hub: Christ the Center.

Listen to Galatians 2:20: ***"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."***

Making Christ central in your life is an act of your will. Have you ever done this? If not, why not?

The Rim: Obedience to Christ.

Check out John 14:21: ***“Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me.”***

The proof of your love for God is your demonstrated obedience to Him. Is there an area that you are not obeying Him in today? Jesus wants us to give our all. In our obedience to Christ, we should be, like one of my friends likes to say: *“All gas and no brake.”*

The Vertical Dimension: How You Relate to God

The Word Spoke.

I love what we read in Joshua 1:8: ***“Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”***

A vital personal intake of God's Word is essential for health and growth. Are you in God's Word every day? What will it take for you to make this happen?

The Prayer Spoke.

Jesus said in John 15:7: ***“If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.”***

Prayer is a natural response to God as you hear Him speak to you through His Word.

The Horizontal Dimension: How You Relate to Others

The Fellowship Spoke.

Psalms 122:1: ***“I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the Lord.’”***

How are you doing in your involvement with other believers? Are you consistent in your Sunday attendance and are you plugged into a small group?

The Witnessing Spoke.

The natural overflow of a rich vibrant life in Christ should be sharing with others how they too can have this life. And when we share Jesus with others, our own faith grows according to Philemon 6:

I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ.

Where are you weak? Is there a spoke that is stronger than the others? What happens when one spoke is broken on a wheel? Is Christ at the center of your life? Are you obeying Him?

If you know that you lack, and you want to get back, then you can't slack. Let's quote our verse again. Romans 12:11:

Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord.

Open the Door

In Revelation 3, Jesus speaks some pretty tough words to a mediocre church that was just going through the motions. The church at Laodicea is the only one of the seven addressed in the opening chapters that receives no word of commendation. Listen to Revelation 3:15:

I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other!

Jesus compared their deeds to the water supply in their town. Since water was sparse, they built an aqueduct to carry water from a source six miles away. They had one spring of cold refreshing water and another supply for steaming hot water from a hot springs. By the time the water traveled the six mile distance, the cold became lukewarm and bitter and the hot became lukewarm and useless.

The only use for lukewarm water is to induce vomiting. And, according to verse 16 that's exactly what Jesus wants to do:

So, because you are lukewarm – neither hot nor cold – I am about to spit you out of my mouth.”

Jesus is nauseated by our lukewarm, lazy lives.

Drop down to verse 19 where we see that Jesus rebukes and disciplines those He loves. And then he says this: “**Be earnest** [zealous] **and repent.**” Jesus wants us to reconnect with him and turn from the way we’ve been living. And then we come to verse 20, which is often used in our evangelistic invitations but in context is directed to spiritually stagnant believers. This tells us what we need to do:

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me.

Jesus wants intimate fellowship with us...but we have to open the door and invite Him to make Himself at home in our lives.

Jesus is knocking. Do you know why? Because He is both jealous and zealous for you! Follow this thought. When Jesus went and cleared the temple of the moneychangers and salespeople, John 2:17 says that the disciples remembered that something was said about this in Psalm 69:9. Here’s what we read:

His disciples remembered that it is written, ‘Zeal for your house will consume me.’

Stay with me. Jesus had a never-ending passion for the Father’s house to be a place of worship. This ate at Him. Check this out. 1 Corinthians 3:16 says that God now dwells in believers, in you and I. That means that Jesus wants to entrust us with the Father’s reputation and yet, He probably needs to clean some stuff out, right? What things don’t belong? Open the door and let Him clean out *His* house. He wants to throw out those things that keep Him from being revered within you.

Will you be sold out to the Savior or will you sell out to sin, self and Satan? It’s time to get out of the jam you’ve been in. Put the games away and stop sleeping spiritually. *If you know that you lack, and you want to get back, then you can’t slack.*

Missionary martyr **Jim Elliot** is known for this motto that kept him from living a mediocre life:

***He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep
to gain that which he cannot lose.***

He also wrote a prayer in his journal shortly before he was killed by Auca Indians at the age of 28 that I would like to use for our closing prayer:

God, I pray Thee, light these idle sticks of my life and may I burn for Thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine. I seek not a long life, but a full one, like you, Lord Jesus. Saturate me with the oil of the Spirit that I may be aflame. But flame is often short-lived. Canst thou bear this, my soul? Short life? In me there dwells the spirit of the Great Short-lived, whose zeal for God’s house consumed Him. Make me Thy fuel, Flame of God.

MISSING Romans 12:11-13

Romans 12:14 Getting Along With Others - 10/4/09

Have I ever mentioned to you that there’s a lot of persecution for Packer fans here in Illinois? I’ve told my dad this many times but I’m not sure he really believed me until last Sunday afternoon when my parents came down from Wisconsin and we met them at a local restaurant. They arrived before we did so they walked around for awhile, looking for a TV that had the Packer game on. They eventually found some guys watching a large-screen TV in another part of the building and went into the room and asked if they would mind flipping to the Packer game. One guy turned to them and said, “*Packers? No way.*” The others were equally rude and by their body language my parents knew they better leave. When my dad was telling me about this persecution I told him that’s just how it is in Illinois.

When I was studying the passage for today I realized that I have a biblical responsibility to bless and not blast Bears fans. In the face of persistent Packer persecution, I must take the high road and no longer denigrate those who were so easily defeated in the first game of the season. Here’s the verse we’re focusing on today from Romans 12:14:

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

Before we dive in, I want to explain a few things.

- We have joined with other churches in past years by focusing on the Persecuted Church on the second Sunday in November. Instead, we’re going to give attention to this a month earlier because the passage before us deals with how to handle persecution. In addition, November 8th is Adoption Awareness Sunday and this will allow us to focus on the needs of

orphans at that time.

- If you follow the preaching schedule for our current series called, “Living Life on Purpose,” you’ll notice that the text for today was supposed to involve three verses. Because of the depth of Romans 12:14, we’re going to camp in just this one verse.
- As we go through this verse, we’re going to find ourselves wondering if it’s really possible to live it out. My guess is that you’re going to have some major pushback when you contemplate this passage. I should warn you ahead of time that it will be impossible unless you and I understand the rich doctrine of Romans 1-11 and that we’ve been saved and living surrendered lives as Romans 12:1-2 teaches. Apart from the filling of the Holy Spirit it *will be* impossible.
- While it’s going to be a challenge to practice Romans 12:14, I want us to work at committing it to memory. One of my goals is for each and every one of us to have this memorized before we leave today. It only has ten words. You can do it. Let’s try it out right now: **“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”**

Did I mention that this passage is not popular and that it runs contrary to the inclination of our flesh? We’re to respond exactly opposite from the way of the world which says, *“Do unto others before they do it to you.”* Let me also point out that in New Testament times, Christians were targets for persecution of one sort or another.

The believers in Rome were blamed for a fire that swept through the city. As a result, the emperor Nero had scores of Christians slaughtered. One writer puts it this way:

Nero wrapped the Christians in pitch and set them alight, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them into skins of wild animals and set his hunting dogs upon them to tear them to death. They were tortured on the rack; they were scraped with pincers; molten lead was poured hissing upon them... eyes were torn out; parts of their bodies were cut off and roasted before their eyes; their hands and feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony. These things are not pleasant to think about, but these are the things a man had to be prepared for, if he took his stand with Christ” (From a sermon by Bill Prater, www.sermoncentral.com).

With that as background, it sure seems impossible for believers to bless those who are intent on harming them, doesn’t it? How many of you have ever had somebody in your life that you just couldn’t stand? Most of us want to write off those who’ve wronged us. Let’s take a closer look at this verse. We’re told to do something and then we’re told to not do something else.

1. Bless persecutors.

We notice right away that the word **“bless”** is used twice, perhaps to underscore its importance and to emphasize the admonition. We can’t really say that we didn’t see it there or we’re not sure what God wants us to do. He repeats it just in case we might use an excuse or try to change the meaning: **“Bless those...bless and do not...”** The word comes from two words “to speak” and “well,” thus, to speak well of a person. Our English word “eulogize” comes directly from the spelling of the Greek word used here. To bless someone is to celebrate and praise them and to then ask that they might enjoy the blessings of God; that He would pour out His goodness, grace and mercy upon them. Now, let’s just admit that it’s much easier to praise someone who pleases us. How in the world can we give praise to someone who is set on persecuting us?

The idea behind **“persecute”** is to press hard after, to pursue with earnestness and diligence. It gets even more complicated when we realize that the verb is in the present imperative which commands an ongoing action. The Greek scholar Kenneth Wuest offers this translation: *“Be constantly blessing those who are constantly persecuting you.”* We can’t just bless our persecutors one time and be done with it. Instead we’re called to do it persistently. We’re to *pray* for those who are *preying* on us. This reminds us of the words of Jesus in

Matthew 5:44: ***But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you***” and

Luke 6:27-28: ***But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.***”

This is radical teaching because we’re told to not just retaliate but we’re told to do something that isn’t very reflexive. Let’s say this verse of Scripture again so it gets into our heads:

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

After Richard Wumbrand was released from prison in Romania for preaching the gospel, he was asked this question many times:

How can you love someone who is torturing you?” His answer is astonishing: “By looking at men...not as they are, but as they will be...I could also see in our persecutors a Saul of Tarsus—a future Apostle Paul. Many officers of the secret police to whom we witnessed became Christians and were happy to later suffer in prison

for having found our Christ. Although we were whipped, as Paul was, in our jailers we saw the potential of the jailer in Philippi who became a convert. We dreamed that soon they would ask, 'What must I do to be saved?'" ("Jesus Freaks," page 87).

2. Don't blast persecutors.

The word "**curse**" doesn't refer to swearing or using profanity but means "to doom, and wish evil upon." The construction in the Greek forbids the continuance of an action already going on. The Christians in Rome were already responding with cursing. We could say it like this: "*Stop cursing.*" (Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament). One commentator points out that to curse denotes a devotion to destruction. We're being warned here against using wicked words towards those who are doing destructive things to us. Both blessings and cursings are pronouncements of the mouth that have to do with the future well-being of the one we're talking about.

We might be prone to proclaim something like this toward a person we dislike: "I wish you would just die." Or when we say, "So and so can just go to ...". Or when we say, "He's a worthless human being..." The word curse means to wish evil upon someone even going so far as to ask God to bring injury, harm or misfortune on the one who has wronged us.

I can sense the push back big time right about now. It doesn't seem fair to seek God's blessings on someone who is out to harm us, does it? Most of us are quick to curse and complain, not just in the face of persecution but also when we are inconvenienced or embarrassed. How in the world can we do something like this when we just want to take their head off? Why wouldn't we retaliate against someone who is out to get us?

That reminds me of what the former Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev once said:

The difference between Communism and Christianity is great. When someone strikes you on the face, you turn the other cheek. If you strike me on the face, I'll hit you so hard your head will fall off."

That's in contrast to what Abraham Lincoln said when he was being criticized for his gracious attitude toward his opponents. "*Why do you try to make friends with them?*" a colleague asked. "*You should destroy them!*" To which the President gently replied, "*Am I not destroying my enemies when I make them my friends?*"

Check this out. We are to bless because we have been blessed and we are to avoid cursing because Jesus became a curse for us. Let's repeat Romans 12:14 again: "***Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.***"

Persecution Will Become More Prevalent

We know from other passages that persecution will become more prevalent the closer we get to Christ's second coming. Some of us have bought into the belief that once we have Jesus in our life, everything will go great. Maybe we've even thought that we should be successful and financially well off. Actually, the Bible says that the exact opposite will happen for those who honor and obey Christ. Listen to Acts 14:22:

We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God."

Jesus never taught the "prosperity gospel," but He did preach the "persecution gospel." We read the final beatitude in Matthew 5:10:

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

One could make a case that there is more and more hostility toward Christians in our culture today. John Stott suggests that we should not be surprised if anti-Christian hostility increases, but rather be surprised if it does not. In John 15:20, Jesus said,

"If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also."

In John 16:33 He adds,

"...In this world you will have trouble..."

The Augsburg Confession defines the church as the community of those "*who are persecuted and martyred for the gospel's sake.*" Speaking of their futures, in Matthew 24:9, Jesus told the disciples that they would face incredible struggles:

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

2 Timothy 3:12 says, ***In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.***"

Philippians 1:29: ***For it has been granted to you on behalf of Christ not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for him.***

Why is persecution so pervasive? Simply put, according to John Piper, it's due to the nature of Christianity and the sinfulness of human beings. There is such a tension between the message and way of life of Christians and the mindset and way of the world, that conflict is inevitable. We will be persecuted because of the life we live and because of the Lord we love. Sadly, we've made the Christian life way too painless. We've gone along and gotten along. Let me ask you a few questions: *What have you done in the last month that has caused anyone to challenge your faith? When have you risked speaking out for Jesus? How have you defended the cause of Christ? Have you identified yourself as a Christ follower?* Maybe you've not said anything against Jesus...you really haven't said anything at all. Perhaps you're not persecuted because people don't see the Savior in your life.

Let's say our Scripture again from Romans 12:14:

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

Making it Personal

Take some time to ask God to bless instead of blast that person you're thinking of right now. Someone has observed that our enemies are not necessarily those who hate us as much as they are people that we hate. Who has wronged you more than others? It's reflexive to want people to hurt as much we hurt. Pray right now for that individual who has hurt you so bad; that parent who has wounded you; that child who has broken your heart; that friend who just turned on you; that coworker who spread lies about you; that bully at school; that ex-wife or ex-husband; that in-law who loathes you. And now think of what you can do to give a verbal blessing to him or her this week.

Some of you are really struggling to do that, aren't you? I like the practical advice that Ray Pritchard gives at this point: "*When faced with someone who has mistreated you, ask God to do for them what you want God to do for you.*" Take a stab at it. The mere practice of blessing instead of blasting will change you. The shift in your spirit may be incremental. Maybe you'll hate that person 10% less and then 30% less and then who knows what God will do in your heart? Instead of seeking retribution ask God to help you be redemptive. Use your words to tenderize your tormentor. Who knows, but maybe God will use you to reach the person that has been persecuting you as they see Jesus Christ in you.

It really comes down to this. Do I really believe that if I follow what the Bible says that God will show up and do what only He can do? It's a matter of obedience, isn't it? Let's say it again from Romans 12:14:

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

Some of you have yet to take a stand for your faith. Could I challenge you to be baptized on Sunday, October 25th if you are a born again believer and you have not yet done so? Baptism is a great way to publicly identify yourself as a follower of Jesus.

As we survey the world, most of us are not experiencing anything close to what Christians in other cultures are going through today. Hebrews 13:3 provides quite a challenge, and even an indictment for us:

Remember those in prison as if you were their fellow prisoners, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.

It's good for us to focus on the plight of the persecuted in other countries for at least two reasons. First, they are requesting us to pray for them. And second, it helps to put our own problems into perspective. Watch this video and then when it's finished we're going to pray for the persecuted. In the first service, Maria will pray in Spanish. In the second service, Kil Sun will pray in Korean.

Video – "Meet the Persecuted"

Prayer Time

We've put an insert in your bulletin today that contains a devotional written by someone who has suffered for their faith. If you want to receive daily e-devotionals like this, simply sign up at www.opendoorsusa.org.

The Union of Communion

The idea of blessing and not blasting our persecutors goes against all of our instincts. But isn't that the point? Love is demonstrated most clearly when it is directed to those who deserve it the least. Jesus provides a pattern for our prayers when he cried out from the cross: "***Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.***"

Think about how Jesus died. Scott Grant puts it like this: "*He absorbed sin instead of spitting it back into circulation. He defeated sin by refusing to pay back evil for evil... He gave us victory over sin, death and Satan... The death of Jesus Christ is more than an example; it is an accomplishment.*"

The word “communion” means “unity or spiritual union.” As we celebrate communion this morning, it’s important for us to ask if we’re in spiritual union with Christ, with each other, and with the church around the world.

First of all, does Jesus occupy first place in my life? Am I in communion with Him? **John Piper** writes:

The path of God-exalting joy will cost you your life. Jesus said, ‘Whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel’s will save it.’ In other words, it is better to lose your life than it is to waste it. This...is not about how to avoid a wounded life but how to avoid a wasted life. Some of you will die in the service of Christ. That will not be a tragedy. Treasuring life above Christ is a tragedy.” (From the preface of [Don't Waste Your Life by John Piper](#))

Many years ago **G. K. Chesterton** sent a letter to the editor of a newspaper in response to the question, “*What is wrong with the world today?*” Here was his answer: “*Dear sir, I am.*” Your real enemy is not the person who annoys you or who seeks to annihilate you. The real enemy in your life is you. The real enemy in my life is me. It was Pogo who said, “*We have met the enemy and he is us.*”

Take some time right now to confess any sins that God brings to mind.

Secondly, before we take communion, it’s important to consider whether or not we are out of sync with a sister or brother in Christ. Are you in union with everyone? If not, do what it takes to make things right by doing all that is possible to live in peace (we’ll talk more about this next week). Make a bridge to that person. Don’t wait for him or her to come to you.

Thirdly, communion has a global element to it. It blows me away to consider that God’s work is going on all over the world. Are you a global Christian or are you guilty like me of thinking only of our little world here? Did you know that more Christians have died for their faith in the last 100 years than in the previous 19 centuries combined? I’d like to recommend another website that will help you grow toward becoming a global believer: www.persecution.com.

I can’t wait for our Missions Festival that begins two weeks from today. We have invited three of our missionaries to come and share stories about what God is doing around the world. Let me remind you that we are changing our regular Sunday morning schedule. Instead of two services, we are inviting everyone to come to the auditorium at 10:00 a.m. on October 18th for a brief opening time. And then, as we did last year, we will be divided into three groups and we’ll move around the facility to hear from our three couples. We’re following the principle set forth by the Apostle Paul in Acts 21:19-20: “***Paul greeted them and reported in detail what God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard this, they praised God.***” Do you see the order? He reported and then the people rejoiced. That’s exactly what we’re going to do. Our missionaries will report what God is doing and we’ll rejoice in praise.

I’m going to read 1 Corinthians 11:28-29 as we prepare ourselves for communion: “***A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself.***”

Let’s take a couple minutes for some self-examination. Ask yourself these three questions:

1. **Am I in communion with Christ?**
2. **Am I in communion with everyone in this room?**
3. **Am I in communion with Christians around the world?**

Romans 12:15-21 Loving Those You’d Rather Hate - 10/11/09

During one of our wars a military unit hired a local boy to cook and clean for them. Being a bunch of jokesters, they quickly took advantage of the boy’s seeming naiveté. They smeared Vaseline on the stove handles so it would get all over his hands. They put buckets of water over the door so he’d get soaked when he opened it. They even nailed his shoes to the floor during the night. Day after day the young boy took the brunt of their practical jokes without saying anything. Finally the men felt guilty about what they were doing, so they met with him and said, “*Look, we know these pranks aren’t funny for you, and we’re sorry. We’re never going to take advantage of you again.*”

The boy smiled and then asked, “*No more sticky on stove?*” The guys responded, “*Nope.*” “*No more water on door?*” They answered, “*No more water on door.*” “*No more nail shoes to floor?*” “*Nope, we’ll stop that, too.*” “*Okay*” the boy said with a wide grin, “*No more spit in soup.*”

Instead of choosing revenge or retaliation when we've been wronged, we're going to learn how to love those we'd rather hate. Last week our focus was on just one verse – Romans 12:14. Let's see how many of us can quote it from memory: ***“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”*** While this verse deals with our attitudes and our talk, the section of Scripture we'll be studying this morning covers our actions and our walk. If there was some pushback last week, my guess is that you'll have some major blowback today because Romans 12:15-21 contains some radical and revolutionary teaching about our relationships. That reminds me of what someone has said, *“The more I get to know the human race, the more I love my dog.”* Or, as one of my pastor friends likes to say, *“Ministry would be wonderful, if it weren't for the people.”*

Most of us need some help when it comes to our relationships, don't we? Please open your Bibles to Romans 12 as we begin in verse 15 and continue on to the end of the chapter. I see 8 remedies that if followed, will mend our relational ruptures.

8 Relational Remedies

1. Empathize with the emotions of others.

We see this in Ro 12:15:

Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

This is a statement of incarnational relationship where we are invited to share both the blessings and the burdens of others. The word, ***“mourn”*** means, *“to shed tears and lament loudly.”* Literally it reads this way: *“Rejoice with the rejoicing ones, weep with the weeping ones.”* Let me ask you a question. Which is more difficult to do, to rejoice with those who rejoice, or to weep with those who weep? I think most of us struggle more with entering into the joy of someone who has received a certain blessing that we have not received. If someone here inherited a million dollars, could you really say, *“I'm so happy for you!”* The story is told of two writers who were very jealous of each other and their animosity was apparent to everyone. One of the writers eventually wrote a book that was very popular and became an immediate bestseller. When the two met at a party, the other man said, *“I bought your book the other day. It's a good read. Who wrote it for you?”* Shaken a bit by this, the first man nevertheless thanked him for the compliment and then asked, *“Who read it to you?”*

We should also admit that sometimes when someone is hurting, inside we're secretly thinking that maybe they deserve it. Proverbs 17:5:

He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.”

In order to rejoice in someone else's joy, we need to get rid of all jealousy and to mourn with those who mourn, we must jettison a judgmental spirit. Instead of being indifferent to the emotions of others, we're called to be empathetic. 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 pulls both of these responses together:

So that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it.”

Someone has said that a sorrow shared is but half a trouble and a joy that's shared is joy made double. Oh, to have the compassion of Paul when he asks in 2 Corinthians 11:29:

Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?”

Fellowship is more than coffee and a cookie; it means sharing burdens and blessings.

In a world that couldn't care less, we should care more. A story is told about a little boy with a big heart. His next-door-neighbor was an older gentleman whose wife had suddenly died. When the young boy saw the man cry, he went into the man's yard, climbed up on his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he had said to the neighbor, the little boy said, *“Nothing. I just helped him cry.”* That's what Job's friends did at the beginning when they sat with him in silence for seven days (see Job 2:11-13). Unfortunately, they couldn't keep quiet and ended up just making things worse for him (For some pointers on how to help those who are suffering, see [Article At Bottom of Page](#)).

I'm convicted by the words of a commentator:

To refuse to rejoice with another reveals envy in your own heart. To refuse to weep with another is to reveal a lack of compassion in your heart. Either way, you have a serious problem.

Is there anyone you can help cry? Anyone you need to rejoice with?

2. Seek harmony through humility.

The only way to enter into the emotions of others is to be humble. Check out Ro 12:16:

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

The Greek for “harmony” literally reads, “*Think the same things toward each other.*” Acts 4:32 tells us that all the believers were “***one in heart and mind.***”

In 1 Corinthians 1:10 Paul makes this plea:

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought.

And later in the Book of Romans, Paul says this in Ro 15:5:

May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus.

If you're haughty, it's going to be really hard for anyone to live in harmony with you. The phrase, “***willing to associate***” means to be led along or carried away with something or by someone. The idea is that we should allow ourselves to be swept into the suffering of others. One commentary suggests this idea: “*Let the lowly take you by the hand.*” Those in “***low position***” describes those who have been “*flattened.*” Look around. There are people in this room who have been pummeled with problems and there are many in our communities that have been flattened by life. We're not just to see them; we're to be humble enough to hang out with them because there is no caste system in Christianity! We're going to be exposed to some of these needs at our Missions Festival next week and at the Orphan Awareness Event that will be held at PTHS on Sunday, November 15th at 2:00 p.m.

We're cautioned against being “***conceited***” because there's no place for conceit in Christianity. The tense of this reads, “*Do not have the habit of being haughty.*” Has it been awhile since you've gotten off your high horse? Are you living in harmony with those around you?

I have something on my mind that may have contributed to a breakdown in our harmony here. I'd like to ask your forgiveness for the “communion confusion” last Sunday. I don't want to be a pastor who is too prideful to admit mistakes. I take full responsibility for how we passed out the elements and the resulting confusion that it caused. I'm saddened by the fact that my inattention to detail may have caused many of you to lose your focus during this special time. I'm grateful to our elders for bringing this up to me and want you to know that with God's help, it won't happen again.

3. Resist repaying a wrong.

The first part of verse 17 is a warning against what comes naturally to most of us: “***Do not repay anyone evil for evil.***” The idea here is that we're not to pay back a wrong that's been done to us. That reminds me of the story about Jack and his little sister. Jack's mother ran into his bedroom when she heard him screaming and found his two-year-old sister pulling his hair. She gently released the little girl's grip as she comforted Jack by saying, “*There, there. She didn't mean it. She doesn't know that hurts.*” Mom was barely out of the room when the little girl started screaming. Rushing back into the bedroom she asked Jack what happened. “*She knows now,*” Jack explained.

Is there someone you'd like to pay back today? Do you want someone to hurt like you hurt? Here's the deal: *Don't retaliate when you've been wronged.*

1 Peter 3:9: “***Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called.***”

1 Thessalonians 5:15 adds, “***Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else.***”

Bruce Goettsche offers some reasons why we should resist repaying a wrong [Doing What Right in the Eyes of Everyone: Ro 12:17-18](#).

- **It causes conflict to escalate.** Proverbs 30:33: “***For as churning the milk produces butter, and as twisting the nose produces blood, so stirring up anger produces strife.***”
- **Retaliation is usually excessive.** When we do pay back, it's often with interest!
- **Retaliation always ruins our witness.**

Friends, you can't always stop people from hating you, but you don't have to hate them back. You can't always make people love you, but you can always love them back. I've been reading the book "Love Dare" that was written in response to the movie "Fireproof." I was really challenged by the reading on Day 25 called, "Love Forgives" and I'd like read part of it to you (pages 122-123):

Imagine you find yourself in a prison-like setting. As you look around, you see a number of cells visible from where you're standing. You see people from your past incarcerated there – people who wounded you as a child. You see people you once called friends but who wronged you at some point in life. You might see one or both of your parents there, perhaps a brother or a sister or some other family member. Even your spouse is locked in nearby, trapped with all the others in this jail of your own making.

This prison, you see, is a room in your own heart. This dark, drafty, depressing chamber exists inside you every day. But not far away, Jesus is standing there, extending to you a key that will release every inmate. No. You don't want any part of it. These people have hurt you too badly. They knew what they were doing and yet they did it anyway...so you resist and turn away. You're unwilling to stay in here any longer – seeing Jesus, seeing the key in his hand, knowing what He's asking you to do. It's just too much. But in trying to escape, you make a startling discovery. There is no way out. You're trapped inside with all the other captives. Your unforgiveness, anger and bitterness have made a prisoner of you as well. Like the servant in Jesus' story, who was forgiven an impossible debt, you have chosen not to forgive and have been handed over to the jailers and torturers. Your freedom is now dependent on your forgiveness.

Coming to this conclusion usually takes a while. We see all kinds of dangers and risks involved in forgiving others. For instance, what they did was really wrong, whether they admit it or not. They may not even be sorry about it...but forgiveness doesn't absolve anyone of blame. It doesn't clear their record with God. It just clears you of having to worry about how to punish them. When you forgive another person, you're not turning them loose. You're just turning them over to God, who can be counted on to deal with them His way...That's why you often hear people who have genuinely forgiven say, 'It felt like a weight being lifted off my shoulders.' Yes, that's exactly what it is. It's like a breath of fresh air rushing into your heart. The stale darkness of the prison house is flooded with light and coolness. For the first time in a long time, you feel at peace. You feel free. But how do you do it? You release your anger and the responsibility for judging the person to the Lord."

Proverbs 20:22: ***"Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you."***

C. S. Lewis hit it on the head when he said,

Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea, until they have something to forgive

For you Country Music Fans, Garth Brooks has a song with these lyrics:

We bury the hatchet but leave the handle stickin' out; we're always diggin' up things we should forget about.

It's been said that true forgiveness is hard to extend because it demands that we let go of something we value – the right to repay.

1 Corinthians 13:5 says that ***"love keeps no record of wrongs."*** Who do you need to let go of right now?

4. Realize that it's always right to do what's right.

This is stated in the last part of verse 17: ***"Be careful to do what's right in the eyes of everybody."*** It's easy to misunderstand this statement. It's not our job to make everyone happy but to instead live holy lives by consistently doing what's right. Note that we're to be ***"careful"*** to do this, which means that we're to "take thought beforehand" how we're going to respond in certain situations. Too many of us live haphazard and shoot from the hip when God wants us to be prepared to walk in His ways. The word ***"right"*** here means, *"beautiful or precious."* When we ponder how to do that which is precious to God, people will notice and give Him glory. Here's the principle: *Live in such a way that no one can make an honest accusation against you. Live so that if they are going to accuse you, they have to tell a lie to do it.* (Ray Pritchard, www.keepbelieving.com).

The Apostle Paul wanted people to know that he handled offerings with integrity when he writes in 2 Corinthians 8:20-21:

We want to avoid any criticism of the way we administer this liberal gift. For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of men."

We take this seriously here at PBC as every dollar that is given is accounted for and is used to connect people to Jesus and equip them to be growing and faithful followers both here and around the world through our missionaries. You may have noticed that our offerings have been down the last couple months. The elders and deacons are closely monitoring our situation as we continue to

trust that God will meet our needs.

Are you rehearsing the right thing to do before you even get into a situation? Do you have a premeditated plan in place or are you just going to wing it? How can you prepare yourself today for what you'll face tomorrow?

5. Be at peace if possible.

Ro 12:18 challenges us to be peacemakers:

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

This verse is so realistic because sometimes making peace is unattainable. The key is to do everything you can do to be at peace with everyone. Notice the phrase, ***“If it is possible”*** and then the next one: ***“as far as it depends on you.”*** This literally means, ***“As far as what proceeds from you.”*** Here are some questions to ponder when it comes to peacemaking.

- **Have you accepted your part in the breakdown of peace?**
- **Are you willing to make right the wrongs that you may have done?**
- **Have you forgiven any wrong that has been done to you?**
- **Are you doing your part to be at peace?**

If the other person refuses to be reconciled there is not much more you can do. I'll never forget the advice someone gave me in this regard: ***“My response is my responsibility and the only person I can change is me.”*** We will not answer for the other individual but we will answer for ourselves.

Rabbi David Nelson likes to tell the story of two brothers who went to their rabbi to settle a longstanding feud. The rabbi got the two to reconcile their differences and shake hands. As they were about to leave, he asked each one to make a wish for the New Year. The first brother turned to the other and said, ***“I wish what you wish for me.”*** At that, the second brother threw up his hands and said, ***“See, rabbi, he's starting up again!”***

I love the closing words of Paul in 2 Corinthians 13:11:

Finally, brothers, good-by. Aim for perfection, listen to my appeal, be of one mind, live in peace. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

As you think of that person that you're in conflict with, have you made every effort to be at peace? Remember the saying, ***“It takes two to tango?”*** We could rephrase this to say, ***“It takes two to tangle.”***

6. Relinquish revenge to God.

When we're hurt we often want to hurt the one who has hurt us but verse 19 calls us to live differently:

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.

God has called us to be peacemakers, not prosecutors. Unfortunately, many of us want to exact justice on those who have wronged us. Revenge goes beyond just getting even; revenge is excessive retribution. Paul quotes Deuteronomy 32:35 which is a reference to the truth that one day God will balance the books. The full verse is not quoted here so let me complete it: ***“...In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them.”***

The wrath of God is not a popular doctrine today but it nevertheless is true. The word itself refers to that which is ***“swelling and ready to burst.”*** Listen to Nahum 1:2:

The Lord is a jealous and avenging God; the Lord takes vengeance and is filled with wrath. The Lord takes vengeance on his foes and maintains his wrath against his enemies.

This underscores the importance of leaving room for the wrath of God. We're to give our anger and desire to retaliate over to God and then back off. When we act in judgment toward others we are usurping God's rightful role because God says, ***“It is mine to avenge.”*** Let's face it – this is hard for many of us. We want justice and we want it right now. Once again, Bruce Goettsche is spot on.

- **God alone can judge fairly.** We don't know all the variables and we can't measure anyone else's heart. God maintains the moral order, not us.

- **No one is going to get away with anything.** God will make sure that justice will be done, in His way and in His time.
- **The God of judgment is also the God of mercy.** Aren't you glad God is gracious and merciful toward you? Think about this. The person you are angry with right now may repent and seek reconciliation. Just as God has extended mercy to us, so He may also extend it to others. Frankly, we're more like Jonah than Jesus because we get angry when our enemies seem to be spared. When God had compassion on the wicked Ninevites, Jonah was upset. Check out Jonah 4:1: ***"But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry."*** Some of us don't want our enemies to be redeemed; we want to retaliate.

This is illustrated well in the story of David when King Saul was seeking to destroy him. David is being hounded and hunted down like an animal, through no fault of his own. David tried to stay out of Saul's way but was persistently persecuted. On two different occasions, David had the perfect opportunity to exact revenge on his enemy, but instead he chose to honor and respect Saul. He believed that since God had put King Saul in power it would be God who would remove him from power. Listen to what David declares in 1 Samuel 24:6: ***"The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord."*** When Saul realized that David had spared him, he was initially very moved by this act of mercy. Here's what he said in 1Sa 24:19: ***"When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the Lord reward you for the way you treated me today."*** By the way, God did take care of Saul when he was later filleted by the Philistines.

Instead of seeking revenge we're to look for ways to point those who persecute us to reconciliation. A man went into the preaching ministry and resigned after seven years, concluding that people don't want spiritual health, they just want to feel good. So he went back to school to become a doctor. After working as a physician for seven years he quit and went back to school again to become an attorney, concluding that, *"People don't want spiritual health. They don't even want physical health. They just want to get even."* Proverbs 25:8 points out that our impatience for justice can backfire on us:

What you have seen with your eyes do not bring hastily to court, for what will you do in the end if your neighbor puts you to shame?"

Vengeance is God's job, not yours.

Go back to verse 19 again. I want you to see the phrase, ***"my friends."*** This comes from a form of *agape*, which means love. Paul is so tender here because he knows this is really tough to do. Let me pick up on that and ask you some questions. *Dear favorite friends, will you move away from revenge right now? Beloved, will you let it go and let God handle your hurts? Are you ready to stop playing God?* It's time to love them and then leave them in the hand of God.

7. Do good to those who do you wrong.

Christ-followers are called to a counter-cultural and contrary response to people who wrong us in Ro 12:20:

On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'

I was on the receiving end of this when I was in college. No matter what I would do to get rid of my college roommate, he just kept responding with kindness. I'd fill up the refrigerator with beer so he couldn't get his milk in it and he would ask if I wanted to play Frisbee. I'd ask my buddies to smoke in our room because I knew Bruce hated it and he would ask what I wanted on my pizza. No matter how mean I was to Bruce he always responded with kindness and love. And that made me mad. But it also led me to Christ. I celebrated my 30th spiritual birthday this past Saturday. Two Saturdays ago I saw Bruce in person and thanked him again for his kindness that led me to Christ.

Exodus 23:4-5 underscores the importance of helping someone you may consider to be an enemy:

If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to take it back to him. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help him with it."

Christianity goes beyond non-resistance to active benevolence. William MacDonald says, *"It does not destroy its enemies by violence but converts them by love."*

A great biblical example of this came during the time of Elisha in 2 Kings 6:22-23. King Aram and his army decide to eliminate Elisha. When Elisha has an opportunity to wipe all of them out, he instead fixes them a banquet and then sends them home. It would be like us gathering members of the Taliban or al Qaeda together for a meal in the Family Life Center:

Do not kill them,' he answered. 'Would you kill men you have captured with your own sword or bow? Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master.' So

he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master. So the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory.

Kindness doesn't always mean that the person who has offended you will change. However, those watching you may be changed. Your children may see Christ more clearly. And beyond a doubt, you will change as your bitterness and resentment are lifted.

Let me say a couple things about what ***"heaping burning coals on his head"*** means. First of all, this is a quote from Proverbs 25:21-22. There's a difference of opinion among Bible scholars about the exact meaning. Here are three different ideas...

- Some think that this idea is borrowed from an Egyptian custom where people would heap coals on the top of their heads as a sign of repentance.
- Others point to the practice of people carrying coals on the top of their heads so they would always have enough briquettes for their Weber Grills -- or something like that. In that case, to heap coals on their heads would be a good thing because it would keep the fires burning.
- Most believe that this symbolically represents something extremely painful that would lead the individual to remorse and repentance. That's the idea behind Psalm 140:10: ***"Let burning coals fall upon them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise."***

I'm not sure which one is correct but in each case, the act of kindness brings about a burning shame that melts a rebellious heart. The idea is to respond so generously with this conspiracy of kindness that your enemy will be ashamed of their actions.

8. Overcome evil by going with the good.

Ro 12:21 is really a summary of the whole chapter:

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

The tense of this verse makes it read like this: *"Stop being overcome by evil..."* Sometimes Christians are so angry because we've made those who believe differently than we do our enemies. We forget that our aim is not to defeat those we disagree with but to win them to the gospel. The cause of Christ is not advanced by doing evil. Bombing abortion clinics is wrong. Being filled with hatred toward homosexuals is wrong. Being constantly angry and vengeful toward those in another political party is not right.

Here's something to think about. As long as you try to get even, you're still living in the past. It may have happened years ago, but you're still stewing about it. Listen. When you try to get even, evil destroys you because the other person keeps on winning. He or she still controls your life as long as you want revenge. The only way to get free of your past is to let it go once and for all. If you think about it, your enemy wins twice -- once when he or she hurt you, and twice because you're still thinking about how to get even. No wonder he or she is smiling. And you're not.

Friends, the best way to overcome evil is to do so with good. This is not easy, is it? Notice the word ***"but"*** in the verse. This is yet another way Christians are to live in contrast to those around them. The word ***"overcome"*** means to conquer or carry off to victory. Let me suggest just one example from Proverbs 15:1. When someone is angry at you, the best response is not to retaliate but instead to respond softly:

A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

I like what Martin Luther King, Jr. often said: *"I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear."*

One commentator captured it well when he said, *"We are the disciples of Him, who died for His enemies."* Friends, remember that none of us would be Christians if Christ had not loved his enemies and overcome our evil with His great good -- His death and resurrection. Jesus is our example and our motivation. How do I show real love to the one I love to hate? I do it by looking to Jesus who showed real love to me.

Let's summarize these eight Relational Remedies:

- **Empathize with the emotions of others**
- **Seek harmony through humility**
- **Resist repaying a wrong**
- **Realize that it's always right to do what's right**
- **Be at peace if possible**

- Relinquish revenge to God
- Do good to those who do you wrong
- Overcome evil by doing good

Action Steps

Do you know how God helps us grow in this area? *By putting us in situations that force us to practice Christian love.* Let me suggest some action steps for you to consider.

1. **You need to make a choice today.** Either you will be overcome by evil OR you will overcome evil with good. What's it going to be? Choose right now.
2. **Make an attitude adjustment.** These two questions will help you do that. Do you want your enemy to repent and know God's kindness and forgiveness? Or, do you want them to roast slowly over a spit in hell?
3. **Take a step this week to do something kind toward the person you're struggling with.** It could be a kind word, a phone call, an email, a note on Facebook, a flower, a meal, small gift, a Snickers Blizzard (that's what I want – actually, don't get me that because if you do I'll know you're mad at me). Your only limit is your own creativity.

I came across a story about a young man who was in the army. He was a Christian and had formed the habit of praying beside his bed before he went to sleep. He kept up this practice every night, but he became an object of mockery and ridicule to the entire barracks. One night he knelt to pray after a long, weary march. As he was praying, one of his tormentors took off his muddy boots and threw them at the soldier one at a time, hitting him on each side of his head. The Christian said nothing about it, and just took the boots and put them beside the bed and continued to pray. But the next morning, when the other man woke up, he found his boots sitting beside his bed, all shined and polished. It so broke his heart that he came to that soldier and asked him for forgiveness. That led, after a time, to that man becoming a Christian.

Romans 13:1-2 God, Government and You - 1/3/10

After an exceptionally long and boring sermon, the congregation filed out of the church not saying a word to the pastor. After a while a man came up to him and said, *"Pastor, that sermon reminded me of the peace and love of God!"* The pastor was pretty happy about that because no one had ever said anything like that before. Fishing for some more compliments, the pastor asked him how his sermon reminded him of the peace and love of God. *"Well,"* said the parishioner, *"it reminded me of the peace of God because it passed all human understanding and it reminded me of the love of God because it endured forever!"*

I was going to make a resolution to preach shorter messages but I knew I'd break it today. I will do my best however, to make the sermons understandable and applicable.

How many of you are 'rule-keepers'? When you see a rule do you try to do everything possible to not break it?

How many of you are 'rule-breakers'? When you're faced with a rule, do you find yourself wanting to inwardly disregard it or outwardly disobey it? I was accused of this on Friday night by my family when we were playing a card game. They claim I was cheating.

Now for all you 'rule-keepers,' before you start feeling smug about all the rules you keep, don't most of us pick and choose which ones we're going to follow? Driving 55, well that's just too slow. The speed limit should be 65 or if you're Pastor Dick driving to Biloxi, it should be 85. We tend to evaluate rules according to what we think should be right.

On their December 30th show, Nightline dedicated the whole half-hour to the topic: *"2009: The Year of Behaving Badly."* Dubbed the "Red Carpet of Rogues and Wrong-doing," they invited people to vote for the worst of the worst in several categories – celebrities, politicians, and financiers. Our own ex-governor not only won in the politician department, he was voted the biggest bad guy of them all.

Andy Stanley makes the point that most individuals chafe under authority. Somewhere along the way in our culture we've learned to quickly evaluate what we're expected to do and then we decide whether or not we want to do it. Whether it's parents or a boss or a teacher or a coach or government or God, if I disagree with the 'what' then I can disregard what it is I'm being told to do. Stanley writes: *"And I don't feel guilty. I don't go to bed at night and confess it as sin...because I've evaluated it and decided that it's just a stupid rule."*

As we begin 2010, I want to propose that Scripture presents a far different paradigm. If you not only want a new year but more importantly, a new you, then remember this: *It's not about 'what,' it's all about 'who.'*

As we come to chapter 13 in our continuing series in the Book of Romans, I'm guessing that in our politically-charged culture, there is going to be some pretty major push back this morning as we tackle this topic: *"God, Government and You."* While many would say that God and government don't mix very well, I want us to see that government can only be understood to the degree to which we understand God. And actually, according to what Jesus said in Matthew 22:21, we owe an allegiance to both God *and* to government: ***"Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's."***

In an effort to be as understandable as possible, I want to make some preliminary comments.

1. Our topic for today is what comes next in our verse-by-verse study of Romans.

I'm not sure I would have picked "What God Says about Government" if it weren't for our expositional approach to preaching. That's one of the clear advantages to studying a book of the Bible – we're forced to tackle topics that we might otherwise avoid because they make us uncomfortable. One person told me this week that after seeing the sermon title, she thought about not coming because she hates government and politicians. My guess is that she's not alone.

2. My intention is not to lift up one political party or denigrate another.

If you're looking for a political gun fight, you can put your weapons back in your holsters. I recognize that this topic can be emotionally explosive and so I want to make an appeal for us to be open to what the Bible has to say.

3. I'm no political expert.

I did major in political science in college (one of the many majors I experimented with) but since most of my classes were taught by Madison Marxists, I quickly lost interest. On top of that, my grades were in the gutter (that's the real reason). While I do follow politics with great interest, my understanding is pretty basic. Having said that, as a Christ-follower, there are moral issues that I unashamedly speak out on – two that come to mind are the sanctity of human life, including the protection of the preborn and the preservation of marriage as one man and one woman in a life-long covenant commitment.

4. Personal conversion through Christ, not political conviction, leads to lasting change.

The church's primary task is evangelism and discipleship. That's why our mission at PBC is to connect people to Jesus and equip them to be growing and faithful followers. While we're prone to divide people according to political affiliation, the Bible classifies people according to whether they are believers or unbelievers. Friends, our task is to win people to Jesus, not to prove that our political views are right. We often get so worked up that we forget our role is to be winsome witnesses. Evangelism is God's primary way to deal with the world's problems. Here's a thought. What do you think goes through a non-Christian's mind when he or she hears us verbally assassinating a politician that he or she might support? What kind of opportunity will we have to evangelize after this? Some of us would benefit greatly by watching news channels less and reading Scripture more.

I love the title of one of Irwin Lutzer's books: ***"Why the Cross Can Do What Politics Can't."*** ([Review at Bible.org](#)) He argues that the problems of America are too far gone to be remedied by a change of administrations in Washington and that our so-called cultural war is really a spiritual battle. God's power is more clearly seen in the message of the cross than in any political or social plan that we might devise.

5. Believers have a dual citizenship.

As Americans, we do have rights and privileges afforded us, and we should take advantage of them by voting and being involved in the democratic process. But as believers, we are first and foremost citizens of heaven as Philippians 3:20 says: ***"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ."*** No politician, political party, or president will provide salvation for us.

6. Keep politics in perspective.

When we see governing authorities doing things that we don't understand, or people getting elected that we don't agree with, remember this promised prophecy from Isaiah 9:6-7:

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end."

Wouldn't it be great if more of us could quote the King of Kings and less of what we hear a political pundit say? Here's a

fundamental proposition: *Jesus Christ must be Lord of our political views and the attitudes in which we share them with others.* Incidentally, as we get closer to the return of Christ, things will get worse and the chasm between believers and unbelievers will become more pronounced. It's time for us to get totally serious about our faith because it will become increasingly difficult to live as Christ-followers in the days to come.

7. God has established three primary realms in which he works: the family (Genesis 2:18-25), the church (Acts 2) and government (Genesis 9:1-7).

Each one of these institutions originates with God and is accountable to Him.

- **God works out His plan through the family.** The family is foundational because the state and the church cannot exist without it. Children and teenagers, your parents are God's delegated authority in your home, and it is your duty to submit to them. As we've been praying about how PBC can do a better job of equipping parents to be the primary spiritual influencers of their children, a phrase keeps rolling through my mind. Let me try it out to see if it resonates: *Saving families, one home at a time.*
- **God works out His plan through the church.** I've been struck again by what Bill Hybels says: *"There's nothing like the local church when the local church is working right."* I love what God did through each of you these past weeks as you sent boxes to children through Operation Christmas Child; you gave over \$4,000 to provide food for about 300 families in our county; you gave over \$7,000 for the unemployed in our congregation and the year-end giving to our General Fund was incredible! On top of all that, 223 of you signed up to pray for our Christmas Outreach and our Christmas Eve service. If you'd like to learn more about God's plan for the church, Jeremy Leacock, who preached last week and did a great job, is starting a new class next Sunday at 9:00 a.m.
- **God works out His plan through government.** While we know about what God says about the family and the church, in general, we know less about what God thinks about government.

8. This sermon will not answer all your questions. My guess is that this message will leave you a bit mixed up, perhaps confused about how to apply everything, and maybe even upset with me. That's OK. My aim is to do my best to communicate what God says in His Word, whether or not it is politically popular with the "left" or the "right." I don't want to say anything more than what the Bible says, but I also don't want to say any less than what the Scripture teaches. Having said that, I'll probably end up saying something that is more opinion or preference, but that's not my intention. My approach will be theological and not filled with prepackaged answers for every situation. My goal is to lay down some tracks for you to run on so that we will think biblically about the subject of civil government.

I initially decided to preach on the first seven verses of Romans 13 but because this topic raises so many issues, I then decided to preach on the first two, but after studying this passage some more I realized that we must first lay the foundation, and so we're going to focus just on verse 1 today. As we will see, *It's not about 'what,' it's all about 'who.'*

Putting the Text in Context

After establishing doctrine in chapters 1-8, discussing the future of Israel in chapters 9-11, the Apostle Paul turns the corner in the remainder of the book by focusing on how our faith should be lived out. According to Romans 12:1-2, we must live surrendered lives of worship to Christ, submitting to Him as He renews our minds in order to think and live differently than the ways of the world. As members of the body of Christ Romans 12:18 tells us that we are to live at peace with everyone, as far as it depends on us. In chapter 13, Paul reflects on how we're to respond and relate to civic government.

This letter was written to believers in Rome. Shortly before this, many Jewish people had resisted Roman imperialism and caused such an uproar that they were ordered to leave the city and now they had been allowed back. To the Roman government, Christianity was regarded as a Jewish sect. Because of that, some commentators suggest that Paul wanted Christians to model civil obedience to distinguish themselves from those who were rebellious and intent on overthrowing the government. Nero was the emperor at the time of the writing and a few years after this book was written he burned Christians at the stake and fed them to the lions.

Before we jump in, remember that the Apostle Paul carried on his back the scars from floggings he received from various government officials. He was stoned by a mob while government officials turned their back on him. He knew all about the bribery and corruption that was rampant, he witnessed fellow Christians martyred and he knew well how pagan the authorities were from top down. We've largely forgotten how wicked ancient Rome really was. Abortion flourished, sorcery and black magic abounded, homosexuality was accepted as normal and masses of people worshipped Caesar as Lord.

And with that, let's look at Romans 13:1. Notice right off the bat that this passage is for all of us: **"Everyone..."** This could also

read, *“Let every soul.”* The very next word tells us that what God is about to say is not a suggestion: **“Everyone must...”** The third and fourth words are where some of us will really get hung up: **“Everyone must submit himself...”** Let’s face it. We’re not sweet on submission, are we? Let’s take a time out. Does God really expect us to do that? Can’t we just evaluate that expectation and conclude that submission is a thing of the past?

That leads us to the first point from this passage and it answers the ‘what’ question. What is it that we’re supposed to do?

1. Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.

Let’s unpack the word **“submit”** because it’s also found in verse 5: **“Therefore it is necessary to submit to the authorities.”** This is an explicit directive – no ifs, ands, or buts. There is no exclusion because Nero wasn’t nice. Submission is a military term that means, *“To rank under, to take one’s proper place under those who are in authority, to be in subjection.”* It’s the idea of curbing one’s will to the will of another. A technical definition is helpful: *“The willing, intelligent submission to the authorities, out of humility, because one is conscious of God’s appointing and working through them.”* Ray Pritchard offers the best definition that I’ve heard: *“Submission means believing that God is able to accomplish His will in my life through those He has placed over me.”*

The key in all this is our attitude toward authority. Many of us have an emotional allergy against submission. This is not a stand-alone passage of Scripture. Let’s turn to some other passages so that we’re not guilty of “proof-texting” from just one verse.

- In 1 Samuel 24:6, after David had an opportunity to eliminate King Saul, we read these words: **“The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord’s anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.”**
- Titus 3:1-2: **“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.”**
- 1 Peter 2:13-17: **“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.”**

That last phrase sums it all up for me: **“Fear God”** and **“honor the king.”** That’s the proper order: God, then government. We submit **“for the Lord’s sake.”** Why? Because it’s not about ‘what’; it’s all about ‘who.’

I know most of you think I only reference one football team but today I want to draw out an illustration of submission from the Indianapolis Colts. On Christmas Day, Randy Kindred wrote an article in the Pantagraph called, “Coachable and Unified, Colts a Gift to Us All.” He starts out by talking about the selfishness and unrestrained egos in professional sports. In contrast, when the Colts were undefeated with a 14-0 record, some key players discussed their attitude about playing the last two games of the season in order to have a chance to go undefeated – or to rest so that the team would be fresh for the playoffs. For some players, sitting out could mean missing out on awards or statistics-based incentive clauses. Surprisingly, Colts players said they will follow Coach Caldwell and do whatever he says. Quarterback Peyton Manning put it simply: *“It’s not really set up that way, to lobby one way or the other. We’ve followed his (Caldwell’s) orders all year, and I think that’s a good plan. Whatever decision he makes, I think will be the right one.”* Randy Kindred concludes this way: *“Call it class, unity, loyalty...above all, respect.”*

Let me point out that the word **“authorities”** or **“authority”** occurs seven times in the first six verses and literally means *“to be above.”* Friends, for the sake of the Savior and His mission of saving the lost, it’s important for us to practice good citizenship through submission to the authorities.

Point number one is the ‘what’: *everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.* And the best way to do the ‘what’ is to focus on the ‘who’ because *it’s not about ‘what,’ it’s all about ‘who.’* That leads us to the second half of verse one:

For there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

2. All authority is established by God.

Let’s be honest. Many of us don’t like this verse. That’s why it’s so important to focus on the *who*. God Himself establishes governing authorities. This Scripture would be easier to swallow if it were talking about religious authority in the church or even authority in the home. But God says that He establishes *all* authorities, including the government. Verse 1 uses the word **“established”** twice and verse 2 says that God has **“instituted.”** People in government and in all authority serve by God’s ordained permission.

Here's the deal. God always works through human authorities, whether they are good or bad. Andy Stanley helped me to see that my attitude and response to human authorities is a reflection of my attitude and response to my Father in heaven because God has established those authorities. That means that since God established those over me then it's kind of scary when I disobey my parents or blow off my boss or not pay the taxes I owe. By rebelling against those over me it's like I'm rebelling against God. That means that what I do at work is a spiritual issue and how I honor and obey my parents is a spiritual issue and how I prepare my tax return is to be an act of worship.

Remember this. It's not about the 'what' it's about 'who's' giving the command. Friends, let me share this truth with you. Without a big view of God, it will be impossible to submit to the authorities, especially if you think they are evil or you disagree with them in some way. And, if you don't submit to authority when you're young (teenagers, listen), you will end up going down a bad path when you're older.

To help us expand our view of the Almighty and to see His absolute sovereignty behind human authority, let's ponder some passages of Scripture

- God allowed Rehoboam, a bad king, to rule in 1 Kings 12:15: ***“So the king did not listen to the people, for this turn of events was from the Lord...”***
- Proverbs 21:1: ***“The king’s heart is in the hand of the Lord; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases.”***
- Isaiah 45:1 says that God used King Cyrus to accomplish His purposes: ***“This is what the Lord says to his anointed, to Cyrus, whose right hand I take hold of to subdue nations before him and to strip kings of their armor, to open doors before him so that gates will not be shut.”***
- Daniel 2:21: ***“He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them.”***
- In Daniel 4:32, after King Nebuchadnezzar boasted about building Babylon, the Almighty answers: ***“You will be driven away from people and will live with the wild animals; you will eat grass like cattle. Seven times will pass by for you until you acknowledge that the Most High is sovereign over the kingdoms of men and gives them to anyone he wishes.”*** Then, after Nebuchadnezzar repents, he says these words that show us that he now knows God to be big and mighty and in control in verse 35: ***“He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: ‘What have you done?’”***
- In John 19:11, Jesus puts Pilate in his proper place. After Pilate bragged about possessing power, Jesus says this: ***“You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above.”***
- After the resurrection, Jesus makes this statement in Matthew 28:18: ***“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.”***
- God works out His ways and His will – even through evil rulers. Check out Acts 4:27-28: ***“Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”***

And so we see that it doesn't matter whether a government exists because a king appointed his son to rule, or a dictator came to power by force, or a tribal chief has defeated his rivals, or a people have voted for their candidate – all authority is there because God put it there. It's clear that the Bible does not endorse one particular form of civil government. God is not a republican or a democrat – when Jesus returns He won't be riding an elephant or a donkey. God isn't even an American.

Oh, and let me point out, submitting to authorities applies to democracies, aristocracies, autocracies, dictatorships, despotism, oligarchies, communism, and Wisconsinism (I just threw that one in to see if you're paying attention). This is exactly what Romans 13:1 says twice as we're pulled from the 'what' to the 'who': ***“For there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.”***

Questions to Ponder

My guess is that all of this has raised some questions in your minds. I plan to tackle some of them next week but you'll have to work them out for yourself.

1. How do we positively engage with government in a country like ours where in a certain sense the government is us?
2. Is there ever a time when a Christian should disobey a law?
3. What will you do if funds for abortions come from tax dollars in the Health Care Bill?

Living it Out

While I certainly don't have all the answers to these complicated questions, I do want to end with some ways that we can apply what we've learned today.

1. Ponder the questions in your bulletin for the New Year.

2. Believe and be baptized.

One of the best ways to publicly demonstrate your submission to Christ is to be baptized. Right now we have ten people signed up to be baptized next Sunday. What are you waiting for?

3. Read the entire Bible this year.

There are a number of Bible reading plans available. I'm using one that is specifically designed for "shirkers and slackers." Related to this, would you read the rest of Romans chapter 13 at least five times this week?

4. Plug into a group where you can grow.

We're offering "In the Master's Steps" classes this winter to help us learn more about the church, about worship, about prayer and about parenting. If you're not in a small group, can I encourage you to plug into one in 2010?

5. When you find yourself getting angry about a political issue or a politician, stop and pray.

1 Timothy 2:1-2: ***"I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness."***

6. Pray for those who are being persecuted.

I'm constantly amazed by the fervent faith of those who are being persecuted. Some of you know that I serve on the board of Keep Believing Ministries. Pastor Ray has been to China many times and we've recently begun communicating with a pastor there who is translating Ray's sermons into Chinese. About a month ago, this pastor sent us an email that I'd like to share (I'll not correct his English because it helps us understand his situation in a deeper way): *"I should let you all know that i am doing well, and that my family is doing well, even we do not know what will happen on tomorrow, then at least we are doing well right now! And we just regard every single day as our last day to serve the MOST HIGH!"* He shared with us that a police officer wants to meet with him and he doesn't know what will happen with that. Here's how he finishes his email: *"You know i have made final decision that i must share gospel with him and try to lead him to Christ, no matter which kind of purposes he has for me, so i am looking forward to seeing him for the reason of gospel, then i still need your prayers and your watch over!"*

7. Submit and surrender completely to the Savior. After all, since God says it, that should settle it, right? This is really the first place to start. Have you ever humbled yourself, admitted that you're a sinner, and then reached out and asked Jesus to save you from your sins? Are you a believer and you're ready to admit that you've been rebelling against the authority that God has placed in your life? Have you been rebelling against God Almighty? Some of us really hate the whole idea of submission and we refuse to do so. Let's call it what it is – sin and rebellion – and ask Christ to forgive us.

I'm so glad that we're celebrating communion on the first Sunday in January. It's a great way to start the New Year, isn't it? And I'm thankful that God's peace is beyond understanding and that His love endures forever.

Romans 13:2-7 It's Always Right to Do What's Right - 1/10/10

I've had the privilege of teaching three of our daughters how to drive, starting each one out in the parking lot right here at PBC when they were ten...JK (just kidding). Over the years I've seen other aspiring drivers doing the same thing. How many of you have used the parking lot like I have? That explains the damage to the light poles in the middle of the lot.

Beth would rather that I handle the driving detail and I'm happy to do so. But I do tell our daughters to do what I say not what I did when I was their age. They've all heard the story about when I lost my license in high school for getting caught speeding twice...in the same week. No matter how much I pleaded for mercy, the policeman said that he had to write me a ticket because I was going 55 in a 25-mile-an-hour zone. Can you believe that? I made my next mistake when I decided to not tell my parents, only to find out that they read all about it in the newspaper the next day.

A couple weeks ago I took Becca out so she could get some driving hours in. We worked on signal lights, looking in the mirrors, speed, placement on the road, and the importance of always paying attention. I found myself pushing on the floor of the car a couple times when I wanted her to brake. While we were driving north on Route 66, Becca turned to me and asked, “Daddy, when will you teach me to drive with my knees like you do?” I acted like I didn’t hear her and when she repeated the question; I told her that that lesson would come much later. I was busted because there have been many times that I have had my PDA in one hand and my phone in the other while my knees handled the steering (demonstrate with chair).

Have you ever slowed down when you’ve seen a police car following you? I had that experience just this week when I noticed I was being followed. I wondered if the Pontiac police had been corresponding with that unmerciful officer from Wisconsin. I made sure to stay under the speed limit, and not steer with my knees. When I thought I was in the clear after making several turns, I looked in my rear view mirror and saw that I was still being followed. My heart started racing a bit but I knew that I wasn’t doing anything wrong. I breathed a sigh of relief when Officer Friendly turned and went in a different direction.

Imagine what would happen if we lived in a society with no local police, no state troopers, no Sheriff’s Department, or without any law enforcement at all. When you call 911 there would be no response. Imagine life without the National Guard or our military protecting our country. What if there were no speed limits (that was actually the case when we lived in Mexico) and no traffic lights. What if it didn’t matter what side of the street you drove on? Imagine no fire department, no sidewalks, no street signs, no public schools, no snow plows, no public housing, no parks and no library. Or what would we do without interstates or any roads for that matter? Imagine no courthouse in the center of our town and no judges or juries to exact justice. What would happen if there was no Social Security, Medicare or Medicaid?

It’s All About ‘Who’

In the message last week called, “God, Government and You,” we learned that it’s not about *what*, it’s all about *who*. While many say that God and government don’t mix very well, we saw from Romans 13:1 that government can only be understood to the degree to which we understand God. We looked at two primary principles from this verse:

- **Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities.**
- **All authority is established by God.**

Romans 13:2 helps us see *who* is behind the authorities:

Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.

The word “**rebel**” means “*to take one’s stand against.*” It’s actually a military term to describe “*getting in line, to arrange yourself to take action against.*” Paul is addressing people who have a tendency to get carried away with their opinions and demonstrations.

We see this in 2 Peter 2:10 when referring to the unrighteous who “**despise authority**” and in Jude 8 when describing false teachers: “**...these dreamers...reject authority...**” These are sobering words for us because not only is rebellion against authority really rebellion against the Almighty Himself; it will also bring judgment or punishment on those who do so. An evangelist from a previous century had this to say: “*The people of God then ought to consider resistance to the government under which they live as a very awful crime, even as resistance to God himself.*”

Here’s where we’re headed this morning. We’re going to keep the *who* in mind as we take a look at *why* it’s always right to do what’s right. We’ll then focus on *how* we can do what’s right and finally we’ll conclude with *when* a believer may need to disobey an earthly authority.

Why It’s Always Right to Do What’s Right

I see three reasons why it’s always right to do what’s right in Ro 13:3-4:

“For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”

1. Because those in government are God’s servants.

Two different times in verse 4 we see that rulers are referred to as “**God’s servants.**” This word in the Greek is *diakonis*, from where we get the word “*deacon.*” This may seem surprising to you but hold on because there’s another word to describe the authorities that is even more startling in verse 6. There we read that authorities are “**God’s servants**” again but the Greek word

here is *lietourgus*, or in our language “liturgist.” This word was used to describe those involved in leading worship. Most of us don’t think of government workers as liturgists for the Lord in the halls of ordained government. When Jehoshaphat appointed judges in 2 Chronicles 19:6-7, he said this:

Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for man but for the Lord, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. Now let the fear of the Lord be upon you. Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery.”

You don’t have to look too hard to find government titles that reflect this reality like “Prime Minister” or the “Defense Ministry.” It’s wonderful when so many who serve in government actually serve as ministers, as true “public servants.” I’m grateful to Pastor Dick for his role in planning our annual Leadership Christmas Breakfast. One of the purposes of this is to thank those who serve our community in various governmental and educational positions. For the last four years, approximately 50 leaders have received a free breakfast, heard a Christmas devotional and listened to music from the Madrigal singers and recorders. It’s our way of appreciating those in authority.

2. Because governments are to preserve what is right.

Look at Ro 13:3: ***“For rulers hold no terror for those who do right...then do what is right and he will commend you.”***

Drop down to Ro 13:4: ***“For he is God’s servant to do you good.”***

This is much better than the situation described in the very last verse in the Book of Judges: ***“In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit”*** (Judges 21:25).

A tidal wave of evil would crash over the world if there were no civil authorities restraining rebellion.

When rulers function as God’s servants, then they are in a position to do good and to commend those who do good. We saw this in Biloxi when homeowners told us repeatedly that it was the churches that were helping the most. And, when Pontiac had the flood two years ago, it was a beautiful combination of government and churches working together that helped those in need. Admittedly, Paul is speaking of an ideal situation. There’s no reason to be afraid of the authorities if you’re not doing anything wrong. A police car in your rear view mirror should not cause terror, unless you’re steering with your knees.

I’ve always loved Proverbs 28:1:

“The wicked man flees though no one pursues, but the righteous are as bold as a lion.”

Governments make laws, but sometimes those laws leave us scratching our heads. Here are some actual laws that are still on the books in Illinois.

- It is against the law to make faces at dogs (Normal).
- Spitting on the sidewalk is a criminal offense (Ottawa).
- Ice skating at the Riverside pond during the months of June and August is prohibited (Moline).
- No person may keep a smelly dog (Galesburg). I guess we can’t ever live there.

And it wouldn’t be fair to not include some from Wisconsin.

- As people used to smuggle it in from Illinois, all yellow butter substitute is banned.
- State Law made it illegal to serve apple pie in public restaurants without cheese.
- It is strictly forbidden to cheer for any team from the flatlands of Illinois.

I’m not making any of these up...except for that last one...but it should be a law if it isn’t.

3. Because governments are to punish wrongdoers.

The first part of verse 3 says that rulers hold terror ***“for those who do wrong.”*** And in verse 4 we read:

But if you do wrong, be afraid for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God’s servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer.”

We don’t use the phrase, ***“to bear the sword”*** today but it basically means that government has the right to severely punish those who do wrong. Swords back then were used for beheading. In fact, according to tradition, Paul himself experienced the cruelty of

the Romans sword when Nero beheaded him.

Proverbs 20:2 says, ***A king's wrath is like the roar of a lion; he who angers him forfeits his life.***

That's why it's never a good thing to "talk smack" to a police officer or get lippy with a judge. Here's the deal. Government is ordained by God for the protection and preservation of social order and for the punishment of those who do evil.

How to Do What's Always Right

We need to keep the *who* in mind as we focus on the *what* and the *why*. Because God is behind all authority and He has put them in place, we must submit to them – that's the *what*. We've been given the *why* behind the *what* – because those in government are servants of God, they're to preserve what is right and they're to punish wrongdoers. And now we'll see *how* we're to respond.

1. Keep your conscience clear.

Ro 13:5 tells us to submit to authorities so we avoid punishment ***"but also because of conscience."*** It's not just so that we don't get caught; it's so that our conscience stays clear. Or to say it this way: *We're to submit to authorities because it's the right thing to do.* Many people submit to avoid wrath but don't do so for the sake of conscience. They reason, *"As long as I can get away with it and avoid the punishment then I have no problem breaking the law."* It means that when you're taking a test at school and you have the opportunity to cheat and nobody's going to find out, it's not just a matter of getting caught or not. It's a matter of conscience because to cheat on a test is to really cheat on God.

I'm drawn to the Apostle Paul's purposeful living in Acts 23:1: ***"My brothers, I have fulfilled my duty to God in all good conscience to this day"*** and in Acts 24:16: ***"So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man."***

And we read this in Hebrews 13:18: ***"Pray for us. We are sure that we have a clear conscience and desire to live honorably in every way."***

Most of us need to do a better job of keeping our conscience clear by speaking up for Christ when we should. I was delighted to hear how Brit Hume responded to a question about what Tiger Woods should do during his Sunday show on "Fox News Sunday." Here's part of what he said: *"He's said to be a Buddhist; I don't think that faith offers the kind of forgiveness and redemption that is offered by the Christian faith. So my message to Tiger would be, 'Tiger, turn to the Christian faith and you can make a total recovery and be a great example to the world.'"*

One Monday night, Bill O'Reilly asked Brit Hume to elaborate some more. Here's what Brit said: *"He needs something that Christianity especially provides and gives and offers, and that is redemption and forgiveness...think of what the message of Christ and Christianity is. It is that the God of the universe sent His only begotten Son, who died a hideous death on the cross, to atone for all of our sins...Jesus Christ is something that Tiger Woods greatly needs."* Near the end of his interview he said that the name of Jesus has always been explosive. Both of these clips are posted on my blog if you want to watch for yourself. I watched both of them a couple times and it seems to me that Brit's conscience kicked in and he spoke up about what he really believes. May we have the courage to speak up as well.

2. Pay your taxes.

Check out Ro 13:6: ***"This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing."***

None of us like paying taxes but we should do so because the Bible tells us to. I heard someone say that in light of the volatility in the stock market we should put all our money into taxes because that's the only thing that's sure to go up!

Perhaps you can relate to what Pastor Ray Stedman did when he had to pay a lot of taxes to a government that in his opinion wasted most of the money. So one year he wrote a check to the "Infernal Revenue Service." It made him feel better, until they cashed the check. The next year he changed it to the "Eternal Revenue Service" but they still took his money. Finally, he said *"I repented of all my sins and I now hope to pay my taxes cheerfully. The largest amount I have had to pay is due this year, but I want to send it off with thanksgiving to God for the government that we have—bad as it is in many ways."*

Jesus believed in paying taxes and led his disciples to do the same, even though the Roman government to which He paid them crucified Him. Turn to Matthew 17:24-27:

"After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma (two-days wages) tax came to Peter and asked, 'Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?' 'Yes, he does,' he replied. When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. (I love how Jesus already knew that Peter had been asked this question) 'What do you think, Simon?' he asked. 'From whom do the

kings of the earth collect duty and taxes – from their own sons or from others?’ ‘From others,’ Peter answered. ‘Then the sons are exempt,’ Jesus said to him. ‘But so that we may not offend them, go to the lake and throw out your line. (Even though a miracle was about to take place, Peter still had to do something) Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.’”

There’s a lot that can be said about this encounter but I want to just point out that Jesus demonstrated his submission to the ruling authority by paying the tax.

3. Be a good citizen.

Of all the citizens in the world, followers of Christ should be the best. We see this in verse 7: ***“Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue, if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.”*** This verse is so clear it needs very little comment. Because government authorities are “ministers of God,” they deserve four things from us: Taxes, revenue, respect and honor. By the way, we may think we are heavily taxed, and we are, but hardly more so than the first century. Rome had an income tax, a head tax, a poll tax, a road tax, a wagon tax, a crop tax, an import tax, an export tax, a harbor tax, and a bridge tax, just to name a few.

We can learn a lot about respect and honor from the example of the Apostle Paul when he was brought before a governmental authority in Acts 26:2-3: ***“King Agrippa, I consider myself fortunate to stand before you today as I make my defense...I beg you to listen to me patiently.”*** Because Paul was polite and respectful, he gained a hearing to share the gospel.

I’d like us to give respect and honor to all those who gain their living in some way through our tax dollars. Would you please stand if you work for the city, the county, the state or our federal government? I know that we have police officers, state police troopers, sheriff’s deputies, correctional officers, parole officers, city officials and administrators, public school administrators, staff and teachers, along with those who work for the Livingston County Housing Authority and Community Action. Would you please stand so we can honor you right now? Have I missed anyone? If so, can you shout out what you do so we can include you?

When to Do What’s Always Right

I mentioned last week that I would attempt to answer a question that goes something like this: *“Is there ever a time when a Christian should not obey the government?”* There are some related questions that go with this one. How do you explain the American Revolution in light of Romans 13? What about the Civil War and the Civil Rights Movement? What about the Tea Party movement? Did you hear this past week about the homeschooling parents in New York who were arrested on child endangerment charges for not registering with their local school district? Recognizing that Christians come down on both sides of these issues, allow me to share some guiding principles.

1. God is the ultimate authority over all other authorities.

I love the reminder found in Isaiah 40:22: ***“He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth, and its people are like grasshoppers.”***

2. Submission does not equal silence.

There are times when believers must speak up about moral matters, but we must do so respectfully.

3. Submission does not necessarily equal absolute obedience.

Several commentators have pointed out that Paul urges us to submit to the governing authorities, but not necessarily to obey them. Some believe that this allows room for civil disobedience. We could say it this way: *We’re to submit to God’s delegated authorities in the home, church and state right up to the point where obedience to them would entail disobedience to the absolute sovereignty of God.”*

4. The Bible allows for civil disobedience when the government forbids us from doing something that God commands.

Here are some Biblical examples.

- In Daniel 6:10, after the king had issued an edict that no one could pray to anyone but him, we read this: ***“Now when Daniel learned that the decree had been published, he went home to his upstairs room where the windows opened toward Jerusalem. Three times a day he got down on his knees and prayed, giving thanks to his God, just as he had done before.”***
- In Acts 4:19-20, after being commanded by the religious authorities to not speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus, Peter

and John replied, ***“Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”***

- Just one chapter later, after being put in jail and then miraculously set free, the apostles began teaching and preaching about Jesus again and the authorities are really upset now and so the chief priest lets them have it. Look at Acts 5:28: ***“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. ‘Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching...’*** I love the short but profound answer the apostles give in verse 29: ***“We must obey God rather than men!”***

5. The Bible allows for civil obedience when the government commands us to do something that God forbids.

Let's look at these examples from the Bible.

- In Exodus 1:17, after being ordered by the king of Egypt to kill all new-born baby boys, ***“The midwives, however, feared God and did not do what the king of Egypt had told them to do; they let the boys live.”*** By the way, if you want to hear about a modern-day story of how one person is making a difference by saving children, check out my blog post entitled, [Drawn from the Water](#).
- In Daniel 3, after King Nebuchadnezzar demanded that everyone fall down and worship his image of gold or else be thrown into the fiery furnace, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego refused to do so. When the king gave them a second chance, we read these words in verses 16-18: ***“Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego replied to the king, ‘O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and he will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if he does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.’”***

John Stott summarizes this issue succinctly:

The principle is clear: We are to submit right up to the point where obedience to the state would entail disobedience to God. But if the state commands what God forbids, or forbids what God commands, then our plain Christian duty is to resist, not to submit, to disobey the state in order to obey God.

6. What fires you up might not fire me up.

Follow God and your conscience but don't expect everybody to feel as passionate as you are about something. The problem often is discerning whether a given law clearly and absolutely “contradicts” God's law. It's therefore difficult to set down hard and fast rules covering every situation because one person's Christian conscience may lead in one direction while another person may choose to do something else or not participate at all. Some faithful people chose to get away from their governments, like the Huguenots who fled from France to England and the Puritans who exited England to practice their faith in America. Let's make sure we exhibit Christian liberty and charity.

7. If you must disobey, do so respectfully and be willing to accept the consequences.

When the three Hebrew boys disobeyed the king's direct orders, they spoke respectfully to him. We can say that *they disobeyed with a respectful heart*. Proverbs 24:21 says: ***“Fear the Lord and the king, my son, and do not join with the rebellious.”***

Submission must be our first impulse. That wasn't Peter's default setting, was it? When Jesus was arrested in the Garden, Peter grabbed a sword and whacked off the ear of the high priest's servant. After Jesus put the guy's ear back on (which is pretty cool, by the way), He turned to Peter and said these words in Matthew 26:52, ***“Put your sword back in its place,” Jesus said to him, ‘for all who draw the sword will die by the sword.’”*** John MacArthur adds this: *“Apart from the most difficult circumstances, in all other circumstances we are called to submit to the government which is over us.”*

Ray Pritchard offers these helpful words:

It's sometimes better to keep quiet than to speak out in anger. But if you choose the course of civil disobedience, it seems to me that it must be over an issue of clear biblical teaching, it must be done publicly so that others can draw the right lesson, it ought to be done in concert *with other believers, it must be accompanied by prayer and repentance, and finally, if you do break a law as a form of protest, you must then face the fact that you may be punished for your actions.*

I think of Esther, who after weighing what might happen to her for going into the king to advocate for her people, said these famous words in Esther 4:16: ***“...I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.”*** That reminds me of the pastors who lived during the time of Nazi Germany who went to prison not for revolting but for speaking out against the government.

8. Keep the main thing the main thing.

1 Peter 2:13-17 captures what can happen when Christians practice good citizenship: ***“Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every authority instituted among men: whether to the king, as the supreme authority, or to governors, who are sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to commend those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men. Live as free men, but do not use your freedom as a cover-up for evil; live as servants of God. Show proper respect to everyone: Love the brotherhood of believers, fear God, honor the king.”***

Paul writes in absolute terms about submission because he is more concerned that we live out our faith, that we practice kindness and give to the poor and that we look after widows and orphans. This is all more important than our civil liberties. One preacher said this:

I cannot imagine Paul writing this way if he thought that the ultimate thing in life was being treated fairly by the government. But I can imagine him writing this way if faith and humility and self-denial and readiness to suffer for Christ and our joy in God are the main thing.

Pastor James Lincoln hits it on the head:

Beloved, if we suffer the loss of rights, we have only become more like Christ. That’s not to say we shouldn’t advocate and defend God-given rights. We should do this. It means not finding in them our greatest or final hope, joy or ambition. Knowing Christ, loving God and being satisfied in Him is our greatest hope and joy. Beloved, if success is your God then God isn’t. If wealth is your God then God isn’t. If health is your God then God isn’t. If power and honor is your God then God isn’t. Governments can take these things away. However, only one is worthy to be your God. Only one is able to hold the heavy weight of your joy, hope and faith and that is God himself through His Son Jesus. And no one can ever take the blessings of His love and mercy away from us. So, beloved, Give unto Caesar what is Caesar’s. He is God’s servant...And give unto God what is God’s, for He is your God. And as you do, may the joy of the Lord be your strength.” ([Render Unto Caesar...Render Unto God by James Lincoln](#))

Practicing What Is Preached

We’re all going to have to wrestle with this teaching in submission to the Scriptures, in obedience to the Holy Spirit and in sensitivity to our conscience. Here are some application ideas that you can flesh out on your own.

- 1. Evaluate whether or not you have an attitude of submission to God and to government.**
- 2. Pray for those in authority** (see 1 Timothy 2:1-6).
- 3. Look for ways to encourage those in authority.**
- 4. Vote your values.** In 2002, only 43% of evangelical believers even bothered to vote, and that’s higher than in other years.
- 5. Get involved in government as you are led.**
- 6. Consider your witness.**
- 7. Determine whether you are leading a life of worship** (see Romans 12:1-2).

In his *Epistle to Diognetus*, an anonymous second-century Christian wrote the following beautiful description of believers who genuinely obey the commands of Romans 13:1-7:

For the Christians are distinguished from other men neither by country, nor language, nor the customs which they observe. For they neither inhabit cities of their own, nor employ a peculiar form of speech, nor lead a life which is marked out by any singularity. The course of conduct which they follow has not been devised by any speculation or deliberation of inquisitive men; nor do they, like some, proclaim themselves the advocates of any merely human doctrines. But, inhabiting Greek as well as barbarian cities, according as the lot of each of them has determined and following the customs of the natives in respect to clothing, food, and the rest of their ordinary conduct, they display to us their wonderful and confessedly striking method of life.

“They dwell in their own countries, but simply as sojourners. As citizens, they share in all things with others and yet suffer all things as if foreigners. Every foreign land is to them as their native country, and every land of their birth as a land of strangers. They marry, as do all others; they beget children; but they do not destroy their babies. They share their table with all, but not their bed with all. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. “They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed

laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their exemplary lives. They love all men and yet are persecuted by all. They are unknown and condemned; they are put to death and restored to life. They are poor yet make many rich; they are in lack of all things and yet abound in all; they are dishonored and yet in their very dishonor are glorified. They are evil spoken of and yet are justified; they are reviled and bless; they are insulted and repay the insult with honor; they do good yet are punished as evildoers. "When punished, they rejoice as if quickened into life; they are assailed by the Jews as foreigners and are persecuted by the Greeks; yet those who hate them are unable to assign any reason for their hatred. To sum it all up in one word—what the soul is to the body, that are Christians in the world." (Underlining mine. As found in "The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Romans 9-16," page 240). (See original - ([Diognetus. The Epistle of Mathetes to Diognetus - CHAPTER V -- THE MANNERS OF THE CHRISTIANS](#)))

Whether you're driving with your knees, or you're on your knees, it's always right to do what's right.

Romans 13:8-10 Loving the Least - 1/17/10

How many of you watch infomercials? Afraid to admit it, aren't you? In their current issue (February 2010) *Consumer Reports* tested 15 different products to find out which ones deceived, delivered or landed somewhere in between.

Here's what they found about the appeal of infomercials: "*The secret lies in neuroscience. Infomercials are carefully scripted to pump up dopamine levels in your brain, says Martin Lindstrom, an advertising expert and author of 'Buyology: Truth and Lies about Why We Buy,' which details how ads affected 2,000 research subjects.*"

"*Infomercials take viewers on a psychological roller-coaster ride,*" Lindstrom says. The fun starts with dramatizations of a problem you didn't know you had, followed by the incredible solution, then a series of ever more amazing product benefits, bonuses, and giveaways, all leading to the final thrilling plunge of an unbelievably low price. After the ride, Lindstrom says, "*dopamine levels drop in 5 or 6 minutes. That's why infomercials ask you to buy in the next 3 minutes.*"

There's a lot of good advice in this issue, including: pause ten minutes before buying, slow down the spellbinders, ask if you'd pay cash for it, consider other solutions, and calculate the real price. Here's something I didn't know. Have you ever wondered why most products cost "just \$19.95"? It's because people can part with 20 bucks without a lot of concern. According to one expert, a \$19.95 product costs about \$6 wholesale.

Are you wondering how some of your favorite products held up to Consumer Reports scrutiny? The "PedEgg" does remove calluses and dead skin but the testers were not wowed with the "ShamWow." I'm sorry to be the one to give you some bad news about the "Snuggie," because I know Ken Fulkerson really likes his. The basic problem is that it doesn't fit right and it sheds when washed. They do have a Snuggie for dogs that I'm going to look into.

After spending two weeks focusing on how we're to relate to government authorities, we're going to look at the next three verses in Romans 13 and it's my prayer that you and I will be wowed by the Word of God, for God never deceives and always delivers on His promises. Someone last week asked me when we would be done with the government stuff because he's ready to move on. Another person told me she didn't like the sermons on submission while another commented on how helpful they were. Go figure.

Turn in your Bibles to Romans 13:8-10:

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law. The commandments, 'Do not commit adultery,' 'Do not murder,' 'Do not steal,' 'Do not covet,' and whatever other commandment there may be, are summed up in this one rule: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' Love does no harm to its neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.'"

Since the word "love" is used five times in three verses, I want to propose this summary statement: *We're to love all life without limits.*

Here's where we're headed today. We're going to begin with interpretation and then we're going to move to application as we allow God's Word to be our authority as it relates to an issue in our culture today.

Interpreting God's Word

I see two main points in this passage.

1. Pay off your dollar debts.

Look at the first part of verse 8: ***“Let no debt remain outstanding...”*** This is in the present imperative which means that Paul is forbidding an action that is already going on. We could say it like this, *“Do not keep on owing.”* This is sometimes interpreted to mean that a Christian is never justified going into debt of any sort but the Bible never categorically forbids borrowing or lending. John MacArthur writes: *“When borrowing is truly necessary, the money should be repaid as agreed upon with the lender, promptly and fully...and whatever is owed must be paid on time and in full.”*

When considering whether or not to take out a loan, it's wise to consult Proverbs 22:7: ***“...the borrower is servant to the lender.”*** And if we make a loan, Leviticus 25:35-36 warns us to not take advantage of people. This isn't easy in our current economic climate but the idea is to pay your bills on time.

2. Keep paying on your love loan.

I read this week that our country has a debt of 12 trillion dollars! That means that each citizen's share is about \$40,000. That sure seems like a debt that we will never be able to repay, doesn't it? We've already learned in Romans that we have a debt to share the gospel (1:14), to the Holy Spirit to live a holy life (8:12), and to the government to pay our taxes (13:6). The rest of this passage declares that Christians have a type of perpetual indebtedness. We're to pay what we can't repay: ***“...Except the continuing debt to love one another.”*** Friends, we are under an obligation to constantly make payments on a debt that we can never pay off. Origen, an early church Father, said this: *“The debt of love remains with us permanently and never leaves us. This is a debt which we pay every day and forever owe.”*

Since the obligation to love is the key point in this passage, who is it that we're to love without limits?

- **Love One Another.** This phrase shows up throughout the New Testament and refers to fellow believers. Jesus gave this command to his disciples in John 13:34-35: ***“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”***
- **Love All Others.** We're to love believers and we're to love everyone else as well, which means we can't opt out if we just don't like someone. Jesus said in Matthew 5:44: ***“...But I say to you, love your enemies.”*** Galatians 6:10 brings these two debts together and rolls them into one “love loan”: ***“Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.”***

We see this in the word ***“fellowman”*** in Romans 13:8. This can be translated as *“the other”* or *“all people.”* And then twice we're told to love our ***“neighbor”*** in verses 9-10. A neighbor is *“anyone near.”* In the Parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus redefines a neighbor as anyone in need that God brings in front of me. The question is really not, *“Who is my neighbor”* but rather, *“Who am I being a neighbor to?”*

With all the horror we've seen happening in Haiti this week, we need to view every one of these people as our neighbors and respond as God leads us. Here are two ways to help: First, our missionary Dave Spangler and his wife Sharon live in the Bahamas. Dave is a pilot and is ready to take supplies to Haiti but needs help with the costs. You can contact him at saved2ru@juno.com. Secondly, Samaritan's Purse is in need of donations as well. You can contact them at www.samaritanspurse.org.

What does this kind of love look like? Most of us don't think this way but paying on our love loan and fulfilling the law of God work together. They're often regarded as contradictory but Paul makes it clear that living a life of love fulfills God's law. Look at the end of verse 8: ***“...For he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.”*** At the end of verse 9 Paul says that God's commands are ***“...summed up in this one rule: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’”*** And at the end of verse 10 we read, ***“...Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law”***

You'll notice that Paul lists four commandments from the second half, also known as the “social section” of the Ten Commandments. Before we list them, you'll notice that the order is changed a bit from the list in Exodus 20 – 7th, 6th, 8th and 10th.

- **Do not commit adultery.** Love does not break the marriage covenant, no matter how good it might feel, or how bad your marriage feels. True love values the virtue of another and will avoid causing someone else to sin.
- **Do not murder.** To murder means to kill someone unjustly. When we love, we will not rob someone of their life.
- **Do not steal.** Do you remember hearing last month about the pastor from England who told people that it's OK to shoplift as long as they don't take more than they need and they steal from large retailers? That's crazy. When we love, we will not take what is not ours.
- **Do not covet.** Coveting underlies all the other sins. Instead of craving what another has, or just plain wanting more, we're to

be content. In our desire for what we don't have, it's easy to become insensitive to the needs of those around us.

Paul then adds this phrase for those of us who think we're performing pretty well: **"...and whatever other commandment there may be."** It's as if he's saying, *"All these and all the other ones as well."* There's actually another command implied in verse 10 where we read that **"Love does no harm to its neighbor."** There's no higher law than love.

Paul next pulls out another command from the Old Testament that trumps all the ones he's already mentioned from Leviticus 19:18: **"Love your neighbor as yourself."** All the commandments can be gathered together into this one relational rule.

Instead of thinking that you have to work at never breaking God's laws, which is impossible anyway, because we're all sinners, Paul is propelling us to live a life of love, *to love all life without limits*. When we do, and this is only possible through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit, we'll end up fulfilling God's laws. Our daughter Emily wrote a paper on this passage and points out that *"when we truly love 'the other,' we are automatically doing what the other commandments demand. No one who truly loves another person will murder, commit adultery, steal or covet."*

Look again at the last phrase in Ro 13:10: **"Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law."** This literally means that the law *"stands filled up."* Living by love and living by the law are not mutually exclusive.

MacArthur adds,

They are, in fact, inseparably related. God's law cannot be truly obeyed apart from love, because love, and only love, is the fulfillment of the law."

Galatians 5:14 says it succinctly:

For the whole law is fulfilled in one word: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'

Love is a never-ending debt, which means we will never be in a position to say that we have "loved enough" or that we can just coast in our Christianity and be crabby toward others. Love is the only debt that we can never fully discharge. My highest obligation toward you is to love you and your highest obligation is to love me, which isn't easy sometimes (just ask Beth). And here's the deal. Even when you don't feel love for someone, if you choose to show love without limits, the feelings will often follow.

Whenever I came in contact with someone this week, whether they were a believer or not, I tried to say to myself, *"I am in this person's debt and I must pay them the love loan before moving on."* I will owe this debt until the day I die. And while I'm alive, I must pay this debt as often as possible, as much as possible, to everyone I come in contact with. Let's consider this exercise: Every time we come in contact with someone this week, let's say this to ourselves, *"I am in this person's debt and I must pay them the love loan before moving on."* The crazy thing is that no matter how much we pay on the love loan, we'll always owe more on it. Even if we feel we've gone above and beyond the call of duty, there is no love loophole.

Before we leave this point, let me add some depth to the word "love." This is the word agape, which is not some emotional and mushy response to what someone does for us. Its loving people for *their* good, not mine as an act of my will, whether I have happy feelings or not. It's an unconditional and sacrificial commitment to a sinful person. You'll know that you're exhibiting this kind of love when your will kicks in and you demonstrate goodwill toward the unlovely and the unlovable, toward those who do not love you, and even toward those you don't like.

Now that we've interpreted this passage, let's see how we can apply it to the issue of abortion.

Applying God's Word

Last week we learned that submission to the governmental authorities does not mean that we must remain silent, especially when moral matters are at stake. It's in that spirit that we must speak up for those who can't speak for themselves.

On this Sanctity of Human Life Sunday, we affirm, along with thousands of other churches, that every human being, from conception on, is an image bearer of God, stamped with divine dignity and worthy of protection. Tomorrow we recognize the incredible impact that Martin Luther King, Jr. had in our country in helping to establish the dignity of every person, regardless of skin color. Someday I hope that our country will gain the conviction to stand up on behalf of the preborn. I appeal to my fellow followers of Jesus; it's time for us to speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves. Proverbs 31:8-9 challenges us to advocate for those who have no voice:

Speak for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

We're called to reach out with care, courage and compassion to our neighbors in need. *We're to love all life without limits.*

Some pastors have chosen, for various reasons, to remain silent on this topic. I don't see that as an option this morning. Where God has spoken, I must speak. My goal is not to be politically correct but to be biblically correct. I'm compelled and constrained to communicate God's heart as clearly as I can, with as much love as I can. Proverbs 14:25 summarizes my purpose and my hope:

"A truthful witness saves lives, but a false witness is deceitful."

I submit that while abortion is, and should be debated politically, discussed emotionally, and described medically, at its primary roots, abortion is a moral issue, and as such, must be defined biblically.

Before I go much further, I recognize that some of you are struggling with the after-effects of abortion. I hurt with you and want you to know that no one is cut off from the cleansing power of the Cross. No sin is too big to be forgiven by the grace of God. We can put you in touch with others who have had abortions and they can help you find healing.

I want us to look at the abortion issue through the lenses of two complimentary truths – God's love and God's laws. I think this will clear up some of the abortion distortion that is so pervasive today.

1. God's love must guide us to love without limits.

Sometimes the debates about abortion have been filled with labeling and loudness rather than loving. Ponder these truths with me...

- We must love women who choose to have an abortion.
- We must love what God is doing in the womb as the preborn develop and grow.
- When we work at paying our "love loan" we will regard *all* life as sacred.
- We must see the preborn as our neighbors and love life without limits.
- We must do no wrong to our neighbors.

As I've been watching the horrible images that are coming in from Haiti, I've been torn up. One seasoned reporter referred to it this way: *"This is a humanitarian crisis like we have never seen."* The more images there are, the more a deep sense of urgency has gripped much of the world. Why is that? It's because every one of those people is created in the image of God and is to be loved without limits. One of the most moving stories this week was when CNN reported on the 11-year-old girl who was rescued from the rubble of her home. After she was freed, she died before she could be taken to a hospital. Her last words were, *"Mother, don't let me die!"* When Campbell Brown, a CNN anchor heard this, she broke down on the air and had to go to a break.

Please hear me clearly on this. What's happening in Haiti is horrible and as believers we must and will respond out of love. But let me also say this. There's another humanitarian crisis going on that is bigger than this one and it has lasted for 37 years. While we don't know for sure how many were killed by the earthquake, the Red Cross estimates that at least 50,000 have lost their lives. Listen to this. There have been approximately *51 million* lives lost to abortion since it was legalized in 1973! In 2008, there were almost 50,000 abortions in Illinois alone! Did you know that abortion is the leading cause of death in the world, killing as many people as all the other causes of death combined? Love should move us to respond because there are babies in the womb right now crying out, *"Mother, don't let me die!"*

2. God's laws must guide us to love without limits.

When I first heard this story I was on the elliptical at Champion. As I was fighting back tears as I watched the middle TV, I looked at what was on the TV on the right and saw that people were debating whether they liked Jay or Conan as the hosts of the Tonight Show. It's almost as if we can't stay focused on tragedy for very long in our country. The same is true with abortion. We have a hard time staying focused on the real issue. Let's go back to one of the commandments listed in verse 9: *"Do not murder."* At the heart of the abortion issue rests one single, overarching question: *Is abortion a form of murder?*

According to abortion proponents, a preborn baby is *not* considered a living human person. Almost universally, those who favor abortion rights believe that what is aborted is something *less* than a human. I'm convinced that if somehow it could be proven conclusively that the destruction of preborn babies is in fact the willful murder of human beings, the debate on abortion would be over, and the law of the land would as clearly prohibit abortion as it does all other forms of homicide.

The fact that the preborn are people is no small point. Scott Cox points out that the first thing any society does if it is going to mistreat a particular class of people is *"to dehumanize them."* Some theologians in the 19th Century espoused the idea that blacks had no souls in order to justify slavery. How much easier it is for our society today to do this *"when the voice and even the form of those who are being dehumanized and mistreated cannot be heard or seen because their cries are silent"* (sermoncentral.com).

That's why pictures of the preborn in the womb are so powerful. Do you know what age groups are the most pro-life today? It's those in their teens and 20s because they've grown up with sonograms on their refrigerators. A new poll by the Pew Research Center shows a 7% drop in the support of legalized abortions by Americans – from 54% a year ago to 47% in 2009, the largest shift since pollsters began tracking the topic in 1995 (citizenlink.com).

[Play video of babies developing in the womb, called "Window to the Womb." To watch, click here <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8U-GJxwdHZ8&feature=related>.]

I listened to a podcast this week featuring Scott Klusendorf, author of *The Case for Life*. Here's something that he said: *"The debate itself is not complex. Either you believe that each and every human being has an equal right to life or you don't."* This is really helpful because for many of us we think the issue is so contentious, complicated and controversial that we just check out. The primary question is this: *Are the preborn people?* He argues that the preborn are distinct, living and whole members of the human species, regardless of their size or location.

Let me demonstrate this visually by asking some of you to come up to the stage right now. I'd first like to have someone who is pregnant. Now I need a child, then a teenager, followed by individuals in their 20s, 40s, 60s and someone even older than that. As they're lined up here, can you tell me the main differences between what is in the womb of this pregnant woman and everyone else up here? The main differences are age, size and location.

We started the service with our children singing. What would you think if all of them suddenly disappeared? Or, if they had not survived in their mother's wombs? Klusendorf offers another compelling question that clarifies the issue for someone who does not believe abortion is wrong. Here's the question: *"If legally someone can kill the unborn, then why can't people legally kill toddlers?"* He calls this the "trot out the toddler" argument.

Earlier this week, I forced myself to watch a video that graphically shows what happens in an abortion (see www.caseforlife.com). I felt physically sick afterwards and those images of body parts will stay with me a long time. There is no doubt that the preborn are fully human. Why do images of abortion make us angry and even sick to our stomachs? Because we know inherently that life has dignity. One person sums it up this way: *"If something is so horrifying that we can't look at it, perhaps we shouldn't be tolerating it."*

In light of that, I want us to watch an interview that took place this past November between Mike Huckabee and Abby Johnson, who was the director at a Planned Parenthood center in Texas. After witnessing an ultrasound-guided abortion, she had a "change of heart" and knew it was time to leave: www.youtube.com/watch?v=mKGOimgTYRQ. [start at 2:18]

Ways to Respond

Let me list some ways that we can get involved. It may be more comfortable to adopt a passive stance with regard to the abortion issue. It certainly would be the least offensive response. But who, with a clear conscience, can sit back, say little, and do nothing while babies cry out, *"Mother, don't let me die?"*

- ☐ **See yourself as a "survivor" of abortion.** Everyone born after January 22, 1973 is a survivor. Historically, those who have endured an atrocity have always labored in earnest to end acts of violence.
- ☐ **Support the Caring Pregnancy Center.** Consider being a volunteer, give financially and donate other gifts like diapers, formula, etc. Pontiac Bible Church was instrumental in starting the CPC over twenty-five years ago and we continue to support it through our mission budget. There's a display set up in the lobby if you'd like some more information.
- ☐ **Consider adoption.** I received an email this week from Christi Ucherek who works for Lifesong for Orphans and was very moved by her compassionate heart. Here's part of what she said: *"You know, when I sit here and think about all the families I talk to every single day who are longing to hold a child in their arms, longing to provide love and care to a child, and longing to show that child a life in Christ, I can't help but think that there is such a need for young women considering abortion to know that there are families WAITING to adopt their child...And then I think about all those couples struggling with infertility, who have gone through more pain that I will ever know... I am truly motivated to fall on my knees, at the Lord's feet, and lift up these families...I can't help but continue to raise awareness and push forward, in the name of Jesus Christ!"*
- ☐ **Write letters to your legislative representative.**
- ☐ **Speak up for life when you have the opportunity.**
- ☐ **Be consistently pro-life.** We need to be pro-life and "whole life," valuing *all* human life – the preborn, orphans, widows, the physically and emotionally challenged, those with Down's Syndrome, the homeless, earthquake victims, those with AIDS, the hungry, the poor, those in prison, and the elderly.

The issue of abortion is much more important than any infomercial. While Consumer Reports is helpful, what we really need are Christian Reports – reports of Christ followers who *love all life without limits*, who don't just respond within three minutes but who

spend their entire lives paying on the love loan. As we've been learning in this series, since God says it; that settles it. Let's say that together as we close: *God says it; that settles it.*

Caregiver Guidelines

by Brian Bill

Published March 11, 2008

Have you ever wondered what to say when you're face-to-face with another person's pain? Ever been speechless when speaking to someone who is suffering? Or maybe you've been on the receiving end of some well-intended but insensitive comments like these:

Our maxims and cute sayings to those who are suffering are not only empty, they can be excruciating. Friends, let's resist trying to 'package people's pain.' Let's cut out the clichés and jettison the jargon:

>I know just how you feel. You don't. Plus, this shifts attention to you, not them.

>God will give you another child. This is insensitive.

>God must have needed him in heaven.' This feels empty.

>God told me that he'll heal you. Really?

>Time heals all wounds. Not always.

>God must be trying to teach you something. This is patronizing and arrogant.

>If you do what I did then you'll be better. Who made you the expert?

>My aunt Mildred had the same problem? Every situation is different.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how helpful are these sayings? 0

In Job 2:11-13 we learn that three friends come to comfort Job. They do a number of things right 'at least at the beginning. Let's take a look at some lessons we can learn to help us help others when they're going through tough times.

Hear the hurting. Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar heard about all the troubles that had come upon him. The first step for us is to actually listen when someone is speaking so that we pick up on their problems. When you hear that another person is in pain, write it down so you can follow-up.

Sacrifice your schedule. The next thing they do is to set out from their homes. If we're going to care for the hurting, we're going to have to sacrifice our schedule. If we wait to care until it's convenient, it will never happen.

Partner with people. Catch what happens next they met together by agreement. It's always a good idea to take someone with you when you hear of a need.

Go with grace. Their goal was to go and sympathize with him. This is the word 'nud' in Hebrew, which means to rock back and forth. When people go through tremendous pain they often rock themselves back and forth we're to join them in that.

Come with comfort. This is a similar idea and carries with it the idea of coming alongside.

Expect a change in appearance. When people grieve they often look different, sickness may cause other changes, and they may say shocking things as well. Look at Job 2:12: When they saw him from a distance, they could hardly recognize him?

Exhibit your emotions. When they saw Job in his distress they started to cry: they began to weep aloud. Don't be afraid to express your emotions. Romans 12:15 says, Mourn with those who mourn.

One author writes: We can forget those with whom we have laughed, but we can never forget those with whom we've cried.

Respond with rituals. After weeping aloud, they tore their robes. That was a cultural way of demonstrating that they were all tore up on the inside as Joel 2:13 says: "Rend your heart and not your garments."

I'm not quite sure what that looks like today but it probably involves doing something tangible like cleaning the house, bringing a meal, etc. If you'd like to serve on a team that brings meals, please contact the church office.

Honor with humility. In that culture pouring dust on the head was a sign of humility: and sprinkled dust on their heads.? This carries with it the idea of looking for ways to enter into someone's pain.

Sit with the sufferer. Look at the first part of Job 2:13: Then they sat on the ground with him

It's important to get on the person's level and get as close as possible. I know of a chaplain who has actually lain down next to a person who was dying because the individual was cold. That's amazing to me.

Take the time needed. These three friends were in no hurry to leave. Amazingly, they were there for seven days and seven nights. This is called 'sitting sheva,' which means 'sitting sevens' and has become part of Jewish life. We see this in Genesis 50:10 when Joseph observed a seven-day period of mourning for his father. While we shouldn't overstay our welcome, it's important to spend time with people when they're in pain.

Be silent in the face of suffering. Sometimes silence is the best response we can have. Look at the last part of Job 2:13: No one said a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was. I'll never forget a hospital visit from a deacon in our church in Rockford after Becca was born. She had stopped breathing several times and I was afraid. As I was pacing around the waiting room, Jay Forsyth showed up and gave me a big hug. He then sat next to me and didn't say a word. It meant the world to me.

I guess we could summarize these caregiver guidelines this way: Show up and shut up. Don't stay away and when you come, silence may be better than speech. Incidentally, if you can't visit, a phone call, email, or a note in the mail is the next best thing. We may have some insight, but we don't have all the answers