

Two Important Rules To Be Observed In Our Dealings With Enemies.

Text: Rom 12:16-21

1) Live Peaceably With All Men

Suggested Hymns:

2) Do Not Avenge Yourself

45, 392, 344, 284, 355

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Romans 12:16–21, *¹⁶ Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*

¹⁹ Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. ²⁰ Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

“Do not be wise in your own opinion.” This is the admonition with which Paul introduces the Epistle of the day. Is it necessary to address such an admonition to Christians, and to tell them that they should not be wise in their own opinion?

If Christians were perfect beings, if their sinful flesh did not cling to them and did not often play false with them, there surely would be no necessity for such an admonition.

But where is a Christian who no longer needs to be admonished that he should beware of sin which encroaches upon him, and by which he is assailed in different ways from all sides? Where is a Christian who is safe from those sins which proceed from his own sinful heart?

Paul therefore addresses this admonition to Christians: “***Do not be wise in your own opinion.***” It is a very common thing among people to be wise in their own opinion. Are we not all prone to exaggerate our own abilities and merits, and to minimise our own faults, but at the same time, to depreciate and belittle the gifts and accomplishments of our neighbours and to magnify their failings?

Christians should not be actuated by this spirit of selfishness which characterises the children of this world. Christians should not make a boast of their gifts and talents and good deeds, and be imbued with their own self-importance. They should not indulge in self-glorification, and exalt themselves above others.

In the preceding part of this chapter the Apostle says: “***For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.***”¹

But this admonition, that we should not be wise in our own opinions, is followed by another admonition in which the Apostle informs us how to deal with our enemies. As the spirit of humility should govern us in our dealings with all people, so should this humble spirit manifest itself in our dealings with enemies; and there are two important rules here which the Apostle tells us to observe.

Let us consider *Two Important Rules To Be Observed In Our Dealings With Enemies*. May the Lord bless our meditation.

1. Live Peaceably With All Men!

Our text says, ¹⁸ ***If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.*** This is the first important rule which the Apostle proposes in our text. The rule is, in short, “Live peaceably with all men!” But there is a restriction and an explanation to that rule. The restriction is, “***If it is possible,***” and the explanation, “***as much as depends on you.***”

If it is possible, live peaceably with all men. Is this always possible? It may be possible for a Christian at times to live peaceably with all men, and not to have a personal enemy in the world. But is it possible at all times?

Was it possible for Abel to live peaceably with Cain when Cain slew him? Was it possible for Jacob to live peaceably with his brother Esau when he had to

flee for his life? Was it possible for David to live peaceably with Saul when Saul thirsted for his blood? Was it possible for the first Christian martyr Stephen to live peaceably with the Jewish council in Jerusalem when they stoned him to death?

Was it possible for the Apostles to live peaceably with Jews and Gentiles when they were persecuted for preaching the Gospel, not to say anything of our dear Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ who all but lived peaceably with the Pharisees and scribes who were after Him continually to entangle Him in His talk, and who did not rest until they had Him crucified and killed?

From this we see, my friends, that it is utterly impossible to live peaceably with all men at all times. We must stand up for the truth, and confess the truth before the world as Christ and the Apostles did, and as the children of this world are enemies of God and cannot bear to hear the truth, there will be enemies.

There will be people who antagonise us, speak evil against us, persecute us because we bear witness to the truth. It is utterly wrong, it is a misapplication of this rule of peaceableness to think that you must sacrifice the truth for the sake of peace. The truth you must uphold and defend, despite all the hazards.

There are Christians who are afraid to tell their brother his fault because they do not want to disturb the peace, and there are ministers of the Gospel who are afraid to proclaim the Law of God and to tell their people where they have sinned because they do not want to disturb the peace in their congregation.

But is this correct? Does not Jesus say in Matthew 18:15, ¹⁵ ***“Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone?”*** Does not the Word of God in Isaiah 56:10 call those preachers dumb dogs that cannot bark, who do not warn their people against the sins that are in vogue? Let us not sacrifice the truth, then, for the sake of peace!

Let us live peaceably with all men, if it be possible, but always remain within the limits of the truth. The Apostle also adds an explanation to this rule that we should live peaceably with all men. He says, ***as much as depends on you.*** In other words the Apostle is telling us to do all you possibly can on your part, within the limits of the truth, to have peace, and to live in peace with others.

Be careful not to say or do anything which may cause distancing between you and your friends, or bring about enmity, and strife, and discord. Guard your

lips, and do not say things which may hurt the feelings of others. Guard your actions, and do nothing to arouse anger and wrath in other people's hearts.

And if ever in haste, on the spur of the moment, or inadvertently you have said or done anything to break the peace, be quick to restore it. Do not be too proud to own your fault! Go to him whom you have wronged or offended, explain matters to him, tell him that you are sorry for what you have done, and extend to him the hand of reconciliation. In this way you live peaceably *as much as depends on you*.

And let us bear in mind that with all people we are to live peaceably. The Apostle therefore says, *Have regard for good things in the sight of all men*. He is telling us that Christians must not only have regard to God, but also to man. You must not neglect your duty toward men, being content with having performed your duty toward God.

You must provide things honest in the sight of men also, that is, you must deal honourably with all men so as not to give anybody a just cause for speaking evil against you. Not only with our friends are we to deal honourably and thereby to foster the spirit of peace, but with all men, even with those who act as enemies toward us.

Even though they show ever so much enmity, we should not deal with them in the same hostile spirit, but live peaceably with them *as much as depends on you*. Did not our Lord Jesus Christ give us this sublime command in the sermon on the mount, written in Matthew 5:44–48, ⁴⁴ *But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,* ⁴⁵ *that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.*

⁴⁶ *For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?* ⁴⁷ *And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?* ⁴⁸ *Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.*

Live peaceably with all men! This is the first rule for us Christians to observe in our dealings with enemies.

2. Do Not Avenge Yourselves!

The second rule is, “*do not avenge yourselves!*” The Apostle explains what he means by avenging one’s self when he says, “¹⁷ *Repay no one evil for evil.*” So to avenge yourself is to do evil to the person who has done evil to you, to get even with him in some way, to make him suffer for the wrong which he committed, to pay him back with the same coin which he has passed on you.

Now among the unbelieving children of this world it is considered perfectly legitimate and right to return blow for blow, and he who quietly pockets a wrong and does not retaliate in some way is looked upon as a weakling and as a coward. It is claimed that a man has no character, no honour, no self-respect about him, who can endure a wrong without retaliation and resentment.

But we Christians are taught to act otherwise. Our text says, ¹⁹ *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves.* This is the great rule which is commanded upon us Christians. No matter how much we have been wronged, or how great the evil which has been done to us, we are not to avenge ourselves, we are not to repay evil for evil, we are not to breed vengeance, and to execute revenge upon the enemy.

This does not imply that a Christian may not go to law when he is defrauded, or when he is harmed in his body, property, and honour. It is true that in his First Epistle to the Corinthians Paul rebuked the Corinthians for going to law, saying in 1 Corinthians 6:6–7, ⁶ *But brother goes to law against brother, and that before unbelievers!* ⁷ *Now therefore, it is already an utter failure for you that you go to law against one another. Why do you not rather accept wrong? Why do you not rather let yourselves be cheated?*

But Paul obviously did not mean to say that a Christian should not go to law under any circumstances. He himself went to law and appealed his case to Cesar when the Jews had him imprisoned. He is simply telling us that Christians should not be rash about going to law, but settle their difficulties among themselves, if in any way possible.

When a Christian appeals to the courts for a just cause, this is not to be considered an act of revenge. But in common everyday life the rule is to be observed, *do not avenge yourselves!*

And why are we not permitted to avenge ourselves? Because we belong to those whom the Apostle addresses, “**Beloved.**” The Spirit of love should rule us Christians. God’s love has been poured out into our hearts; the love of Him who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all; the love of Him who has not visited vengeance upon us for our transgressions, but has forgiven us all our sins for Christ’s sake.

Now, must not the love of God which He has shown to us in His beloved Son induce us to banish from our hearts all thoughts of revenge, and to deal kindly with our enemies and adversaries as God has dealt with us?

Furthermore, we are not permitted to avenge ourselves because God wants to take this matter in His own hands as the Apostle says, ***but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.*** How dare you meddle with God’s affairs and take in your hands what God has reserved for Himself?

Give place to wrath therefore, that is, to the wrath of God. Do not interfere with the wrath of God, but let Him execute judgement and inflict punishment upon your enemy according to His own will. He will effectually repay the wrongdoer for his evil deed if he does not repent of his sin.

And is it not much better to convert the sinner from the error of his way, to win the enemy, and to turn him into a friend — is it not much better and more profitable for you than to repay evil for evil, to avenge yourself and thereby to establish enmity and make the breach irreparable?

The Apostle says, ²⁰ ***Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head,*** that is, you will make him feel ashamed of himself for his enmity towards you, and eventually lead him to true repentance.

In this way Jacob heaped coals of fire on his brother’s head when he sent him gifts, so that Esau’s heart was changed and he permitted Jacob to travel his way in peace.

In this way David also heaped coals of fire on Saul’s head when he spared the king’s life in the cave, so that Saul was forced to say, ***“You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have***

*rewarded you with evil.*² Do good to your enemy, and you will eventually turn him into your friend.

Finally, the Apostle says, ²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* Are we not overcome with evil, does not sin obtain dominion over us, if we avenge ourselves? And can a true Christian commit sin maliciously, willingly, and intentionally? Is not this the mark of every true Christian that sin has no longer has dominion over him?

May the Lord, then grant us all, His grace that we observe these two important rules in our dealings with enemies, that we live peaceably with all people, and that we do not avenge ourselves.

And where we have transgressed these rules, may He graciously forgive us our sins for the sake of our dear Saviour who is the propitiation for our sins, and enable us henceforth to walk worthy of our calling to the glory of His name. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Romans 12:3

² 1 Samuel 24:17