



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 12: 14-21

Romans

“Love Your Enemies”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Open your bibles to Romans chapter 12, and we will look at verses 14 through 21.

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

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

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation.

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

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

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,” says the Lord.

“BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.”

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

May the Lord bless this reading of his Word. Let’s pray.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for the opportunity that we have this morning, great privilege, blessing, that it is, to come together with the saints, with believers in Jesus Christ, open the Bible, read a text of Scripture, sing hymns of praise to you, and

then spend some time of study together. And we pray, Lord, that as we do these things, you bless us. Give us an understanding of the text that we have read. Teach us these things.

It is a great privilege to be able to read your Word, to have possession of it, but this book would remain a closed book to us if we did not have the divine teacher, the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. And by your grace, we do; he's the seal upon the hearts of your people. The moment we believed in Jesus Christ we were blessed with that gift. Our hearts were sealed, and he protects us, he guides us, and he guides us into all truth. So we pray for that ministry.

That our hearts would be open; that you would guide us in the things that are difficult; a difficult subject – relatively easy to understand, but very difficult to obey – so make us a people who not only understand, but act obediently upon the things, the truths that we find here. We pray your blessings upon us spiritually. We pray your blessings upon us in the material things of life as well, Father. We pray for the sick. We pray that you'd give healing and encouragement to them.

We pray for those who are dealing with various issues, financial issues, job issues. We pray that you bless, that you give wisdom, and that you would give confidence in the midst of difficulty. We pray that you'd open doors of opportunity in terms of employment. We pray that you would give wisdom and help in terms of the financial issues of life where that is needed. Father, we can go down the list of all of the various needs that we have.

Some are more pressing on some than others, but the reality is as we look at our lives we are completely dependent upon you. In times of prosperity we tend to forget that. We tend to forget where our daily bread comes from, and where the abundance that we have originates. The reality is it all comes from you, and we thank you for that. In times of distress, in times of difficulty, we come to the throne of grace, and oftentimes you bring those times into our lives in order to cause us to draw near.

Father, when you bless us with prosperity, may our hearts not be led away; keep them focused upon you. Keep our eyes upon the Savior, and bless us as we study this morning, that that would be the result of our time together. Help us to

always remember that we are dependent people; that we are simply creatures, and we live, and we move, and we have our existence in you and in you alone.

Remind us of that as we enjoy health and prosperity, and comfort your people who are suffering ill health and privation of various kinds with the reality that you are in control, and your hand is upon them. Bless our nation. We pray for our leaders, that you give them wisdom. We look at the world and we see a world in turmoil – it’s not surprising because this is a fallen world. But it reminds us that our hope is not in this place; it’s in a world to come.

It’s in our confidence in you, because we know that in spite of what we see that you’re the governor of this universe, and you are guiding it to its appointed end, and we look forward to that time when Christ will come again, and the King of kings will reign and put everything in order. But in times of trial and difficulty and chaos that we see around us, may your people, wherever they are in this world, be strengthened and be a good witness, and may we in this church be that to those around us.

So bless our nation. Bless our government with wisdom. We pray for our leaders that you would bless this land, and in the midst of this, bless your church. Bless us now, Father, as we sing our final hymn. Prepare our hearts for a time of study together. May this be a rich and enjoyable and profitable time for us. We pray in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] There is a Christian maxim that I grew up hearing that Christians are to be in the world but not of the world. When you are young, you really don’t want to hear that. Probably when you’re old as well, but it is true. We are to be involved with the world, but we are to be different from the world, and what could be more different from the world and more enlightening to the world than the instruction that Paul gives in Romans 12:14-21.

Bless those who persecute you. Never pay back evil for evil. Never take your own revenge. Overcome evil with good. That is completely contrary to the way people normally respond to hostility. Even the rabbis taught the people to love their neighbors and hate their enemies, and we can understand that. It’s natural to love those who love you, and to hate those who hate you. But Christ said, “No. I say love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you.”

That is what Paul instructs us to do in Romans 12:14-21. It is not natural, but Paul is not writing to natural men. He is writing to people who have been changed; whose minds are being renewed and being transformed by the grace of God. That's how Paul began this chapter. We are in the application section of the book of Romans. For 11 chapters, Paul taught doctrine and explained the life-changing grace of God. Now he instructs us to live according to that grace in regard to all of our relationships.

First, in our relationship to God, we are to offer our bodies as a living and holy sacrifice. Next, in relationship to Christians, we are to love one another. Now Paul instructs us in our relationship with those outside the church, with the world: we are to love our enemies. That's the subject of this final section of Romans chapter 12. Paul begins, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” And as John Murray wrote, “No practical exhortation places greater demands upon our spirits than that.”

What makes it so difficult is not just the maliciousness of persecution, but also that it is unprovoked and unjust, so our tendency is instinctively to lash out, to retaliate. But we're not to do that. In fact, we're not simply to refrain from retaliation; we are to respond positively. We are to bless our persecutors. We are to actively seek their good, and we do that in various ways, but certainly fundamentally we do that by praying for them, and asking that God would bless them.

Now, if that seems impossible, it is not. Not for a child of God. It is what the Lord himself did. Christ not only taught this principle – he modeled it. As he hung from the cross, having been unjustly convicted of crimes that he did not commit, having been brutally beaten and cruelly mocked, though he was innocent, he prayed for his enemies. “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” So we can't say that this is impossible, because Christ himself has done it.

And he never asks us to do anything that he has not himself done. Now, if we say, “Yes, but that's Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God. He is the eternal Son of God. He's divine. I'm merely flesh and blood. I'm frail, I'm weak, I'm dust, I'm ashes. I'm not like that.” And that's true, but then we have another example; we have the example of Stephen, who did the same thing. As he was being stoned to death, he fell to his knees, and he prayed, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

His prayer was effective. It's not known what happened to everyone that was present when he was martyred, but we know that one person was affected by that, and

that was Paul, who as Saul of Tarsus was there participating in Stephen’s murder. They laid their coats at his feet. And so Paul was the object of that prayer. Paul knew in a very personal way that the right response to persecution sometimes results in great blessing for persecutors.

So as impossible and unnatural as it may seem, we are to bless those who persecute us, and the resources of God’s omnipotent grace are equal to all of the impossibly high demands that he places upon his people, and that grace is always open to us. These Roman Christians would need all of it, because in a few short years after Paul wrote these words, their obedience to them would be sorely tested when the great fire of A.D. 64 swept through Rome.

Nero blamed the Christians, and he began an horrific persecution of the church, in which among other things he fed Christians to mad dogs, and he made them into human torches to light his garden at night. That’s unusual, of course. But even if persecution doesn’t occur on that scale, we can expect to experience hostility from the world if we are living an earnest Christian life, if we are being witnesses for Jesus Christ. We will suffer. We will face hostility.

But we must not retaliate, should that time of suffering come. We are not to curse, we are to bless. We are to love our enemies. That’s the lesson of Romans 12:14-21. Paul continues in verse 15 with the command to rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. This is often understood to refer to the relations of Christians with one another, the relationship within the church.

And it is certainly consistent with the sympathy that we are to show to one another, and consistent with the previous section, where Paul spoke of our love for one another, the love within the church. But there is nothing in the verse itself that would require a change of subject from that of the Christian’s relationship to the outside world, to those outside of the church. This is how we are to respond to all people; with joy when joy is fitting, and with sorrow when sorrow is called for.

And when is it not more fitting to show sorrow with people than when there’s sorrow among those who are not saved? When they grieve, that is truly grief, and a hopeless grief, and that calls for great sorrow from God’s people. Sympathy is an important Christian virtue, both the positive side and the negative, with joy and with sorrow. But it’s not always easy to produce.

The fourth century preacher John Chrysostom pointed out that rejoicing with those who rejoice is often harder than weeping with those who weep. In fact, he felt that the reason Paul mentions it first is because it is very difficult. It's difficult because when people receive what we would like to receive, very often our reaction is not one of joy, but one of jealousy. Paul is calling us to an unselfish response. We're to rejoice with those who rejoice. We are to weep with those who weep.

We are to identify with and not be indifferent to the weal and woe of the world. That is genuine love – the love that Paul urged in verse 9 – love, he says, which is “without hypocrisy.” In verse 16, Paul moves from an exhortation to sympathy to one for harmony. “Be of the same mind toward one another,” he says. His instruction here refers to harmony among Christians; that is, harmony within the church. But his concern is still for the world. Those outside the church should see harmony within the church.

When they look at us, they should not see discord. They should not see infighting. They should see harmony. Now, that doesn't mean that we agree on everything. That's not possible, unless you all want to agree with me. But that's not expected, and that's not possible. But what is expected is that when we disagree, we disagree amicably, and in our disagreements we're able to maintain harmony with one another.

A famous failure to do that occurred during the Reformation, during what is known as the Marburg Colloquy. It was a conference between Martin Luther and his Swiss counterpart, Ulrich Zwingli. Those were violent times. Those were times in which lives were literally laid on the line for their faith, and the idea of the conference was to find points of agreement so that the Reformation would be united, and be able to put forth a united front against the enemy.

Well, the men agreed on 14 of 15 points. They disagreed on the Lord's Supper; on the nature of it. Luther believed in consubstantiation, which means that Christ is really present with the bread and the wine. It's different from transubstantiation, the view of the Roman Catholic church, which is that upon the blessing of the priest, the wine and the bread, or the host, actually becomes, is transformed into the body of Christ, so that when a person takes the bread, takes the wafer, he or she is literally taking the body of Christ.

And at that moment during the Mass, Christ is again crucified; sacrificed all over again. Luther did not believe that, but he did believe that Christ’s body was literally present with the bread – *con*, with – and his blood was literally present with the wine. Zwingli believed that the Supper is a remembrance only; Zwingli could quote Luke 22:19, “Do this in remembrance of me.”

But Luther insisted on the literal physical presence of Christ. And he wrote with a piece of chalk on the table around which they were sitting Matthew 26:26, “This is my body.” Zwingli had the stronger argument, but Luther had the stronger will. They reached an impasse, and the Colloquy ended in failure. As they were leaving, Zwingli approached Luther with tears in his eyes, held out his hand as a gesture of unity and brotherhood, but Luther declined it, saying, “Yours is a different Spirit from ours.”

No, it wasn’t. Zwingli was a godly man, and a very useful man, but great men sometimes have great failures, and that was one of Luther’s. It gave fuel to the enemy. That was in the year 1529. Fortunately, in that year, a young law student in France named John Calvin was brought to faith, and he would unify men and organize the Reformation with powerful effect. Christians cannot agree on every position, but we should be able to disagree amicably.

And where we must agree with one another, where we cannot disagree with one another if we are to have true unity is in regard to faith in Christ and obedience to him. That agreement will be to the greatest blessing of the world, because that will promote the gospel, the way of life and light. Well, Paul continues in this same vein, “Do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly.” “Do not be haughty in mind” is literally “do not think high things.”

The idea is the same – do not be haughty, do not think high. Christians are not to be given to thinking high things about themselves; to think inordinately of their own abilities. Now, Christians can think some high things about themselves because we do have a high position. Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:6 that we are seated with Christ in the heavenly places. We have knowledge of the greatest truths. At least we have access to that knowledge, and we need to be acting upon it.

And we certainly have access to the God of the universe, and to the throne of grace, at every moment. Believers in Jesus Christ are the most blessed and advantaged people in the world, but it is all of grace. We can take no credit for who

we are or what we have and that should make us humble. And making us humble, that should make us willing to associate with lowly people. We are all made of the same stuff, so who are we to be proud of who we are?

Who are we to be arrogant, to exalt ourselves among others? Everything that we have has been given to us – everything. As we look at the world around us, we see it in the condition that it’s in. We see multitudes of people going into a Christless eternity, going into eternal judgment. As we see personal lives in chaos, we should always echo John Bradford’s thought as he watched some convicts go to the gallows: “But for the grace of God, there goes John Bradford.”

There but for the grace of God go any one of us. A refusal to associate with people is arrogance. It’s snobbery. John Stott wrote, “Few kinds of pride are worse than snobbery.” Snobs are obsessed with questions of status, with the stratification of society into upper and lower classes, so they are obsessed with the company that they keep. Well, that’s not only wrong, that’s worthless.

C.S. Lewis wrote of the desire to be part of the inner ring; the desire to be on the inside, and the terror of being on the outside – of not being part of the smart set or the popular crowd. People make compromises. They forsake friends in order to be on the inside, in order to be accepted. But what they find when they are on the inside is that what is there is, as Lewis said, a ring yet more inner, so another ring must then be penetrated, and so it goes.

It’s like peeling an onion. The very inner ring of the onion is really nothing. And the person who follows that desire, Lewis said, will reach no inside that is worth reaching. Nevertheless, people do pursue it, and they disdain those who are outside. That’s the snobbery that Paul condemns. Christ cared nothing for the inner ring, for the social ladder, for acceptance and popularity. He went to the sick, he went to the poor in spirit, he gathered around him the outcasts, the sinners, and the publicans.

He looked down on no one, and he lifted up all who came to him. Donald Gray Barnhouse illustrates that kind of behavior from an incident in the life of Chief Justice Charles Evans Hughes, who was the son of a Baptist preacher, and according to Dr. Barnhouse, had a good Christian witness himself. When he was appointed to be Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, he moved to Washington, D.C., and he transferred his membership to a Baptist church there.

It was the custom in that church to have all new members come forward during the morning service and be introduced to the congregation. On that particular day, the first person to be called was a Chinese laundryman named Ah Sing, who moved to Washington from San Francisco, and he kept a laundry near the church. He came forward, and he stood at the far side of the pulpit. As others were called, they took their positions at the extreme opposite side of the pulpit.

When a dozen had gathered, Ah Sing stood alone. Then Chief Justice Hughes was called. He took his place next to the laundryman. He saved that man from embarrassment, and he lifted him up, because Ah Sing, the laundryman, was standing next to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. It was love without hypocrisy and snobbishness, and that’s what we are to be. That’s what the world is to see in us: love for one another that is characterized by harmony and humility.

And that is what it should receive from us – that is what it should experience from us. But we should not be so naïve as to think when it does see that, and when it does experience that from us, that it’s going to reciprocate and love us back. The world will not do that. The Lord warned his disciples in John 15:18-20, “If the world hates you, you know that it has hated me before it hated you.”

In fact, it will hate them – it will hate us – because of him; because of our association with him. Paul explained the reason for this antipathy earlier in 8:7, where he wrote that the mind set on the flesh – that is, the unregenerate mind, the mind of the unbeliever – the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God, for it does not subject itself to the law of God, and it cannot, in fact, do that. The natural man, the unbeliever, is in rebellion against God, and so he opposes God and opposes his truth wherever he finds it.

When he hears it from us, when he sees it in our life, it will be opposed, and Christians can expect that, can expect persecution. We can expect double-dealing from the world. We can expect high-handedness from the world, cheating and abuse. So Paul comes back to this idea of hostility and persecution in verse 17. He writes, “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.” Rather than retaliate, we are to respect what is right in the sight of all men; not just in the sight of all Christians, but all men.

And the world has a sense of that. The world is a fallen place. Mankind is a fallen humanity. But still, men have a sense of right and wrong – they have a sense of “ought.” The world may not always be honest and fair, but it expects honesty and

fairness of others, and we Christians should be honest and fair in our dealings, all the time, with all people. That’s true in our finances, in the way we earn money and the way we use it, both personally and as a church.

It’s very important that this church handle its financial affairs wisely and well and openly. It should obtain its finances properly, and it should use them properly. Paul was particularly concerned about that very issue. When he took a large gift to the poor Christians in Jerusalem, collected from the Gentile churches, he avoided all appearances of impropriety, all questions of misusing the money, by entrusting it to a group of men, trusted men who were appointed by the churches and accompanied him to Jerusalem.

So there was clear accountability with the handling of that money, and he wrote about this in 2 Corinthians 8, and stated that careful precautions were taken because he had regard for what is honorable in the sight of men. Paul cared about what people thought, what the world thought. He didn’t try to gain the world’s approval, but he was very concerned to keep his witness spotless; to be above reproach. And that is the way we are to live our lives. That is the way this church is to conduct its affairs.

We are to be above reproach in the eyes of the world. Christian businessmen are to be above reproach in the eyes of the world. They are to be known as honest businessmen. Churches should be open and honest about their finances. We try to do that. We post the information of our financial affairs on the office window so it is public to you. You can know what’s going on by looking at it, and someone from the outside can come in and look.

But Paul’s principle here about respecting what is right in the sight of all men is very broad in its application. It goes beyond finances. It has to do with our family life; it has to do with our social life – with every aspect of life. We are to be good workers. We are to be hard workers. We are to be above reproach. Our behavior as Christians is to have a positive effect on the world. And so Paul writes in verse 18, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”

Now, that’s not counsel that originated with Paul. We find the same kind of counsel throughout the Proverbs. Proverbs 15:1, “A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Avoid a harsh word; avoid stirring up anger. Proverbs 17:14, “The beginning of strife is like letting out water.” It’s like a breach in

the dam. “So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out.” Christians are to be peacemakers; that’s to characterize our lives.

That’s to characterize our behavior, our relationships with other people, in the church and outside the church. Now, Paul qualifies that. He says, “If possible.” That’s not always possible. Some people don’t want peace, or they give unreasonable conditions for peace, and so it’s not wrong to defend oneself, to defend one’s property or family. But we are never to be the one who provokes hostility. We are to do everything that we can to promote peace and a positive witness.

War does come, though. The spiritual conflict is brought to us. We can expect that; that is inevitable, so Paul concludes the chapter by again stating the Christians’ proper response to hostility. Verse 19, “Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God.” So again Paul comes back to this warning against retaliation or revenge, and he repeats it because settling scores is such a natural response for man.

Shakespeare expressed that in *The Merchant of Venice*, when Shylock the Jewish merchant said, “Hath not a Jew eyes? Hath not a Jew hands? If you prick us, do we not bleed? If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge? If we are like you in the rest, we will resemble you in that.” Well, that’s true of human nature – that’s true of whoever. Men naturally seek revenge.

Christians are not natural. Christians are different, and we are not to take revenge. Instead, we are to leave room for the wrath of God. The words “of God” are supplied – they are not part of the original text – but they are certainly correct. Paul’s quote from Deuteronomy 32:25 supports that. “‘Vengeance is mine; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” That is the reason vengeance is wrong. It’s not that judging is evil. It’s not that wrongdoers should not be punished. But that is God’s prerogative, not ours.

We are to leave that to him; that is not our job, to bring about vengeance. That’s his, and he will right all wrongs in the best way, and he will do it at the time of his choosing, which is always the best time. So Paul says leave it to the Lord; it’s not our prerogative. He continues, quoting the Old Testament in verse 20, from Proverbs 25:21-22. “But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

Repaying evil with kindness is a way of heaping hot coals on a person’s head. That’s clear, but the meaning of the metaphor really isn’t, and different interpretations have been given. Coals and fire in the Old Testament often speak of God’s presence and God’s judgment, so some have argued that what Paul means is that giving food and water to the enemy is the means by which guilt before God is increased, leading to severer judgment.

And that will certainly result on the enemy when the enemy resists the good that the Christian does; that’s certainly true, but that’s not Paul’s meaning here. Christians don’t show kindness for the purpose of making judgment harsh. That’s not the motive for doing good; and the idea doesn’t fit the context. Paul has repeatedly urged Christians to avoid a spirit of retaliation. That idea, that interpretation could support such an idea, or such a spirit of retaliation.

So most commentators explain the meaning of the “coals of fire” to be a figure for the burning pangs of shame – of an afflicted conscious that leads to repentance. The positive motivation for acts of kindness to our enemies is that by them, we might win them to the truth. Charles Hodge wrote, “Nothing is so powerful as goodness. It is the most efficacious means to subdue enemies and put down opposition.

“Men whose minds can withstand argument and whose hearts rebel against threats are not proof against the persuasive influence of unfeigned love.” Well, that’s not always true, but often it is. Not everyone is a brilliant theologian. Not everyone is a skilled debater. But we can all show kindness, and the encouraging thing is that kindness is effective; effective in God’s service, and we should do it. But that’s easier to say than to do, isn’t it?

It’s easy for me to stand here before you and preach this sermon, and urge you to love your enemies, and to not take revenge, and do all of that, but reality is that’s very difficult to do. As we think about it, and I’m sure you have thought about it, and as I certainly have thought about it as I’ve pored over this passage, what can be harder than loving your enemies? Than to feed and comfort those who hate you, and those who have mistreated you, or mistreated your family?

And so as we think about this, we can’t help but wonder how is that possible? How can I possibly do such a thing when really faced with the opposition? When times are peaceful, and times are good and pleasant, that’s very easy to think about doing that, and resolving to do so. But when the time comes, is it possible? Well,

Paul may have hinted at what is needed in order to do this humanly impossible deed in what he said in verse 19: “Never take your own revenge, beloved.” Remember that you are beloved.

We are the objects of God’s love, and his love, as Paul explained back in 5:8, is for sinners. He did not show love to the kind and loving, but to those who are sinners, those who are by nature haters of God, and that is universally the case. And so it’s always helpful to remember where we came from and what we have received, and why we are the people that we are. It’s not because of anything within us. It’s not because of any merit in us. We are by nature haters of God, and yet God loved us.

We’ve been forgiven much, and those who have been forgiven much must forgive much. Now, Paul concludes the chapter with a final word of instruction, a general word of advice. “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” That really sums up what Paul is teaching in this passage. When a person pays back evil for evil and takes revenge, he is conforming to the attitudes, the actions and standards of the world; he is being overcome by it because he is yielding to it.

And when a person does that, he or she is not only overcome by yielding to an evil inclination, but he is subdued and branded by it, and taken captive by it. No one can take fire to his chest and not be burned, and we cannot embrace evil and not be wounded. When we harbor bitterness or retaliate it scars the soul; it hardens the heart. It leaves its mark, and it also affects others. Like the proverb said, it’s like breaching a dam. It lets a floodwater of evil that sweeps away others. It can’t be contained.

You cannot carry out evil, carry out a vendetta against another person and expect to contain that within a small group. It spreads. There are many examples of that. We think of the blood feuds that have gone on for generations because of an evil that took place generations previous. It continues on and on – we see that in the Middle East today. So Paul counsels against that. Instead, he urges a positive step: overcome evil with good. Respond to evil by doing good, and do that constantly.

That’s the force of this command. It’s not a one-time act. It’s not do one great, good thing, and that will take care of the problem, the issues of evil; no, those come to us daily, and we are to meet them regularly, consistently, with good. And as we do that, it promotes our sanctification. Just as doing evil corrupts our souls, so too doing good for our enemy edifies our souls. It strengthens us. It changes us for the good.

David’s response to Saul is an illustration of all of this. Saul persecuted him unjustly and mercilessly. He hounded David back and forth across the Judean wilderness in his mad attempt to murder him. But on one occasion Saul was in David’s grasp. David was hiding in a cave. Without knowing it, Saul entered, and while he was there, David snuck forward and he cut a corner off of Saul’s robe. After Saul left, David followed him, and he used that piece of robe to prove his love and his loyalty to the king.

He called out to Saul from a distance, and he asked him why he listened to those who said that David meant him harm. He told him how he could have killed him in the cave, then said, “Now, my father, see; indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand; for in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands.” When Saul heard this, his conscience was stricken. He said, “Is that your voice, my son David?” Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept.

He said, “David, you are more righteous than I, for you have dealt well with me while I have dealt wickedly with you, and now I know that you will surely be king.” He asked David that when he came to the throne he would swear not to cut off his descendants. David promised that, and then the two parted, but not long after that a similar incident occurred.

Saul again was pursuing David, and while Saul and his guards were asleep, David and Abishai went into the camp and they removed Saul’s spear and water bottle. They called out to Saul from a mountain ridge and showed him their trophies as proof that David again could’ve killed him, but instead he spared him. Again, Saul was convicted; he said, “I have sinned. I have played the fool.” David repaid evil with good; he heaped burning coals on a king’s head.

Now, Saul’s heart never changed. Saul was wicked to the end. But David became only stronger, while Saul grew increasingly weaker, and God preserved David, who did well, and in time, he destroyed Saul. Now, that is how we are to live in the world, and what that means is we’re to live by faith. We’re to trust God at every step. We are to trust him and his wisdom, and we do that by being obedient.

And in being obedient in times of great injustice, we are trusting God’s providence to work things out properly and justly in our lives, and he will do that. So what are we to do? We’re to love our enemies. We are to bless those who hate us.

And while that is hard to do, unnatural and seemingly impossible, this is instruction for people who are not natural; who are different from the world; who have become new creatures. We cannot do this in our own strength. You know that; I don't need to tell you that.

But we can do it in Christ's strength; as Paul said in Philippians 4:13, “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” And as we walk by the Spirit and not according to the flesh we will live as God wills us to live. So the life Paul urges here is not impossible – not for us. We can live it by God's grace. But if you're here without Christ, then such a life is impossible for you. You need the Savior, who gives new life, and gives a righteous life.

And if living well is not incentive for you to trust in Christ, then dying badly and eternally should be, and that incentive is found in God's own Words. ““Vengeance is mine; I will repay,” says the Lord.” That day will come – it will surely come – a day of vengeance, when God will right all wrongs. And as John said at the end of John chapter 3, verse 36, the wrath of God abides on you if you're in unbelief. But you can escape that wrath. There is a door of escape, and that is Jesus Christ.

He is God's Son, who became a man, lived a perfect life, and offered himself up as the all-sufficient sacrifice for sinners, so that all who trust in him are saved; forgiven, declared righteous, made children of God, sons and heirs. May God help you to do that, to look to Christ, to believe in him. May God help all of us to live obediently to the instruction that Paul has given and be a witness to the world. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank you for your goodness and your grace. We come to a marvelous text of Scripture, a lofty ethic that Paul gives to us, and yet one that is impossible. In fact, Father, as we read through the Scriptures, and we consider the life that is required of us, we must confess it is an impossible life, and actually a cruel life; if left to ourselves we could never do it. But we're not left to ourselves. You've given us new hearts. You've taken hearts of stone away and replaced them with hearts of flesh.

And you've given us the Spirit of God, the third person of the Trinity; God the Holy Spirit dwells within us to energize us, to enable us, to lead and guide us. He is

within us praying for us. The second person of the Trinity, your Son, is at your right hand interceding for us. We have the model of Christ before us, the example of your Son. We can do all things through him who strengthens us, so enable us, Father, to act upon that, and to be good and faithful witnesses in the midst of a dark world that needs your light.

We pray these things in Christ’s name. Amen.