

Live in Peace

Romans 12:18

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

Romans 12:17. It's the verse we talked about last Sunday, you may remember. "Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all." We talked about the high cost of getting even and how we needed to see that even if a person intended evil for you, yet God intended it for your good. And that God was able to use even the free will actions of people who regarded you as an enemy to further his purpose for your own life.

It's important for us to see that that's the attitude that God wants us to have to others in regard to personal hurts. The situation is that you and I are in Jesus on the Cross and we're now at the right hand of God far above all these things. His Spirit in us produces a readiness to realize that everything that anybody does against us is filtered through God's hands. And the only part of it that comes to us is the bits that God can use in our life. What we're talking about there is our personal reactions to personal evil.

We are talking about what you feel when somebody does something against you; when somebody puts you down in the office or somebody tries to undermine your position at work. We're saying that in that situation, Jesus produces in us a spirit of love and a spirit of trust in God's power and ability to take those evil actions and to use them for good in our lives. Loved ones, that's in regard to personal relationships. In regard to those relationships and our personal reactions to harm done to us, God says, "Repay no one evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all."

It's different if you're a policeman. You see that. It's different if you're a policeman or if you're a judge or if you're a parent or if you're a teacher. Then your very appointment by God to that position and by the secular authorities to that position -- requires you to resist evil. So we should be clear about that. When we say, "repay no one evil for evil", we're talking about our own personal relationships with people.

When you are in a position either as a parent or as a teacher or as a judge or a policeman or as someone who is in one of these positions of authority which God has created to restrain the bursting out of evil in our world -- then of course, you ARE responsible for resisting evil. Presumably all of us are clear on that distinction. But in those situations, you resist evil not because of the harm that is being done to you, but because of the harm that's being done to society. You resist evil not in a spirit of selfishness and petulance but in a spirit of self-discipline and self-will, governed by your position in God.

So, though you need to resist a person who wants to rape your wife or though you need to resist evil influences that are coming upon your children, what God is saying to us in this verse that we studied last Sunday is: in your personal relationships, as far as your relationships with people personally in your own private life are concerned -- repay no one evil for evil. But it's in the light of that qualification that the next verse, Romans 12:18, is appropriate.

Romans 12:18: "If possible, so far as it depends upon you, live peaceably with all." If possible, so far as it depends upon you. The Greek phrase is "Tau eks humon" and it really means: if possible as to that which comes out of you. As far as what comes from you, live peaceably with all

men. Or the King James Version you remember has that phrase, "As far as is in you lies". As far as it lies in you or depends on you; from your angle; as much as you have anything to do with it; so far as you can influence or govern things -- live peaceably with all men. That's what God says to us this morning.

Now the Father is realistic and he knows "it takes two to tango". He knows that there are many situations in which it is not possible to live at peace. But he does normally outline those very clearly. So maybe we should look at some of those relationships where it is impossible to live at peace and God recognizes that. One is in First Corinthians 7:15. It's the marriage situation. You're married, and this is the situation.

First Corinthians 7:15: "But if the unbelieving partner desires to separate, let it be so; in such a case the brother or sister is not bound. For God has called us to peace." You're married to a person who does not believe the same way as you do about God -- does not believe in Jesus; does not feel the same way about them as you do. So they want different things from the marriage than you do.

They want liberties at times that you don't think are right. They want to engage in activities that you don't think are right. They want to practice unfaithfulness and make a mockery of the marriage. You do not agree with those things and you do not believe in them. You are honor bound before God to hold to your beliefs in love. So you hold to your beliefs and then the person says, "I'm fed up with this marriage. I'm not getting what I want out of it. I don't believe in your God. I don't believe the way you believe. I don't accept the standards that you accept. I want out of this." In that situation God says: "Then you are not bound." Then you can let that person go because he has called you to peace and not to strife with a person who doesn't want to stay with you anyway.

Now it is important to see that it's the other person that determines that. The normal situation for marriage -- where one partner is not a Christian or does not believe in God and the other does -- is outlined in some verses further up the chapter. It's First Corinthians 7:12.

First Corinthians 7:12: "To the rest I say, not the Lord, that if any brother has a wife who is an unbeliever and she consents to live with him, he should not divorce her. If any woman has a husband who is an unbeliever, and he consents to live with her, she should not divorce him. For the unbelieving husband is consecrated through his wife, and the unbelieving wife is consecrated through her husband. Otherwise your children would be unclean, but as it is, they are holy." Now that's the norm.

You may find yourself married to a dear one who doesn't feel the same way about God as you do; doesn't believe the same way about Jesus as you do, but they love you and they want to live with you. And the pattern that God outlines is that it is your responsibility to take that glorious opportunity -- not only because you love them -- but because by doing that, they and the children will continue to have a touch of Jesus' life through you as they grow up. And will constantly have presented to them the invitation of Jesus to trust him.

We need to see that our society is pretty short on patience and we need to recognize that this is the normal pattern. If the other loved one is willing to live with you, you stay with them through thick and thin. And the history of unknown saints down through the years is filled with wives who have lived with drunken husbands, who have wrecked the kitchens and the living rooms every Saturday night when they come home drunk. But the wife has kept on praying for the husband and kept loving

him. And after 40 years of hell like that, the husband has come to know Jesus and has walked through the gates of heaven with the wife and the children.

So we need to see that the normal pattern that God outlines is: you stay with the other person through thick and thin if they're willing to stay with you. Of course, it puts in its right position our silly little protests: "Oh, he won't let me go to church." Or, "He doesn't come to Bible study with me." Well, big deal! You're lucky that he still loves you! That's the big thing. If he still loves you, then you still have contact with him and Jesus through you can still be an influence towards your loved one.

So God has called us not to run for the foxhole every time we see the first sign of strife in the marriage -- but to be prepared to be long-suffering and patient as long as the other loved one will stay with us. So that's the pattern, loved ones, that he outlines. But he does say clearly if the other person doesn't want to live with you then you're free.

There is one other situation loved ones that concerns those of us who are in business relationships. It's in Second Corinthians 6:14: "Do not be mismatched with unbelievers." You can see by the context -- this is not marriage. Marriage is not talked of in that chapter and the previous chapters. So it's not marriage.

"Do not be mismatched with unbelievers." It doesn't mean we're not to have anything to do with business groups such as the Lions Clubs, and other groups -- in business groups with people who don't believe in God. Because if we were ever to do that, we would retreat into a ghetto and we wouldn't be used at all by God to touch other people. In fact we ought to kill Christian Corps right here because that's what it's all based on -- having contact with people who don't know Jesus. But what God is saying is elaborated in the rest of that verse: "For what partnership have righteousness and iniquity? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Be'lial? Or what has a believer in common with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?"

You may find yourself in a business association or a legal alliance with someone who does not believe the same way as you do. You may find yourself being drawn more and more into practices that you really don't agree with, or attitudes that to you seem to lack the faith that we need to have in God in daily life. Or you may find yourself constantly being drawn into attitudes or ways of thinking that don't seem right to you. If that happens, then, loved ones, you are responsible for breaking that relationship. Because then you could be in a place where you can do all that you can possibly do, and yet still you're being driven into habits and attitudes and practices that are wrong.

Now you need to be very clear that you're breaking the relationship for that scriptural motive, and not simply because you're fed up or you're growing weary in well doing in season and out of season. But there's no doubt that if you're in an alliance with someone in a business situation or a political situation -- where you're finding yourself forced into ways that are not in accordance with your belief in Jesus or your trust in God -- then you've to break that situation.

Now, having dealt with those exceptions to what's normally referred to in the verse that goes, "If it be possible as far as in you lies" -- let's get to the positive injunction that God gives: "Live peaceably with all men." Live at peace. That's what God wants, loved ones.

He wants us all to live at peace with each other. To live in peace with our roommates, with our friends at home, with our wives or our children, with our fellow students, with the people we work with through the week. It is God's will for us to live in peace, not to live constantly in strife or constantly in tension.

Now are there any down-to-earth practical guidelines for living at peace? Yes. Those of us who have made a lot of mistakes down through the years know there are some guidelines in scripture and we've learned them the hard way. Let's look at a few of them. One is in Second Timothy 2.

Second Timothy 2:14: "Remind them of this, and charge them before the Lord to avoid disputing about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers." If you live with a wife or you live with a husband, or you live with children or with your parents, or you live with someone in one of the student houses on campus, or you live with a roommate in an apartment -- don't argue. Don't argue. Never even think about arguing! Never even consider arguing. Don't argue.

I come from the land of the Blarney [Ireland] so I am an expert arguer. We all kiss the Blarney stone [an idiom meaning that the Irish are talkative] before we were three years of age and have the gift of the gab. I agree with you that argument, in a technical, logical, philosophical sense is one of the most beautiful instruments of civilized man. Argument in the sense of dispassionate, unemotional, setting forth of the reasons for a certain line of action, with no emotion or no self-interest, is a beautiful thing to behold. But that's normally not what we mean by argument.

Normally what you and I mean by argument is, trying to defend with our minds what our will has already made up its mind to do. So don't argue. Just don't argue. You may say, "But listen! There are things that we have to settle. There are things that we have to settle in this relationship. Let's get down to it. Let's really settle this!" Probably they don't need to be settled. Probably they don't.

Probably, in fact, they can go on unsettled for years and years and years -- until you, through your love and your prayers, draw the other loved one to the point where either they see your viewpoint, or you see their viewpoint. But loved ones, argument achieves nothing. The only thing arguing achieves is -- it forces the other person into a more stubborn position.

Those of us who are married know it. And I think those of us who have lived with the same person for a long time as roommates, know it. Argument is death and destruction of peace. Never argue. Never argue. Doesn't matter what the pretext is -- never argue. Just refuse to argue.

The moment you smell the acrid smoke of argument coming up in a discussion -- stop. Stop, smile and give the other person a chocolate chip ice cream or something. [Audience laughs.] But don't argue. Because it's just Satan's trick to get you into opposing each other, and you lose all sense of each other's heart.

Argument is essentially an antagonistic enterprise. If you weren't antagonistic before you started out, you're antagonistic before you're half way through the argument. So don't argue. And if you find yourself pleading, "Oh but brother I have to settle this!" Probably you don't.

It's amazing how many of our relationships have grown over the years through great forbearance, great trust in God, and great love for one another. You probably don't need to settle things. And anyway, argument isn't the way to bring the other person around at all. The way to bring the other

person around is to love them and give them time to think through the thing themselves, and to trust God to bring them to the same point of view as you -- or you to the same point of view as them. Don't argue.

Another verse about living in peace with each other is in Matthew 6:13: "And lead us not into temptation." God is the only one who knows when it will help you to go through a certain temptation. He alone knows that. He alone knows when it will help you to go through a certain trial. He knows what part of your faith can be strengthened or what part of your personality or your will can be strengthened by going through that. We do not know it for each other.

So don't hit a person when he's down. Or don't hit a person when she's down. In other words, you know your friend better than anybody else. You know your husband or your wife better than anybody else. You can tell when they're in bad shape. Either they've had a bad night's sleep or they've had a tough day at work. Or the assignment is not done and you know things are rough. Do not mow in at that moment for the kill. Don't. [Audience laughs.]

Don't decide this is their time for a trial. "They have had a trial coming to them for some time and I have decided that this is the moment." Don't. It's very touching when you see a little animal that is injured. A little animal when it's injured wants to hide and not let anybody see that it's injured. Because actually there's some instinct in the fallen animal kingdom that lets an animal know, "They'll go for me! I'm ruined if they see I'm injured. I'll have to hide and pretend that I'm not injured." It's almost like blood drawing sharks.

Now, let there be none of that in our relationships. Let our friends know that they are secure in our friendship. They're secure in our hands. And when they are at their lowest, and when things are toughest for them, and when they're going through a trial or temptation, they'll know that you will be right there helping them and strengthening them and not beating them down forever.

That enables great peace to come between two people. When the other person senses they can trust you, that you won't hit them when they're down -- but rather that you'll be sensing, "Boy, they're having a tough day. All right, let me do everything to build them up and to make this as nice an evening as possible." Live at peace by protecting the other person, not hitting them when they're down.

Just one last verse, loved ones. It's First John 3:18: "Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth." Do little acts of love for each other. Peace is not an absence of war. It's the presence of love and concern for the other person expressed in practical ways. Do little things for the person you live with to show them that you don't just take them for granted.

Force yourself to go into a store and buy something for them and bring it home especially when they don't expect it. Let them sense your love not just with all those words, "I love you. I love you." Or, "I'm your friend." But in actual acts of love that build up a harmony and a peace between you and them. Because loved ones, living at peace with each other is an art.

It's an art. It's a beautiful work of art. It's a poem or a symphony so that you yourself can be a great composer or a great author -- in the only way that really matters to God. In writing some kind of a relationship between yourself and your friend, or your roommate or your wife or your husband -- that the angels in heaven can read. It requires thoughtfulness and care and interest and

creativity.

So yes, it is possible to live in peace with each other. It's possible to live at peace with each other -- and that's God's will for us. I pray that all of us here will start living at peace with each other and bring peace into each other's hearts. Because this world could do with a lot more of that. Let us pray.

Dear Father, we thank you for the person that we live with. Lord, forgive us if we've taken them for granted, whether they are a husband or wife or children or friends. Lord, forgive us for taking them for granted. We apologize to you, Father, for any time we have hit them when they're down. We apologize for our stupidity in being drawn into arguments, which we know have never solved a thing, but have always left wreckage in their path.

Then Lord, we do apologize for the lack of thoughtfulness in our love. For this abstract love that we have that never expresses itself in little acts of kindness or little gifts. But dear Father, we do thank you for your word this morning: "If possible, as far as it lies within you, live peaceably with all men."

Dear Lord, we commit ourselves this day to beginning to live in peace with each other, at work and at home and in our classes, for your glory. Now, the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us, now and evermore. Amen.