**How To Live**

**Roman 12:14-21**

Our text for meditation this morning is the Epistle lesson read earlier as recorded by the Apostle Paul to the church at Rome.

We pray Luther's Prayer before the sermon: Eternal God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, give us Your Holy Spirit who writes the preached Word into our hearts. May we receive and believe it and be cheered and comforted by it in eternity. Glorify Your Word in our hearts and make it so bright and warm that we may find pleasure in it, through Your Holy Spirit think what is right, and by Your power, fulfill the Word, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Your Son our Lord. Amen.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

How do you live? There are simple prescriptions for Christian life. Those who are in Christ Jesus, will exhibit that faith in things you do, and things avoid doing. Following those prescriptions does not earn one a different standing before God, but if you have faith, they are things you ***WILL*** do. No one place in Scripture lists all the prescriptions God has given, but by the pen of Paul today’s epistle lesson from Romans, there are a few. Let us look at them.

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.* I cannot speak for you, but this is difficult. Some people try to justify themselves and how they treat others by asking the question, “What does it mean to ‘bless’ someone?”

Does bless have to do with worldly, temporal things? It may, but it may not! A gift of $1000 may be either a blessing or a curse. How can that be, you ask? Well, if that money leads someone to do something they would not normally do, something sinful, in the great scheme of eternity, then it was not a blessing. Of course, if it frees them to join the Body of Christ in gathering to receive God’s gifts, it is a blessing.

To bless someone is to desire God’s good will toward them. God’s good will is an eternal thing, His will is that they be a part of His kingdom – both now and forever. Know this also, the will of God may or may not include temporal blessings. And yes, God’s will – may or may not even include healing of a person’s body in this mortal life.

So, do you bless even those who persecute you? Do you pray for them? Do you desire good for their eternal well-being?

The next line is, *Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep*. Do you do this? Do you seriously get involved with the lives of others so that their lives, their joys, their sorrows touch you? Yes, we rejoiced recently with the graduates from our midst, then with the recent baptism at Zion – corporately we rejoiced because I brought these things up in the prayers. But did you personally rejoice, did you share news of your joy with the families involved? If not, why not?

Recently we have lost some parts of the Body of Christ. Yes, we are joined with them at the Table of the Lord. Yes, we will rejoice with them at the eternal banquet. However, there were other parts of the Body that have been more sorely touched by these loses. Did you weep with them? Yes, you may have attended the funeral, but did you weep with them? Have you let them know they are in your prayers? Have you visited to just sit and talk with them?

Next we have a curious statement. *Live in harmony with one another.* Do you? Are you of the same mind and heart with those of the family of faith? Are you all united in the will and truth of God, in harmony? No, this is not saying, “We will agree to disagree – we will look past our differences so we can be united. Jesus instructs us to avoid those who teach falsely, and that there is only one truth. Through Paul’s pen, God tells us that if someone another teaching, they are to be accursed. Those who chose to deny portions of God’s Word and will break the harmony we are to have with one another. To live in harmony is to live in God’s truth.

God reminds us, *Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited.* Yes, we should do this, but there is always someone who we think is not quite worth our attention – someone we deem to be beneath us.

We are instructed to *Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.* Again, we are reminded that we are not to do evil unto those who do evil to us, even more, to be honorable – at all times! It is tough to do, and even if it outwardly appears that we are accomplishing this, there are times that the thoughts in our hearts and minds are less than honorable.

And, if we take the rest of this passage from the twelfth chapter of Romans as one thought, *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.*

As far as it depends on you, do you live peaceably with all? Not some – not most – not a few – not only ‘those who are nice to you’ – but, all? We do not! For our part, we are to do this. That is, in regard to our side of relationships, we are to live at peace with all. ‘For our part’ it doesn’t always go that way. Sinfully, too often we hold grudges in our heart and mind, and so are not at peace with others.

When someone does you wrong you want to get even. You think that this is justice. You think that since he did you wrong, you have the right to do him wrong. And, it won’t be wrong, because he did you wrong first. He deserves what he has coming to him. He says something to hurt your reputation. You say something to hurt his reputation. And so it goes. Getting even is considered the right thing to do.

But the way that seems right to us is sinful. If someone does you wrong, he deserves punishment. This is most certainly true. It is not up to you to mete it out.

St. Paul echoies the words of our Lord Jesus who said:

You have heard that it was said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. (Matthew 5:38-39)

Justice does not arise from within us, it comes from God. When you are wronged you are to commit your cause to God. Listen to the inspired words of St. Peter:

For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Peter 2:21-25)

It was supremely unfair! The only One who never sinned was brutally sinned against and no one intervened to save Him. He never said an unkind word and He never did an unkind deed. Evil men lied about Him and cruelly mocked Him. It was an egregious abuse of the judicial system, for which Jesus should have appealed for vengeance. Yet He issued no complaints, no threats, no recriminations. It appears terribly unfair, does it not? And God does nothing to stop it.

As a matter of fact, God took this most unfair of all atrocities and turned it into the salvation of sinners. For when men were wickedly abusing the innocent Son of God, God was placing upon Him our sins and He was doing so in love. Men hated. God loved. God took human hatred and directed it for the purpose of divine love. The most treacherous act of injustice becomes the fulfillment of all vengeance.

That’s right. We do not need to get even. We do not need to take out vengeance or obtain justice. We already have it. All the sin – of all sinners – of all time – was heaped upon Jesus’ innocent head and He fully bore it. In so doing, He fulfilled divine demands for vengeance. He also fulfilled our need for justice. There can be no point in personal vengeance.

Vengeance is mine says the Lord our God. If you want to see vengeance displayed, look at Christ’s suffering. See Him suffer, not only for your sins that you have committed against God and your neighbor, but also for the sins committed against you. When Jesus tells you to turn the other cheek and to bless those who curse you, He is not telling you to do anything He has not already done.

But does it work? I mean, really, it is possible to overcome evil with good

When Christians, whose sins are covered with the righteousness of Christ behave by seeking no vengeance but that which God, in His own way and time will exact, they are living lives that reflect their confession of faith. The “burning coals ” that St. Paul mentions refer to the shame that people will feel when Christians refuse to respond to their evil in kind. And, if people will not be shamed, let God worry about it. We have no need to fight battles for ourselves.

Indeed, who are we to seek vengeance upon those for whom Christ also died. If they refuse to repent and have faith in the forgiveness of Christ, their eternity will be much different than ours – it will be much warmer. If they will not repent and trust Christ, we know what their eternity will be. Dear friends, they deserve our pity and prayers. In this is how we are to live peaceably with all.

The innocent One, Jesus Christ, has taken all sin into Himself. He has taken your sin, my sins, and the sins of all people into His own flesh. He died that forgiveness might be granted to all sinners. Some reject it!

Jesus gathers us today to live peaceably with us. He grants us His peace in the Word that we hear and in His body and blood as we gather at His table. We have an Advocate with the Father: Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He pleads our case for us. He provides us with better justice than we could possibly obtain for ourselves. It will stand the test of time and endure into eternity.

We live under mercy, at peace with all. God provides it. It is this mercy of God, given to us in Christ, which the Holy Spirit lives through us in mercy to others. In our mercy toward others, we give what we have received, and we show that we are children of God. Amen.