

**“SEEK PEACE, NOT EVIL.”**  
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**Scripture Texts: Romans 12:17-19**

### **Introduction.**

When you hear Paul’s exhortations to the Christians in the church in Rome what do you start wondering about? Exhortations like:

Love one another. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Repay no one evil for evil, ... do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Do you start to question how healthy this church is? Sounds like they have some problems, maybe some conflict issues. Think about it for a minute. The church is made up of Romans and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, foreigners, aliens. There are slaves and freemen, men and women, young and old. There are bound to be some interesting relational dynamics. Would you want to belong to a church like that?

Let me burst your bubble, that is every church that has two or more people in it. Every single church on earth has always had conflicts, arguments, disagreements, differences, misunderstandings. We are sinners who sin against each other. It is endless, there will be no end to it until Jesus comes.

Do you think I am exaggerating, let me prove it to you.

Cain and Abel. Brothers in the same family.  
Abraham and Lot had to go their separate because of conflict.  
Jacob and Esau, same story. The eleven sons of Jacob and Joseph.  
Moses and the children of Israel in the wilderness. Grumbling, complaining, and griping.  
How did they get along with their leaders? How did the leaders get along, Aaron and Miriam against Moses?

Did the disciples all get along with each other? In the upper room?

Where did the office of deacon come from? It was created in First Church Jerusalem because of conflict over the distribution of food to widows.

The first council meeting in the early church was called to deal with a serious disagreement.

Later on Paul and Barnabas got in a big conflict over taking John Mark on the next missions trip.

In Galatians 2 Paul confronts Peter in a serious theological clash.

And what about the Christians in Corinth taking each other to court?

And then my favorite. Paul in his letter to the church in Philippi publicly rebukes two women and names them out loud, Euodia and Syntyche and urges them to get along in the Lord. How would you like having your name forever etched on the pages of Holy Scripture. And mind you of all the churches Paul wrote letters to Philippi was the best church. Even they had conflict.

I still remember so clearly being a brand new Christian and a week into my new reality being in a conflict with another Christian and it really messed with me. I didn't have spiritual understanding to deal with it. We are Christians, everything should be good and great all the time.

Don't be surprised by conflict, by sin, by sinning against each other. You and I are normal people, normal sinners, normal Christians. God's people sin. God's people have conflict. If someone sins against you, cut them a little slack, they are just being people doing what people do. And when they do quickly say, "there but for the grace of God go I." I am the same.

We will have conflict. The question is not whether we will quarrel, but whether or not we can keep it a lover's quarrel. The issue is not will we fight, but will we fight fair, with a goal to seek peace and honor and deference.

It doesn't have to mean total agreement, but respect and deference in disagreement.

The world needs to see us Christians having our differences in a way that's different from the way the world has its differences. The world needs to see Christians having differences while also having an observable unity, brotherly affection and genuine love (Francis Schaeffer).

Paul has been exhorting all us about how we can do just that, be different from the world and be a light to the world.

Let's start with verse 18 and then include verse 17 with verses 19 to the end.

**12:18**

*18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

**Romans 14:19** Let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

**Hebrews 12:14** Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.

**Matthew 5:9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall see God.

Do you notice here and appreciate how honest and realistic Scripture is. It clearly states the goal, the good thing we are to pursue, peace with all. But the realism is if possible, in so far as it depends on you, it acknowledges there are limits to what we can do.

To the extent that it is in your power, seek peace; strive for peace.

What does this mean? Does it mean if you are a person with a short fuse, a quick temper or a sharp tongue, and we just can't restrain ourselves, then it isn't possible for us to be at peace with others? No, not controlling yourself is not an excuse or loophole. That is sin and that is on you.

Make sure it is not you who refuses to make peace, but it is them who refuses to make peace. You make every effort; you try and try again. The pursuit of peace often starts out one-sided. Someone has to go first. Decide to be the one.

Are we obeying this admonishment if we just avoid certain people or cut them out of our relationships, or withdraw or withhold affection, brotherly love, is that keeping peace? Well it might be keeping a kind of peace, but Paul is saying pursue peace. This is not conflict avoidance, it is conflict resolution and reconciliation. This is doing the Gospel.

The rest of Romans 12 shows you how you are to behave as you seek peace with others. On your part, you have genuine love, you love with brotherly affection, you outdo others in showing honor, thinking more highly of them than yourself, being patient in trial and constant in prayer. Seek harmony. That's what you bring to the table seeking peace and reconciliation.

The impossibility of peace comes when the other person refuses to join us in this effort, when because of their bitterness or anger or stubbornness or hardheartedness they refuse to seek peace.

Make sure the problem is on them and not on you. Live, act, speak, behave in a way that wins peace, changes the hearts and minds of those opposed to us.

There are two kinds of peace we cannot attain. Peace with evil, with sin, keeping the peace when it makes us complicit with sin or sinful behavior. And keeping the peace with those who oppose us because of the Gospel and our love for Jesus.

We are not to be contrarians, we are to represent God's reconciliation. God sought peace with us and came to make reconciliation, while we were enemies. Go thou and do likewise.

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**Ephesians 4:32** Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.

**Matthew 6:14-15** For if you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, 15 but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.

God is deadly serious when He says if we will not forgive others, He will not forgive us. God forgives the forgiving but leaves the unforgiving unforgiven. Withholding forgiveness is one of the most dangerous things we can do because it puts us in danger of losing heaven.

God forgave us when we were sinners sinning against Him. Forgiveness is how we make peace with God and often with each other. Does being forgiven by God have such a powerful and profound effect on you that you are able to forgive others and make peace and let go of grudges and bitterness?

Why seek peace? Because of God, because of the Gospel, because of the cross, genuine love.

*18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.*

12:17

***17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.***

Repay no one evil for evil. This was one of the mantras in our home while raising five boys. It was a constant refrain, don't pay back evil for evil. Parents, you cannot begin teaching this too young. The opportunity will present itself very early and the lesson never ends.

So when can you pay back evil for evil? Never. Not ever, no way, nada, nyet, zilch, zero, never.

Who does this apply to? Paul wrote this to Christians in the church.

What, really, are there Christians in the church wanting to do evil to other people in the church?

No, certainly not, not us, not here. Well why not. It happens in our families, with our spouses, siblings, relatives, friends, fellow students, co-workers. Yes, even among Christians, even here.

The evil takes on many forms. Passive aggressive behavior, silent treatment, shunning, ignoring, avoiding, speaking ill of, bitterness, not wishing good to, bearing grudges, holding on to critical thoughts for years, not seeking peace.

When we are hurt we all have the strong innate desire to get even. We may give unspoken agreement to the bumper stickers that say: "Don't get mad. Get even!" "Avenge yourself! Live long enough to be a problem to your children."

Admit it, we have all felt the strong alluring power inside of us to get even, to retaliate. And if you are able to resist it most of the time, just watch what happens when we get behind the wheel of a car and find out what kind of person we can turn into.

The nicest people in the world get in a car and they turn into something not so nice. Just ask my wife, she is married to one of those kind of people. Something about not using turn signals, delaying at lights, cutting in too close, not knowing how to drive through a roundabout, and that deserves a glare or raised hands or a honk. At least I can smugly say I don't give one finger salutes.

Evil for evil. Don't do it.

Never return evil for evil, never retaliate, get even. Never to anyone

Not at home, not with family or relatives.  
Not at church, not on the job, not at school  
Not in the car, on the road.  
Not on Facebook, Twitter.

Speak no evil. Do no evil. Write no evil. Think or wish no evil.  
Stop yourself, count to ten, pray, for yourself and the other person.

**1 Corinthians 4:12-13** When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; 13 when slandered, we entreat.

**1 Peter 3:9-12** Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. 10 For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; 11 let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.”

If you return evil for evil, you make God your adversary, and you really don't want to do that. Listen to the convicting voice of the Holy Spirit and receive His words as grace calling us to Christ-likeness. Jesus extended love to His enemies and offered grace and forgiveness, “Father, forgive them.”

I am not naïve, I know there are some situations that are extremely difficult, and for these I urge you to get help for the sake of your own soul and others. Don't stay in bondage to bitterness or unforgiveness.

The reason we don't return evil for evil is because God hasn't returned evil to us when we deserved it. People who don't return evil for evil show they are born again, they show that they get it, they see what Christ did and what God does for us and they imitate that.

Are you so aware of your blessings that you can't help yourself, you just overflow with blessings to others? What do you have to lose? How will blessing an enemy diminish you in any way? You already have your inheritance. It is kept safe in heaven for you.

***17 Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.***

## **Implications and Application.**

I had two text scams on my phone this morning. Someone in the church got a scam email from me this week. We are constantly being warned about scams, about ways people try to take advantage of us and steal our personal information. We are warned about IRS scams and computer repair scams and Nigerian email scams. Now AI is making them more realistic and sophisticated.

Satan is constantly scamming us, baiting us, tempting us, stirring us up to offenses, to criticisms, to gossip and slander, to backbiting, to giving the cold shoulder or silent treatment.

We are being played by Satan every day through social media, conversations, chance encounters. Who has Satan been baiting you over? Who are you out of harmony with? Who are you not talking to or avoiding? Who are you keeping score on? What hurt feelings are you nursing?

When we are free in Christ, we are free to love, to honor others, to make allowances for others.

With whom can you put these things into practice this week? Who can you bless because of the blessing you have already received and because of the blessing that is yours to come?

**Prayer:** Holy Father, by your Spirit in us enable us to live worthy of the calling we have received, worthy of the reconciliation you have made with us. Enable us to do what the Apostle Paul calls us to do, to “bear with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

Thank you for showing us the way to restore what becomes broken through sin and misunderstanding. Make us hungry and thirsty for peace and reconciliation with you and with each other. Fill us with your Holy Spirit and help us this week to live graciously in a hard and hostile world and now having been blessed over and over again, we may be a blessing to others. Help us as we go from this place to be well and to live well and to do good.