

ROMANS (12:14-16)

Mind Your Manner

PART 70 – MAY 14, 2006

BLESS THE PERSECUTORS

We'll be looking to Christ as our great example this morning, as we examine a set of scriptures regarding pride and persecution.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. - *Romans 12:14-16 NIV*

What a perfect Mother's Day verse Paul begins with: "Bless those who persecute you"

- That's the definition of a mom! Bless those little *persecutors*!

And now, the way "persecute" is used here, it could refer to anything from the simple offense of a fellow believer, to the harsh mistreatment of a radical non-believer. Who the persecutors are is not what Paul wants to emphasize - that's not the important part.

Notice how radical the behavior is that Paul calls for. He doesn't just say, "Don't retaliate" - we could accomplish that with willpower. In fact, we can harbor all kinds of hateful, resentful, vengeful thoughts, and yet *not* strike back.

God wants internal heart transformation: "bless and do not curse"

I must become a different kind of person. Not one who *wants* my adversaries to have trouble, but one who *wants* them blessed. But, what does it mean to want them blessed?

GUARDING THE FORT

It doesn't mean that we tolerate injustice; it simply means we work to understand them, and we want what's best for them.

I tend to judge others by their words and actions. And turn around and judge myself by my intentions. It's a double standard that needs to be reversed. I should work hard to understand the intention and motive of my adversary, while paying strict attention to how my words and actions are being perceived by them.

- I must judge *my* words & actions, but *their* intentions.

The ultimate example (and inspiration) of someone blessing those who are cursing him, would (of course!) be Christ on the cross.

Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing." -
Luke 23:34 NIV

Rather than a condemning, go-to-hell attitude; we must adopt a Christ-like, let's-get-you-right-with-God attitude.



D.L. Moody poetically pictured Jesus giving His disciples these instructions after the resurrection: Go and find the man who thrust his spear into My side and tell him there's a much quicker way to My heart. And find the men who crowned Me with thorns and tell them I would like to give them the crown of life.

- We have a choice to make: we can offer a crown of thorns or a crown of life.

It's all about who I worship. If I worship myself and my body (as my main source of contentment and security), I'll have a raging impulse to retaliate when under fire. But, if I've "died to self" (I'm not my *greatest* treasure), then being rejected or wounded is no longer an *ultimate* threat.

It's like a lone soldier guarding his FORT: If he's attacked, he just tries to take out as many enemies as he can. But, if he moves to another location he can watch the enemy attack his old fort without feeling threatened at all.

To the degree that my trust and faith, my security and contentment is in Christ instead of myself, I'll be free to bless those who attack that empty fort.

- And I won't even need the last word!

BE SYMPATHETIC

Then Paul says something that doesn't immediately seem to tie in:

"Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn"

Q: Is he just reminding us to be more sensitive and more connected to the people around us? Or is there something more?

Q: When would failing to do this become especially destructive?

A: When you're *glad* they're mourning, or *mad* they're rejoicing!

You're angry because they've attacked the fort, and you want things to go bad for them. So, if things go bad you're glad; and if they don't, you're mad. That's *cursing*!

Again we can look to Jesus for an incredible example:

- The *first* miracle (John records) takes place while Jesus is rejoicing at a wedding with guests who are drunk. (*John 2:1-10*)
- The *last* (John records) happens while Jesus is weeping at a funeral with people who blame Him for the death. (*John 11:32-44*)

Jesus didn't allow the inappropriate actions or accusations of others to keep Him from rejoicing with those who rejoice, and mourning with those who mourn. And in both instances He was able to bring a great witness to those people on behalf of God.

And then Paul says: "Live in harmony with one another"

Your level of relational harmony will be directly proportional to the degree that you choose to judge others by their intentions and yourself by your words and actions.

Q: What keeps us from doing this?

A: In a word: pride!

"Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position"

Q: What do we say when someone hurts our pride?

A: How low! Low blow! You low-down, low-life, "so-and-so"!

And then Paul adds: "Do not be conceited"

Q: What's the difference between "proud" and "conceited" here?

A: Proud means "big-shot"; conceited means "know-it-all".

Pride will guard an over-inflated sense of dignity. Conceit will keep us from admitting we're at fault. Both gotta go - because both will kill sympathy and empathy.

Q: Do you know what needs to *replace* pride and conceit?

A: Humility's good, but it's not enough of an alternative.

- Pride and conceit must be replaced by faith.

Humility simply looks away from itself. I can have loads of humility and still look to other *humans* for my main source of contentment, security, and joy. But faith continually looks *to* Christ for security, contentment, joy, and example. It's said that the life and death of Jesus Christ are a standing rebuke to every form of pride susceptible to mankind.

- A. To the pride of birth & rank:

Isn't this the carpenter's son? - *Matthew 13:55 NIV*

- B. To the pride of possessions & wealth:
The Son of Man has no place to lay his head. - *Luke 9:58 NIV*
- C. To the pride of respectability:
Can any good thing come out of Nazareth? - *John 1:46 NAS*
- D. To the pride of personal appearance:
He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. - *Isaiah 53:2 NIV*
- E. To the pride of reputation:
Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners. - *Luke 7:34 NIV*
- F. To the pride of education:
How has this man become learned, having never been educated? - *John 7:15 NAS*
- G. To the pride of authority & superiority:
I am among you as one who serves. - *Luke 22:27 NIV*
- H. To the pride of success:
He was despised and rejected by men ... - *Isaiah 53:3 NIV*
- I. To the pride of ability:
By myself I can do nothing ... - *John 5:30a NIV*
- J. To the pride of self-will:
I do not seek My own will ... - *John 5:30 NAS*
- K. To the pride of intellect:
My teaching is not my own. - *John 7:16 NIV*

There is only one conclusion when it comes to Christ: The One who deserved the most, demanded the least. This is our Savior; and this is our model. The ultimate blessing in the face of the ultimate cursing!

As we look to His example and yield to His Spirit we will become a different kind of people. Our hearts will be radically changed as we reflect Him; and we will long for the salvation and the ultimate good of those who curse us.