

“Right Living in a Wicked World”  
Romans 12:17  
(Preached at Trinity, February 27, 2011)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

**Disclaimer:** These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verses 14-21** Paul describes the virtue of loving our enemies. How do we love those who hate us? How do we love those who have treated us unjustly?
2. The first thing we have to understand as we enter this section of **Romans 12** is there is a presupposition in this passage that Christians should expect opposition from those who do not know Christ.
  - A. When we looked at the phrase in **Verse 12** – “persevering in persecution” I pointed out that the New Testament presents persecution as something connected to the nature of Christianity itself?”
  - B. Persecution is a part of the Christian experience. Those who live righteous lives in this evil world will inevitably face the displeasure of people who suppress the rule of God in their lives.
  - C. Those who live righteous lives can expect to face opposition.  
**Matthew 5:10-12** – “Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. <sup>11</sup> "Blessed are you when *men* cast insults at you, and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely, on account of Me. <sup>12</sup> "Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”  
**2 Timothy 3:12** – “And indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”
3. In a world that demonstrates such opposition to God's righteous people it is important for us to understand how we are to behave.  
Last week we looked at the way love affects how we behave towards our enemies.
  - A. We seek their blessings – **Verses 14-15**  
Human nature is curse our enemies and desire their downfall  
The Christian way is to love and bless our enemies rather than curse them
  - B. We are to approach them with meekness and humility – **Verses 15-17**
    1. This demands great measures of love and mercy
    2. We are to rejoice in God's blessings upon them. In fact we are to pray for God's blessings upon them.
    3. If we love our neighbor as ourselves we should enter into their joy and grief as if it were our own.
4. As we come to **Verse 17** we come upon a passage that demands some close observation lest we miss the importance of what Paul is trying to say. The original readers of Paul's epistle would have understood what he was saying, but we have the challenge of trying to understand it through the filter of a different language.

5. The first section is straightforward:  
 “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.”  
 We’ll see more of this in **Verse 19**. It simply admonishes us to show mercy to our enemies. It prohibits us from taking revenge. It expresses our Lord’s command:  
NAS **Matthew 5:44** "But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you”
6. Paul is setting up a great contrast using two contrasting words:  
 κακός, καλός – evil, good  
 Do not render evil but render good before all men. The second half of the verse stands to explain the great contrast with the first. Instead of rendering evil the Christian is to do what is right.
7. I want us to focus primarily upon the second half of **Verse 17**.  
NASB – “Respect what is right in the sight of all men.”  
 This is obviously a difficult passage to render into English which is testified by the lack of conformity in translation.  
ESV – “but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.”  
KJV – “Provide things honest in the sight of all men.”  
NIV – “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.”  
NKJV – “Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.”
8. And if you read ten different commentaries you’ll probably get ten different views of this passage.  
 We need to consider carefully what Paul is teaching us here.  
 The problem arises from the many different ways the word καλός can be translated. The Greek dictionary defines it as good, beautiful, right, proper, fitting, honorable, honest, or precious. So we find:  
 The ESV translates it “what is honorable”  
 The KJV translates it “honest things”  
 The NKJV translates it “good things”  
 The NASB and NIV translates it “what is right”
9. The only way to truly understand the meaning of this word is to examine it in light of the context of its use.  
 In terms of “the good” in aesthetics καλός takes on the meaning of “the beautiful”  
 In terms of “the good” in philosophy καλός takes on the meaning of “the truth”  
 In terms of “the good” with regard to morality or ethics καλός takes on the meaning of “what is right.”
10. In each of these it is a matter of objective truth.
  - A. In other words in terms of “the beautiful” that which reflects God is beautiful— thus there is beauty inherent beauty. Something is beautiful because it reflects the beauty of God. “Beauty is in the eyes of the beholder” is not a true statement.
  - B. In terms what is true, that which God reveals is true. Truth is absolute.
  - C. In terms of ethics, that which reflects God’s holy character is right, and that which God commands is right.
11. When Paul tells us that we are to “Respect what is right in the sight of all men” he is saying that we are to live ethically before all men according to the will of God.  
 The NIV actually captures the best meaning in this passage:  
 “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.”

12. In other words, not only do we respond to our enemies by not returning evil for evil, there is a right behavior that we must maintain before all people at all times. There is much at stake. All men are watching us. We are making bold claims before them. Do our lives measure up to those claims?  
Robert Haldane, 18<sup>th</sup> century Scottish pastor, put it well: “We are to be careful that all our works are done so as to avoid anything that would bring a reproach upon the Gospel. We ought not only to abstain from what we know to be wrong, but we ought sedulously to avoid just suspicion.”
13. Some people boldly testify, “I don’t care what men think. I only care what God thinks.” This may seem good in the surface, but it doesn’t bear up well under the scrutiny of Scripture. The Bible stresses the importance of bearing an excellent testimony before all men.
- A. As we consider the qualifications for a pastor we read that he has to have a good reputation of those outside the church:  
**1 Timothy 3:7** – “And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he may not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.”
- B. When Paul collected the offering to be sent for the relief of the poor in Jerusalem he was careful to place it in the hands of faithful brothers:  
**2 Corinthians 8:20-21** – “taking precaution that no one should discredit us in our administration of this generous gift; <sup>21</sup> for we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.”
- I. First, we need to understand that there is a universal standard of right behavior
- A. People are often guilty of assuming behavior is determined only by cultural norms and standards.
1. Different cultures have very different standards of sexual behavior. Some see no problem with very promiscuous lifestyles. In our own country most children are now born out of wedlock. This has become our standard
  2. Different cultures have very different standards for raising children and the role of men and women within the home. Some are very matriarchal. Some have little regard for children, others elevate them to the highest level.
  3. Different cultures have different work ethics
  4. Different cultures have different views of private ownership of personal property.
  5. Different cultures place have different value upon honesty. Most people place little value upon the word of politicians. This is particularly troubling in our own country.
- B. We must see right living as transcultural – in other words there are ethical standards that extend throughout all cultures
1. There are countless cultural differences among human beings
    - a. There are differences in language and tradition. There are differences in dress and diet.
    - b. God has commanded a single ethic
  2. God has placed His universal standard upon all men regardless of culture

3. God has written His Law upon the hearts of all men  
**Romans 2:14-15** – “For when Gentiles who do not have the Law do instinctively the things of the Law, these, not having the Law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup> in that they show the work of the Law written in their hearts, their conscience bearing witness, and their thoughts alternately accusing or else defending them”
4. Rather than submitting to their conscience lost humanity sets their own standard for living.
5. Most people pride themselves in wanting to do the “right thing.” The problem is, they’ve rejected the right standard to do the “right thing.”
  - a. The world is full of religion, each religion giving its idea of how to do the right thing.
  - b. In our land we have bought into the lie of relativism – that there are no absolutes, particularly with regards to ethics.
6. God has revealed a single ethical standard and we must live this standard

- II. The Bible places this standard of “right” with regard to our fellow man into several basic categories or laws – we refer to this as the Moral Law.
- A. The category of the family as represented in the 5<sup>th</sup> Commandment
    1. God has revealed a principle of masculine leadership  
 Adam was created first and then Eve was created for him and out of him  
 Adam became the representative for all mankind
    2. Within the home the man has chief duty of leadership  
 Wives are to submit to their husbands and children are to obey their parents
  - B. The category of respect for life as represented in the 6<sup>th</sup> Commandment
    1. God forbids individuals from taking life (doesn’t apply to civil govt. although the civil govt. has the duty to protect the lives of its citizens)
    2. God commands us to respect life. We are to protect life.
    3. Our culture has perverted this ethic. The killing of the unborn denies God’s principle of right. It is particularly wicked because it preys upon the weak for the sake of personal satisfaction.
  - C. The category of sexual purity as represented in the 7<sup>th</sup> Commandment
    1. God has given the gift of human sexuality but He has set the parameters for its practice.
    2. It is to be restricted to one man and one woman and denied in any manner outside marriage.  
 Our culture has perverted this God ordained ethic through promiscuity, homosexuality, and pornography
  - D. The category of property rights as represented in the 8<sup>th</sup> Commandment
    1. God’s standard is that we respect the property of others
    2. We live in an age where thievery has become the norm  
 People steal from their employers, cheat on their income taxes, and rob God in their tithes.
  - E. The category of honesty, particularly with regard to speaking truth
    1. We live in an age of dishonesty, of lies and deceit. Children lie to parents, wives to husbands and husbands to wives. There is dishonesty in advertising. Politicians have made lies and deceit the norm – just a part of being a politician. Attorneys develop great skill at lying.

2. God's standard is honesty. He hates the lying tongue.  
**Proverbs 6:16-17** – “There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: <sup>17</sup> Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood,”
- F. The category of contentment with what we have
1. This is at the core of loving one another—to rejoice in the blessings of others.
  2. The sin of covetousness is at the heart of a multitude of sins from adultery to robbery to murder
- III. There are two issues a heart here
- A. First, in order to do the right thing one has to know the right thing
1. As I stated, God has written His Law upon the hearts of all men.
  2. More importantly, God has given us the revelation of His holy will in His Word.
  3. God has not left us without direction. If you deny that the Bible is the one source of ethical direction you are left without guidance.  
**Psalms 119:11** – “Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You.”  
**Psalms 119:105** – “Your word is a lamp to my feet And a light to my path.”  
**2 Timothy 3:16-17** – “All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: <sup>17</sup> That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works.”
- B. Second, there must be the will to do what is right
1. No one has an excuse before God. The problem isn't a lack of understanding. The problem is a rejection of what is known. They suppress the truth of God and His rightful dominion in this world.  
**Romans 1:18** – “For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,”
  2. God told Joshua as he entered into the land of promise:  
**Joshua 1:8** – “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it”  
In Joshua's farewell address at the end of his days he proclaimed before Israel:  
**Joshua 24:14-15** – “Now, therefore, fear the LORD and serve Him in sincerity and truth; and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. <sup>15</sup> “And if it is disagreeable in your sight to serve the LORD, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve: whether the gods which your fathers served which were beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are living; but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.”

**Conclusion:**

1. What will we do? How will we live? We know what to do. We have the duty to do it.
2. “Do what is right in the sight of all men.”
3. We have to understand what is at stake. People are watching us. Human beings have an inner sense of right and wrong. This is why it is so important for us to live rightly before them. When believers violate the principles of right and wrong we bring a reproach upon the name of Christ.
4. May we be careful to reflect Christ before them.