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ROMANS 12:17-21

Romans Series: How God Changes People

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Father, we find ourselves in challenging places sometimes when we have to live with or interact with difficult people. We thank you for your word that gives us insight into how we are to handle ourselves in the midst of those situations and how we might then relate better. We thank you for this passage in Romans 12 that we've been in for what seems like months, just learning more about what it means to live the Christian life in regards to interpersonal relationships. This morning, Father, as we complete this passage we ask that you would draw it to some personal conclusions in our own hearts as to what we need to do, how we can be more effective in managing ourselves and also in relating to other people effectively. Use this time, Father, we ask, looking at your word to prepare us and to teach us how to be more like you. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.

Open your Bibles with me to Romans 12:17-21. I want to take all five of these verses because they're all tied so closely together. So this might be a little longer than usual, but I want to take all of these verses. Hold onto your hat. I'm going to move quickly on a lot of this, but I think it will be really helpful. In fact I would suggest that hidden within this passage are some keys for our life, not only managing our own selves but also relating to others effectively.

Let me read Romans 12:17-21. It reads this way. *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

In order to understand this passage and apply it fully, I want to first draw our attention to some concepts that give us some background. We've been studying about the heart and trying to understand what's in the heart. According to the Bible there are a lot of pieces that we need to consider, all of these things running around at the same time. It's the place where we ponder things, where we make decisions, where we come to conclusions and then have determination to make those commitments and move forward. That's when we do something from our own hearts. It's the place where the Bible comes to do some change inside of us.

Psalm 119:11 says, *I will hide your word in my heart, so that I will not sin against you.* So the Bible affects behavior if we allow it to go through the heart. It's a place where we experience

hope. It's a place where we experience hurt in our lives. So if you've been hurt deeply it happens inside of the heart of a person. It's also where we experience, where we have desires and emotions. It's the place where Jesus wants to come and live. When Jesus Christ comes into our heart He organizes all of these things. So whatever pain you've experienced, whatever guilt you're experiencing, whatever's going on, God organizes those things because He comes to live in there. Jesus lives in our heart. The Holy Spirit also finds residence in our heart as well.

All of those things are going on in the heart, which make it a rather challenging place to work and understand. God wants to do some work in our hearts, especially as we're relating to other people. That's the passage in Romans 12:9-21 which talks about how we're to get along and either take action with other people or respond to other people in a proper way. We all need help in our hearts to know how to do that effectively. So understanding the heart is the first idea I want to share with you.

A second idea that you must understand in order to understand this passage is the conscience. God has placed a conscience in each one of us. The word *conscience* is used thirty times in the New Testament. The idea is the conscience convinces us or tells us what's right and what's wrong. The conscience needs to be trained. That's why in childhood we're often trained about the right way and the wrong way to do things.

There's a right way and a wrong way to leave the bathroom (at least there was in my house) – turn off the light. I always had to remember that's the way you leave the bathroom. Clean off the counter. That's the conscience prompting me. When I leave the bathroom today, I still turn off the light. Why? Because my conscience was trained early on about that.

There's a right and a wrong way to leave the table when you're done eating, a right and wrong way to clean the kitchen, a right and wrong way to deal with an annoying brother, a right and wrong way to deal with parents when you don't like what they've asked you to do. There's a right and a wrong way and the conscience guides you and helps you know a right and a wrong.

Now if there's this line in the heart that deals with right and wrong, that's really important because you grow up with this right and wrong, and you develop these opinions about what's right and wrong, many of them coming from God's word, some of them coming from our parents' voice in our head. Some of that is the same and sometimes it's different. But we have this right and this wrong being fed to us through the conscience that God has placed there. So we're sensitive to right and wrong, which creates inside of us a scale.

We have to understand the scale. Every one of us has a scale inside of our hearts that needs to be balanced. On the one side of the scale we have hurt (that is wrong has been done to us), and on the other side of the scale we have guilt. These are the challenges. If you've been hurt then the hurt level is a little bit up. You don't feel so bad. But then if you're mean to someone because of it then the hurt comes up a little bit and the guilt goes down and you feel guilty. So the balancing of the scale inside of our heart is very important. The conscience helps identify what balance is. And then we have to look at this hurt and this guilt to know what goes on in order to respond to it really well.

Let me explain to you how the scale works in life. Let's imagine that you're a wife and you have planned this great meal for your husband, looking forward to him to come home. You say, "Hey, would you be home at six o'clock so we can have dinner together." You get yourself all fancied up, you look nice, you're looking for a good meal and a good evening together (but we're focused on the meal at this point). And he said he'd be home at six, so everything is ready at six.

You've made him his favorite meal, you've got candles out, you've invested in this meal. And he's not there at six o'clock. Not only is he late, he doesn't show up until 7:30 and he doesn't even call to tell you he's going to be late.

What happens? Inside your heart you are hurt. "I can't believe he would do this to me. This is so terrible that he's done this to me. He must not love me," or something like that. He finally comes home at 7:30 and doesn't even apologize. He just says, "I had a busy day at the office." As if you're supposed to understand.

So what is her response? Her response to that is to do something about it. So she's got a challenge. How is she going to respond? The first part of our verse says, *Do not repay anyone evil for evil*. Yet she, not knowing exactly how to respond to this hurt and this pain inside of her, reacts by saying nothing. Leaves the food out on the table cold, goes away, doesn't speak to him the rest of the night, in fact doesn't talk to him for a week. For a week she doesn't speak to him!

Now after a few days of this, she's starting to feel guilty. Because she's been doing the evil to the evil thing. She's been giving evil to evil, but now the scales have not only balanced, they've tipped the other direction. So now she's starting to feel bad because she knows it's not right for her to be mistreating her husband by not speaking to him for a week. So now she's feeling guilty. So now she comes and says, "I'm sorry," in order to try and balance the scales again. Because the scales want to be balanced in our hearts.

When the scales aren't balanced in our hearts, the heart cries out to balance them in one way or another. The hurt that we have in our lives is a problem and it needs to be addressed. That's why there are several scriptures that encourage us to deal with these things right away.

In Ephesians 4:26 it says, *In your anger do not sin*. Remember inside the heart we have emotions too. So if you're hurt, then that connects real well with the anger part of your emotions. So you can feed that hurt with the anger or to cover it up. The hurt is still there, so you want to get back at someone. So here's what God is saying in Ephesians 4:26. *In your anger*, when you're angry, *do not sin* by doing evil or doing something bad toward the other person. *Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry*. Don't let this fester because it's going to do damage.

Here's the thing about the scale. The scale wants to be balanced. When it's not in balance you feel either hurt and then it starts to eat at you and starts to damage your heart, or you feel guilty for things you've done wrong, and that starts to damage your heart and create some problems inside of you. It is a problem, so we must be able to address that in ways that are biblical and strategic. I hope you're getting the idea about the scale here because we're going to use that as we go through the passage to understand it.

Again, in Matthew 5 in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says these things: *“You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘You shall not murder (we all know murder is terrible), and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.’ Of course. We would expect that. But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment.* What do anger and murder have in common? They are both forms of revenge, a word we’re going to see in our passage in Romans 12. They are both forms of revenge and Jesus is saying that here.

Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the court. And anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell. Notice the effects of the imbalanced scale when it’s stuck in the wrong place. Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.”

One of the things that happens when the scale isn’t balanced on one side or the other, it affects your relationship with God. It’s hard to pray. If you’re having an argument around the house and then you come together around the table, you want to say “let’s pray,” but you can’t pray because everybody is so mad at each other. You can’t come before God and worship Him if the scales aren’t balanced inside your heart. God wants you to have that scale balanced inside.

He continues and He says, *“Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny.”* The idea here is to deal with it right away in your life.

Now let’s go back to Romans 12:20. Because it says there, *“If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.”*

Who is the enemy? Let’s talk about this for a moment. Sometimes the enemy referred to in Romans 12 is a person that is a stranger that happens to collide with you in life somehow and does damage to you and that’s your enemy. But sometimes an enemy is a former friend, a former mate, a former colleague. Those are the worst enemies because we use the word ‘betrayal’ to describe that hurt that we experience with that person. Something has happened in that relationship and that person becomes the enemy.

We’re going to talk about the enemy as we go through here, but I want you to see that the enemy isn’t someone that...we’re not just talking about ISIS as an enemy. Many people don’t even know ISIS or what they do and so on. But we’re talking about the personal enemies that we have in our lives. He’s giving a response there on how to deal with them. We’ll come back to that in a moment. I just want you to see that sometimes the enemy is closer than we think. Sometimes the enemy is someone in our own home. Thus we have a problem with the scale. We want to be balanced in that scale inside of our hearts and we have to have a way to deal with that.

So sometimes what we do to get balance, we get even we call it. Even. Even means balance the scales. We do it by getting revenge. By making a comment or doing something else along that

line. Or we give someone a poor apology in order to address it. The poor apology sometimes is designed to balance the scale, but it's a poor apology so sometimes it doesn't work.

Now when this problem happens, this hurt and blame takes place, in parenting, bad things happen. When parents take personally the offenses of their own children and they start getting hurt by those and retaliating then you've got a difficult challenge going on in that parent-child relationship.

In a marriage the same thing can happen. Because the mate says, "Oh, she must not love me. If she loved me, she wouldn't spend money like that." "If she loved me, she wouldn't leave her stuff out in my space." "If he loved me, he wouldn't leave his underwear on the floor." "If he loved me, he would come home on time." There's a statement we start making, we start viewing the mate as the enemy and it gets us into trouble. Bad things happen when the scale isn't balanced.

Now God has a plan for balancing the scales and I want to talk to you first of all about the interpersonal relationships. How do we balance the scales in interpersonal relationships? It's not just there. We also need to balance the scale before God. He has a plan for that as well. In fact in dealing with the conscience, Paul says, *I strive to keep my conscience clear before God and man.* It's something we work at in order to make that happen. The goal is to be able to work on this and have a way of balancing the scale.

We look at that verse that says *do not repay evil for evil.* The word evil in the verse is the word *kakos*, which means inner malice overflowing out of morally rotten character. I just want you to see this is really bad. Okay? This is the evil that's really bad evil. And so we want to see that.

He says *don't repay evil for evil.* What we do is we say to someone – if someone does something evil to us, we attribute malice to them. They planned this. That's what malice is. It's planning evil. They planned this. He did that intentionally to me. And so we start attributing evil to that person and so we feel justified in returning evil in order to balance the scales. God is saying here don't dish out the evil to balance the scales. That's one of the ways the world does this. To get even. To try to make it right. They balance the scales and that gives temporary relief. If you say, "I told her off. I feel better now." Well yeah. I suppose you do feel better. You told her off and you feel a little bit better now, but it damages the relationship. It never ends.

Then you've got the battle that goes on between people when they are at odds. Because this person hurts this person, this person hurts that person. It's back and forth and you've got a significant problem in the relationship. It might feel better for the moment, temporary relief to tell someone off or give someone a piece of your mind. And when that happens then, yes, there's a temporary satisfaction, but the long-term damage is great because it damages the relationship.

So one of the imperfect ways to balance the scales is to dish out evil for evil. So God is saying here, don't do that. Don't repay tit for tat. Don't give evil for evil.

The other thing that happens, I think, is that people in order to try to solve this problem what they do is they give a poor apology, can I say. A weak apology. On the one hand what they're

doing here is they're trying to deal with the hurt that goes inside of a person's heart, but the guilt is a weak apology. "I'm sorry."

Let me point out some weak apologies. These are the apologies you want to avoid. Weak apologies are things like saying to someone, "I'm sorry." That is so lame. That's weak. Like what are you sorry for? Like yeah, anybody can say that. But even worse than that is "I'm sorry if I've hurt you." That is totally lame. Okay? That is not an apology.

But even worse than that is this one – "I'm sorry, but..." Anytime you say 'but' in an apology, everything you said before it is lost. In fact I think using the word 'but' in relationships is very unhealthy. Instead we should use the word 'and.' Try to put 'and' instead of 'but' wherever you've been using the word 'but' and you'll be surprised at how often you can use the word 'and'. Those are weak apologies.

But notice in the passage it's telling us in the next verse not only don't return evil for evil, but also *be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* In order to do that, we need to be able to address the scales. I think that's what he's saying. *As far as it depends on you,* you want to be able to deal with that. This justice scale that's on the inside. You want to do your part to be able to live at peace with anyone.

In order to do that I think it's important for us to understand what a mature apology is. So I'm going to share this with you. This is what I teach young people in my counseling practice. I think it helps any relationship to embrace a mature apology.

A mature apology starts this way. "I was wrong when I..." and then fill in the blank. The problem is that some people don't ever think that they're wrong. Or they can justify what they've done, so they have a hard time with the first part of this. Maybe you can't say I did anything wrong, but if you look at the choices available, now you realize because this hurt the person so much you could've taken a different approach. So in that case you could say, "It wasn't best when I" or something like that. But the first part is to admit fault. "I was wrong when I..."

The second part of a mature apology is to say, "It was wrong because..." Then you're able to get into that other person's frame of mind – "because I hurt you" or "because it didn't have the best outcome here," or whatever it is. So to say "it was wrong because" is helpful. It helps you to connect with that person significantly.

Another part of a mature apology goes this way: "Next time I will..." because now I'm going to focus on where I'm going instead of where I am now. Next time I find myself in that situation, I will do this.

It's also helpful then to say, "Will you forgive me?" To ask the question "will you forgive me" transfers the response to the other person, having admitted my fault and asks them for a response. You cannot guarantee the other person will forgive you, but this is the way to apologize if you're going to be mature. It's also sometimes helpful to use the word regret. "I regret having done that." Because that word expresses more value. In fact this whole mature apology is much more

effective than is a response that just says “I’m sorry” or “I’m sorry if” or “I’m sorry but” or whatever.

So the verse says this: *Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.* So what you’re doing is you’re going forward and you’re trying to do your part. A mature apology can help in that.

So far we’ve just talked about you in your heart or one person, ourselves. But this problem of the scale is seen in relationships. So here’s the problem with the scale. Let’s say that someone has hurt you or they’re hurt. This person over here is hurt. That’s why that scale is tipped that way. Because they’re feeling hurt. And they’re hurt because you’ve done something. You could apologize, but the problem with this is that you’re also hurt because of what they’ve done. Now we’ve got two hurt people and nobody wants to apologize.

So the hurt that we have in our hearts is hard to address because sometimes the person who is mature is going to rise above their own pain in order to initiate some of the healing in the relationship. So the person who’s able to have this peace inside in regards to relationship is able to offer something to the person who doesn’t have that. Paul is describing that process here in Romans about how to reconcile in relationships so they make sense.

I want to tell you a story. I want to tell you a story about Mike. This is a real boy that I counseled with in my office. Mike is twelve years old. He hit and he pushed his mom. His mom is a single mom and the dad took action immediately. They were very firm with him. But they didn’t know how to end the situation and mom didn’t talk to her son for three days.

So she calls me. After three days they call my office. And so I said, “Come on up right away. Let’s talk right now.” So she and Mike came up to my office. They come into my office and I sit down with the mom and I try to get a picture of what’s going on a little bit more and try to understand it.

I said to mom, “Okay look. I’m going to meet with Mike by himself, and then we’ll see where we go.” So I sent mom out.

I brought Mike into my office. Mike was obviously remorseful. So I said, “Mike, it looks like you’ve done something wrong.”
“Yeah I guess so.”

So I said to him, “What do you do when you’ve done something wrong?”

He said, “Say you’re sorry.”

“Yeah, but that’s a third grade response, a third grade apology. Would you like to learn a mature apology?”

His eyes lit up. He says, “Okay.”

So I said, “Well then I need to ask you some questions. What did you do wrong?”

He said, “I hit and pushed my mom.”

“Okay, why was that wrong?”

“Because you shouldn’t hit or push your mom.”

“That’s true, but another reason why it was wrong is because it’s not a good response to authority and it’s not a good response to correction. I’m going to ask you the question again, Mike. Why was it wrong?”

He answered using the words I gave him.

I said, “What are you going to do differently next time?”

He thought about it for a moment and he said, “I’ll talk about it instead of hitting.”

“Great! Let me form those words for you now into a mature apology. Here’s what you want to say to your mom. Something like this: ‘Mom, I was wrong when I hit and pushed you. It was wrong because it’s not a good response to authority, not a good response to correction. If I find myself in that situation again, I’ll talk about it instead of hitting. Will you please forgive me?’”

He liked that. Since it now needs to be his, we practiced it four times in my office until he could recite it to me and he could do it well. Because we’re going to bring mom in here next. So he had it down, he was ready.

I said, “Are you ready for me to bring mom in?”

He said, “Yes.”

I said, “Well the mature apology is really powerful and it has an affect on people. I don’t know what it’s going to do for your mom, but we’ll bring her in, we’ll do something, you can share it with her, and then I’ll send her back out and then we’ll talk some more.”

He said, “Okay.”

I asked mom to come back in. Mom later reported that she thought I was bringing her in and that I was going to be the referee while she and her son argued.

I said to mom, “Why don’t you sit down here.” Her son was on the couch. I said, “Mike wants to share something with you,” and then I was just quiet.

Mike shared the mature apology with his mom. His mom began to cry. And then she said, “And sorry for ripping the CD out of your hand.” She never told me she had done that! But do you see the guilt/blame thing? She felt guilty and so she wanted to resolve that. So then she gets up from her chair and goes to sit on the couch, puts her arm around her son.

I let them be for just a couple minutes and then I said to her, “Okay mom, why don’t you go back outside. Let me talk to Mike again.”

I said to Mike, “Well Mike, what happened?”

“She started crying.”

“Yes, she started crying because the mature apology touched her heart in a powerful way. What else happened?”

“She apologized.”

I said, “Yeah. She didn’t even tell me she did that. But do you see what happened in that relationship? Your mom was part of the problem with you and she felt guilty about that, but because you had hurt her by your response and you addressed that, then she was left with her

guilt. So she wanted to get rid of that quickly, so she wanted to apologize to you for that. You acted maturely and in the relationship with your mom you were the one to initiate reconciliation. This is amazing! What else happened?"

"She wanted to hug me."

"Yes, because she wanted to reconnect with your heart. That's what happens when reconciliation takes place."

I told Mike, "You can use this mature apology with your dad. You can use it with your brothers. You can use it with a coach on the team. You can use it at school. You can use this for the rest of your life." The mature apology is significant because it changes us. It changes what we think and how we respond in situations.

You see, Matthew 18 has given us a process when we're in conflict with another person, when we've been hurt by someone, or we have an offense against someone. The process is to go to them and to talk about it, me and that person. Why? Because in the midst of that situation maybe I'll realize that I didn't understand, I get it now. Or maybe the other person will say, "Oh, I didn't know that hurt you. I apologize." So somehow it will get worked out in the midst of that. That's God's design for reconciliation to take place.

The idea here is that God wants us to deal with this scale inside of our hearts and the scale can be a rather challenging place for us.

Here's the problem. What do you do if the other person won't apologize? You've got this problem of hurt, the scale is down over here, and you've got the hurt and you've got the blame. You're having trouble dealing with that and you don't want to retaliate because you're a Christian and the other person doesn't apologize. You're stuck with that hurt. What are you going to do with it? That's an important question that we have to ask ourselves. In fact I would suggest that God would have us deal with both sides of the scale and do it well.

He says, *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.* So the getting even with someone, the tit for tat, the eye for an eye approach is an approach that doesn't work because it leaves us with a damaged relationship. It only feeds us temporarily so that we can feel a little bit better in the moment.

The other thing that we try to do when we're hurt by someone else is we try to demand an apology from someone that's acceptable. "Oh I don't believe they mean it" or "that wasn't a good apology." That's why the mature apology is so helpful in working on someone else's pain in their life.

Now this idea that God is the one to avenge is very important because He's the one who balances the scales of personal justice. He didn't create our hearts to carry around the personal justice of the world. When we try to do that, then bad things happen inside of us and in the relationships. So what we need to do is we want to come to a place where we can have peace inside of our hearts and don't have to tip the scales, and if they're tipped we can move them back to this balanced place.

How are we going to do this? I would suggest that we have two different ways that both address forgiveness in a different approach.

One, let's talk about the guilt that we have over on this side where we've experienced guilt because we've done things wrong. We've all done things wrong and the conscience helps us know what those wrong things are.

I would suggest that in order for you to have peace in your life that you want to do this. If you're a young person today, I want to encourage you to do this now. It will save you a lot of heartache later if you can practice this now and set it up now. If you want to have a clear conscience, then here's what you do. Sit down and make a list of all the people you've ever offended in your life. See why I suggested to do this when you're a young person? When you get to be my age, you've offended a lot of people either intentionally or inadvertently. Which leaves you with a lot of guilt.

If you really want a clear conscience then you'll go through this exercise of writing down all the people you've ever offended in your life. That's a lot of pages for some people. You just write them all down. Writing them all down so you know who they are that you need to deal with. Then as far as it depends on you, you want to go back and make peace with those people. You're going back and in many cases apologizing. If you remember you stole something from a store, you go back and return the money. You make restitution if you have to so that you have a clear conscience.

If you're having trouble thinking of people you've offended, your conscience keeps a list. Just keep quiet and ask the Holy Spirit to reveal it from your conscience where the list is and He will reveal that list to you. You take that list and you start working it through. If there are some people that if you were involved in a relationship in the past and you did some wrong things in that relationship, you want to be careful how you approach that. It has to be done delicately. Certainly a general apology may be helpful. Maybe you won't even know where some of these people are. In those cases you determine in your heart that you are going to, if you ever see them again, make it right.

So in your heart you have positioned yourself to live at peace with all people. As far as it depends on you, you're living at peace with them. The problem is we have a scale inside that needs to be addressed. That scale on the guilt side is addressed by us coming before other people and saying will you forgive me? And then every time thereafter, from now on going into the future every time we have an offense or are guilty in some way or another we are quick to make it right. "I just want to apologize for yelling at you." "I want to apologize for the way I did" this or that or whatever it might be, so that we are quickly coming to this place of dealing with our own guilt so it isn't laboring inside of our hearts. Unresolved guilt in personal relationships eats away at our hearts, so God is giving us directive to deal with that.

Then next we have to go to the hurt side. Because on the hurt side we are hurt by somebody else. They are unwilling to forgive us or they're gone or they're still being mean or whatever. So we have to be able to sometimes set boundaries on people so they don't keep hurting us. Sometimes

we end up in court because of whatever we need to do. I'm not saying we don't do that, but there's a difference between that and what's going on inside of our hearts. If we're trying to keep court going on inside of our hearts then we get stuck in the past and we can't move forward and we don't have the peace.

God wants us to have peace in regards to the scale so that it's balanced inside of us so we can move on and we can be free when it comes to this hurt that we've experienced in our lives. That's why the passage says, *Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

That revenge can be very simple. I can play the silent treatment on someone or if they're not going to clean up their mess, I'm not going to clean up my mess either. It's just tit for tat kind of response that we have that gets us into trouble. When we are able to forgive, the forgiveness doesn't get rid of the hurt, it gets rid of the anger surrounding the hurt, but that anger often prevents us from being able to deal with the hurt the way God wants. God wants to comfort us in our pain and that only takes place when we're able to unwrap that anger that's trapped around it that gets us into trouble.

How do you do that when you've been hurt a lot? I know that some of you and some of the people I work with the hurt that they experience is just amazing. It's great. It's harder than I can imagine. God does not give me grace as a counselor to deal with the pain of the person I'm working with. But He does give them the grace to deal with it, so I just trust in the fact that God is giving them the grace to deal with the immense pain that they've experienced. All I know is that in the midst of their deep pain that the solution can't be to try to balance the scales inside their heart. They've got to be able to release it to the Lord and let Him go forward.

Because it's hard work to do that, He's given us these next verses in verse 20, which says – *On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."*

Heap burning coals is the idea if your enemy is acting out of hurt and hurting you because they feel hurt by you and you start doing good by them, you're going to remove some of the hurt and they're going to be left with guilt. That's the burning coals on their head. That's leaving room for God's wrath is what's happening inside of their hearts. They're starting to experience that and they want to get rid of that. And so they come back and they want to reconcile sometimes.

Jesus said in Matthew 5, "*You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.'* That's the revenge kind of thing that the world often offers. *But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.*

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' You see that? Hate your enemy. *But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.* There's something that happens inside of our hearts when we do good to those people who are trying to

hurt us out of their hurt. It's therapy for the heart when we do good to someone who has hurt us. They have their own scale. It's difficult to work on this in that situation.

Notice in the passage it's not good enough to not retaliate. As Christians we are called to do good. It's not good enough to just not retaliate. We're called on to do something different. That's because God wants us to have peace in our hearts to be able to rise above the situation.

Jesus says through John 14:27, *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives.* The world gives peace for tit for tat or weak apologies, but God does something different in our lives. *Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.* He wants us to have that peace deep inside of our lives.

Now if we go back to Romans 12:21 we come to the last verse in the chapter, which reads this way: *Do not be overcome by evil.* Same word. The word is *kakos*, inner malice flowing out of a morally rotten character. He says don't be overcome by this evil. The problem is if the scale is not balanced in your life (on either side really, but he's talking about the hurt side), if it's not balanced and you live with that continually then what that does is it starts to rot inside and it starts to affect you and it starts to turn you into an ugly person. Don't allow that to happen, he's saying.

Don't be overcome by this evil, *but overcome evil with good.* So the balancing of the scales is very important in each one of our lives. The best way to get rid of enemies is to turn them into friends when possible. Remember the verse says *as far as it depends on you.*

Yes, there's still times when we have to put limits on people or people are abusive. There are some people who are caught in their cantankerous ways. They're stuck there. The worst penalty that they have is that they have to live with themselves. Because their scale is down and they're hurting other people and it's starting to eat at them and tear them up. So the worse penalty they have is to live with themselves.

The problem is when we try to get even then we are living in the past. God does not want us living in the past with that hurt. He wants us moving forward in our lives. So if you're still stewing about a past divorce or you're still upset about the boss who fired you or you're angry with your kids because they're not doing what you expect them to do or you're mad at your parents because of the way they treated with you, you're living in the past. The only way to get free from the past is to let it go once and for all. If you start getting even then you're living in the past and that's dangerous. We don't want to be chained to the past. We want to have this freedom in our hearts. That's why he's saying in this verse *overcome evil with good.*

Now all of what we said today has to do with interpersonal relationships. How we're treating other people and how we're relating to ourselves in regard to other people and how we're dealing with the internal scale that we have. I want to conclude by taking this and just applying it to our relationship with the Lord. This is where salvation becomes so powerful in each one of our lives as Christians.

Romans 5:1 says, *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, since we have Jesus Christ inside of our lives, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.*

You've got to understand that God has given us freedom from the guilt before Him. We can come before Him no matter what we've done in our lives and we can say, "God, would you please forgive me." He will balance that scale and He will give us freedom and peace inside of our hearts. There are some people who go around in life living with guilt and it's damaging their hearts. I'm telling you, all we need is Jesus. Jesus frees us from that pain that's inside. He frees us from the guilt and gives us the peace so that we can be balanced on the inside.

I would suggest that the Christian has the greatest ability to be emotionally healthy in our world today. The Christian has spiritual resources that we can draw upon that will allow us to not only balance the scales in interpersonal relationships, but to have the freedom we need to face whatever difficult challenges that we have in life.

You and I have difficult challenges. You have ones probably a lot more difficult than me. As we each try to deal with the pain and the struggles and the challenges that we have, there's a way to live that's different. There's a way to live that God calls, a way that following Jesus or being a disciple of Christ or being a Christian.

I trust that this study in Romans 12 has been an opportunity for you to explore some of the ideas that are upside-down thinking. Because the way Jesus Christ describes the way we respond is different than the world, is a different way that we are to respond. When we do, then we experience the great things God wants in our hearts – freedom from guilt, freedom from hurt (no, not freedom from hurt), freedom from the anger. The hurt comes along with His grace and turns it into a ministry in our lives.

God wants to do great things to provide that balanced scale in our hearts. If it's not balanced, bad things happen. So if you sense that it's not balanced in your life today, I encourage you to come before the Lord and ask him to start doing a deeper work than He has already to bring that balance inside that He wants. It's called peace. That peace that passes all understanding that He offers us.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we thank you for the work that you do in our hearts. As we ponder our own lives we often see adjustments that need to take place. Sometimes it's the minor adjustments like driving along in the car and staying within the line, just minor adjustments, and other times we need to get on a whole different road. So I pray for each one of us, that you would provide the emotional strength and the healing that needs to take place in this particular area of our lives. Lord, we thank you for your word and how practical it is. Thank you that you use it to teach us, to correct us, and to guide us. We thank you for the peace that you offer. Give it to us today, we ask, and we'll respond to that. In Jesus' name, amen.