

Romans 12:9-21

Sunday 1/17/2010

This has been an incredible chapter. I think it was right in timing with where God has us as a church, with the great concepts that we have been looking at. We have been working down through this chapter. Remember, we started in Romans 12:1 where it talked about your bodies being living sacrifices, mine and yours, giving it to the Lord and letting God have our bodies for whatever He wants to do for His work in the ministry.

We have been coming down through this chapter. Once we saw that concept, we have been looking at the character qualities of God that as you and I grow in the Lord and you go through the process of spiritual growth in your life, these things become part of your lives to help us become a living sacrifice. There are so many things in the Christian life that we know the terminology, but we really do not understand the process or really what it takes to have it operational in our lives. We talk about being God's man or God's woman. We are basically talking about these basic character qualities of God that we have been looking down through here at.

I want to begin reading here in verse 9 again. We have been through this before, but I want to keep this passage together as we read it, and then we will pick it up where we left off last week. Remember, I told you these are the reality verses. This is what the reality is of the Christian life. You can make it anything else in the world you want to make it, but at the end of the day, it is what these things that we are talking about here are.

So here is what it says, picking it up in Romans 12:9.

Romans 12:9-21

Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good.

Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another;

Not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord;

Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing instant in prayer;

Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality.

Bless them which persecute you: bless, and curse not.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

Now Father, we thank and praise You for the Lord Jesus. We thank You for this great passage and all of the things that we have gleaned from it so far. And yet, Lord, there is so much here that needs to be talked about today. Lord, I ask You, Holy Spirit of God, give me the clarity of thought. Let me get everything in the right order to say it as easy and as simply as I can, that it will go into the hearts of Your people and that Father, they will understand that true spirituality is not what we know about the Bible or how many times we come to church a week. The true spirituality, true walk with God, is the character qualities of God that we put in our lives that we live our lives by. Help us Father in everything that we say and do today to give You the honor and the glory. And we will thank You and praise You in Jesus' name, for His sake we ask it. Amen.

I. The Call to Living Sacrifice and Godly Character

You will remember so far as we come down through here, last time we stopped in Romans 12:16, and that is where we stopped and we are going to pick it up on the last part of that today. But you will also remember I talked to you about the great concept of Proverbs 27:17 about iron sharpening iron, how that we as Christians need to help each other, not hurt each other. Remember, I told you that iron sharpening iron, when you sharpen something, you use a harder metal to sharpen a softer metal. But when the iron is sharpening iron, both metals have the same value as far as hardness is concerned, so while you are shaping one, it shapes the other. That is a picture of what we ought to be as a church and what we are going to get to starting next week as we understand that great concept even more, building each other up and keeping each other sharp.

Then we talked about Romans 12:14: "Bless them that persecute you, bless and curse not." We talked about Romans 12:15: "Rejoice with them that do rejoice and weep with them that do weep." Then we got into Romans 12:16, and Romans 12:16 says, "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things but condescend to men of lowest state. Be not wise in your own conceits."

II. Unity and the Peril of Conceit

We talked about how this is a great principle based on how we treat people in the ministry. I gave you many examples last week; we will certainly not go through them again. But I told you how that in most churches, in most ministries, with most pastors, they are going to cater to people who have some influence. If you have a lot of money, you are going to get preference over somebody who does not. If you have a political position or you are somebody that has some kind of clout in the city, you are going to get better preference than somebody who is just a factory worker or somebody who is basically a nobody.

Of course, we went through that and looked at the fallacy of that. I told you that it is all the time the thinking today that the church will be more appealing when people look at it if so-and-so is going there. Somebody says, "What kind of church is it?" "Well, so-and-so goes there, and he is a state's attorney," or "so-and-so goes there, and he is a federal judge," or "so-and-so goes there, and he owns half of Kansas City." Pastors think that kind of stuff makes their church more appealing. Of course, we saw the fallacy of that last week, and we know that is not true.

I told you that the key to all of this, the key to everything he is saying here, is the concept of unity, and that is what he is trying to get across. Do not separate your church into a caste system. Do not have it set up where you have rich people and then you have poor people, and then the rich people get the best and the poor people or the middle-line people do not get anything. Make sure that there is a unity, and that is the key to everything in the church. It is one word: unity. The key to unity is found in the verse there where he says, "Be of the same mind one toward another."

Now, what does he mean by that? "Be of the same mind one toward another." It is not my mind, nor is it your mind, but the thing that brings unity to any church is not my mind or your mind, but all of us getting the mind of the Lord, and that is the Word of God, the principles in the Bible. When you operate on biblical principles, then the whole church gets, as we say in the world, on the same page. It is not your mind, nor is it my mind, but rather both of us getting God's mind toward people and toward the aspect of ministry. When a church or a pastor does not operate this way, then they fall into the trap that leads in time to corruption.

What happens is, in the last part of that verse, it simply says that they become "wise in their own conceits." That is a great phrase. The word "conceit," when we think about that word, and I know there are many different applications to it, but the easiest one to grasp when it is somebody that is conceited, that is by definition a self-flattering or over-inflated opinion of oneself or maybe in some cases even their accomplishments. In the ministry, there are great examples of that. In the ministry, you see it all the time.

I think of Joel Osteen, and I do not mean to pick on Joel Osteen, but I think of Joel Osteen as someone who is a great example of this. A couple of months ago, maybe six months ago, him and his wife were flying on a plane, and they were sitting in a first-class section. Something had to happen, and they had to move out of that section and go back with the common people. She raised an absolute fuss to the place where it hit the news media because she did not want to go back and sit with the common, ordinary people. That is the mindset we get into when it comes to people like that.

You see it all the time. I knew a pastor in town here that pastors a church, and I would not tell you who he is, but it is a situation where I remember when he was an evangelist. I remember when he was an evangelist that he would never take a meeting in a church that the pastor could not guarantee him 5,000 people for that meeting. In other words, if you had a church of a thousand, if you had a church of 900, if you had a church of 20, if you had a church of 3,000, he would not come to preach in your church. Do you know why? Because he thought his ministry was so vitally important that he could not waste his talent and his preaching on anything less than 5,000 people. Do you know that is conceited? That is the height of conceit.

I know of a story, Bible models again. I know of a story in Acts chapter 8 where Philip was having a great revival down in Samaria. Remember that story in Acts chapter 8? Great revival! The whole town was coming to Christ. What did God do? God pulled the lead evangelist out, Philip, took him to the backside of the desert for one Ethiopian eunuch to hear the story of Christ. Do you see the difference between modern-day ministry and then following the biblical principles in the Bible? It is incredible what goes on today. All that stuff just feeds your ego. All that stuff just feeds your ego.

Back in the early church, and we are going to study this when we start church history, we started last Tuesday night, but as we come through this, we started church history. A little bit later on, I want to tell you about a guy by the name of Clement of Rome. Clement of Rome lived at the end of the first century going into the second century. He came up with the idea of what the Bible says in Revelation chapter 2, called the doctrine or the deeds of the Nicolaitans. Now, "Nicolaitans" is a Latin word and a compound of two words: "Nico" and "laity." "Nico" is Latin for "conquer," and "laity" is Latin for "the common ordinary people." Nicolaitans, or the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, was to put a priest class over the common people, that the pastors and the hierarchy of the church were on some spiritual level that was over the common everyday man.

A little bit later on in time, this move went into the Gnostic movement. "Gnostic" means "knowing." The Gnostics were a group of people that thought they had a greater, superior relationship with God than the common ordinary man. Therefore, they felt that they were better, on a higher level, and you saw how that went into and developed into a system of religion where there was a priest class on top of all the masses. We criticize the Roman Catholic Church many, many times for the priesthood and archbishops and all that on the top and the common people on the bottom. But I want to tell you something, there is nothing worse than it in most Baptist churches. Most Baptist churches have their own order of being on top of people.

We have pastors today, and I have never understood this. We have pastors today that think they need a personal assistant. If you are a million-dollar rock star, you probably need a personal assistant. I am not sure what a personal assistant does. If you are a sports figure or a great movie star, you probably need a personal assistant. But what a pastor thinks he needs a personal assistant for when his ministry is dealing with people, I never figured it out. It reminds me of Origen. Origen was one of the greatest corruptors of the Word of God. Origen was so conceited in himself. Do you know what he did? He had 20 stenographers, 20 people with notepads following him wherever he went, so they would write down every word that he ever said because he felt like his words, no matter what they were, were so important that they could never be lost, and somebody had to write them down. That is conceit. That is conceit in who you think you are, that you need somebody around you all the time to make sure every word does not fall to the ground and they have a record of it.

Most churches today in modern Christianity are like the Christian version of the rich and famous. In most churches, and you better get this, and this comes from experience, this is why when you learn this, you never cater to rich people. You never fall into the trap as a pastor that any one family, oh, I have seen this, "we just cannot lose this family." "We just cannot lose this family." "We will do whatever we have got to do. Cut whatever we have got to cut. Fix whatever we have

got to fix. Compromise whatever. We just cannot lose this family." There is no family that valuable in any church. There is no family worth compromising the standards of the Word of God. Do you know why pastors do that? They do not want to lose the family. Do you know why they do not want to lose the family? Because the family gives a lot of money to the church.

I do not want to lose any families either, but I have told you many, many times it happens in the reality, and that is experience. But I need to tell you this, and you learn this in time: any meaningful work that God has ever built, I have never seen it built with rich people. It is always built by common, ordinary people.

III. The Deception of Wealth and Self-Sufficiency

I have watched some things over the years. Billy Graham pretty much retired now. Billy Graham was a great, great, great preacher back in the beginning days. I have actually seen videos or heard him preach back in 1947 and 1948 and 1949 and up in the early 1950s. My mother, he is a far cry from what he is today or was today when he stood all polished and spoke for about 20 or 30 minutes. I actually saw him preaching back there in the early 1950s, and his tie was off, his hair was all messed up, he was sweating like a stuck pig, and he was spitting everywhere, and he was preaching like nobody ever heard preaching in my life. What happened to him?

Do you know what happened to him? I will tell you what happened to him. It is a great lesson to learn. I will tell you what happened to him. Along the way, Billy Graham wanted to win people to Christ. Nothing wrong with that. Along the way, some evangelicals got a hold of Billy and they said, "You know what, Billy, we think you are a great preacher. We think you can reach the masses, and we have got what you need. You have got the message and the preaching, we have got the money to put you everywhere in this world." And they started putting in thousands and hundreds of thousands, probably millions of dollars in his ministry. But do you know what came along with that money? Strings were attached, and they began to tell Billy, "Look, Billy, you are going to go preach to this crowd over here. You cannot say those things you said over here. It is going to make them mad. If they get mad, they will not come. You know what, Billy, you take too hard a stand on some of this stuff. You cannot preach about hell like you do. You know what? You are going to preach to evangelicals who are refined people. You cannot get your tie all out of shape, get all sweaty, and spit on the front row. You cannot pace up and down and scream and yell and shake your fist and preach the Word of God. They are too refined for that."

Do you know what happened over the years? The people that came in with their money not only shaped him but changed his very direction in ministry. Now here he stands, and the last time I heard him preach, he did not believe in hell anymore. He believed, he thought that the Muslims were okay and going to heaven too. He completely made a reversal of where he was at. Do you know why? Because money came in, and when money comes in and somebody puts money into your ministry, it is only a matter of time that the strings attached with it, they begin to tell you. Now you know what happens? You get hooked on it. Money is like dope. You get on the hook, man. Once you get a taste of the life when you are out there with the shining lights and the newspaper ads and the whole world thinking you are the greatest evangelist in the world, you are not going to go back to the dirt roads you were on. It just is not going to happen.

I had a good friend of mine who is an evangelist. He is dead now, and he did, let me tell you something, this guy did more on a shoestring budget to reach millions and millions of people to Christ, and I cannot ever remember a day when he had two nickels to rub together. He got the same thing. Some businessman came to him and he said, "Hey, man, we would like to support your ministry. You know what you need to do? You need to form a board. You need to form a ministerial board and get some rich people, people with some money. You have got a great work, and you can do 10 times more if you just got the right people on your side. Build a ministerial board and let them take over your ministry, let them raise the money, and you just go and preach." Do you know what he told me? He said, "I am not going to do that." Do you know why? He said, "I know how those things work. Today I form a ministerial board, and they put the money in, and tomorrow the ministerial board decides I am no longer the preacher and puts somebody else in." He had some experience. Boy, once the money comes in, they get their claws in.

I will tell you, no meaningful work by God has ever been done, ever been built by rich people. It has always been the common people. In most cases, the God of the Bible in most churches has been replaced by the God of money, and that is why when you go to hear them, you hear 40 minutes on money, and then you hear 20 minutes on the son of money, and then you get about 10 minutes in the Bible.

A man said to me one time, and I told you this last week, we did not get a chance to finish it. A man came to me one time and he said, "If I win the lottery," I think it was 98 million dollars, "If I win the lottery, I am going to give you 20 million dollars to build a church. You have got a great ministry, and I am going to give you 20 million dollars." Now, most pastors heard that, they would call a special church meeting together and pray for the lottery. But folks, you realize as good as that sounds, this church getting dumped 20 million dollars on it would probably ruin this church.

You see, in ministry, and this comes with experience, this is what I want to teach you in our times together, men and women. I want to show you what I have learned by experience. This tells me that is not a good idea because in ministry, not everything that looks good is good, and not everything that looks bad is always really bad. My old father in the Lord, Mel Sabaka, he had one of the great sayings, and he was faced with it too. We look at this thing, "Wow, what could we do in our church with 20 million dollars? Look what we could build. Look what we could do. Look at all this. Look at all that." God owns the cattle on a thousand hills, but He only gives it to us one hamburger at a time. Boy, there is some great wisdom in that. It would ruin this church. It would ruin most people.

Do you realize that the reason that we are in the mess we are in financially in most cases is because we cannot handle the money we already have? If you do not have any responsibility and accountability with the money you have, what makes you think somebody is going to give you 20 million dollars or even a million dollars? All that is going to do is give you a million dollars worth of more problems. The danger in any church or any Christian man or woman's life, and listen to this very carefully, the danger in any church, I do not care who it is, I do not care how big they are, I do not care how big they think they are, I do not care how conceited they think

they are, the danger of any Christian or any church, man or woman, is getting to the place where you and I do not have to trust God for anything because we can just go out and buy it. There is no quick fix.

That is the mark of the Laodicean church. That is where we are at. Turn over to Revelation chapter 3. I will show it to you. Revelation chapter 3. Here is the church that we are part of today, the Laodicean church age. This is why I have told you many a time, my goal is to build a Philadelphian church in the middle of the Laodicean church period. A church that is based on one thing: the Bible. The church that only needs one thing. Somebody says, "What kind of church do you have? Are you independent?" And I said, "No, we are not independent. We are dependent." Too many Baptist churches are independent, and that means independent of even God. This church will never be independent. This church always needs to be dependent on the Word of God and the things that God gives it.

Here is what it says:

Revelation 3:14-18

And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God;

I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot.

So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked:

I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

That is a reference to the judgment seat of Christ if you have not figured it out yet. There is the church today, a church that does not need anything. The mark of the Laodicean church will always be that it has so much of everything that it has need of nothing. Boy, this church and your life and my life can never get to that place. Very few rich people ever do anything for God. Do you know why? Because the God that they have is their money. It is just that simple.

Have you ever noticed the great money givers in this city? There is a word for it. I cannot think of it. It started with a P. Philanthropy. That is right. Have you ever noticed those guys? They always give, start great foundations. I am not arguing with it. They always start great foundations. They give great amounts of money. But do you know what they always do? They always try to control it. They always say, "Well, it has got to go here, it has got to go there, it has got to be for this, it has got to be for that." Of course, the reality is, give it to God and get out of the way.

Then you have the Christians who leave it to God after they are dead. That is always a good one. Keep it and enjoy life, buy everything you want, and then when you are dead and gone, do not

need it anymore, then give it all to God. It sounds good, does it not? Some people think God is as stupid as they are. I am not kidding you. Have you ever read the Bible over there in 1 Corinthians, when it comes down through there in 2 Corinthians 5:10? You talk about God reading a man's heart and knowing what is on a man's mind when he says, "Well, I am going to leave it all to God." But that is the right debt because, man, I want to have it all now. And then when I am gone, I will leave it all to God, and He can do what He wants to do with it.

Have you ever seen 2 Corinthians 5:10? That great passage on the judgment seat of Christ? It says that at the judgment seat of Christ, you get rewarded for the things that are done in the body, not after you are gone. God has it figured out. He reads you like a book. He reads me like a book. Somebody gets up there and he says, "You know what?" He says, "I am going to give it all to God after I am gone." God says, "I do not want it after you are gone. It will not do you any good. The faith has given it all to Me when you are alive."

Do you know why God brings tough times financially in your life and my life? Do you know why this country is going through a depression right now or recession, however you want to call it? Do you know why people, many times God's people, either lose their job? They lose the job for one or two reasons. They really do, and I have seen it. Sometimes you lose your job because God has got a better job for you. Losing your job is a scary thing. I get phone calls all the time from you and situations when you lose your job. It is a tough thing because you have families, you have bills to pay. Maybe you just got a new house. Maybe you are doing it, and all of a sudden, out of nowhere, you lose your job.

I am telling you right now, and you can mark it down, as a child of God, when something like that happens, it only happened for one or two reasons, and you have got to decide. I cannot decide for you. I have seen situations where somebody loses their job, and they have done what is right with God. They have done everything God wants them to do. They are growing up through the process of it. And they lose their job, and for a moment they panic, and then they say, "Well, God is okay," or they will call me on the phone, and I will say, "Well, you have done what is right. You have hung in there. God will take care of you." Do you know why God takes your job away? He takes your job away because He is going to give you a better one.

Is not that true, April? April called me this week. Lost her job. A little distraught. But underneath the distress, I saw a solidness. And I told her what I tell most people. I say, "You know what? You will not have a problem finding a job." And I said, "Did not I tell you this? I say, you have done what is right. You have hung in there. You have grown. You have done everything that God has asked you to do. I guarantee you God did not take your job away to leave you on a curb." And what happened, April? One day later, you got a better job, did you not? Now, Josh has lost his and been out now for nine weeks. "I have not got anything." Look at your life, Josh. What is wrong here when your wife gets a better job than you do? He is going to retire, honey, and let you take care of him. I will tell you where that is going. God always takes care of you.

Now, you have got to look at this. You have got a job, and everything goes well. You do not do what is right with God. You do not take care of God. You do not do anything with God. Do you know what God will come down and do sometimes? He will come down and take it away from

you just to get you to see that you are not doing what is right with what you have. You say that to God's people, and they look like some of you look at me right now. Is not that what you do with your children? When your kids have a toy and they do not play right, and they really like that toy, and it is a toy to be a car to go on the ground, and they are beating their brother and sister over the head with it, or they are trying to force it down the dog's throat, or you find it down inside a television set, do you not walk over and say, "Give me that. I am getting this back until you learn how to do with it right"?

If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father in heaven give good things to them that ask Him? Sometimes when God gives you good things, and we do not do with it right, because He loves you, He takes it away. He did not take it away because He is mad at you. He is taking it away just like a parent takes it away to teach you a lesson. The question is, do you learn the lesson? He is not going to let you starve to death no matter what. But the bottom line is everything in our life we go through, we go through for a reason. And you get into a situation like that, I cannot discern that for you. I cannot look at you and say, "Well, He took it away for you because you were not doing what is right," or "He took it away for you because you were and gave it back for you." We are doing that. You have to decide that, but I am telling you right now, that is what happens. God gave you the job that you have, the money you have coming in. He gave that so you could support yourself on the mission field. The quicker you learn that, the better off you will be.

Now that old boy said to me, he said, "Well, if I win the lottery, I am going to give you 98 million dollars." This is my answer to it. I said, "Well, that is really nice. That is big of you. But if God gave you 98 million dollars, why not give it all to God? I mean, if God gave you 98 million dollars in the first place, and you give it all away, can He give you another 98 million dollars? What kind of faith is that? I am going to get 98 million dollars. I am going to give you 20. I am going to keep 78 for myself." If God gave you the 98 million dollars, then give the whole thing away and wait for God to give you another 98 million dollars. I got the same response from him that I am getting from you. He did not say anything either.

Do you know why God will not give you 98 million dollars? Do you know why God is not going to give you a million dollars? Because He cannot trust you with it. That is why. He will mess you up. If God gave you a million dollars, He will never hear from you again. Now, it is okay. Some of you are looking like, "Oh yeah, I have not got a million dollars either." He cannot trust me with it anymore. He can trust you. The difference between me and you is I know it would mess me up.

Experience, a fact in church history, and we will read about it when we study it. In church history, no man that ever was used of God to turn the world upside down ever had two nickels to rub together. That is why he had to trust God for everything. I think of the story of George Mueller. Most of you do not even know who George Mueller was. George Mueller lived about 1805, almost at the turn of the century, about 1898, 1890, somewhere in there. He is from Prussia, German. Moved to England. Tried to get into the ministry and tried to be a missionary, and nothing worked out for him. Got saved. God gave him a burden. He looked around in England. You have to understand England at that particular point, but there were just homeless

kids everywhere. Thousands of kids that ran the streets with no place to go at night, nothing to eat. George Mueller got a burden for them. He took 26 girls, started his first orphanage. Over the next 70 years of his life, he built over 15 orphanages and housed over 20,000 kids. He had raised over \$7.5 million in the course of a 60-year ministry. Do you know how much \$7.5 million would be back in 1850 to what it would be today? He raised every dime of it, never taking a dime from anybody. He prayed every dime in. He started with 26 girls, and he wound up with 20,000. In his lifetime, he probably put 100,000 kids in the ministry because he provided an orphanage that fed them, gave them everything they needed, clothed them, gave them the Bible, had people work with them that were Christian and won them to Christ, and then turned them out to go back and be preachers and missionaries. Incredible. Incredible.

Somebody said, "You know what, when you talk like this and you tell stories like this, it is like talking about somebody living on Venus. We cannot even relate to it." Somebody said, "Well, I do not understand that. I mean, are there any stories like that? I do not understand why God did that with George Mueller and He will not do that with me." Well, maybe he read through the Bible 200 times, 100 times on his knees. Maybe that is something to do with it. You hear these stories and you hear these facts and you hear these truths about through history, and it is a thing where we cannot even relate to it anymore, simply because it is a day gone by that God was doing great things, and God is not doing great things today in most people's lives. George Mueller is a great example of that.

IV. Responding Biblically to Wrongdoing

Then as you come on down and look at Romans 12:17-21, these are great verses. These great verses all deal with how we, as God's people, should respond when somebody does us wrong. They are great principles. They are hard, but they are great principles. You will find that when you get into the ministry and you get into dealing with people, that reality is much different than the fantasy that you think the ministry is.

The Bible says there in Romans 12:17, "Recompense to no man evil for evil." Now in the modern world we live in, that is payback. I love the Star Trek movies. I like the series, but I really like the movies. Star Trek one, two, three, four, and five. One of my favorites is the one where it is called "The Wrath of Khan." Remember that one? My favorite line in "The Wrath of Khan" is the guy that played Khan, he is up there and he says, "Revenge is a dish that is best served cold." I love that. Unfortunately, it will not work for you and me as Christians. No revenge. He says, "Recompense to no man evil for evil."

Now this brings up the great biblical principle that we are going to learn about in counseling. We will not get into it today. I told you that when we started this year that I had strategically, as best I could, planned the book of Romans to get us to a point where we would get into these things and have a time when we hit New Year's. We are going to finish up Romans here in probably another, oh, I do not know, maybe another eight or nine months, depending on how long it takes to get through there. And then we are going to go into the book of 2 Corinthians. I want to tie 2 Corinthians in with Romans because 2 Corinthians is going to take wherever you are at, on whatever level you are at, it is going to help you begin to understand the concept behind

ministry. And that is my goal. We have already started the church history, and I was designed to put in there to get the thing up and running, that we get that part of it covered for those of you that wanted to get a historical where you have come from. And then we are going to tie into that once we are done in Institute. We are going to tie in the aspect of biblical counseling. On whatever level you are, if you are committed to doing it, taking you and understanding the biblical principles, how to work them in your own life first, and then use them in the lives of others through the principles.

One of those principles goes right along with this. It is the principle of reacting versus responding. Husbands, do you know why you get in problems with your wives? This is not so much true of the women. It can be. But do you know why you and I get in a jam with our wives sometime when we say something we should not say? Maybe it works both ways, I do not know. But here is the story. You come home and you have a tough day at work. We all think that because we work, and our wife, if she does not work, stays at home, that she does not work. That is not true. She would trade days with you at the office watching those four little rug rats anytime you want to.

You come home and you are tired, and she has had a tough day too. Now you are supposed to be the spiritual leader of your family. So you are supposed to be like Christ to her, see? And in being like Christ to her, and being like in ministry, we always respond. We do not react. So the greatest example of responding versus reacting is you come home and you say something, and she has had a tough day. And you are oblivious to it. And because you think you are the center of the universe. You are oblivious to it. And she says something back that maybe might be a little snappy because she has had a bad day. Now at that point in time, you have a choice to make. You really do. And this is what it takes in ministry because there are going to be times in ministry that people are going to say things to you, and you have it. You now have the chance to make it better or make it worse.

The best example is husband and wives in their scenario because you come home, and you will say something to her, and she will maybe say something not as pleasant back, or if she had a tough day, she does not answer it the way we think she would. She is not waiting there with our slippers and our coffee and all those things. And you are kind of irritated, and you think to yourself, "Well, what does she do all day? I have been out here working, and we had a tough day at work today. The computers broke. We all had to think, man, what is going on here?" And you will say something to her. She will say something back. And at that point, you have a choice. Now you know she said something to you that it was not the way it should be. Now you are in charge. You can do one or two things. You can respond to it, or you can react to it.

You are like a terrorist on an airplane. You have the hand throttle in here with a bomb strapped around you. And now you have just been told that if you blow yourself up, you do not get any virgins. So you have a choice. You say, "You know what? Oh, big deal. I will just give myself up and go to Guantanamo and live like a king down there." Or you say, "What the heck?" And you blow yourself up. You either respond or react to it, see? Now you either say, "Okay, honey, that is fine. No problem. I did not mean to, I did not mean to, anything by that. I know you probably had a tough day." Or you say, "What is wrong with you today? You are kind of edgy." Or you do

this. This will really frost her off. She said, and you walk over and go, "What are you doing?" "Oh, I am just rubbing off the rough edges I see here." No, you are going to get punched if you do that. You have the choice. You either respond or react. And when people do something nice to you in ministry or Christian life, you have the same deal. You can respond or you can react to it. It is hard to do.

A Christian should never react but should always respond. When we react, it is in the flesh. When we respond, we take the biblical principle and then we apply it and filter what somebody said to us, somebody did to us through the principle. And by the time it gets to the other end, it is pretty much taken care of.

It is a reality. The ministry is people. There are two basic things in ministry with people that you are going to have to realize. When you start working with people, if you ever get to the point in your life when you have a church someplace or you are in a major part of area of ministry, these are the reality things:

1. People will love you.
2. People will hate you.

And if you are really successful in ministry and God is really in your life, you will get a third aspect:

3. Some people will love to hate you.

But it is the way it works.

In ministry, experience is absolutely vital. This is why I try to get you involved with people as soon as you are ready. If you are not ready to do somebody one-on-one, I will put you with somebody. Last Thursday night, we had a host of visitors that came in to Bible study. I had six people that wanted to be discipled. Many of you are going to work with your people, and you have a great opportunity to do something. My job is to get you involved with people as quickly as I can.

The ministry is like driver's ed. You can come to Sunday morning, Thursday night, and come to all the classes, just like you go to driver's ed, and you sit there, and you watch the movies, and you hear the books, and you take the test. But until you get behind the wheel and actually get out on a highway, you have never learned how to drive. And ministry is the same way. I can teach you all the classes in the world. But until you get involved with somebody and help them, and you learn the pattern of ministry, you learn the pattern of people, you learn, as I said last week, not just to see but to observe, and you gain the ability to discern your situation and then biblically respond to it, it helps you better understand why some people, God's people, do the things they do to other Christians.

The greatest example, and I have talked about this before, if you ever get feeling down in the dumps because people are against you when you are doing what is right or trying to do what is right, I have told you this before. Just go to the computer and type in Dr. Peter S. Ruckman. Last time I did it, it had been about a year ago, there were 68 pages of trash about him and his brother

Donovan. 68 pages. One guy on there who I know personally even took pictures and used Photoshop to put Donovan in a bar with women. He took obviously two pictures and then put Donovan's picture and did Photoshop and put it in a bar with women all around him and then put out there that Donovan was running out on his wife and going out there and in the bar. The guy fabricated the picture. Incredible. Incredible.

You can say what you want about Brother Ruckman, and you can think what you want to think, but the bottom line is this: if you look down in your lap today and you have got a King James 1611 Authorized Version, you would not have it if it was not for him. This church would not be here if it was not for him. I will tell you what. As far as I am concerned, the greatest book he ever wrote, bar none. I know he has got a lot of good commentaries out, and he has got a lot of good stuff out, but I am telling you what. As far as I am concerned, if you ever seriously want to take the ministry, the greatest book that he ever wrote is a book simply called *The Full Cup*. It is an analysis of his life from before he was saved up to when he got saved and walks you through as an autobiography he wrote himself about the ministry and what he went through and what he experienced, and he called it *The Full Cup*. Greatest book on ministry and its trials and blessings I have simply ever read in my life. Because, boy, when you start to do the work, you see this verse in reality. You see this work in reality.

I mean, I know both those guys. I know the guy. I was back there in those days. I know why this guy hates Ruckman. It comes down to the fact that he is insanely jealous of what God has given him in the ministry. So he tried to do these things to make him look like he is somebody. He is conceited in his own mind. It is just that simple. I have seen guys like that. I had a guy one time that right now he is a pastor, one of the biggest cult churches down here in Blue Springs. He was in my ministry a number of years ago. It was probably 15, 20 years ago. I remember one time I took him. I took him, wanted to go with me when I go out to preach. So I took him down to Alabama with him. I had a church down there that I knew the guy, and he wanted me to come down for a revival. So I took this guy with me. We stayed in a hotel together. We went out and did it with a pastor, and went out to eat, came back to the hotel. We were sitting around just talking, and somebody knocked on the door. I opened up the door, and there were probably about 15 high school college kids out there that had heard, knew I was coming, and found out where I was staying. They were sheepish about it. But they said, "Brother Alexander, we just cannot wait until you start Sunday." He says, "Could we all come in or we go someplace, and we just want to study the Bible right now?" And I said, "Well, yeah, if you want to come on in." So we packed that hotel room out. We sat there for three and a half hours, and they just had the time of their life asking questions about the Bible.

That kid saw that. From that point on, that kid had a desire, a desire that that is what he wanted. Do you know what he did? We went back, did the revival, went back, and about six weeks later, he got his wife in a car, drove back to Alabama, that church, got in the same hotel, called all those kids up, and invited them back over for a Bible study. Do you know why? Because he wanted to be like me. He was so insanely jealous of the fact that a bunch of, to me it was just like, "Okay, here we go again." To him it was what? He was so insanely jealous over the fact that he wanted people around him all the time to learn the Bible. He made one of the bigger messes

out of it and taught some things he never should have taught. I got a phone call about four days later, and half the people in that church were ready to kill him. Arrogance does not replace experience when it comes to the ministry.

I am telling you, you know what? I will tell you one thing, great example, never one time in all the years has Ruckman ever spent five minutes on those things publicly that anybody said about him. You can go on the website, you can just see it everywhere. Never one time does he waste time doing that because the Bible simply says that that is not what we are supposed to do. Now I am going to tell you something, do you know why he does not do it? I will tell you first of all because he has got more grace than they have got, that is why. He understands that real Christians do not do those kind of things. Doing an unchristian act back to a person who did one to you just makes you like them. He has learned that through experience. He has learned by experience, and those kind of things never hurt the ministry, but in reality, they help establish the ministry. He has learned to choose the battles that he fights, and the third great lesson that he has learned through experience is the great concept of time. Time will always prove in any situation who is right and who is wrong in any given situation. That is why patience is so important in ministry. That is why you do not recompense evil for evil.

Let me tell you something, in 35 years of ministry, I have seen it all. I have seen God's people get mad at the preacher or mad at the church. "I will show you" attitude. They leave the church, get mad at somebody in the church, and 20 years later, they have lost everything they had with God. 20 years later, they are right back out in the world again. 20 years later, they are right back into the bars, right back into the booze, right back into the cigarettes, and the tragedy of that is, they lose their kids. You know the devil is not dumb. Many times they get mad, they leave the church. When they leave the church, the kids are four or five years old. Twenty years later, the kids are in their 20s or mid-20s, and you could not touch those kids with the gospel now. And the devil just grabs them, and they are on their way to hell, and the devil goes out the door laughing.

I am telling you, I have seen guys get an attitude, they think they know more than a preacher, they criticize him, they decide no church can teach them, and they go out and start their own, and you see how that works out. Five years later, the church they left is still going and blowing, and they are just blowing. I am telling you, in ministry, arrogance or being wise in your own conceit is no substitute for experience. My favorite expression to people like that is to say, "Hey, you know what, no problem. I will tell you what we will do. Five years from now, let us go to lunch. I will even buy it. Let us sit down, and five years from now, let us see where you are at and where I am at and where God is at because time proves all things."

I had a buddy of mine one time, he is a pastor, and he is a good friend of mine, and he was going through something one time that was really tough. He took a church, and that church had given him all kinds of problems, and he had some good people in it, but he had some bad people in it, and they were just giving him fits. They were just clobbering him. I talked to him on the phone and tried to encourage him, and he was going through some tough time, and I told him, I said, "You know what, you want to let God justify you. You do not want to get into the thing where you try to publicly justify yourself. Now if somebody comes to you and says, 'Well, so-and-so is saying,' you can deal with it that way, but publicly you never want to respond to it." And he said,

"Well," he says, "I am dealing with it," and he says, "I said, 'Well, good.' I said, 'Let me know how you are dealing with it because we all ought to deal with it.'" He said, "Well, I am writing poetry." I said, "Poetry?" He says, "Yeah, man, I am in my Bible, and I am looking at these things, and I am taking what I am going through. The Bible says, 'Recompense no man for evil.' So I just, I am kind of, I am just writing poetry.

I have learned years later, he gave it to me, this has been 15 years ago, and I have never forgotten his poem. But it is a true thing. You have got to realize that in your life when you go through things, we lose sight of the fact that many times you are doing it, you are going through it because of what you are doing for God. And when she and I have a little thing, when she gets in a tough situation or I get in a tough situation, we always get together and compare notes, and we always got this little thing we do. "Remember how it goes out, you want to just show how we go." "You are like, yeah, this is what we do with each other." "I will do the top one, you do the bottom one, then we will switch it together." It was what we do. I say, "What is the matter, honey?" She will say, "What is the matter, Dad?" And I say, "Eh, no, no, no." And either I will do it to her or she will do it to me. And it breaks the ice. It brings us back around. We just simply dish. It does not mean nothing. It does not mean nothing. It does not mean nothing. We do that about 20 minutes. And then we laugh and we go on with it and all this.

But I have got to tell you, the poem he wrote, it is called, "The Bugs on the Windshield of Life." It is great. I wrote it down here. I had to find it this morning. I had it back in my file someplace, and I finally found it right before I got here. This is what he wrote:

- > *Oh, the bugs on the windshield of life,*
- > *Full of anger and stirring up strife.*
- > *Do not be afraid because they cannot break the glass.*
- > *Just keep on driving. Keep your foot on the gas.*
- > *Oh, the bugs on the windshield of life,*
- > *Spewing out words that cut like a knife.*
- > *And some are so scary with wings, big and fat,*
- > *But they will end soon when they finally go splat.*

Boy, I will tell you what. That is a true statement, man. He says, "Do not worry. They never break the glass." And then he told me, he says, "When they hit the windshield and they go splat, everybody sees what was really on the inside of them." I thought that was very prophetic.

Now, look at the last part of Romans 12:17. This is another great principle. This goes along with it. "Provide things honest in the sight of all men." That is great advice. Take your Bibles and turn over to 2 Corinthians 4:1-2. Here is what it says:

2 Corinthians 4:1-2

Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Now, 99% of American churches and ministries and pastors follow this category. Three things:

4. Hidden things of dishonesty. What does that mean? That means they have got another agenda than what you see on the outside.
5. Walking in craftiness. To me, walking in craftiness, I have got an example about that in the Old Testament. I call it the ox cart ministry. Remember back in the Old Testament, you get asked this question in Bible study many, many times. Remember back when the Philistines had the Ark of the Covenant, and finally the Nation of Israel goes back and gets it back? And they are bringing that thing out, and they have got it on an ox cart. And they are all walking down along the side of it, and the ox stumbles, and the cart begins to shift, and Uzzah thinks that it is going to fall, and he puts his hand up to grab the Ark to keep it from hitting the ground. And what happens? God kills him.

Do you know that story bothers a lot of people? I have people all the time say, "Boy, that does not, I mean, you know what, you try to do a good act and a good deed, and God came down. What did God have a bad day that week or what was going on that day?" Well, God cannot have a bad day because there are no days in heaven, so it cannot be that idea. But he says, "You know what," he said, "that really bothers me." When you look at the analogy of that story, you see the whole picture of that, and it brings up what he is talking about there, as far as I am concerned, and it brings up the great aspect of the walking in craftiness. You see, the ox cart back there was not the way that God intended the Ark of the Covenant to be carried. I do not know if you know it or not. You go back in Leviticus, that Ark of the Covenant was supposed to be, it had rings on the side of it, and there were staves or poles that they put through those rings. That Ark of the Covenant was supposed to be carried on the shoulder of people. And that Ark of the Covenant was supposed to be, the weight of that was in those staves. You had two guys up front, two guys in the back, and they carried that thing.

Do you know what the analogy of that is? That Ark of the Covenant is a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ and a picture of the central part of Israel's ministry for God. Without the Ark of the Covenant, they had nothing with God. And it is a picture of our ministry being in the person of Jesus Christ and that God has given us. Now, they had lost the Ark of the Covenant, and the Philistines had it. What did God do when the Philistines got it? He plagued them. He gave them diseases. Finally, they called them on the phone and said, "Hey, come get this thing back." When Israel went back to get it, we see that the time without the ox cart had not done that many good because they had forgotten the way they are supposed to carry that Ark. And so they put it on a cart.

Now do you know what that is a picture of? That is a picture of modern-day ministry in most churches today. The ministry, that Ark of the Covenant, was to be carried on men's shoulders. Why? Because they were supposed to bear the weight and the burden of carrying that Ark of the Covenant, just like you and I are to bear the weight and the burden of the ministry. Kind of like

they did not want to carry it anymore, so they found a personal assistant to carry it for them, see? And God says, "You do not carry that thing on an ox cart. That is a Philistine ox cart." Do you know what the Philistines were a picture of? They are a picture of the world. Do you know what that whole story is a picture of? It is a picture of today taking the ministry of God, i.e., the Ark of the Covenant, and putting it on a worldly system to carry it through. That is the problem. And God said, "That is not going to happen." God killed him. And Israel had lost the perspective of how they are to carry that Ark. And today in ministry, we have lost the perspective of how we are to do the ministry, so we have the hidden things of dishonesty. We walk in craftiness, and oh, the third one:

6. Handling the Word of God deceitfully.

You see, the real job of a pastor or any minister is to renounce those things. And it says, "by manifestation of truth," you see, "by manifestation of truth, commending ourselves to every man's conscience." What does that mean? How do you manifest a truth? You do not do that by preaching. You do not manifest truth by preaching. You put forth truth, but if you want to manifest truth, you manifest it by living the truth, not preaching the truth. It says "commending." Do you know what "commending" means? It means to commit. It means "commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." It simply means committing who you are so your people see who you are with no hidden agendas.

Every church ought to have an open-door policy. You ought to be free to ask whatever question you want to ask, whatever you want to know. If there is something you do not understand, or something you do not agree with, or something you do not like, maybe you do not have all the facts, maybe you do not have all the answers, maybe you ought to have a right to be able to go and ask any question you want to ask. I have always thought ministry needs to be that way. Nothing to hide. What you see is what you get. You have a question. You have a right to come and ask that question, no matter what it may be. If it is something that you want to know about this, or why has this done the way it is, you will never get a negative response from me, because I will tell you what it is. Now here is the problem. If you have got a question, go to the person who has the answer. Going to somebody else who does not have the answer, that is going to cause you problems. You want the answer? Go to whoever has got the answer. But that is the way it has to work.

Now look at Romans 12:18, another great verse. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Now that is a great concept. Do you know the reason why he says it that way? It is real simple, because it is not always possible to do that. I am going to tell you something. In dealing with people, in dealing with ministry, there are going to be some people, no matter what you do, they will never make it right. They will never do what they need to do. You will go to the grave before they ever turn the corner on it, and you better understand that that is just the way it is.

There are a couple of reasons for that. Many of the times, the problem is not really you. Do you realize that if you are really hitting on all eight cylinders with God, and you are doing what God wants you to do, people who are not hitting on all eight cylinders, they are not going to want to

be around you. And the farther they get, the less they are going to want to be around you, because every time they are around you, they basically get reminded of where they are not where they should be. And they get mad at you, because you represent God. And they hang out with you when you live right, and they do not really want to live right. It just reminds them of where they are at. And so it makes a problem for them.

I have seen situations where people came into this church, where some of you brought them in, and they are no longer here. And they brought you in, and when they brought you in, they were on fire for God, and they taught you the Bible, and they did everything for you the way that they were supposed to do, and then something happened in their life, and if they got farther away from God, did not want to deal with it, and before they left, and I have had this happen all through my life, the guy will come in to me, and he will say, "Well, so-and-so is this, so-and-so is that," and that is the very person who brought them in and disciplined them and worked with them. Do you know what, in most cases, that means? That means there is nothing wrong with so-and-so. The problem is with the person, because you are not doing what you need to do, and they still are.

Sometimes it happens more often than not. It happens because, do not ever think for a minute that God does not put in, or the devil does not put in, satanic implants in churches. Now I know that up to last Thursday night, some of you were naive about that, were you not? And then we asked a question about Haiti, and we took the next hour and a half and showed that thing and broke that thing down and showed you on a worldwide scope how the devil works across this world. And I tell you something, my friend, he works the same way in churches. Hard to believe. Hard to believe. The key to the devil's implants is always going to be counterfeit and infiltration. But I will tell you what, when you follow the models, you realize that the Lord Himself in His earthly ministry was not free from it because He had twelve apostles, and He says in John 6:70 that one of them, Judas, was a devil. Do you know what Judas was? He was a satanic implant into the Lord's earthly ministry to stop the work that God wanted to get done. Now if the Lord will not escape it, do you think we will? And sometimes you have to deal with that.

That is why Paul says in Romans 16:17-18, he says, "Mark them that cause division." Now I have always thought that was interesting. I never just take the way something is said in the Bible as the way it is supposed to be said. If I read a book over here, and it says what it says, I will just take it for that. But not the Bible. When Paul uses the word "mark those that cause division," I know what a mark means in the Bible. And I know there is a man coming who is going to have a mark, and I know the first man in the Bible that caused the problem had a mark, and I know that that word "mark" was used because he is not only telling us to mark the people, but he is telling me that that person is going to be satanically connected so you mark them. Oh yeah, the Bible is a great book. Interesting choice of words.

Now the rule of thumb is this: you never attack them, you always let them attack you. And the next verse shows you why, and it shows you more how to deal with it. Look at Romans 12:19. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." What is written here is a quotation of Deuteronomy 32:35. In other words, do not take it personal. It is God's work. And God is not

only keeping the record of who is doing what, but mark it down, folks, He is also keeping a record of who is doing what to whom. Now you do not have to worry about it, that is why it says, "give place to wrath." Do you know what that place is? At the foot of Calvary, under the blood. You never take it personal.

You realize that you are in a ministry, and you are representing God. A lot of people are going to hate God in various stages of life, and they are going to take it out on you. It would be nice if they ripped their clothes off and on a hill on a full moon and killed a cat and screamed at God and cursed Him, but they are not going to do that. They will kill you instead. Get used to it. It is part of it. You do not have to worry about it. You do not have to take it personal. It is God's work, and He is keeping the score.

I have seen this in action many, many times over many, many years. Do you know how God avenges you sometimes when you are wrongly under attack and you are just trying to do what God, and I know sometimes we cause our own messes, and I understand that, but I am talking about in the pure sense here. Do you know the greatest single thing that God can do to avenge you, and that is what he says. He says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord." Now if you are a person, I do not think you probably are, but just so you get it. If you are somebody who is going after another Christian openly on an ongoing basis, you better read the last part of that verse. You would do a lot better if you had my revenge than you would have God's revenge. But God says, "Uh-uh, I will take care of this."

I am telling you, do you know God, do you know how God does that? Do you know the greatest single thing that God can do to avenge you and me? Now I know how we think about it, and I know what you are thinking. It is not to kill them. You say, "Oh, I do not want them killed. I just want them crippled for life in a car wreck." No, no, no, no, no, no, no. "Well, no, I just have God kill their kids." No, no, no, no. "Well, I just have God bankrupt them and they lose their house." No, no, no, no, no, no. "You know, oh, no, no, I do not want any of that. I just have God give them cancer, give them tuberculosis, give them AIDS, give them this, give them that." No, no, no, no, no, no. "No, I just have God burn their house down." No, "I just have God kill their dog." No, do not kill the dogs. No, no, no, no, none of those things.

The greatest thing that drives people crazy, I am telling you, I have seen this all of my life, and the biblical principles behind this found in the book of Proverbs, we will get into when we get into biblical counseling, but I am going to tell you, nothing drives a person crazier than when you have a person who they think God should not use, who God will not use, who God cannot use, who they just trash up one side and down the other, and God just keeps blessing that person. That drives them nuts. The greatest thing that God can simply do in your life is simply keep blessing you. It just drives them crazy.

I talked to Ruckman one time, and I told him, I said, "Man, I said, I do not know. Anybody gets a rear end kicked more than you do." And he said, "Well, it just comes with the territory, brother." But this is how he said it. "Well, it just comes with the territory, brother." And I said, "Yeah, I know, but man, do not you get tired of it?" He said, "Brother, let me tell you something. Man, I

have been in this thing now for almost 40 years. I tell you what, I cannot stand about people criticizing me and clobbering me." And I said, "What is it? Because you seem like it does not bother you." He said, "Well, it does not bother me, but this is what does bother me. Every time somebody comes down and publicly nails me, God gives me another ministry." And he said, "Every time somebody comes down and publicly trashes me or brings up this or brings something up here, God just dumps another blessing on me." And he says, "I just cannot deal with it because he has got more ministries and more blessings." And I thought to myself, that is how God does it. You see? And you know what happens? Do you know why that does not hurt your ministry? Smart people figure it out. People who are in the Bible, they start seeing, "Well, they are saying this about Brother Ruckman, and they are saying he did all these things, but God keeps blessing him. Somebody is wrong somewhere." See? Time. When nothing else tells, ladies and gentlemen, get it down. When nothing else tells, time will tell. That is why you have got to be patient. That is why if you get in ministry and you do a work for God, there is no defense for biblical, unconditional, Holy Ghost, God in your life.

V. Overcoming Evil with Good

That is why he says in Romans 12:20, "Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head." You ought to have a show in your heart if you are driving down the road in the middle of the night in a driving rainstorm, and trees are being blown all over the place. And it is just raining cats and dogs. And it was just an absolute mess. And you drive down there, and you drive by, and you see a car off the side of the road, and somebody out there with a flashlight with a flat tire, and they cannot get the thing down, and they are down there. You drive by and you see it is your worst enemy. What do you do? Do you honk the horn? Honk and wave. Do you stop for a minute, put the window down, and say, "Hey, is it wet out there?" Let me tell you what you ought to do. I will tell you what we ought to do. You know what you do? Pull your car up behind them. You get out. If they are soaking wet, you let them get in the car and dry off, and you change the tire for them. That is what Jesus would do. That is what we need to do. If you find that opportunity. You never win anything by becoming just like them.

Proverbs 15:1 says, "A soft answer turneth away wrath." Proverbs 10:12 says that "hatred stirreth up strifes: but love covereth all sins." And you know what? They expect you to treat them exactly like they have treated you, but you do not. And bang, it hits them right between the eyes.

Now look at Romans 12:21, another great principle. Another great principle. And this is good for you. It is good for me. It is good for everybody. It says this because this can happen: "Be not overcome of evil." Now look at that. Have you ever seen a Christian like that? Have you ever seen a Christian that just cannot forgive, cannot forget, obsessed with something bitter, angry? I mean, they have got a mean spirit. I mean, come on. I have seen God's people hate people, carry a grudge for 20 years over something that should have been dealt with an hour and a half after it happened. I will tell you, do you ever see a Christian like that overcome with evil? The place that every other word out of their mouth is a negative thing towards somebody. Every other word out of their mouth has to do with something that is not positive and negative. I have absolutely

observed, I mean, absolutely obsessed with rage and hatred. I mean, you can see it dripping off their lips like venom. Everything that they say, it just has a negative connotation, anger. One little word can set them off into a 25-minute tirade. And all the time they claim to be God's child.

In church history, when I was studying it, I told you the other night, I probably read over 2,000 books as I was coming through church history, but I cannot, I wish I could find where I read it. I wrote it down. I am famous for writing things down. In the last four or five years, I wrote where I found it because for many, many years I did not, and I cannot find the books that I found it in. But I read this, and this is great. And you want to remember this. It says, and I read this by somebody who, like I said, wrote this in a book on church history, and he was dealing with the persecution of the church. But it is a great line. He says, "You know, in history, and it is true in life, people who claim to be God's true people are always persecuting those who are God's true people." And he says, "You know how you know that? Because God's true people do not persecute anybody." That is a great line. People who claim to be God's true people are always persecuting those who are God's true people. And the reason for that is, God's true people never persecute anybody.

Do you know what? If you have got the power of God in your life and God is using you, what do you care what people think? If you have got the hand of God in your life and the hand of God is using you, what do you care? And nine times out of ten, the reason why they are angry at you is because God is not using them. I mean, you have got to move on, people. There is a great passage in Hebrews chapter 12, and boy, it is so good, and I have seen it. It talks about the root of bitterness. What a great concept that is. Root of bitterness. You know, bitterness is what anger turns into when anger is not dealt with biblically. Bitterness is what your life goes to when you do not deal with those things in your life that have to be dealt with. It is a very subtle thing. I do not think anybody who ever woke up in their life bitter about anything ever intended to get bitter. Bitterness is a very subtle thing as it is laid out in the book of Hebrews, and that is why it is called a root of bitterness.

You see, roots of a tree. You take a little tree and you plant it down in your yard, and you look at that thing and you say, "Boy, that is a pretty nice little tree." Two years later, you decide, "Well, we do not want that tree there." Now you can probably pretty much dig it up, put your car on, pull it up. You let that tree down there for 15, 20 years, try to dig it up then. Those roots are down so far and so deep, you will never get it out. You will never get it out. That is why he used the word "root of bitterness." You get out of fellowship with God, you get your nose bent in a joint about something, somebody does something to you, and it may be a legitimate thing. Maybe it is not. I do not care. The blood of Jesus Christ covers all sin. But you know what? Roots grow best in the dark, do they not? I will tell you something else, roots grow best in the dirt, your flesh. I will tell you something else, day by day, the deeper they get, the stronger they get. And one of these days you wake up and you look at everything in life, and where God intended you to have a box of crayons that had 40 colors in it that you could just paint the most beautiful, colorful pictures of life, you have got one color, and it is black. And that root of bitterness got into your life, got into your soul, and everything you see, every circumstance you deal with, every circumstance reminds you of the one you cannot get rid of.

Do you know what the problem is? It even tells you what the problem is. In Hebrews 12:15, it said, "Fail the grace of God." What does that mean? Does it mean you did not get saved? No, you are saved. But you are supposed to give grace to people in your life just like God gave you. And when you fail that grace in your life and you cannot give people the grace that God gave you, you know where you wind up? Bitterness. And you wind up being just like this: overcome with evil. Overcome with evil.

Is it not strange to you that so many people who claim to be Christians are so far from God's character in the way they deal with life and people and situations by what they do and what they say? I mean, the truth, I mean, look at the last part of Romans 12:21. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." Now, the true child of God does not get overcome with evil. But he overcomes evil with good. Now, these are the character qualities that Christ had. These are the character qualities that need to be built into this church, into each of us. I am not going to tell you you are going to hit them all every time and do it right. I do not. But that is beside the point. The bottom line is that every day you put these principles in your life, you form what you do by reacting versus responding. You take these character qualities and you say, "You know what? Let us get the reality. If I am going to be God's woman, if I am going to be God's man, let us strip it all down. Let us get the varnish off. Let us get all the big Bibles out of the way and all the study notes and all the things that you have got piled around you. Let us get it down to where it really works." So the principles in his life match up with the principles in your life and my life.

You see, here is what we are going to change. By design, we cannot do it all at one time. You build a church in a process just like you build people through a process. But the bottom line is this. In the last six and a half years, we have studied the book, and we have learned the book. And many of God's people in this very building know the Bible. And that is commendable. I had to get you to that point. Now we are going to put a whole new concept together on whatever level you are. If you just came in, if you have been around for a couple of months, years, or you have been around forever, whatever level you want, if you want to find out how to be used of God, get the right principle, learn how to respond versus react, and learn how to do it the biblical way, then this is where it is at. You see, we spent a lot of time getting to know the book. That is good. Now we are going to take the time to get to know the author of the book. And brother, there is a difference. Many of God's people know the book. They just do not know the author of the book. I am not talking about just being able to preach well, teach well. I am talking about now the very principles of God dictating what you and I do and how we respond and how we react based on the character qualities of God.

I talked about models. Jesus is the greatest model we could all have. I have analyzed this thing many, many times in my life. I first saw the models of how important they were too many years ago to remember. And then I analyzed that whole thing over my lifetime. I have studied every character in the Bible. I went out and tried to lay out every character trait I could find, good or bad. I tried to catalog them and line them up to the book of Proverbs. I tried to do everything I could do, but I came up with at the end of the day, I came up with this. The greatest single example of you and me, of what we should be and how we should deal with people, circumstances, and situations, is simply the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

I understand why God put all the other men in the Bible. You have Abraham, you have Isaac, you have Jacob, you have David, you have Samuel. You have incredible, probably a hundred thousand characters you can learn something from. But you know what? The thing that they all have in common, they are still all sinners, and they fail. Do you know what God had to do? He gave you a whole book from Genesis to Revelation that deals with every man and woman that you can learn everything about. And then He gives you one perfect example. And that perfect example is His Son. You look at David, you can learn some great things, but he screwed up. You get Solomon, you can learn some great things, but he messed up. You can look at Samuel, he did some great things, but he messed up. You can look at Abraham, tremendous study, but he screwed up. There is only one man in the Bible that you can go to. I am not saying you cannot learn from everything else, but you have got to recognize that there is one perfect model. And that is the Lord Jesus Christ. And the character qualities we have been coming down through in Romans chapter 12 are not the character qualities of Abraham, Jacob, Isaac, David, Solomon. As much as they may have loved God and the Word of God, they are not the character qualities of those guys. Those are the character qualities of God that those guys had to get in their life just like you and I do.

Remember Jesus on the cross? Luke 23:34. They had beat Him. They had spit on Him. They betrayed Him. They had lied about Him. They falsely accused Him. They hit Him in the face. They pulled out His beard. They had whipped Him. They put nails in His hands and His feet. And finally, they hung Him up on a cross naked before all the world. They made fun of Him. They made sport of Him. They antagonized Him. They tried to give Him the wrong stuff to drink. In every aspect of His life, He had about His worst day in ministry that you could ever hope to have. And yet in Luke 23:34, He simply says:

Luke 23:34

Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. And they parted his raiment, and cast lots.

Do you know what? I am going to tell you something. Maybe you cannot get here yet. But in ministry, this is why you do not take it personal, because that same line is true in dealing with people. Most of the time, the people that are persecuting you and want to stop you in ministry do not even know why they are doing it. That is why you cannot take it personal. Like the old poem says, "They are not going to break the glass. Just keep driving and keep your foot on the gas." That is it.

Now, let me just talk to you, and then I am done. On the cross, He took the abuse and took it to Himself. He took the beatings, the spitting, the betraying, the lying, the false accusations. He took the whippings, the nails in His hands and His feet. He took the terrible things they said about Him. He took the terrible things that they accused Him of. And He took that abuse so you and I could have what He had for us. Do you understand that? Do you realize that He took all of that so He could give you and me what He had for us? I do not think we grasp that. But let me just say this. That is why you need to take it for Him. That is why you need to let them ridicule you, mock you, make false accusations about you. That is why you need to let them whip you,

beat you, and even if it comes down to it, kill you. Because the bottom line is where He became your sacrifice on the cross to get to you what He had for you, He now wants you and me to be a living sacrifice for Him.

Do you know what? That does not lessen the abuse. It does not lessen the ridicule. It does not lessen the hurt. It does not lessen the pain. It does not lessen the adversaries that are going to come after you. But you take what they have got for you that you may get to others what God wants to get through you to them, through your body becoming a living sacrifice. He was a sacrifice on the cross, and He took it all that you and I might get what He had. Now He wants you and I to take what we have to others, and you will have to pay a...