

Romans 12 v 14-21

Introduction

Last section of Romans Ch. 12. So far, what consecration means in relationships in church. Now consider effect on relationships in the world. Nothing is clearer than that the Christian life is not designed for monastery but to be lived among men in every day world.

Interesting aspect of this section – how far Paul is influenced by teaching and example of Christ. Also use of quotations from Old Testament, especially three from Book of Proverbs. (C.f. cross references in Bible). There was a Christian merchant who habitually gave a copy of Proverbs to every boy who came into his establishment. He considered it the best book of practical ethics available for human life.

Paul gives more telegraphic rules, which this time we will gather together under two main heads, rather than looking at them individually.

Treatment of enemies

N.B. Paul is speaking of personal relationships only. Not saying that evil is to be tolerated, justice not to be done, or denying the right of the state to deal with evil-doers and protect the innocent (that to come in next chapter), or denying right of the state to use army to defend citizens from aggression and tyranny.

Paul is dealing with personal enemies. Those who would harm in various ways, slander, misuse. **Bless them which persecute you. Bless, and curse not** (12:14). **Recompense to no man evil for evil** (12:17). **Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves** (12:19). Not to take law into own hands. Leave vengeance to God. Only He knows all the facts and can act without passion. Therefore feed and give drink to your enemy **for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head** (12:20). Acting thus, we can move men to sense of burning shame, and the fire of their hatred dies down like burning coals scattered on a glacier.

Do not be conquered by evil by taking revenge. Conquer evil with good, and be a victor. Teaching like this is the very reverse of instincts of human nature and reverse of practice of the world. Underlines that Christian is utterly different kind of person, operating by different rules and motives.

Clearly Paul is echoing Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. And not only His teaching, but His example also. **Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously** (1 Peter 2:23) Meekness and dignity set Him apart. **Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do** (Luke 23:34).

Booker Washington said "I will not allow any man to lower myself by hating him". Not to stoop to level of godless and worldly man, because higher motives, and citizens of another kingdom. Our character is not to be a mirror of the persecutor. To

be a marked difference from them. The principle of “getting even” is not in our rule-book. Leave our character, reputation, all that concerns us, in God’s hands. He will set record straight in His own time. Knows all the facts. If we take care of our character, God will take care of our interests.

Not just to put up with situation in a passive way but, by deeds of kindness, to break down hostility. Love enemies, and win them. Only real way to destroy enemy – to make him a friend. Not just to be a victim, but to seek to be a victor and conqueror. Come out of encounter well, and triumphantly.

There has been no greater force to move men to Gospel than this supreme spirit of forgiveness which martyrs in every age have shown, c.f. Stephen’s prayer for forgiveness – directly responsible for Saul’s conversion. Augustine said “The Church owes Paul to the prayer of Stephen”. Many a persecutor since has become a follower of Christ because he saw how a Christian can forgive. W.G.Scroggie writes “If I had the opportunity to live life over again, some things I have done I would not do, some things I have said would remain unuttered, and some letters I have written would never have been penned.”

Treatment of fellow men

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep (12:15). Share one another’s sorrows and one another’s joys. This binds us together as nothing else will, as we enter into one another’s lives and experiences. It can be harder to rejoice with another than to weep. Harder to express pleasure that someone else has done well and got that job, especially if it brings disappointment for us, than to sympathize in his sorrow and loss. Hardest of all when two men are in for same job and other one gets it. Sportsmanlike to be first to shake hands, but how are we dealing with jealousy, resentment, sense of injustice within? Not easy to be interested and delighted in progress and success of others.

Be of same mind one toward another (12:16). Live in harmony with one another. Nelson’s despatch giving reason for his victory in one action – “I had the happiness to command a band of brothers”. How much more true should this be of the Christian church. When strife enters, little hope of any good work being done in any Christian society.

This is constant plea in Paul’s epistles. Not always agree with one another’s point of view. Yet to remain understanding and tolerant. Problem is that it is such a short step from disliking a man’s opinion to disliking him as a person. How seriously do we take this command and believe it is our duty to be of the same mind – to live in harmony with one another?

Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate (12:16). “Don’t become snobbish but take a real interest in ordinary people” J.B.Philips translation. God’s values are not our’s. Saintliness has nothing to do with rank or wealth or education. Duke of Wellington’s words at the Lord’s Table – “We are all equal here”. No place in church for cliques based on our group, type or class. Give selves to everybody alike, showing preference to everybody who is outside our sphere.

Christ's example – first 30 years spent in little obscure village, in carpenter's shop, laid hand on few sick folk, loved by outcasts and sinners, despised by all whom the world honoured. Concerned with little children, sorrowing widow, or widow with two mites. Always accessible to the poor, the socially inferior, the weak and the defeated.

Be not wise in your own conceits (12:16) “Don't think you know it all” – Living Bible. Be ready to listen and learn from others. Conceit divides a fellowship more quickly than anything else. With conceit goes supercilious criticism of the unenlightened who are content to do lowly Christian duties. This is like iceberg which brings down temperature wherever it floats.

So often conceit is shown by those who have least reason to pose. Shallow and empty. Corn, when green, is upright, but when ripe it bends low. Vain young man was a great trial to D.L.Moody. Said to him once “You know, Mr Moody, I am a self-made man”. Moody's reply “Young man, you have relieved the Almighty of a great responsibility” (This reply is also attributed Earl Lloyd George). People like that young man only succeed in making themselves ridiculous.

Provide things honest (Beautiful, lovely or good) **in the sight of all men** (12:17). Do not say “It does not matter what people think”, but see that your public behaviour is above criticism. Conduct to be fair and attractive for all to see. Not only must conduct be good but look good. Above suspicion or reasonable criticism. Not be slave of world's opinion. But be jealous for Christ's honour and not give people cause to point the finger. Being watched at all time. The world has standard for Christians, and we should measure up to it.

Often the conscience of the worst of men will show them what is the right way. **Let your light so shine before men that they may see your works and glorify your Father in heaven** (Matthew 5:16). Tertullian, quoting what a heathen had said about a certain Christian “He is an excellent man, that Caius Servius, only he is a Christian.”

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men (12:18). As far as possible, be a peacemaker. Not imply easy-going tolerance which accepts anything and shuts eyes to everything. Sometimes duty, truth and honesty means we have to say something, though we would gladly run a hundred miles than say it. Not peace at any price. But not go out of way to cause trouble. Not be overcritical or quarrelsome. Act from principle not pique. Say it in a Christian way. Strife upsets nerves, disturbs minds, arrests spiritual progress. Never quarrel. It takes two to make a quarrel – make sure you are not one of them.

Conclusion

Do not pay back. Weep and rejoice, live in harmony, do not be a snob or big headed, be seen to be good, not be troublemaker. What a difference this would make to homes, churches and all relationships. Christ here is our pattern and our power. Christ formed in us. **Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus** (Philippians 2:5).