

Revenge: A Bitter Root of Offense

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

The first question I think we should ask ourselves is based on this verse is...

What does the word "Bless" here mean, who exactly are our persecutors, and why should we not curse them?

The literal translation for the word "Bless" here in this verse means, to praise and give thanks for and also to speak well of and act kindly towards others. This can be done through a number of ways such as...

1. Prayer- when we actively and daily pray for others (especially those who we think are our enemies), our hearts become softened and compassionate toward those we may have grown bitter, angry, hateful, or even revengeful with.
2. Speech- when we choose to speak words of graciousness, love, encouragement, and compassion to and about those who have and are hurting us, we help fight against roots of bitterness taking hold in our lives and create opportunities for God to use us as ambassadors of His love.
3. Acts of Service- words are fleeting but our actions are physical evidence of God's love at work in our hearts which bear witness of the Holy Spirit's fruit in our lives.

We see the command to "Bless" others in other passages of scripture as well...

Matthew 5:43-44,

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Luke 6:27-28,

"But to you who are willing to listen, I say, love your enemies! Do good to those who hate you. Bless those who curse you. Pray for those who hurt you."

I think based on these two verses we can answer the question of who exactly our persecutors are...

1. Are those who actively hate us and inflict injuries to us which cause pain, suffering, and torment.
2. Are those who seem not to care for us and are seemingly opposed to what we believe and stand for.

But wait...Isn't Paul writing to Jewish and Gentile believers in Rome? Yes, he is! Which means that their persecutors were those who were outside of the body of Christ AND those who were inside the body of Christ and who were professing to be Christ-followers.

I think a question we need to ask ourselves based on this reality is...

What does Paul mean when he tells us to "Bless" those who persecute us and not "curse" them?

But maybe, just maybe, a better question we should ask ourselves is...

What would happen if we actively chose not to "Bless" those who "persecute" us and decide to "curse" them instead?

1. The reality is that for some of us right now, this is exactly what we are wrestling with; we are seeking to correct the wrongs done to us; we have a desire to see ourselves avenged; we deserve justice and will do whatever it takes to see that person who wronged us punished.
2. For others, we may have gone through this cycle already but perhaps, we have been thrust into another situation where we are being faced with this reality again.
3. And for some, we have been so transformed by the process of pursuing peace and releasing offenses that we are able to recognize moments when our flesh cries out "Avenge Me!" and we respond confidently "Father, vengeance is yours and yours alone!"

Tell the Story about when I was told to first forgive and then pray for my attackers salvation...

Hebrews 12:14-15,

"Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and by it many become defiled."

Notice what Paul mentions here, we as Christ-followers are to strive for peace with everyone. This is not an option! We are to do the following...

1. Be at peace, with everyone; yes, even that person who just popped into your mind!
2. Actively pursue holiness, which helps us understand that we are to put on and act out of a desire to be "Holy as God is Holy" which is part of our journey as Christ-followers.

But why? Why must we do these things?

Because Paul understood that when we actively fight against and even desire not to be at peace with everyone, when we seek to put our own selfish desires and needs above God's holiness and perfect righteousness, we invite a root of bitterness into our hearts and lives.

But where does a root of bitterness spring from? Well, I am glad you asked!

Look with me at Romans 12:17

17 Repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

This verse makes sense to us this morning, doesn't it? We are being commanded to...

1. Not return injury for injury
2. To not respond to evil with our own evil
3. To not act out of a desire to see ourselves avenged for hurts, pains, torments, and sufferings caused by others
4. We do this so that we, as Christ-followers, who have made the command our own to "turn the other cheek and go the second mile for others" serve as a reflection to others of what not do, when the world would say "Go ahead, avenge yourselves, it's the just thing to do."

This all makes sense to us this morning, right? So why then, Christ-follower, are we so quick to take offense with one another and look for opportunities to promote our own agenda and selfish desires? Why do we hang on to and even soak in ways we can make others pay for what they have done to us? Why do we seek to repay someone evil for evil when we know we are to do just the opposite? When we strive after making others pay for what they have done to us, we have become judge and executioner for not just them, but for ourselves.

When we do this, we have allowed the destructive root of bitterness to grow and fester in our hearts, and when we daily feed the root of bitterness in our lives, it becomes easier and easier to plant seeds of anger, resentment, hate, jealousy, division, and pain in our hearts, minds, and souls.

I know, this is a very weighty and hard to hear message so far, but we must get this right!

What then, our we to do Oh Christ-follower and lover of Jesus?

Look with me at the following verses

Colossians 3:5-14

“So put to death the sinful, earthly things lurking within you. Have nothing to do with sexual immorality, impurity, lust, and evil desires. Don’t be greedy, for a greedy person is an idolater, worshiping the things of this world. Because of these sins, the anger of God is coming. You used to do these things when your life was still part of this world. But now is the time to get rid of anger, rage, malicious behavior, slander, and dirty language. Don’t lie to each other, for you have stripped off your old sinful nature and all its wicked deeds. Put on your new nature, and be renewed as you learn to know your Creator and become like him. In this new life, it doesn’t matter if you are a Jew or a Gentile, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbaric, uncivilized, slave, or free. Christ is all that matters, and he lives in all of us. Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tenderhearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds us all together in perfect harmony.

But Why? Why must we hear and do what Paul commands in these verses?

Look with me at Romans 12:15, 16, & 18

15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

The reality is this...

1. When we actively choose to make allowance for each other’s faults; we allow the Holy Spirit to cut away at our bitter root of offense and revenge.
2. When we actively choose to forgive anyone who offends us past, present, and future; we allow the Holy Spirit to cut away at our bitter root of offense and revenge.
3. When we remember that Jesus Christ first forgave us our sins, even when we did not deserve God’s grace, forgiveness, and were deserving of righteous judgement; we allow the Holy Spirit to cut away at our bitter root of offense and revenge.

4. When we clothe ourselves with Christ's love; we allow the Holy Spirit to cut away at our bitter root of offense and revenge.
5. When we put on our new nature rooted in Christ; we allow the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see the needs of others and enter into opportunities to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep. We function the way the body of Christ was meant to function.
6. When we see the needs of others both outside AND inside the body of Christ, it keeps us from becoming prideful and arrogant, because it isn't about us. And guess what, this actually helps us to maintain peace with each other and with those God has commanded us to love as we love ourselves.

So than, what do we do when we are faced with a very real situation where we have the potential possibility to take matters into our own hands and seek to avenge ourselves?

Look with me at Romans 12:19

19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

I want us to pause for a moment, and wrestle with this verse. When someone does something to us or someone else, that causes us to get angry, feel sad, feel taken advantage of, and or have a desire to repay evil, how does it make us react?

Share the story about Celebrate Recovery and the capture of Osama Bin Laden

Look with me at our final two verses in Romans 12:20 & 21

20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

I have one final question for us to ask ourselves this morning...

Do we really want to destroy and kill that perceived enemy of ours this morning, than I challenge us to look in the mirror and ask the hard question...are we the one who needs that bitter root of offense ripped from our hearts this morning? Have we become the enemy of a

friend? If not, than my next challenge for us this morning is to make our enemy a friend. -
President Abraham Lincoln

Remember family, that all of us, at one time were enemies of God. We deserved to be destroyed and killed for our transgressions and sins against a righteous and Holy God.

Once we were dead because of our disobedience and our many sins. We used to live in sin, just like the rest of the world, obeying the devil—the commander of the powers in the unseen world. He is the spirit at work in the hearts of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following the passionate desires and inclinations of our sinful nature. By our very nature we were subject to God’s anger, just like everyone else.

“But God is so rich in mercy, and he loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins, he gave us life when he raised Christ from the dead. (It is only by God’s grace that we have been saved!) For he raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ Jesus. So God can point to us in all future ages as examples of the incredible wealth of his grace and kindness toward us, as shown in all he has done for us who are united with Christ Jesus.

God saved us by his grace when we believed. And we can’t take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it. For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.

Family, this morning our challenge is to overcome evil with good and so walk in a manner that reflects our Great King.