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Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith
Message: Honorable Living

Transcribed Message
March 12, 2023
Romans 12:17-18

If you were with us last Sunday, and I don't usually begin that way because if you weren't with us last Sunday then you don't necessarily know what I'm talking about, but in this case, you'll still be able to participate. If you were with us last Sunday you remember that I asked two true or false questions. Remember those questions? The first one was Christians should be easy to live with. And you all gave a very resounding yes to that, a very strong word of encouragement from the whole group. It was a strong yes, that's true. And then the second question was are Christians are easy to live with. Once again there was a very strong response to that question. This time, and I have to say I was a little bit surprised, but this time you almost unanimously said it's false. They're not necessarily all that easy to live with. Where I failed was to follow it up with a third true or false question. When I was talking about this with Bonnie, she gave the question before I even had the chance to get it out. She knew right where I was going. The third question I should've asked is are you easy to live with? And that one we will not ask for any response publicly. We'll allow you to resolve that in your own mind.

Well, you know if we are in fact fully devoted followers of Christ, and if we are living in and living out the truth of Romans 12, then the answer to that question would be very much that's a true statement. Let's see what that looks like again this morning as we turn to Romans 12. We're going to look this morning at verses 17 and 18 and as we do that the idea that we pull out of these verses is in the midst of a culture filled with conflict and animosity, followers of Jesus are called to be people who make and keep peace.

Three reminders about life. Do not expect life to be fair. Peter tells us as much in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 20. This is what Peter says: "For what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it you endure? But if, when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called

because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in His steps.” Peter just tells us, and much of the rest of Scripture tells us, life oftentimes is not very fair.

Secondly, we do not expect the world to be tolerant. Do not expect the world to be tolerant. Jesus said in John 15 they’ve hated Me. If they’ve hated Me, they’re going to hate you. In other words, there’s something wrong if the world loves you, then you’re not evidently walking in step with Jesus because Jesus said the world hated Him. Paul said in Romans 8 and verse 7 that the natural man’s mind is hostile towards the things of God. Always there is a hostility on the part of the world towards the believer. We should anticipate and expect that the world is going to be intolerant of us.

Then the third one is do not expect everyone to be your friend and be nice. Do not expect everyone to be your friend and be nice. Now, present company excluded, but that is certainly not a universal principle. The question that comes to us this morning then is in light of this. How do we respond when life isn’t fair? How do we respond when the world is not tolerant of us? And how do we respond when people are not so nice to us?

Paul tells us the answer to all of those questions in verses 17 and 18. How should we respond? If you look back at verse 14, it’s kind of a counter to this one. Verse 14: “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.” That 14th verse started off with a positive statement and then gave us a negative one. In this 17th verse, we’re going to just flip that. We’re going to start with a negative and then we’re going to move to a positive. The very first thing he says is there is never a time to retaliate. There’s never a time to retaliate. Repay no one evil for evil. Here we have another one of our “no exception clauses”. Within the contract there is a no exception clause here. Look at that 17th verse and the words “no one” appear first in the Greek text. That’s called the position of emphasis. Whenever the writers of Scripture writing in the New Testament language of the Greek text wanted to emphasize something, those words would always appear at the beginning of the sentence. That’s the way this starts off. No one. There’s a point of emphasis here. There’s something important here. There is something that we’re to pay attention to. There are no exceptions to this principle, in other words. The only exception is it’s okay in this instance to say the word “never”. We

talked about that last week. We're not generally speaking to say the word "never" or "always". They always get you into trouble, don't they?

But here is an exception to that again. We can say never in this case because he says never repay evil for evil. This is the consistent teaching of Scripture. It reminds us very similarly of what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus spoke words very similar to what Paul says as we've seen more than once in this Romans 12 passage. But it's not just in the New Testament. It's the ethic of God's people all through the Old Testament as well. If you just note in Leviticus chapter 19 and verse 18: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord." That was the Old Testament ethic as well. Under the law of the Old Testament, God says something very similar to what we just read in Romans 12:17. It hasn't changed, has it? In Proverbs chapter 24 listen to what the writer of Proverbs says in verse 29: "Do not say I will do to him as he has done to me." That is a proverb that we are familiar with. I'm going to get even with that person. We looked at that when we looked at verse 14. Do not say I will do to him as he has done to me. I will pay the man back for what he has done. No, we can't do that.

And then right where we were as we started in 1 Peter chapter 3 and verse 8, this is what Peter says here: "Finally, all of you have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary bless, for to this you were called that you may obtain an inheritance for a blessing." It's the consistent teaching of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament. We can read all of those verses and 10 more. We can read all of those verses. We can understand the words as we read them, but it's not so easy to apply them. We can read them with understanding and then we can leave them behind without applying them.

I simply say then secondly as we look at this 17th verse, this is another challenging imperative, isn't it? Another challenging imperative. If you happen to be keeping track, if you happen to be counting along when we began this 12th chapter at verse 9 now through verse 17, this is the 21st imperative that we've come across in Paul giving us this instruction for how it is that we're to live as Romans 12 Christians. I'm sure we would all admit again even as we come to this verse this morning that these are

difficult to obey. These are pushing against our natural reaction on so many different fronts. This is a remarkable attitude that we are to have in the face of what we would normally do and say by way of response.

Now, keep in mind as we come to this again, we kind of touched on this in verse 14, as you look at this 17th verse and this matter of not taking vengeance, this isn't talking about self-defense. This verse does not require us to simply become somebody that gets run over all the time by somebody who is committing acts of crime or injustice. That's not what this verse is about. This is talking about a personal relationship issue. This isn't a national issue even. When we get it to Romans 13, Paul is going to say the government does not bear the sword in vain. So we know that that isn't even the application here. This is an application that has to do with personal relationships. How do we respond within the context of personal relationships? In that arena, it is no, never, ever, personal retaliation is not allowed.

It reminds me of the story of little Johnny who is playing in his room. Suddenly there is a screen that comes from the room. Mom runs into the room and there is little Johnny with his two-year-old sister who has him by the hair and pulling him down as he is screaming. Mom runs in and undoes the little hand from his head of hair and says to him I'm so sorry. She doesn't understand what she's doing. She doesn't even know this hurts. Mom walks out of the room. No sooner did she get out of the room then there is another scream that comes from the room. This time it is the little sister's voice. Mother rushes back in and little Johnny says now she knows. Now she knows it hurts. That's a misapplication. That's to go completely against Romans 12:17. No retaliation allowed. No payback called for. No getting even. No silent treatment. No shunning. No rejection. No avoidance. Just think of all of the things that fall into the category that might very well be a part of the spirit of retaliation. Paul says no, we cannot do that.

So then we ask, what can we do? If we can't do that, what can we do? He says to us be intentional about doing right. Do be intentional about doing right. And you say that's not exactly what I had in mind, but look at this. When you look at that 17th verse, repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

The first thing I want you to see is this is not spontaneous. This is planned. This is not something spontaneous. This response that Paul is calling for is to be literally a

planned response. Note again as you read that verse that the first part of this clause and this phrase begins again with an adversative. But. He is saying to us okay, don't do this. Don't be seeking after, never seek retaliation, but do this. So there's a strong adversative that tells us something different is coming. What he tells us is in the first part of that verse – there's no retaliation. That is kind of a passive response. This is very much a proactive response. On the one hand, don't do that. Don't retaliate. Don't strike back. But here's what you are to do and it is very proactive. But more than just proactive, I want you to see that it's premeditated. When he says to us “give thought to”, we could understand that to be saying give full consideration to this. Think beforehand about this. That's what he's saying. Actually premeditate a response that reflects not a spirit of retaliation but a spirit of goodness and kindness toward somebody.

How in the world could you ever premeditate a response of goodness? How can you ever preplan a response not of seeking retaliation but of actually seeking somebody's good? How could you ever plan something like that? How could you ever give consideration to that? Where would that even begin? Silence in 27 different languages. Where would that begin? the only place that could begin. In verse 16, you people who have a New American Bible, that word appears three times in that 16th verse. Where to begin? It's going to begin in our mind. When he says give consideration to this, think beforehand of how you're going to respond to somebody who strikes out against you. You would normally want to retaliate. You would normally want to come back with a barrage of words of your own. He is telling us that we are to preplan a response that is the opposite of that. It is going to have to begin in our mind. It takes us back to Romans 12:2. Don't be conformed to the world but be transformed in the renewing of your mind. It takes us to verse 3. Don't think more highly of yourself than you should be thinking. Where do all of those things happen? They happen in the mind.

When he says to us as a fully devoted follower of Christ we started off and said life isn't fair. People are not always going to be tolerant. Everybody isn't going to be your friend and be nice. You know that. You are to be planning and thinking I am to be giving considerations to when those circumstances come our way we already have committed to a certain course of action. We have already taken a certain number of responses off of the table for how we're going to respond. We're not going to retaliate.

There is a wonderful ministry called Peacemaker Ministries. Sixteen years ago, the church and school utilized Peacemaker Ministries to resolve some issues between us. The reason the school this last week in large measure was allowed to celebrate 40 wonderful years of God's blessing, and have furthermore the opportunity to thank Steve for 10 years as headmaster, I believe looking back on the hand of God on the church and school ministries we look at peacemaker ministry and the principles that they brought to us to help us resolve some of these issues. The very first thing they say, and much of it's based on Romans 12, all of it is based on Scripture. Every new member's class from that point on I hand out the peacemaker brochure to everybody that comes to Covenant because I believe so strongly that what God has called us to is in a world of conflict and animosity and struggle. We are called to be peacemakers and peacekeepers.

The very first thing that you're confronted with as a peacemaker is they have four g's that they lay out by way of principles. The first one is glorify God. Glorify God. What is that? That is you in a premeditated position and stance and thought process saying that as a fully devoted follower of Christ what I am going to do whatever conflict comes into my life – and by the way, it comes into our lives every day – I am going to adopt a policy that says in the midst of this conflict I have one guiding principle that I'm going to start with. And that is I want to glorify God in how I've moved through this issue. I can tell you that if you and I did just that, life would look very different. If you're married and this afternoon somebody's going to have a conflict. Somebody's needing to resolve the conflict because you had one on the way this morning. Somebody thought you were supposed to turn the clock back an hour and somebody thought you're supposed to turn it ahead and that led to a conflict. You've still got to resolve that even though you've already lost your hour. But here's the thing. If every time you have a conflict with your parents, if every time you as a parent have a conflict with your teenager or one of your children, if you have a conflict with a coworker, with a neighbor, a friend, somebody here at church, whoever it is, wherever it is, if you start off Romans 12:17 and you give due consideration and you preplan and you premeditate that in your response you're going to do what you can to glorify God, there is just a whole bunch of choices that you've taken off of the table. Not the least of which is I will not retaliate. I will not

respond in kind. Those were hurtful words. Those were cutting words. I could easily come back and do the same to you, but I have considered, I have given thought to, I have decided beforehand but by the Spirit of God I'm not going to respond in that way because I want to glorify God. Then they go through a number of others that you can follow up on in your community group if that's what you so choose to do. But that's what he's saying to us here. Give that kind of consideration.

Notice secondly this is about a lifestyle choice. This is about a lifestyle choice. I want you to see three things here in this verse. It's about doing what is honorable and good. Do what is honorable he says. It is honorable in the sight of all. That word honorable is the Greek word *kalos* which could be translated good, right, proper, fitting, beautiful, precious, morally beautiful, visibly good. In other words, it's such a big word that there isn't one English word that quite grasps everything that that word includes. All of those things are a part of that. It's what Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 8 and verse 21: "For we aim at what is honorable, not only in the Lord's sight but also in the sight of man." What is good, what is honorable, what is morally beautiful, what is actually visibly seen.

Notice then, it's about every area of life. It's about every area of life. It's about our public witness. He says we do this in the sight of all. It is the very same thing Jesus said again in Matthew 5 and verse 16 when He said let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works (same word) and glorify your Father who is in heaven. It's the very same idea. People watch you. They listen to you. They see how you respond. They see that it's different than the way other people respond. They can't explain it. They can't understand it. They don't know why you act that way, but that's the point that he's making here – that they will see you and glorify your Father who is in heaven.

This is an often repeated principle. I'm not going to read all of those verses that I've listed, but I do want to just pull out a couple of them. 1 Corinthians chapter 4 verse 12: "And we labor working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat. We have become and are still like the scum of the world and the refuse of all things." Romans 12:3. Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. Paul says we are the down and outers as far as the

world is concerned. 1 Thessalonians 5:15. "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone."

Now the other part of this comes in verse 18. Make every effort to be a peacemaker. Make every effort to be a peacemaker. It's almost like Paul says this 17th verse is difficult. I know what our natural, normal inclination is but it's not enough just to not strike back. It's not enough just to not retaliate. He is going to raise the stakes, if you will, and he's going to say to us there's something even more that is required than just the stance of non-retaliation. And what is that? I would say first of all verse 18 is just simply a logical extension of verse 17. Verse 18 just flows right out a verse 17. We are a gospel transformed people. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, and peace. Love, joy, and peace. We're called to be peacemakers. We're called to be peacekeepers. It's the expression of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, flowing out of our lives. That's the first thing we note.

The second thing is Paul adds some important qualifiers to this 18th verse and this whole principle of how it is that we respond and how it is that we do not retaliate and why we do not. Here are the qualifiers. He says in that 18th verse "if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all". I would just start off and look at that 18th verse and say Paul, it sounds to me like you're saying maybe it is and maybe it isn't. maybe it is possible and maybe it isn't. That's the way he begins. If it's possible. In other words, here's a very practical reality. God is not going to hold you accountable for somebody else's unwillingness to be at peace with you. That's important. That is a very practical expression of this truth. If it's possible. God is not going to hold you accountable for somebody else's position of being unwilling to be in a relationship with you that is peaceful and seeking reconciliation. It may be possible. It may not be possible.

In fact, there is one sense in which you can say peace is objectively impossible. There is a war going on. There is a spiritual battle going on. We are engaged in the spiritual battle every day with the world, the flesh, and the devil. There are two kingdoms warring against each other, the Scripture says. The kingdom of God and the kingdom of Satan. There's not going to be any peace treaty signed between these two. Our enemy wants to destroy us. He wants to defeat us. He hates God. He hates the

truth. He hates you. In that sense, we're not going to make peace. Think of Jesus's relationship with the Pharisees. Did they have a peaceful relationship? No, they did not. They were constantly agitating against Him. They were constantly trying to undermine His ministry. They were constantly threatening Him. But this still applied. If possible. If there was going to be a conflict between those two groups, you weren't going to lay the blame at Jesus's feet. You would lay the blame at the feet of the Pharisees. And so he says first of all maybe it's possible and maybe it isn't possible. In that sense, there's a freedom to step in to this desire for peace without being burdened and carrying false guilt because somebody else doesn't want to make peace with you. Always, we have to do a very thorough job of self-introspection to make sure we're not contributing to that, that we're truly wanting that peace.

Notice secondly there's another qualifier. Simply to say, make sure you're not the problem. Make sure you're not the problem. In a very practical expression he says, as far as it depends on you. If possible, make peace as far as it depends on you. In other words, you do everything that you possibly can to be in a peaceful relationship with the people in your life. That's on us. That is God's requirement to us. Ed Stetzer wrote a book entitled *Christians in an Age of Outrage*. He could probably come out with a follow-up to that of Christians in an age of even more outrage. He says in this book 35% of evangelical Christians say that they have significant disagreements with their family and with their friends 50% of the time. 35% of people of persuasions such as we have and we share, which is to say those who are doing their best to follow Christ and to obey His word, 35% of evangelicals say that they have regular significant conflict within their family group and friends over all kinds of issues. Just think about that for a minute and think about what this is saying to us here. What does that mean? What is the application to that for us today? well if that's true, that 50% of the time we're in conflict over issues that are going on in our world and our day with regard to Scripture, what does that mean?

It means we need to learn to disagree well. If it's possible as far as it depends on you. You're not going to resolve all of these issues. You can't. somebody else may not want to. But as far as it depends on you, we in every conversation that we enter into, whether it's about politics, current events, theology and doctrine. What if in every one of

those conversations you stepped into knowing that disagreement was awaiting you, you stepped into those conversations fully prepared, fully determined that as far as it depends on you, this conversation is going to go well. You can't control the other person, but you can control how you respond and what you say. We're not, in other words, to be the cause of the problem. We're not to be the source of the hostility. We're to be the peacemakers, the peacekeepers, the peace pursuers. We're the ones who are praying for peace, not agitating against it.

Then the final qualifier It's certainly not peace at any price. It's not peace at any price. This isn't telling us here that you put your fingers in your ears, or you see what everybody is thinking believing and feeling so that you never adopt a position or say anything that is contrary to what everybody else is thinking and feeling and saying. That way you'll be a peacemaker. That's not what he's calling on us to do. He certainly isn't calling on us to pursue peace and leave truth behind. We have enough of that going on in our world and in the church today where we have a willingness to leave behind Biblical truth and doctrine simply to make peace with our culture. That is a failure on the part of the church. We love the world that God has put us in and the people that are around us, but we must also hold on with a measure of tenacity to the faith that we are called upon to contend for. Jeremiah 6:14 Jeremiah said, they have healed the wound of my people lightly saying "peace, peace" when there is no peace. That's not what God is calling us to. True peace is only realized through the gospel. True peace is only realized and it is only possible by turning to the Prince of Peace.

By turning to the One who came and said, I am the way, the truth, the life. I am the one who brings peace. In the midst of a culture that is filled with conflict and animosity, you and I as followers of Jesus are making the declaration, we're making the commitment that we're going to be people who make peace and keep peace and pursue peace and pray for peace and do all we can that we would be known as people of peace.

What do we take away? We have one more question to wrap up the morning to add to our other three. The question is simple and straightforward. Am I a peacemaker or am I a peace breaker? Am I a peace maker or am I a trouble maker? Maybe that's a good question for us to consider, and maybe if you're brave enough to ask a friend or

family member. If you're fully devoted follower of Christ, the mandate and the commission is plain and it's clear. We are those who are following after the One who did declare himself to be the Prince of Peace. We are to be peacemakers.

Remember back in Romans 5:1 therefore having been justified by faith we have peace with God through the Lord Jesus Christ. That is to say in response to this gospel which is the good news, in which I recognize that I've sinned and fallen short of what God requires, and instead of trying to earn God's favor and work my way to heaven, Paul tells us in Romans 5:1 we have been justified. We been declared righteous. We have been provided eternal life, not on the basis of what we've done, but on the basis of what Christ has done. Then we have peace with God. You can't have peace with each other. You can't have peace with other people in the truest sense of that word unless and until you have peace with God. When you have peace with God, then God calls you, He mandates you, He requires of you that you be a peacemaker. He's given us that great delight and great privilege through the gospel.

We invite you this morning if you've never trusted Jesus as your Savior, if you've never put your faith in Christ alone, we invite you to step into the truth of that gospel this morning right where you're sitting wherever that might be. Just say I agree with You, God, that I have sinned and fallen short of Your perfect standard of righteousness, but what Jesus did for me is all that needed to be done. I believe that. I trust that. I'm staking my eternal destiny on that. And God gives to us the gift of eternal life. he forgives our sins and we are at peace with Him.

Let's pray. Father God, we are thankful this morning again for this wonderful reminder of Your calling on our life. I pray that within the life of Covenant Community Church – be it within personal relationships, within the church family, within relationships in our individual families, within marriages, within the parenting realm, friendships, work, all of these – Father, I pray that the Spirit of God will call us to be people who pursue, desire, pray for, consider, premeditate, and plan for peace. We ask in Jesus's name, amen.