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**Series: Romans: The Just Shall Live by Faith**  
**Message: You Want Me to What?**

**Transcribed Message**  
**February 19, 2023**  
**Romans 12:14**

Depending on your age when you hear the words mission impossible you might think of the six movies that bear the name “Mission Impossible”. There's a 7<sup>th</sup> one coming. Or you might think of a TV show that I guess ran from '66 to '73 or something like that. I'm told that on that TV show. I'm told this that on that TV show, that the IMF (Mission Impossible Force) would get an assignment. It came every week as we watched...wait a minute, as some of you watched. It came every week and you might remember Jim Phelps. He would listen to a tape recording in which some impossible mission was described and laid out for him. And of course, you remember those words at the end something to the effect of, “Your mission, should you choose to accept it, is thus and so.” And then: “This tape will self-destruct in 5 seconds.” We come to Romans 12 this morning in verse 14. We might think that we're listening to a mission impossible because that is very much what it sounds like when we look at this verse.

Here we are this morning. Romans chapter 12 verse 14. We want to see Jesus calls us to a life that is going to run counter to our feelings and impulses. We're going to look at this verse and we can read this verse and we're going to say this does not compute. I don't understand what I'm being asked to do here. But it is the grace and mercy of God in our lives that enables us to do this. As the recipients of that grace, we in turn are to extend that to others as well.

Back to Romans 12 we go and as we do that we remember that in these opening verses we've been encouraged and challenged to live like an R12 Christian. An R12 Christian is just a Romans 12 Christian. The turning point in this 12<sup>th</sup> chapter, and it really is this 12<sup>th</sup> chapter that is the turning point of the book of Romans. We look back at those first 11 and in those 11 chapters we were called on to affirm this wonderful truth of the gospel, this knowing of the gospel so that Paul laid out all of those amazing truths in chapters 1 through 11. He began way back in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter and said in verse 16 that

it is the power of God, it is the gospel that we are not ashamed of, for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For it is in this gospel the righteousness of God is revealed. As it is written the just, the righteous are called to live by faith. That's the knowing, the foundation that we laid. We moved forward with that truth and we realized that we're to live this out. This gospel is to be lived out. That's the doing part. That's the doing. It's not enough just to know it. We've got to do it. We step into this truth. And so that's all that we begin to look at in this 12<sup>th</sup> chapter. What we know, we believe, we do. It's the imperatives that we've been talking about, the commands.

Then thirdly, we focus not on ourselves but on others. That's the great challenge. Our basic default position is self and selfishness and self-centeredness. This R12 living is calling us to a totally radical different lifestyle. It begins in these opening verses of this 12<sup>th</sup> chapter by redirecting our attention off of ourselves in this narcissistic time in which we live, how we have to stand against that which seeks to infect us as well. He calls us to live with the perspective on others. When you look at that set of opening comments there, it looks a lot like "Know God, Love others, Live the gospel", doesn't it? Maybe just a little bit different order, but that's what we're calling ourselves to here at Covenant all of the time.

This section that we start this morning beginning at this 14<sup>th</sup> verse going all the way to the end of the chapter, there is really a bit of a subtle shift here when we come to verse 14. You can look at it kind of like this. You can think of it as three concentric circles. In that 9<sup>th</sup> verse when Paul says don't let love have any hint of hypocrisy. Let it be sincere. Let it be genuine. That was the opening challenge of that first section beginning at verse 9 and that was directed at ourselves. We're the ones who are to step into this truth to love without hypocrisy. Then the circle widened a little bit when he challenged us in verses 10 through 13 with that growing list of things that we've been looking at over these past weeks. That really is focused primarily on the church family. It is focused primarily on believers, how it is that we're relating to each other within the family of God. Now when you come to verse 14, the circle widens out to its farthest point. Now it's not just how you're treating each other in the body of Christ, but it is also now our relationships with people in the world, unbelievers. We're going to see when we

get into the remaining verses of this chapter, they don't all just neatly fit in one of those circles and that's true even in sections 10 through 13. There are things there that apply to everybody, but I think their primary application begins with our self in verse 9, verses 10 to 13 the church family, and then it's brought out in verses 14 to 21 to everybody. Because we know even as we look at this verse this morning talking about persecution, we know that Christians, when you study church history, did a pretty good job of persecuting each other and they still do in some respect even today. There's a subtle shift when we come to verse 14.

Secondly, it sounds a lot like Jesus. It sounds a lot like Jesus. In fact, it sounds like Paul may have been familiar with the Sermon on the Mount. Remember back in Matthew 5, and when you look at verse 10, first of all Jesus said blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake. There's a blessing in the midst of persecution, Jesus says. Then you go over a little bit farther and you look at verse 43 of that same chapter and there our Lord said, "You have heard that it was said you shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. But I say to you love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." It sounds a lot like what we're looking at here in Romans 12. It sounds a lot like what Jesus said. The challenge that Christ gave in the Sermon on the Mount, which everybody sat there and said I can't believe He's telling us to do these things. All kinds of things in that sermon. When Jesus said you've been taught all of your life by the religious leaders that this is what you're supposed to do, but this is what you're really supposed to do. He went through all of those variations in the Sermon on the Mount. Paul does the same thing in pulling that truth here.

I think it's important because liberal theology loves to drive a wedge between Jesus and Paul. There isn't any wedge between Jesus and Paul. Jesus said He was going to send out His disciples and that would include even Paul and He would tell them what to say. He would give them what they were to teach and preach. I think that is clear here that Paul and Jesus are in absolute harmony.

The third thing you notice here is this simply sounds impossible. This simply sounds impossible. Why does this sound impossible? Because it is. It sounds impossible because it is impossible. There is no way apart from the gospel, there is no way apart from the empowering, controlling, filling work of the Holy Spirit that we could

ever do what we're called on to do in this 14<sup>th</sup> verse. When we say this sounds impossible, I think that is exactly what Paul wanted his readers to think. This is impossible, but he's calling us as R12 Christians, as Roman 12 Christians, he's calling us to a different life. What did Jesus say when He threw out the challenge of discipleship? He said you have to count the cost. You have to count the cost. We often say salvation is free and that is true. Discipleship is costly. You have to count the cost. That's what Christ said. We don't go through the Bible and pick out things that we can do, things that we want to do, things that fit with where we are. That's not the way we live the Christian life. We submit ourselves to the authority of the Word and what it tells us to do. That's what we're called on to do. That's what we see here. So it sounds a lot like Jesus and it sounds impossible because it is, and it's only possible by this transforming gospel.

Let's look this morning at the 14<sup>th</sup> verse, the radical ethical call that Christ and Paul put upon us. What does it say? Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Let's start off and look at what is not in view here. What is not in view in these 10 words. I would just offer a few things. There's many more probably that we can mention, but let's just focus on three things that this verse is not saying to us when it says bless those who persecute you. First of all, this is not a persecution for bad and offensive behavior. This is not a persecution for bad and offensive behavior. We don't look at this and say here's an obnoxious and rude Christian and he is being persecuted for his faith. Of course not. When we're in a work environment, we don't claim persecution if we come late, leave early, and don't work while we're there. That's not what he is talking about. He is not talking about a Christian acting poorly, offensively, rudely, bad behavior. In 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 12, listen to what Peter said. This is amazing how these different writers of Scripture all just weave this similar message together. Verse 12: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation." Keep your conduct honorable. That is the goal.

The gospel to the world seems foolish. That's what Paul said in 1 Corinthians. The preaching of the cross to those who perish is foolish. You bring the gospel to the world and they think it's foolish. They're going to laugh. They're going to mock you for

that. But while the gospel is offensive, we shouldn't be. He's not talking here about when we're behaving badly and we are persecuted for it.

Secondly, this is not a persecution in which justice is simply set aside. This is not persecution in which justice is simply set aside. We know that from Paul's own story. In Paul's own experience, he faced persecution. He recounts it for us, all the things that he endured. But what Paul didn't do is he didn't just turn away and ignore the role of justice in his life. For instance, in Acts 16 when he and Silas are beaten and imprisoned. Then the earthquake comes. You know the rest of the story. Nobody escaped or left because Paul told them all to stay. At the end of it all, the magistrate comes and just says okay, just let them all go. They had beaten them and imprisoned them, persecuted them. The magistrate says okay, we're done with them. They can go. Paul says no, no, wait a minute. Wait a minute. You did these things to us openly. You beat us. You imprisoned us. You're not going to apologize to us in private. You're going to come yourself and he demanded that the magistrate come and speak publicly and apologize to them. There was persecution but Paul didn't set aside justice in the face of that.

It's the same thing as in Acts 22 when Paul comes to Jerusalem. There the crowd rises up at the instigation of the religious leaders and they're about ready to beat Paul. They've got him strung out and into place and they're ready to begin. Paul pulled out his Roman citizenship card and he says are you supposed to be doing this to a Roman citizen? Acts 22 says the leader of the garrison was in great fear because he had about done something that he wasn't allowed to do. Persecution doesn't mean we set aside the role of justice in our life.

Thirdly, this is not persecution that requires me to minimize the truth. This is not persecution that requires me to minimize the truth. To bless our persecutors does not mean we have to agree with them. This is the world that we're increasingly living in. I don't have to change what I believe. I don't have to change what the Bible speaks into my life by way of its truth in the face of persecution. No. More than ever we need to stand for what the Bible teaches about marriage and family, about the role of men and women, total equality but distinct and different in the eyes of God. We need to stand without embarrassment, without any hint of pulling back from what it means when we talk about the sanctity of life from the moment of conception all the way to death. What

we are talking about when we speak about matters of human sexuality and how God has designed that for His glory. Those are all things that our world looks at us and they're ready to persecute us for our belief. But Paul says in 1 Timothy we're not given the spirit of fear. In fact, we're given the spirit of power, a spirit of boldness, a spirit of love and not timidity. In the face of persecution, we don't have to shrink back and agree with our persecutor. No, we can still stand boldly for the faith and for truth.

Well then, what is in view here? If it's not my poor behavior and if it's not in relation to justice being set aside or my changing my belief system, what is Paul calling for us to do? Let us note first of all that persecution is a sure thing. Persecution is a sure thing. This is, in other words, to be expected. This is what Jesus Himself said. Jesus is the one who specifically said this is what would come to us. John 15. Jesus said the world hates Me. They're going to hate you. Jesus said in this world (John 16) you are going to have trouble. Those were the expressions that Jesus Himself taught us with regard to this matter. They hate Me. They're going to hate you. They persecuted Me. They're going to persecute you. In 2 Timothy chapter 3 and verse 12, Paul says again in harmony with what Christ said: "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." So there it is. It is something that is to be expected. It is a part of our life at some point.

Now we live in a time and a place that frankly as I was studying this week this verse it's hard in some respects to relate to this. We live in a time of relative peace and security. You would say very much that way. We can look on the horizon and we can see indications where the culture is beginning to push back with a great deal more force and vigor than maybe in a previous generation. But the reality is living as we do, we live differently than millions of people around the world. If you just think in terms of believers in North Korea, in China, in most of north Africa, in Turkey, in Pakistan. You have countries in the world that every day believers are hurt physically and killed daily. We come to this verse and I confess that I don't honestly in some respects know how to relate to this because I haven't experienced this in the way that Paul did, or many down through church history have.

But I also realize secondly this is more than general suffering. This is more than general suffering. James says in the opening of his little epistle that we are to count it all

joy when we fall into any kind of suffering. We know we have that admonition. But this is something different. This is someone who has animosity and hatred against you personally. Notice he says bless those who persecute you. so here is something that is directed against you. We saw this word “persecute” back in verse 13. There we were to persecute hospitality, remember? We were told to persecute hospitality. The word “persecute” means to pursue. Pursue hospitality. Here's the same root word in verse 14. Now we're not pursuing something for a good of somebody in hospitality, now this is looking at somebody that is pursuing you with the desire to harm you, to hurt you, to inflict something bad upon you. They're going after you, pursuing you, hunting after you to hurt you. It is in the present tense so it's happening as Paul writes this letter to the church at Rome.

Again, I think it reminds us very starkly that we don't belong to the world. We don't belong to the world. We are the called-out ones from the world. The world loves the world. The world does not love the church when the church stands on the truth of the Word of God. So what could this look like? It could obviously look like verbal abuse. Probably on some level, most of us have been in situations where because of our faith somebody made comments to us, verbally maybe making fun of us, ridiculing us for our beliefs and our behaviors, of the choices that we've made to live our life in a certain way. I suppose on some level we've experienced that. Maybe we could experience some measure of social ostracization, people who for whatever reason because of our beliefs, our worldview don't include us in some settings. It's possible that there are people here this morning who have lost a job on the basis of their faith. They would not do something that their employer wanted them to do that they knew was ethically wrong. There could be a financial impact, an economic burden that is placed upon somebody in this regard. And then of course it goes all the way to the level of physical harm and then even if you finish out the continuum to the point of death.

I suppose if there is any word of caution, and I don't know how necessarily important this is, but I think it's a good guard just to think of what's going on here so that as a believer we don't begin to develop some kind of a persecution complex. Again, I think the tide of our culture speaks about what is coming our way. I don't think there's any doubt that it is going to be increasingly hostile. But I think just in the wisdom of

God's Spirit we don't want to begin to see everything is happening in our life as some way of a persecution complex. I think those things might very well come in their own time.

But here is the question then. How do we respond? How do we respond when these things happen? How do we respond in the face of verbal abuse? How do we respond when we are socially ostracized from everybody else? How do we respond when we do lose our job because we took a stand for what was ethically right? What do we do in the face even of physical threats? Here the question is answered for us. How do we respond? He tells us there are two things that we are to do. One we're to do and one that we're not to do. There is persecution and a positive command. Here we have our first imperative actually since verse 2.

Now he gives us a very specific straightforward command. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. This is not exactly how we naturally respond. This is not exactly how we naturally respond. What I want you to do, Paul said, is I want you to offer them a double blessing. I want you to bless them, and then I want you to turn around and bless them again. He repeats it two times. bless those who persecute you, and then bless them again. They want to harm us, and we want to bless them. What's more natural than that? What is more natural than that? Someone says something to us that is mean and hurtful and ridiculing, and we offer them a blessing. We all do that every day. That just comes naturally. What is more likely our natural response? You fill in the blank for me. Don't get mad, get \_\_\_\_\_. Okay, you did really well on that. How about this one? Do unto others \_\_\_\_\_. Before they do unto you. we better stop because you guys are way too good at this.

What is the source of this blessing? If we're going to bless somebody, how most likely are we going to bless them? Most likely we're going to bless them with our mouth. Right away when we come to this command, we're confronted with the fact that the first thing Paul basically says to us is if you're going to do this, you're going to do it because you're in control of your mouth. Very often when someone strikes out against us initially they may very well do it verbally. Here the command that comes back to us is we're to bless them, which means we're going to have to be in control of our mouth.



Secondly, what does it mean to bless? What does it mean to bless? The word to bless is the word *eulogeo*. Look at that word. It's a compound word. The first part of that word means good. It means well. *Logeo* means to speak, to say. It's pretty easy to look at that word and to simply realize that we are to say something good. We're to speak well of somebody, respectfully of somebody. That's the idea here. Again, this is an imperative. This word that is before us is easily understood as what word in English? Eulogy. When we eulogize somebody what are we doing? We're speaking well of them. We're giving praise to them. We're offering up words of accommodation to them for their character, for their behavior. In 1 Peter chapter 3, Paul says this in verse 8: "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 a blessing." Peter says the same thing. In the face of this you offer a blessing, only Peter adds this second thing – you then will be blessed in return. If you're offering a blessing, Peter says, then you are going to be blessed.

Practically speaking, what does this mean? What does this look like? How do we do this? We're not asking a blessing on them, as I said earlier, so that they could do even better at persecuting us. That's not what is in view here. We don't necessarily want them to be more effective in their persecution of us so we're asking a blessing. What would be the greatest blessing that could come into the life of someone that was persecuting us? What would it be that they could experience that would be the greatest blessing that we can think of? It would be that they would come to the Lord. It would be that they would understand what God has done in our life, how God has changed us, how this Romans 12 passage has come into our experience and how we stepped into this radical ethic that God has called us to, that God would show them the favor that He has shown us. That's what he's talking about when he says bless those who persecute you. it is simply our way of saying God, I want them to understand the gospel. I want them to understand what it is that Christ has done in my life. I want their worldview to be as changed as mine is. I want simply for them to come and see Christ as Savior. I want You to heal their brokenness that is causing them to reach out and strike out towards me in the ways that they are. Change them, Father, even as You have changed me.

Think of Jesus hanging on the cross, looking out over those who had crucified Him. And what does He say? Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. What is that? That's Romans 12:14. Jesus is calling out to the Father at the point of the most heinous act in human history against the perfect Son of God. He is saying do in their heart, Father, what only You can do. I forgive them. What about Stephen following in the example of his Lord? In Acts 6 as the stones are thumping against his own body, he says Father, don't hold this against them. What is that? That is a prayer of blessing. He is simply saying I pray that they would come to understand the gospel. I pray, Father, that You would change their hearts from the inside out. That's what's happening. That's what he's doing. Don't hold this against them. Open their eyes to the truth of the gospel. Now that's a hard word. That's a hard word – to bless somebody in the midst and in the face of persecution. Impossible apart from the gospel.

Then the other part of that in which that truth is simply reinforced is the negative aspect of this command. In this regard, he says, persecution should be met with blessing and not just one blessing, but yes bless them, and then he says don't bring any curse against them. Don't curse them. First of all, to curse is not profanity. He is not relating to what we might think of the word curse as being profanity. Somebody cuts you off in traffic and you begin to share with them something other than God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life. I must say one of the things that helps me as I drive, not only my wife when she's with me, but one of the other things that helps me is the thought that I would turn with some measure of anger or hostility ready to say or act toward somebody and it would be any one of you right there beside me. That always helps me to stay strong. That's also why we don't do CCC bumper stickers. He's not talking about profanity here. This isn't somebody cursing somebody out in that way.

To curse is the opposite of to bless. To curse is the opposite of bless. It is offering a prayer of judgment. Don't offer a prayer judgment against this person who is persecuting you. The interesting thing is in the Psalms we have a whole group of psalms called the imprecatory psalms. The imprecatory psalms are psalms of judgment. The little caveat there of course is in many cases it's David praying and he's praying with a national view in mind, not just a personal one, as he calls for God to intervene and judge the nations who are against Israel. But here this is not to be a prayer of

imprecation. This is to be a prayer of blessing. We don't want their demise. We don't want their soul to come under judgment. We want them to experience the blessing of God. Paul says don't do that. Don't offer a curse against them.

Our behavior, my friends, is to be decidedly different than that of the world. We look at this command. We look at this positive and negative and rightfully we say this is impossible. We can't do this. I think that's right where God wants us to be, because it drives us to the gospel and it drives us to submitting our lives to the Holy Spirit of God who alone can do this in our life. We respond differently, even praying a prayer of blessing over those who would oppose us. Jesus calls us to a life that runs counter to everything that we feel at times, all of our natural impulses. He speaks in a different way and it's all because of the grace and mercy of God. The grace and mercy of God that has come into our life, that we've experienced, and as recipients of that grace and that mercy, then we pass that on to those who might be undeserving as well.

What do we take away? Living this new life, this R12 Christian kind of life, is one of the most powerful forms of witness and evangelism that a Christian has. This is radical living in a world that has no idea of how or why somebody could respond and act in this way. The world is used to the push and the pull and the back and forth, to be treated in the way that they treat somebody else. The world is not ready for the radical ethic that God calls us to. I mentioned earlier the example of our Lord. and as our Lord hangs on the cross and He says, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do. What does the centurion who is down at the foot of the cross say after Christ has said these amazing words? Truly, this must be the Son of God. Then in Acts 6 when Stephen is stoned, who was standing right there watching the whole thing unfold? A man named Saul is standing and watching and listening to the words that Stephen said. Father, don't hold this against them. We have to believe that those words rang in Saul's mind from that day going forward. We have to believe that when he penned these words by the Spirit's direction that he had in his mind the very act that he witnessed in the life of Stephen. It is, my friends, the power of the gospel that changes lives.

I invite you to believe that gospel this morning. If you've never put your faith and trust in Christ alone as your Savior, I invite you to do that this morning. We're not asking you to join the church. We're not asking you how many Sundays out of the year you're

in church. We're not asking you how much money you give. We're not asking how many kind things you do for your neighbor. All of those are good. But what the Bible calls on us to do is to simply agree with God that we have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. If we want to spend eternity with God in heaven forever and have our sins forgiven, God says the only way that that can happen is not for anything I do or anything that you might do, it's through what Jesus has done on the cross. We invite you to believe that and step into true living according to Romans 12.

Let's pray. Father God, we do ask You again this morning to do a work that only You can, to bring blessing into the life of anybody that's listening this morning who has never put their trust in Christ. Father, bring them the blessing of the gospel that to trust in what Christ has done, in Christ alone, for the gift of eternal life. Lord, I would ask that You would bless this word in each of our lives, that this radical living that You have called us to would be the radical living that we put forward every day because we're walking by the Spirit and not by the flesh. We ask these things in Jesus's name, amen.