

Do No Harm

July 2, 2018

Romans 12:14-19 and Romans 13:8-9

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other. Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! ¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.

⁸ Owe nothing to anyone — except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. ⁹ For the commandments say, "You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet. These — and other such commandments — are summed up in this one commandment: "Love your neighbor as yourself."



As we begin tonight, a question: what is your guilty pleasure? What is that thing that you just love but feel guilty because you often over-indulge? For me, my guilty pleasure would come down to either Reese's Peanut Butter Cups or those little chocolate and peanut butter wafer bars called 'Nutty Bars'. For some reason I crave the Nutty Bars when I am driving somewhere far away. These are not so bad because when I am in line at the convenience store, I can

purchase them in just a single package. For me the danger is the Reese's. When I am in line at the check-out, I often am tempted. I could buy the single Big Cup or I could buy the standard two-pack. And then there is the king size four pack. But my real issue comes at Halloween. When I buy a big bag of Reese's singles and there are a bunch left over after Halloween, then I struggle to not sit and eat six or ten or twelve of those little puppies. Have you ever done something like that? At first, I really enjoy them. Every single one. But then, a bit later, I look at that pile of wrappers and I feel a bit guilty. What I started out enjoying thoroughly, I end up feeling quite guilty about. I come to realize that what started out so good is really harmful.

During the month of July, we will be studying John Wesley's three simple rules. John Wesley was the founder of Methodism and he developed these three basic rules for Christian living. These three simple rules are not all-inclusive instructions on how to live the Christian life, but they do give us a good start to understanding what Christian discipleship is all about.

The three simple rules are: do no harm, do good, and stay in love with God. This week we will look at the first of Wesley's rules of life: do no harm. Let us pray...



In our passage from Romans, we gain some insights into Paul's view on how Christians should deal with each other and with the wider world. Please join me as we

read together the first few verses from Romans 12, reading verses 14-19:

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you. Don't curse them; pray that God will bless them. ¹⁵ Be happy with those who are happy, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with each other.



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In a general sense, Paul's advice is to offer blessings to others instead of cursing them. Paul encourages us to bless those who persecute us. How do you think we would do that? It seems irrational to us, doesn't it? Paul says to begin by praying for God to bless those who persecute you. Pray for those who harm you. Paul is not suggesting for us to pray for them to die or to be hit by a car or something like that. No, Paul is telling us to pray for God's blessing to fall upon those who persecute us. It may seem crazy, but if someone is persecuting you, getting under your skin a little, then I encourage you to give it a try. Pray for them. Pray for God's blessings to rain down upon them. Pray for God's love and grace and mercy and forgiveness to fill their hearts. And you know what? From experience praying for those who persecuted me, God will fill your heart with love and grace and mercy and forgiveness as well. Try it. Pray for your enemies. When I was teaching seventh grade for many years, once in a while a student would be difficult or hard to have in my classroom. When that happened, I would pray over their desk each day before school started. Soon enough God would go to work in my heart either changing how I saw that student or giving me guidance on how to better interact with that student. Instead of cursing them or retaliating against them, pray for them. Practice Wesley's first rule: do no harm.

Three Simple Rules

"Do No Harm"



To illustrate what this can look like in real life, a story:

A man went to his pastor and said: 'Pastor, I can't take it anymore, my wife is driving me insane!!! I want to kill her, but I'm afraid someone might find out I did it. Please help me?!'

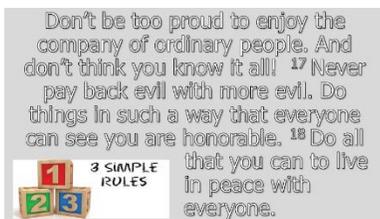
The pastor replied: 'Yes I can help you, but there's a but... you're going to have to make amends with her so no one would suspect that it was you, when she dies... You'll have to take very good care of her, be kind, grateful, patient, caring, less selfish, listen more and help her with chores... you see this powder here? Every day you have to put a little in her food. So, she dies slowly.'

Thirty days had passed and the son came back and said to his pastor: 'I don't want her to die! I have come to love her. And now... how do I cut the effect of the poison?' Then the pastor said: 'Don't worry! What I gave you was rice powder. She's not going to die, because the poison was in you! When we feed grudges, our love slowly dies. When we make peace with ourselves and with those who offended us, then we can deal with the other, as we would like to be treated. Then, we will have the initiative to love, to give, to offer, to serve, to care for... and not just have the need to win, to be served, or to take advantage of and exploit the other. We all need to stop, pray, and ask for that antidote called forgiveness.'

If you pray for those who are harming you or persecuting you, then it will be your heart that is changed. Try it. Pray for the other.

Again, Paul encourages us to just be with people – being happy with those who are happy and sad with those who are sad. He is saying to live life with others. In verse sixteen Paul writes, *"Live in harmony with each other"*. Allow your life to intertwine with the lives of others. In doing so, we must be the light that shows the way, not the light that blinds another with searing criticism and rebuke. Be the warm and loving light of Jesus Christ.

Our passage continues with some words of warning. Join me as we read together the rest of verse 16 plus verses 17 and 18:

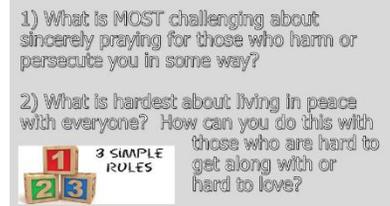


Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all! ¹⁷ Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. ¹⁸ Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone.

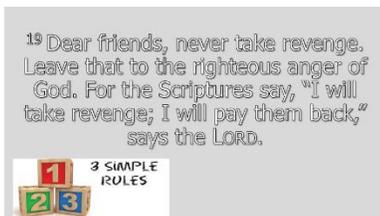
Here, Paul rephrases how to live in the world. First a warning: *"Don't be too proud to enjoy the company of ordinary people. And don't think you know it all!"* We are encouraged to be out there in the world, getting along with others and not being too snooty. Yes, don't be conceited! What great advice. Too many times people think that Christians are "holier than thou", that we are looking down our noses at non-believers. Do not act in such a way as to be perceived as hypocritical or judgmental. No one likes to be judged or condemned for their behavior or choices. Avoid being this way and we will be less likely to do harm.

At this point, let's take a few minutes to discuss these two questions:

- 1) What is MOST challenging about sincerely praying for those who harm or persecute you in some way?
- 2) What is hardest about living in peace with everyone? How can you do this with those who are hard to get along with or hard to love?



As we wrap up the passage from Romans 12, Paul addresses what is our natural tendency. In the world, we are taught to stand up for ourselves and, when necessary, to get even with those that hurt us or who hurt those we love. Instead, Paul tells us to not take revenge but to trust that God will take care of what needs taken care of. I invite you to read these words and to offer them to God as a pledge to do no harm to others. Please read verse 19 with me:



Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, "I will take revenge; I will pay them back," says the LORD.

When we can commit to trusting God and to commit ourselves to "doing no harm," when we can take that first step of laying aside our weapons and our desire to do harm, then we will immediately discover just how very connected we are. It was the moral of the story of the husband who was struggling to love his wife. This is one of the amazing things about living the Christian life. When

we lay aside our desire to take revenge, then we will see that we all share an equal measure of God's unlimited love. We will see that we are all part of God's family, each dearly loved by God. When I love you as God loves you, then I am determined to do no harm to you. In doing so, I lose my fear of you and we find that good and solid place to stand where together we can live life in harmony and can seek the way forward in faithfulness to God.

As we shift to our passage from Romans 13, we begin to tie in the larger truths that we find in the Bible and into the example that we see in Jesus. Please read with me these words of advice that we hear from Paul in verse eight and nine:

⁸ Owe nothing to anyone — except for your obligation to love one another. If you love your neighbor, you will fulfill the requirements of God's law. ⁹ For the commandments say, "You must not commit adultery. You must not murder. You must not steal. You must not covet..."



These — and other such commandments — are summed up in this one commandment:
"Love your neighbor as yourself."



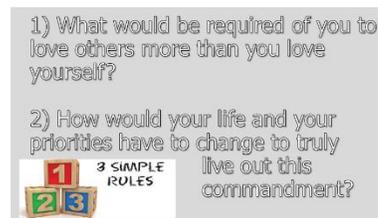
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Please repeat that last line with me: "*Love your neighbor as yourself*". Practically speaking, we would cover all of the commandments in the Bible that speak of our relationship with each other if we followed this simple commandment. We would not murder or covet or be jealous or lie or cheat or gossip or... if we

simply loved each other as we love ourselves. Of course, this is really hard to do. It is hard to set aside our own wants and desires in order to place the needs of others ahead of our own. This is not the way of the world. This is instead the radical way of love. This is Jesus' way.

Considering the charge to love your neighbor more than yourself, I invite you to a few minutes of discussion around these two simple questions:

- 1) What would be required of you to love others more than you love yourself?
- 2) How would your life and your priorities have to change to truly live out this commandment?



For me, my pride and ego are two of the greatest things that get in the way of me living out the commandment to love others more than myself. My greatest obstacle is the certainty that I am right and that others are wrong. To work my way past this, I must strive to see others as Christ saw – no, as He sees them. When I see the other as Jesus sees them, then I see first with eyes of love. When I see with eyes of love, then I see others and their needs as more important than myself and my needs. If I can do this – if we can do this – then it is a giant first step toward transforming the world in which we live.



To “do no harm” seems like such a simple thing, but it really is not an easy rule of life to follow. It requires a radical trust in God’s presence and power to allow us to see and love as Jesus did. But the truth of the gospel is that Christ has already taken that first step for us; even a casual reading of the gospel suggests that Jesus taught and practiced a way of living that did no harm. All we have to do is follow His lead!

If we’re feeling inadequate, all we have to do is turn to Christ. Jesus Christ can come to you in your hurting and bring you peace. He can forgive you for all the things you have done to hurt others, making you new again. Christ can forgive all of our uncertainties and doubts. Christ can forgive all the ways we have harmed ourselves and others. All we have to do is humble ourselves enough to ask for Christ’s forgiveness and His mercy will come pouring in. All we have to do is follow where Christ is already leading.

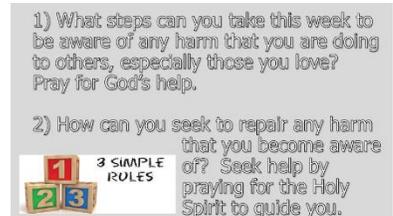
When we turn to Jesus and trust in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit, then the way of love will become easier and clearer. When we walk in the way of love, then we will do no harm. When we walk in the way of love modeled by Jesus, then we will stop following the ways of the world and tearing down others with harmful and hurtful words and actions. If we can commit to following Christ, we will feel and experience Christ’s love and grace, and we will be more able to share that same grace and love with others.

As we close, I leave us all with two questions to ponder and pray over as we go through the week ahead. May we all spend time with these questions as we seek to grow closer to loving as Jesus loved this week.

1) What steps can you take this week to be aware of any harm that you are doing to others, especially those you love? Pray for God's help.

2) How can you seek to repair any harm that you

become aware of? Seek help by praying for the Holy Spirit to guide you.



Let us pray...