



Sermon Transcription • Romans 12:17-21 (NIV)

Dealing with Mean People

Pastor Jeff Bucknam

[Please Note: This transcript has been lightly edited for ease of reading. Also, some headings have been added in square brackets to aid the reader in locating portions of the sermon.]

My wife and I enjoy in the evenings to watch murder mysteries. I know it's a little bit weird. Her family was always into the murder mysteries. When I first met her, they—I remember sitting and watching *Perry Mason* episodes with them. Those of you who are older in the room are like “Ahh... *Perry Mason*..” and younger people are like “Who...is that?” So let me fill you in if you're younger. Cause I will fill in some of the older people about some references later. If you're younger, *Perry Mason* was like the greatest lawyer who ever lived, but he's not real. He's a character who's played by a guy named Raymond Burr on TV in the 1950's I think...and 60's I think. Black and white. Always wins every trial that he's ever in. The defendant that he's representing is always innocent as is always the case apparently. So...But the thing about *Perry Mason* is that the way that every show would finish, when you go for an hour and you discover all sorts of things about people. The way that every show would finish is that you would have a...like a confession on the stand. *Perry Mason* was such a good lawyer that he could get you to confess in front of everyone without a lawyer. He would sneak up on you and next thing you know you're saying “I did it!!” And then you're like “Oops.” He was amazing. *Perry Mason*.

I remember one time though watching *Perry Mason*, after we've seen several *Perry Mason* episodes with my wife and her family and her parents walked out of the room, and I leaned over to her and I said, “Does it ever just occur to you that this is so fake? Like this is never the way it works.” And she said, “Yeah...I know. But that's the...you get to watch it an hour and you go away happy all the time because justice is done.” And I'm like, “Yeah...but justice is not done like that in the real world, is it?”

I mean most of us recognize that. That often times the person who's perpetrating the crime doesn't...either they don't even get caught, or if they do get caught, even with the smoking gun in hand, they're not punished. It's difficult for us. This actually is near to my heart recently because a couple years ago, my wife parked...We had a little red Toyota Matrix and she went and parked the little Toyota matrix down at Willband park. You know where Willband park is? Just on Highway 11 there on the Sumas highway. She parked it there and she left her purse under the seat. Which...just so you know, ladies, all the thieves know you leave your purse under the seat. Every last one of them is like, “Hmm...there's nothing in there. I bet the purse is under the seat, right?” We were told that by the police later. You're not fooling anyone, okay? So she left her purse under the seat. She said, “I think I might have left a strap out a little bit...” So apparently this is a place that's frequented by thieves in our



area. She went for a walk. As the walk takes I don't know...30-45 minutes. So she went for a walk, with a friend, and she came back, and the window was bashed in and her purse was gone. She had her phone with her so she called me immediately. I was at work here. And she said, "Uh...Someone stole my purse. It's terrible. They bashed in the window of the car." And I was like, "Okay. So let's cancel credit cards right away." So I get on the phone to the credit card company and the person I'm talking to on the credit card company is saying, "Well let me check your account." And she said, "Ohh...Actually someone's trying to charge something at Wal-Mart right now. And a few minutes ago they went to the gas station and charged some gas and just a few minutes before that they were at Save-On-Foods and charged \$400." And I said, "That's not me! I'm here, my wife's stranded. I mean, the windows all bashed in. She said, "Oh no! They're trying to swipe again. They're trying to get it through again." "You know this like real time?" And she said, "Yeah... it's at till number 4 at the Wal-Mart in...Abbotsford, British Columbia. And so and so's working on that time..." I don't know...she knew everything! And I was like, "Oh are there video cameras at those tills?" "Yes!" "O! We got him!! We're gonna get him!" And she started to laugh. And I said, "Get him! Should I call the police?" And she said, "Oh the police don't care." And I was like, "What!" She said, "No, they like, the police they've got other things they need to do than catch the person who's trying to charge \$300 at the Wal-Mart." And I said, "Yeah, but it'll be on video. We can get the video and stuff." She said, "You know the amount of money that it would cost for us to get the video and prosecute this in the courts would be way higher than just letting the person just...you know, that's it. It's no big deal. You are not gonna be charged for any of it. So, you're fine." And I said, "Fine? What—who's gonna deal with my window?" "I hope you have insurance," she said. <frustrated grunt> [fist up in the air] Injustice!! Even when they're caught red handed....injustice.

Although it might be a little big of a goofy, I mean, who cares...\$200 window or whatever...I do. [audience laughs] But who cares that it's—That's not as big of deal though as of all the different ways. If you think about it, everybody I'm talking to right now, everybody I'm talking to can think back in their little rage fantasies, which we all have, and we think back to the people who have wronged us, they're the people we think about when everything is quiet when we're trying to reflect on our lives and how they've gone and why they haven't gone the direction that we wanted them to go. Everyone of us can remember how we've been wronged.

And we struggle, honestly, to know what to do with those who've wronged us. We struggle to know how do I interact with that person. In many cases, those people have not apologized, or if they have been confronted with the facts, they've said "You're wrong. I was in the right." And you know in your heart, they were wrong. They're unwilling to admit it. And you want justice to be done, but you can't bring, you don't know how to go about. How do you live in a world where you come across those people at Costco? How do you live in a world where you come across those people around town? What do you do with that? And more generally, how do you deal with your enemies? That's not a Christian thing to say, I get it. So, how do you deal with your frenemies? Right? How do you deal with your opponents? With the people who are your critics, the ones who you feel would be much happier if you weren't doing what you're doing, you aren't succeeding at what you're succeeding. That they wish you harm. Maybe not physically but certainly in the predicament of your life. How do you live with



them? This passage actually is about that. How do you deal with outsiders? How do you deal with the...I titled this how to deal or “Dealing with Mean People.” So how do you deal with mean people? Whoever they might be in your life. I’m going to give you five principles here. And the principles are straight from the passage itself. Explicit. How do you deal with mean people. I’d give you the list of the five up front, it would all wash over you. So let’s just deal with them in order, okay?

[Reject Payback]

Here’s the first one. You gotta reject payback. Like as a concept, you need to decide, as a Christian, look I’m not going to pay people back evil for evil. In fact that’s the language that’s used in verse 17, the very beginning of it. He said, Romans 12:17,

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil.”

Cause you and I know, that’s the most natural response that we have when somebody wrongs us. You did that to me, Oh I’m gonna do it to you. You ever played a board game with me? And you decide that you’re gonna wrong me in the board game. I don’t care about anyone else at the board table, I’m going after *you*. And my wife gets so mad at me, she’ll say, “Why are you trying to take me out?” “Because you looked at me wrong!” “But the kids are gonna win!” “I don’t care! *You’re* not gonna win! Alright?”

Payback. Payback. In our culture, lionizes payback. Revenge. We lionize—you know what I mean lionize? We—“That’s what you’re supposed to do, guys!” How many fights do you? You fight back. Somebody wrongs you? You wrong them back. As much as you can. We learn that from...even our movies reflect this don’t they? That’s how *John Wick* does it right? Okay, some of you in the room are “Who?” Okay, can I just...disclaimer here. I am not recommending the film *John Wick* or anything having to do with *John Wick* or *John Wick* 1, 2, 3. They all probably have seven *John Wick*’s at some point. I’m not recommending it. In fact, I’m not recommending any movie that has Keanu Reeves in it period, okay? But the story behind *John Wick* is interesting. It’s a kind of a cultural phenomenon these days. *John Wick* is a guy who is, you end up finding after, he’s a hitman. But what you end up finding early on is he loses his wife, and then so the bad guys come to his house and kill his dog. The bad guys didn’t kill his wife, she just died. But then he loves the dog, and the bad guys kill the dog. He spends the rest of the movie paying back everybody for the death of the dog. That’s it. Just the dog. No, he shoots this guy, that guy, you killed the dog. You looked at someone who killed the dog...you know? You know a dog...he...doesn’t matter. He’s just wiping everybody out. And there’s...while you’re watching the movie, I imagine, you’re starting to cheer for *John Wick*. “Go get them, John!!” And you’d think, you’re spilling over the dog? This is so overboard. That’s the way our movies are though. Think about all the other. <in an accent> “I have a particular set of skills...” You know. You have people. You do. Somebody, a girl gets stolen, or she gets kidnapped and the father...<in an accent> “I’m gonna pay you back and everybody...” And this is the way our films...This is the storyline in majority of our movies. You’re supposed to do that. It’s not just in film.



Like, we believe it. We really do. We might not in our minds, sitting here now, and saying “No, I would reject payback.” Do you? So I was driving back from Oliver this last summer. We were spending a week or a few days up in Oliver camping. Coming back, during the three hours heading away. You know, a Sunday afternoon in the summer, there are cars just backed up. There’s not...We’re all going the speed limit, or a little above it. And everybody’s really stacked up. Really. Especially in the left lane. And you know, I mean, we were between kind of Hope and Chilliwack. And you know how it works, you’re backed up in the left lane, and there’s always the person—you know who you are—who comes around the right and decides “I’m gonna pass all over you guys and then cut in as quick as I can before I get to the semi. And then I get pass the semi, and then I’ll pull in the right lane and pass everybody and then cut in.” Even though everyone on the left’s like, “Yeah, we’re all trying to pass the semi too.”

Well, we were driving along and there was this girl, I could see her in my rear view mirror that she had kept doing this. She kept pulling out, around, and then cutting in, like people in the back were like, you could see their cars kind of lurching to the side. She didn’t, she didn’t check a blindspot, she just kinda coming in. She finally came up to me, and I noticed that she was gonna actually arrive right next to me when I was coming next to this semi. So she’s in the right lane, and the semi’s in the right lane, she’s right behind it, and she was gonna come into the lane. And I thought, “Oh surely, she’ll stop.” So I just kinda keep going. But she didn’t. Didn’t even look, decided that she was just coming over. Right? “It’s my divine right, baby to come over and into that lane.” [steering over] And I’m like, laying on <honks> And I’m not moving. And she of course, went back into her lane and didn’t even look at me [upset face]. She’s behind this semi now, and she just waved [half hearted wave] at me with the gesture, right? And I’m like, “Okay. Not today.” Right? That’s it. I’ve been driving for three hours. Right? Family. Wife’s been asleep...and I’ve been going over the Coquihalla. I’m done. I am done. With all of this. So she pulls in behind me, and she’s still waving at me, she’s like she had a part of her finger was permanently stuck up. And she had a dog, no kidding, a dog, little tiny yappy dog on the front of the dashboard. And his finger was up too, right? [audience laughs] And so everybody...So I’m like. Okay. So she gets in behind me, and so I’m going pass the semi, and because I’m like “That’s it.” I just slowed right down. Right? Right now, next to the semi. Semi’s like, he’s looking over at me like, “What are you doing?” And then I’m just driving next to him, waving at him...There’s a line...Seriously I’m doing this for a good four-five minutes. There’s a line back to Hope behind me, people are losing their minds. And she’s especially losing her mind. She’s way even back and forth, finger’s all going everywhere, right? She’s throwing things out the window trying to... And I was like, “This is so good, right” And finally, I finally get to the front of the semi, and I speed up, and she’s right on my tail. She’s gonna go to the right, and pass me, in her little Civic, and she pulls right in. “Ah...Civic. Whatever.” <accelerating sound> Right up. And I went to the next semi and slowed right down, right? Eventually we got to Chilliwack. And she’s been so angry, right? And the guys behind her who’ve been cut off came up and wouldn’t let her come back in. So she’s losing her mind. And she finally gets off in Chilliwack, where she lived... I bet. Right? Just kidding. Just kidding. Kidding. [audience laughs]

And isn’t it funny? Look. Like, even...and I tell that story. Every one of us is like <raised voice, excitedly> [banging on podium] “That’s right! That’s right! That’s what you do!” Right? You pay back.



You pay back. You pay back. And yet what you find in Scripture. In Romans 12, okay? The context of this passage is in Romans 12:2, the apostle Paul says,

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world [meaning the thinking that pervades our culture that tells us that pay back is the right thing], but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Well in what way? Don't repay anyone evil for evil. That the kingdom of God has different rules. That people who have been graced by a God, listen now, by a God who rejected payback for you. Who didn't...who didn't repay evil for evil. But instead showed you grace. For a God who's done that for you, he's saying “Okay guys, as my children now, live according to the rules of the kingdom. What you've received, pass on.” You find this throughout the New Testament. And you really do. Matthew 5:38-39, Jesus says it,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.’ But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also.”

1 Thessalonians 5:15,

“Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.”

1 Peter 3:9,

“Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay evil with blessing, because to this you were called [see you've been blessed. **to this you were called**] so that you may inherit a blessing.”

We're the people, we Christians are the people who aren't governed by revenge. We're the people who are governed by grace. We see this just recently in a very sharp way the difference between the way that Christians act and the way that the world thinks we oughta act. In a story that happened, I don't know if you've been following it, a few weeks ago in fact. A woman named Amber Guyger, she was a police officer in Dallas, Texas. Amber was coming home from a shift on one day, and she came to her apartment building. Took the elevator up, she thought she was getting off on the floor that is her floor. She was with other people in the elevator. She got up, tired after a day of police work around the Dallas Fort Worth area. And she walked out, walked down the hallway as she always had, was distracted by her phone and some other things, but she walked inside her apartment, and there was a man. A black man. Sitting on the couch, with the TV on. And so she is a police officer, pulled her gun and shot him. And he died. She only realized afterward, that she was not in her apartment, but in his. That she had gotten off on the wrong floor, inadvertently walked into his apartment where he was getting ready to have dinner and watch TV. And she killed the black man on the couch. Now, it's important that he's black and she's a white police officer because in Dallas Fort Worth, there's a massive racial challenge with the police and the black community.



So this erupted. She of course goes to trial. She's convicted. The name of the man who was shot was Botham Jean. And there's a period after the conviction that the family members of Botham Jean get to sit before her and express to her their anger and frustration at what she's done and what it costs them. Brent Jean, Botham's brother, gets on the stand while she's sitting in the defendant's chair, and he starts to speak to her. But he doesn't say what you'd expect. What you expect from him is "How dare you? I hope you rot. You're just an awful person! You stole my brother from me, my beloved brother." But you don't get that. What you get from Brent Jean is: "I want you to know, that I forgive you for this. That if my brother were here, he and I are both followers of Jesus, and if my brother were here, he would want me to forgive. And he would forgive you for it as well. But here's the thing," he said, "I want to make sure that you know that all of this is redeemable and will be redeemed if you come to faith in the same Jesus we serve. If you see the grace and you realize that that grace was shown me, and is now being shown you." I mean the whole place is silent. It's on video, you can watch it if you like. He then turns to the judge and said, "Can I go and hug her?" Which is, what? They don't know what to do. So the judge says, "Yeah. Okay." So he walks across the court room and the black brother of the killed man, in Christian love, hugs the woman who killed him. She's breaking, she's sobbing. You can watch this. Went viral this video.

And the reaction to it was interesting. Because the Christians who saw this, go viral, we're like "Right! Right! That's what Jesus. That's the way that we Christians ought to act. We often don't, but that's what we ought to do." But the other response was, "How dare he? How dare he forgive this woman? He should pursue payback." And you can see the difference between the kingdom of God and its rules and the kingdom of this age and its rules. You and I are kingdom of God people though. You and I are kingdom of God people. So reject payback.

[Don't Unnecessarily Offend]

Second, don't unnecessarily offend. Little shorter now. Don't unnecessarily offend. Look at the second part of verse 17. Romans 12:17,

"Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone."

One of the commentators Colin Kruse on this passage he said,

"When Paul speaks about doing 'what is right in the eyes of everyone', he is not suggesting that believers should simply let their behavior be determined by public opinion, but that under God they should be careful not to offend outsiders unnecessarily."

In other words, the outsiders, the opponents to the Christian faith, *already* have reason not to like you and me. They might think that you're immoral, they might think that you're acting wrong in the culture because you obey the rules of the kingdom of God and not the kingdom of this age. So they already got something against you, why pour kerosene on that fire by acting in ways that offend them



unnecessarily? This is what Paul's essentially saying. And you find this language in other places. 2 Corinthians 8:21, Paul says,

“For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man.”

1 Peter 2:12,

“Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong [cause they don't understand who you are and...they accuse you of doing wrong “Oh I hate those Christians], they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.”

You're gonna prove them wrong by the way that you act. But that's not really the way that we often act, right? I know it's not the way that I often acted. I've often taken the adversaries of Christianity and thought, “Well...if you want to fight against me? I want to fight against you!” Right? Repay evil for evil.

I'm kind of ashamed to tell you this story, it happened when I was 16 years old. And my body was outgrowing my brain at the time. I had a friend, we were invited to go to this other couple's house. It was an atheist guy and his Mormon girlfriend. And we were just going over to play board games or whatever. We got a conversation about religion and this atheist guy was really vitriol. Like really mean spirited toward Christians. He didn't say a lot, but he said a few things and he finally found out that we were Christians. And he says, “Oh yeah? Fools believe in Christianity. I dare you to prove to me that it's true. That there is a God. That Jesus has anything to do with it. That he even lived. I dare you.” He said with his chin sticking out. “I dare you.” And I was like, <grunts> [pretends to crack own neck]. Take off my coat and shirt, right. Cause this is go time [warming up to fight]. And so, we started to go at it. And I'm gifted with the gift of verbal assault, and I'm like going for it. <angry gibberish> Zing, zing, zing. When he'd make a point, I'd just make my point <loud voice> LOUDER. Right? His girlfriend is getting pinned back for the next 30-45 minutes. We were going at it. And I mean, it was an all out barrage that he was facing in the end.

She finally broke in and said, “I don't like the way you're talking to me. Don't like the way you're talking, it's so demeaning the way you're talking to him about this.” She said, “I mean, I don't agree with him either, I'm a Mormon.” And I said to her, “Don't get me started on the Mormons.” And after that she said, “I'd like you to leave.” So we walked out, me and my friend, we walked out the front door. I remember what I said the moment we were walking down the steps, I remember where I was, I remember where in the Seattle area it was, I could walk down the steps. I was on the third or fourth step down and I said, “Well some people get offended by the gospel.” [pause] Were they? Is that what they were offended by? The gospel? Forty seven year old Jeff says to sixteen year old Jeff, “No, no, young man. They were not offended by the gospel. They were offended by the tone that you used to try to communicate the gospel if it was even there. And if it was there, the verbal barrage had created such a cloud of dust and smoke, nobody could see it man.”



They're already against the faith, they're already negative toward you, they don't like the gospel to begin with. Why are you going in there and chucking kerosene on that fire? You're gonna share it with them, they're gonna have enough to oppose you on the merits of it. Why through your tone are you not just doing what's right in the eyes of all people? It doesn't just apply to the way we talk to each other about the gospel and outsiders like that. Some of you, you know imagine you have a neighbour, and you have some property and you're gonna build a barn or a house or some building on the edge of the property. And your neighbour, who is, doesn't like Christianity, knows you're a Christian, and is against you and struggles with your...they're an opponent in some way. Comes to you and say, "Please don't build that barn.. because you know, it's gonna block my view. Or it's gonna do blah blah..." whatever reasons. And in that moment, we have a response to make. And it's either "I don't care what you think. It's *my* property, I can do what I want with it. Shut your mouth." or "Listen, let's engage and figure out a way that maybe this could work for both of us. Tell me what your concerns are."

What I'm saying is, Paul is urging you to say "Look, choose the second option." Choose the second option. Don't unnecessarily offend. Reject payback, don't unnecessarily offend.

[Understand Peace is Sometimes Impossible]

Third, understand, though, that peace is sometimes impossible. Understand though that peace is sometimes impossible. Listen to verse 18, Romans 12:18,

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."

See, what I expect Paul to write here, he starts with verse 17, "Don't repay anyone evil for evil." second, "Be careful to do what's right in the eyes of everyone." Third, you expect immediately, "Live at peace with everyone." That would make sense. Command, command, command. You kind of get that, but in the third command, the "live at peace with everyone", he couches it with a couple of qualifiers doesn't he? I mean if it all possible, and as long as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Why does he use the qualifiers? Cause he's not stupid. He understands that sometimes you can try and try and try and try to make peace with people, with your opponents, and sometimes they just will not have it. And you and I are not ultimately responsible for the response that they give, we are responsible with the attempts at making peace.

In the early church it's a big deal. The Romans hated the Christians on moral and philosophical grounds. If you were a Roman, you hated Christians because the Christians were worshipping another God and saying that all of your gods were not real. And because your gods were not receiving the worship from a growing number of people who were converting to Christianity, those gods of yours, will repaying you with less rain for the crops, fewer children, less prosperity. And so if you're a Roman, you're thinking, "You know what do we need to do to solve the world's—" their election time, "What do we need to do to make sure that our future is better?" And the answer was "Kill the Christians." Get rid of the Christians. Kick them out. Do whatever you can. If a Christian came to somebody who have



that belief, and they would say, “No you don’t understand.” There’s a guy named Justin Martyr, in fact, who wrote some apologetics stuff. And he said, “You don’t understand. The way you understand, this is totally wrong.” And he wrote this stuff, and they all said, “Shut your mouth! You’re wrong. We hate you, we hate you, we hate you.” And it didn’t matter what the Christians did. It didn’t matter. No matter what they tried to do to make peace, it just it didn’t matter. If it all possible, as long as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

You know. Some of you been bullied. Or you know kids who’ve been bullied. You know what kids do when they first get bullied? They usually try to find a way for the bully to back off through kindness. Do you understand? Well the bully’s doing this, because he doesn’t understand who I am and what I’m like. If he just understood who I am and what I’m like. So you go to school the next day, look for the bully. “Hey, bully.” They don’t usually say that “Hey bully”. Bullies usually named Chad...or whatever, sorry. Right? If your name’s Chad, I apologize for saying that. But you go to school and say, “Hey bully... can we just talk about this? We figure this out...” and blah blah blah. And the bully’s like “Shut up! I don’t—I hate you! Stop talking to me.” blah blah. So the next day kinda amps it up, “I made you a cupcake.” or whatever. “It’s a bright huge cupcake, and I bought it at Tracy Cakes, even. It cost me all my allowance. Here, take the cupcake.” And the kid’s like, throws it on the ground and squishes it. Next day, “I bought you hockey tickets! They’re on the bench, right? You get to play in the game!” And the kid’s like “I hate hockey and you!” No matter what he does. and he eventually comes to you, and says, “Dad, mom, friend. Whatever. What do I do?” You know, you tell him, “Look, sometimes a bully gotta bully. And I see you trying to make peace, but you’re not responsible for his response. You’re responsible or your attempts at peace making.” As long as it depends on you, if it all possible, live at peace with everyone.

[Leave it to God]

Here’s the fourth one, you gotta leave it to God. Romans 12:19,

“Do not take revenge [he comes back to the first point he was making. **Do not take revenge**], my dear friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.”

Now I mentioned a few minutes ago that you and I have rage fantasies. Uh... you do. I do. I know I do. I usually have them when I mow the lawn. That’s why I don’t mow the lawn anymore. I send my kids out to mow the lawn. And if they don’t do it, then I have other rage fantasies. I don’t know why it is, but when I used to go out and mow the lawn, it was just sort of...I would think about, and I could tell you exactly who I thought about. This guy in New Zealand who I met one time and he found out that I went to Dallas Theological Seminary. And he said, <dryly> “Oh some good southern theology there.” And I stood there, shocked. Like, “What do you mean? Like slave-owning southern theology?” I was shocked. And I didn’t respond. He just turned away. And that line has made me so irritated for years, that I’ve come up with so many great comebacks to this guy. So many. Always thought to myself, “If I go back to New Zealand. you know, I’m gonna find him... And I’m gonna.” Like if you remember,



Seinfeld, like the jerk story, I'm gonna go and I'm gonna find out where he lives and I'm gonna deliver one after another, all of the lines I've been thinking out through lawn mowing over the years. I mean I've received critical emails and comments, I've responded in email <angry gibberish>, which most of you have not received. Somebody will read them and they'll say, "This is a great email Jeff. It also will probably kill the church." And...you know. But you know, I think about how is it I can pay—even the lady who pulled up next to me, no joke, I have thought in the past just in quiet moments like, "You know what I should've done, is just follow her off the freeway. I should've gone off the freeway, followed her to her house. Walk up to her car and give me that dog. <angry gibberish>" I'm gonna...You know?

That's what... This is the content of our rage fantasies. We all have them. We all have them. We have the greatest comebacks ever in those rage fantasies. And the reason that we want to give the payback. The reason that we're convinced that it's the right way to go is because we feel if we don't take revenge, justice won't be done. Like you're the one who can respond to that injustice. You're the only one who can do it. And if you don't do it, it's a cosmic error! You must balance the force! And in that moment, you and I become practical atheists. Because you aren't the right person to make that determination. There is one in the universe who will make amends. There is one to whom we will all give account. And the benefit he has that you don't have is he sees all things rightly. You and I, we judge quickly, snap judgments, and when we give our "judgments" and our "sentencing", we go way overboard. Just to prove a point.

So what Paul is saying here, look, leave it in the hands of God. More properly, leave it to the wrath of God. Now I gotta be clear here, I want you to see what he's actually saying. He's not saying "Ah...just forget about it. Cause nothing can be done." That wrong that you experienced, just forget about it. Nothing can be done about it. He's saying, "No, no, no. I want you to leave it to the one who can hold all people to account. I want you to leave it in his wrathful hands." Now that doesn't sound very Christian does it. Okay, so Paul, you want me to hand this person over so that the wrath of God might be laid out on them. Hm. That doesn't seem...Christian. But I want to show you in fact, if that's the way you think about this, I want to show you in fact that it's quite Christian.

So I want to show you a couple ways. First of all, in the Old Testament, and if you go read the psalms, one of the kinds of psalms that you'll read is called the "imprecatory psalms". The imprecatory psalms are basically the "God get 'em" Psalms. Right? "So God, these people, that person has wronged us, the wicked are wronging us, arise o Lord and payback! I'm not gonna payback, Lord, but I'm praying that you will." That's what the psalms are about. So, Psalm 10:12-15,

"Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God.
Do not forget the helpless.
Why does the wicked man revile God?
Why does he say to himself,
"He won't call me to account"?
But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted;



you consider their grief and take it in hand.
The victims commit themselves to you;
you are the helper of the fatherless. [ready for it?]
Break the arm of the wicked man;
call the evildoer to account for his wickedness
that would not otherwise be found out.”

He’s hiding it, Lord. Arise! Let your justice roll, Lord. Another one. Psalm 109:1-5,

“My God, whom I praise,
do not remain silent,
for people who are wicked and deceitful
have opened their mouths against me;
they have spoken against me with lying tongues.
With words of hatred they surround me;
they attack me without cause.
In return for my friendship they accuse me,
but I am a man of prayer.
They repay me evil for good,
and hatred for my friendship.”

Psalm 109:29,

“May my accusers be clothed with disgrace
and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.”

Get ‘em, God! Says the Holy Spirit through the psalmist.

Yeah, yeah, that’s the Old Testament, Jeff. A lot of mean stuff in the Old Testament. Okay. So in the last line of the Bible, in Revelation 22, one of the last lines of the Bible is the apostle John saying “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” It’s a prayer from the apostle. “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” It’s the prayer that Christians like me and you pray when we see injustice in our world. When we see news of rape and pestilence and murder and war. When we hear about cancer, we say “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” We hear about shootings, “Come quickly, Lord Jesus.” What are you praying for there? Well yeah, you want the world to be made right. What is it gonna take for the world to be made right? Because Revelation 19, just a couple chapters before describes the coming of the Son of God, and when he’s coming, he’s coming on clouds with a sword coming out of his mouth and a tattoo down his legs. And he slays the wicked. That’s the future according to the book of Revelation.

So it’s very right for you to pray “Lord, take this injustice that I’ve experienced and the person who’s perpetrated it against me, I will not seek revenge on them. I’m going to leave it in your wrathful hands.” And all one day will be made right. Yes, you want that wrath as a Christian, yes you want that wrath to



be dealt with in Christ, just as it was dealt with with you, so that they won't face the wrath of God at the end. Instead Jesus will have paid it for them. Yes. Yes. You pray that first. But if that doesn't happen, justice will be done by our just and righteous God. And you can rest there. Listen, if you have been abused or if you have been abandoned. If you have been wronged on severe levels, you need to own this. God will make it right. And you can rest there.

[Overcome Through Hospitality]

But the last question, is what do you do if the person who wronged you, how do you act toward them in the meantime? And everybody with Canadian blood in their veins just like me, says "Passive aggressively." Right? You act like you like them, but behind closed doors you wish for their immediate termination. But look at what Paul says. Romans 12:20-21,

"On the contrary [so on the contrary to taking revenge]:

'If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.'

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

Everybody reads that, they're like, "Oooh...burning coals. That sounds good." Right? That's what I want to do to my frenemy. Give me the coals. I'm going to lay them upon his head myself and get a blowtorch. Right? This will be good. Actually, what's going on there is, there's an ancient Egyptian ritual. If I had wronged you, and I've come to be convinced that I had wronged you, you who had approached me, and maybe we had fights for years or whatever. I'd come to the conclusion that I had actually wronged you. The way that I would demonstrate my penitence, the way I demonstrate that I was sorry for what I'd done, is I would take a tray, a pan, and I would place charcoal on it and I would light that charcoal up. And I would walk in front of you with charcoal on my head. With burning coals on my head. And by doing it, I would be saying "I'm so sorry for the wrong I've done."

So what Paul is saying here is, we don't show revenge, but we show hospitality right? Giving water to those who are thirsty, and we give food to those who are hungry. We don't show revenge but we show hospitality to those who have wronged us and this might lead them to repentance. This kindness that we're showing them may, doesn't always, but may lead them to a point where they're like, "Oh...you're right." And sometimes that happens.

One of the great illustrations in the Bible of where that happens is 1 Samuel 24. It's a great story. I mean, what you've got is David is being chased by the King Saul, because David has been anointed as the new king. And Saul's like, "Well if I kill the new king, then I'll still be king." So he gets 3000 of his men and he chases David into the wilderness. They can't find him. David's a good hider. And so they get up there in the wilderness, and no kidding, Saul it says in Scripture 1 Samuel 24, Saul had to



relieve himself. He had to go into a cave to relieve himself, you can figure out exactly what he's doing in there right. But it's probably gonna take longer than the number one kind. So there he is. He's in there squatting, squatting down, in the most exposed and vulnerable position you can be, yes?

What he doesn't know, is in that very cave, is David and David's mighty men. And David's men come up behind David, cause they're further back int he cave. They said, "That's Saul! He's totally exposed, David! The Lord has laid him in your hands. Go get him!" And David you can kind of feel, "Ooh.. yeah maybe!" Then he gets to the edge and he's like, "No, I'm just gonna cut off the cloak." And he cuts off a piece of the cloak and he comes back and he feels really bad cause he's like "He's still the king. I shouldn't have done that. I don't want to dishonour God...God will bring me to the kingdom when it's his time." Saul cleans himself up, goes out of the cave. David comes behind him and says, "Hey Saul." Saul quickly turns around, sees David. David said, "Hey. You need to know that you were in there just a minute ago totally vulnerable, and I and my buddies were in there. We could've killed you, in fact I took this edge of your cloak to show you how close I was to you. But you need to know Saul, that I'm not your enemy. You've treated me very badly. You keep chasing me and you need to know that you're in the wrong, Saul." 1 Samuel 24:16 says,

"When David finished saying this, Saul asked, 'Is that your voice, David my son?' And he wept aloud. 'You are more righteous than I,' he said. 'You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly.'"

And there's Saul with burning coals on his head. Listen, I'll finish with this. There's a lady I knew of who was on a hockey team. And a bunch of Christian parents were on a hockey team, and there were a few families who didn't like Christians. In fact, one woman on the team didn't like Christians at all. She said that in the first meeting of the team. She looked back, noticed some of the people who are Christians from years passed and said, <sarcastically> "Great. We got a bunch of Christians on this team." And she was openly oppositional to the Christians on the team for various reasons. Was mean, unkind, spoke about their kids the wrong way, always wanted her kid to be the first player and if he wasn't, she'd criticized everybody else. They played together with this woman and her family for years. These Christians. Anyway the woman who was very critical ended up contracting cancer. And she was going through chemotherapy. She was going through, these Christian parents, the mothers especially got together and said, "Listen even though she's been very unkind to us, why don't we make sure that she will always have a meal to eat while she's going through chemotherapy every night? We'll make sure that for the next month she doesn't have to cook." So they did. They would show up at her doorstep and give her this thing, over and over and over again. Woman finally, she survived. It was great. But as soon as it was over, she came back to the team, sat down next to some of these parents, right in the middle of some of these Christian parents, started to weep and said, "I am so sorry. I didn't know who you were."

Look, people have wronged you and me. We've been badly treated in many places. And the temptation for you and I is to be overcome with evil. But we're Christians, we're not the people who are overcome with evil. We overcome evil with good. Yes?



Let me pray for us.

I'm thankful, Father, for your Word and for your grace. And I pray, Father, that you would help us to understand these things better and better as we go on. And, Lord, I know that there are lots of people in the room here. And I'm trusting that your Spirit would go and then you would apply this in this specific circumstance, Father. Give them an illustration and things like that here. But I know there's a specific circumstance in the lives of all the people who are sitting here; Lord that you by your Spirit want to put your hand on, and you want to show them, how a kingdom Christian acts differently. Help us all with this we pray. By the power of the Spirit, in Jesus' name. Amen.