

During WW2, a military unit in the Pacific hired a local boy to cook and clean for them. Being a bunch of jokesters, they took advantage of the boy's seeming naiveté. They smeared Vaseline on the stove handles so it'd get on his hands. They put buckets of water over the door so he'd get soaked when he opened it. They even nailed his shoes to the floor for a laugh. Day after day the boy took the brunt of their jokes w/out saying a word. Feeling guilty, the men apologized to the boy saying, *"We're sorry for the pranks we've pulled on you and we promise to stop."* The boy smiled and asked, *"No more sticky on stove?"* *"Nope."* *"No more water on door?"* *"No more water on door."* *"No more nail shoes to floor?"* *"No more nailed shoes."* *"Okay"* the boy said w/ a wide grin, *"Then no more spit in soup."*

As we come to the end of *Romans 12*, Paul has taken us on a tour of discovering the heart of the Christian walk and how we can **elevate** our faith in 2015. He began by declaring the key to walking w/ Christ is our constant **surrender** to God by *offering our bodies as a living sacrifice*. He states **if you want to GO up w/ God, you have to GIVE up to God.**

Next, he declared we must also gain a proper perspective of ourselves and recognize we're a part of something greater than ourselves. We're a vital part of the body of Christ.

Last week, Paul reminded us that while we're God's children gifted and called to serve at His pleasure – if our motivation is not His **love**, then we've missed it. Today, Paul is going to remind us that if we've surrendered to Christ, then it'll also show up in those relationships that disagree and disgrace us.

Here is a simple reality – **everyone has enemies**. Everyone has people that don't like them and they don't like – people they don't jive w/ – who always seem to get under their skin.

I'm reminded of the story of two writers who were jealous of each other and their animosity was apparent to all. One of the writers wrote a book that became a bestseller. Shortly thereafter, the two met at a party, the other man said, *“I bought your book the other day. It's a good read. Who wrote it for you?”* Frustrated by the dig, the first man replied, *“Thanks. And who did you get to read it to you?”*

As you may be aware, the movie, *American Sniper*, has overwhelmed the box office in the past 2 weeks shattering all kinds of movie records. The movie is about the life, impact, and struggles of Chris Kyle, a Navy Seal from Texas, who is recognized as the most lethal sniper in US history. In the movie, as in any war movie, we get a glimpse into the idea of ROE – **Rules of Engagement**. *ROE refer to those necessary responses permissible in times of conflict.* **In Romans 12:14-21**, Paul offers us **God's Rules of Engagement** when facing conflict and opposition.

¹⁴ *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*
¹⁵ *Rejoice w/ those who rejoice; mourn w/ those who mourn.*
¹⁶ *Live in harmony w/ one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate w/ people of low position. Do not be conceited.* ¹⁷ *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.* ¹⁸ *If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace w/ everyone.* ¹⁹ *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.* ²⁰ *On the contrary: "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."* ²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil w/ good.*

I The ADVERSITY Rule

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

bless (*eulogeo*) *eu* – **good** & *logeo* – **speak** – to speak good of someone – to find and say the good in another person.

persecute (*dioko*) to stalk or to hunt down to harm.

curse – to wish evil upon

Instead of hoping for the worst of those who seek to harm us, we're to willfully desire the best for them. Instead of speaking hatred, we're to speak well of them.

Here is the problem. This goes against human nature. We prefer the OT adage of “*an eye for an eye.*” Our flesh thinks – *I’m going to pay back the person who hurt me w/ interest.*

Jesus offered a new command – *You have heard it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. Mt.5:43f*

II The EMPATHY Rule

¹⁵ *Rejoice w/ those who rejoice; mourn w/ those who mourn.*

This is a statement of incarnational relationship – that is, we are never more like Jesus then when we meet others at the point of their need.

How do you want people to respond to you in times of joy? Then treat others in the same way. How do you want to be cared for in times of sorrow? Then care for others.

This reminds me of the 2nd time we found ourselves at the hospital after Colin had a seizure. We had just left a church as pastor and were new members of a church in north Atlanta. As we sat in the hospital w/ no idea whether Colin live or die – it was painful to have no one at our side to pray for us, walk w/ us and encourage us.

Today it matters to me when someone goes into the hospital. I don't want anyone to ever feel alone or w/out support.

rejoice – means to return to joy – contextually it means to share w/ others in their success.

mourn – to shed tears and lament loudly.

This idea is well illustrated in a story told about a little boy w/ a big heart. His next-door-neighbor was an older gentleman whose wife had suddenly died. When the boy saw the man crying one day, he went into the man's yard, climbed onto his lap, and just sat there. When his mother asked him what he had said to the man, the boy said, “*Nothing. I just helped him cry.*”

In a world that couldn't care less – **we should care more.**

III The HARMONY Rule

¹⁶ *Live in harmony w/ one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate w/ people of low position. Do not be conceited.*

harmony – to think the same things towards one another – to be in tune. I think of an orchestra w/ all the instruments get in tune w/ one another and play the same score.

low position (*tapeinis*) to flattened or to have been made flat

Paul says don't to think too much or little of yourself as you don't think too much or little of the circumstances of others.

There are people in this room who've been pummeled w/ problems and others who've been flattened by life. We're not just to see them; we're to be humble enough to hang out – **there's no Christian caste system!**

conceited – means we should never think we are any better or any different b/c we've not been flattened by life or b/c we've been able to get up off the canvas – it could just as easily happen to us. Instead, we should be humble and grateful and lend a hand to those who've been blitzed by life.

Not long after the Civil War, in an all-white, fashionable Church in Richmond, VA, a black man entered the service shortly after it started and sat down on the bottom level, something that never happened before. Immediately a buzz went through the church. When it came time for the people to come to the altar to kneel and receive communion, the black man was the first to walk forward and kneel – sending the parishioners spiraling – even the rector didn't even know what to do. Very soon, an esteemed layman got up, walked to the front and knelt beside the black man to receive communion beside him. When he did, the rest of the church came to receive communion along w/ their black brother. The esteemed layman was none other than General Robert E. Lee – a committed follower of Christ.

IV The MEEKNESS Rule

Meekness isn't weakness. Biblically, meekness is a word picture of a horse broken (saddled) – **power under control.**

If a person would ever need meekness, it is in situations where we've come face to face w/ an opportunity to get even w/ someone who has harmed us.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right (honorable) in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace w/ everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary: "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."

Will Rogers, one of the great humorists in American history said, "***I never met a man I didn't like.***" Can anybody say the same? How many of you believe Rogers? Some of you are saying, "Well, Will never met my boss, my neighbor, or my spouse." **Maybe not, yet Paul calls us to a higher response.**

Is there someone you would like to see get their due?

Everyone says forgiveness is a lovely idea until they have something or someone to forgive. *C.S. Lewis*

Jack's mom ran into his room after hearing him scream. She found his 2 yr. old sister pulling his hair. After getting her to let go, she comforted Jack saying, "*Jack, she didn't mean it. She doesn't know it hurts.*" As she left, not 3 seconds pass when she hears to little girl scream. Rushing back in she asked Jack, "*What happened?*" he said, "*She knows now!*"

repay – to seek to settle a debt

OPTIONS

There are many attitudes and beliefs in our world on how to settle a score – yet only one brings honor to God.

The **YELLOW** Rule – *Do unto others what they do to you.*

This is a good rule so long as things are good, but should things get bad – this is a cowards approach to life.

The **GRAY** Rule – *Do unto other before they do to you.*

Gray b/c it is neither black nor white but somewhere in b/w.

The **GOLDEN** Rule – *Do unto others as you would have them do to you.* Treat people the way you want to be treated.

Honestly. When someone throws an insult, we feel obligated to return the venomous volley. There's just something delicious about giving it back to someone who given it to us.

But note Paul's ROE when faced w/ such a moment...

do what is right – honorable

(See *Ph. 4:8-9*)

*...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable – anything is excellent or worthy of praise – think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – **put it into practice**. And the God of peace will be w/ you. Ph. 4:8-9*

if it is possible live in peace – as far as it proceeds from you – do you part b/c peace requires two parties to call a treaty.

Don't take revenge – *imperative* never not ever take matters into your own hands to exact your estimation of justice. Leave it to God. **The idea is simple – relinquish revenge.** Let go of your assumed right to even the score.

This is illustrated well in the story of David when King Saul was seeking to destroy him. Even though David honored Saul as the king, Saul was jealous of David so he threatened David's life and began hunting him down like an animal. On two occasions, David had the perfect opportunity to exact revenge on Saul, but instead, he chose to honor and respect Saul. He believed since God had put King Saul in power it was God's responsibility to remove Saul from power. Listen to David's words in **1 Sam. 24:6: *The Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, or lift my hand against him; for he is the anointed of the Lord.*** So David didn't exact revenge allowing God to take care of Saul in his own way in his own time.

V The CONQUEST Rule

²¹ *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil w/ good.*

overcome (*nikao*) to conquer or to carry off to victory

Translates – **Present Imperative** – STOP being overcome or conquered by evil but conquer evil w/ good.

Why? B/c through Christ, you have overcome evil – so stop living like a loser in the faith – live in Christ's victory.

...for everyone born of God overcomes (present) the world. This is the victory that has overcome (aorist) the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes (present) the world? Only the one who believes Jesus is the Son of God. 1 John 5:4-5

So how do I overcome evil? I overcome through reliance on God motivated and enabled by the indwelling, empowering work of the H.S. as I delight and abide in God's Word.

The key to intimacy w/ God is a vibrant prayer life. The key to a vibrant prayer life is delighting and meditating in God's Word. Psalm 1 begs us to make the connection and to engage in a deeper walk w/ the Master. When we combine the two, God will begin to speak clearly into your life to guide you in leading a surrendered life before all men.

I came across a story this week I think beautifully portrays this passage. It is about a Christian man in the army. As a believer, he regularly practiced praying beside his bed before he went to sleep. As you can imagine, he became an object of mockery and ridicule to the entire barracks. One night as he knelt to pray after a long, weary march, one of his tormentors took off his muddy boots and threw them at the soldier hitting him on each side of his head. The Christian said nothing, and took the boots and put them beside the bed as he continued to pray. But the next AM, when the other man woke up, he found his boots sitting beside his bed, all shined and polished. It so broke his heart he came to that soldier and asked him for forgiveness which eventually led to that man giving his life to Christ.

So let's begin new and afresh today seeking to ELEVATE our lives to God in 2015. To do so requires our absolute and complete surrender, but the results will be a reassuring knowledge of God's will, a place to belong and serve in God's church, a new kind of love ready to dispense on others, and the ability to have victory in the face of opposition so that our lives might make both an earthly and eternal impact on our world. ELEVATE