***Pursue Hospitality  
RO161-02***

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Our subject is "Christian Conduct," and this is segment number ten in Romans 12:9-21.

At the last campfire gathering during boys camp this past week, we used the time to give the boys an opportunity to give their own testimonies. The boys told what they had learned in camp, and how they were different at the end of the week from what they were when they came, and what especially they liked about camp. One little boy finally stood up, after several others had spoken, and said that he appreciated coming to a camp where we were all Christians. And then he mentioned several reasons why he found a Christian camp to be a good thing, and how he enjoyed it, and why he liked it. He was just very warm and very sincere. You could tell that something very deep inside of him had been touched. When he finished and sat down, the campfire circle of campers and counselors burst out with applause, because they had all sensed the genuineness and seriousness and truthfulness of what he had said. Their applause was their way of saying "Amen" to what this little boy had said. And it was a nice thing to have a camp that you could go to where, as he put it, we were all Christians.

This camper was, in fact, observing the very point which the apostle Paul has been making in Romans 12; that is, that Christians live a different lifestyle from that of unbelievers. And for those of us who are in the family of God, we don't like the way the unsaved world lives. It doesn't set well with us, and we don't like to be part of it, though we stumble into it on occasion. Christians, however, have God's ability, inside of them, to live up to the image of God in which they were created. The Christian, who therefore obeys God's moral laws and operates from the motivation of divine love, is a really nice person, and he's a nice person to have around. The godly Christian who knows the Word of God is just one nice person to be around. He's never perfect, and he has to keep straightening himself out, but at least he's moving in the right direction, and in the overall haul, he accomplishes the divine good that we all want to see taking place.

Christians, the apostle Paul has been pointing out, have a particular tenderness and concern for other believers. And he bases this all upon the basic quality of Christian love. So, he's been listing different things that make us, as Christians, different from the unsaved world. He points out that Christians really do love people, and they don't just hypocritically pretend to do so. The world pretends to love you, but they're hypocrites. They don't really mean it. They're trying to con you out of something that they want that you have. Christians, Paul points out, hate doing what God says is evil, and they love pursuing doing the things that God says are good. Christians treat each other with tender affection, and with an emotional type of love. Christians respect each other, and they furthermore lead the way in showing it. Christians do not lag behind others in diligence in serving God our Father. A mature Christian does not stand around waiting to see if something he could do will be done by somebody else, so he doesn't have to do it. Paul says, "The Christian, who is in tune with God the Holy Spirit, is out on the point leading the way."

Furthermore, Paul says, "Christians burn with zeal in their human spirit for God and His work. They're really enthusiastic for it in the right way, because the Spirit of God is leading them. Christians serve God as a slave serves his master. Paul says that Christians rejoice in the certainty of the hopes that they have in Jesus Christ. Christians persevere in God's service even under adverse situations. They do not desert the battlefield.

Furthermore, Paul says that Christians are persistent and consistent in their prayer life, especially before they enter into a crisis situation.

**Contributing**

Now we begin with Romans 12:13, where the apostle Paul begins by saying, "Distributing to the necessity of the saints." The word "distributing" looks like this in the Greek Bible. It's the Greek word "koinoneo." "Koinoneo" means "to contribute." It's the word that we get the idea of fellowship from. Sometimes you hear about a Sunday school class, or a Bible group that gathers, and they call themselves "The Koinonia class." This is where they get it from. It's the idea of people who gather, and they share the fellowship of the Word of God together. Here it is connoting sharing material things with somebody else. It is in the present tense. Therefore, Christians should be constantly in the habit of doing this. It is active voice. Christians decide to share what they have. And it is a participle in mood. A spiritual principle is being laid out here for us.

There is a group of human beings with whom you, as a Christian, have an obligation to share what you have, not out of your abundance, but, like the Macedonian Christians, who followed this principle, and shared out of their poverty. It is a requirement of God. The idea here is to make the needs of others your own needs.

Let me show you how this word is used elsewhere in the Bible. In Romans 15:27, we have this word used: "It has pleased them verily, and their debtors, they are. For if the gentiles had been made partakers (and there's the word – to share: had been made sharers) of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in material things." Here the apostle Paul says that it was the right thing for gentile Christians to contribute to the famine condition being suffered by Jewish Christians in the city of Jerusalem. Paul says, "After all, it is the Jews who brought to these gentiles spiritual enlightenment, and it is only right that now the gentiles enter into a 'koinoneo relationship with the Jews by giving them the material help they need."

This word is used in 1 Timothy 5:22: "Lay hands suddenly on no man; neither be a partaker of other men's sins. Keep yourself pure." Here the idea, in verse 22, to "lay hands suddenly on no man," the apostle Paul is saying, "Don't suddenly decide that somebody is an example, and has something to teach you and to say to you in the Christian life."

There are Christian groups that do this all the time. Here's a famous football star. He doesn't know anything about spiritual things, but somehow, in the grace of God: he put two and two together; heard the gospel; and, became a Christian. The first thing he does is go around talking to all the Christian businessmen groups. There's little church group, and this guy is a dummy when it comes to spiritual things. He may be a famous football star, but he does not know anything about the things of God. And that's what this verse says: "Tell him to keep his mouth shut, and not to go around pretending that he has something to say to people until he has learned some doctrine so that he does have something to share."

Paul also goes on and says, "Be not partaker of other men's sins. When you do something like that, that is a sinful thing to do." And here we have this same word 'koinoneo' – to become a fellowshipper with other sins, but to keep yourself pure. Every individual Christian should live in a world that is morally impure, while he personally does not partake of it.

1 Peter 4:13 uses this word in this way: "But rejoice inasmuch as you are partakers (and there's the word again) of Christ's suffering, that when His glory shall be revealed, you may be glad also with exceeding joy." People who oppose God do not like Jesus Christ. Eventually, they murdered Him. And people who do not like God do not like godly people: "Therefore, be glad, and considered it a point of honor that you are treated with abuse as the Lord was, because you are now a partaker with Him of His suffering." Again, it's this same word "koinoneo."

We have one more example in 2 John 11: "For he that bids him God speed is a fellowshipper (a partaker) of his evil deeds." To understand that, you have to look at verse 10, which says, "If anyone come in unto you (someone comes into your Christian circle) and brings not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed." And to understand the doctrine that he's talking about, you have to go up to verse 9: "Whosoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ has not God. He that abides in the doctrine of Christ, he has both the Father and the Son." So what he is talking about is the truth about who Jesus Christ is, and what He came to do – the Savior that He is, and all that.

Now here comes some really nice, personable individual that you have a lot of rapport with in the business world; socially; and, in any other way, and you become partaker of his views. You enter into a close relationship with him. The Bible says, "Don't do that."

Verse 11 says, "When you bid him God speed (that's what goodbye means – God's blessing go by you), you are saying to him: 'The evil things you stand for, and the evil things you teach, are okay with me. And I call upon God to bless you." So what you have done is made yourself partaker of that person's evil. So, when you meet somebody who resists this Bible doctrine truth, don't be too cordially warm with him. You be civil, and you keep doors open, but just be aware of the fact that God says, "Don't get socially active with that person," because what you are doing is being a partaker (a fellowshipper) with his evil.

**Necessity**

So, the idea here is taking part (sharing) in something, in a very specific way. And this world says, "You be a taker in something that other Christians have, which is described by the word "necessity." The Greek word looks like this: "chreia." And what this word means is a person's needs. We are talking about other Christians. Here it refers to the necessities of life. The necessities of life are what it takes to keep your body and soul together. It is very explicit: the food you need; the clothing; and, the shelter you need. Those basic essentials are the necessities of life. What it has in view are these things that we observe some group of people not having.

**The Saints**

What group of people? It's very clear. The saints. The word for that is the Greek word "hagios," which is the word for "holy." And, in the Bible, this is the word that refers to those who are in Jesus Christ. Therefore, they are holy. Therefore, they are called the "saints." Please remember that the Roman Catholic doctrine is quite wrong – that certain people are so extra good that God declares them to be saints. What makes you a saint is that you're as good as Jesus Christ. And everybody who has trusted in Christ is in Christ, and is therefore a saint. Therefore, everybody in this room is a saint without the declaration of the papal authority.

Paul is talking about partaking (participating, or sharing) with the basic essential needs of other Christians. So, when some Christian is short of food, you take it as an attitude that you are short of food, and you do something about it. When you're short of food, and you have money, you know where to go to get the food, and you do something about it. In the same way, if you see some other Christian who is short of these necessities of food, clothing, and shelter, and you have the means to correct it, you do something about it. Believers in Christ share His holiness. Therefore, they share the needs of all the saints. Paul says that his needs are the needs of all other believers. And the needs of all other believers, in the matter of keeping body and soul together, are his needs as well. Christians are to identify with these material needs of other Christians, and to help out.

**Goldbricking**

This is not an easy thing to do. In a free enterprise society, we expect everybody to carry his own load. And, of course, we have such great opportunity to do so, that it's kind of natural that we suspect somebody of goldbricking who doesn't carry his own load and provide for his own necessities. We have to temper our freedom in American capitalism with the fact that there are some people, and even Christians, who indeed have a problem, and have a need on occasion of caring for themselves. A fellow Christian in genuine need needs more than you shaking his hand and saying, "Well, I'm certainly going to be praying for you. I am certainly going to hope that before the day goes too far, that you will get a good meal. I'm going to go home right now right after lunch, and I'm going to pray for you." That's what we're talking about.

Paul says, "You people are going home. You're going to lunch. And this poor guy is starving. And you're going to pray for him. He's shivering out in the cold, and as you close the door to your warm house, you say, 'Brother, I'm going to be praying for you. The Lord bless you that God will give you a nice coat.'" This is the thing that James was referring to as such a ludicrous situation in James 2:15-16, when James said, "If a brother or a sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, 'Depart in peace. Be warmed and filled,' notwithstanding, you give them not these things which are needful to the body, what does it profit?" It couldn't be clearer. When a person, especially another Christian, has a need for food and clothing and shelter, and you have food and clothing and shelter, and you have funds, great or small, you do the best you can to help them out, and to carry them through.

**Government Welfare**

Having said that, I must reiterate and stress that this is not a call for a government welfare program that will enable the indolent; the self-indulgent; or, the spendthrift to survive by the sweat off the brows of other people. Government programs violate the basic principles of the Word of God concerning the care of individuals for their own necessities. Government programs are a violation because they go beyond what God intended for human government to do, and therefore, for what He will allow human government to do. Don't forget that. If you go beyond what God intended for human government to do, God's not going to let it work. Anytime you step beyond what is the order of God's creative order in His universe, the system is going to break down. And governments always think that they can take over where God has said, "You have no authority." Governments are for keeping law and order. They're acting as umpires for everybody to have a fair chance.

So, the problem with government programs is that they violate such principles as 1 Thessalonians 4:11: "That you study to be quiet; to do your own business; and, to work with your own hands as we commanded you, that you may walk honestly (toward them that are outside – toward unbelievers), and that you may have lack of nothing." Paul says, "By your personal enterprise, God, who has promised to give you a logistical grace to enable you to serve Him, will also provide you with some luxuries and reserves, such that you can help other believers who have come upon hard times.

Notice 2 Thessalonians 3:10: "For even when we were with you, this we commanded you: that if any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some who walk among you (other Christians, he's speaking of) disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such, we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they work, and they eat their own bread." Now that is the basic fundamental principle. Governments cannot ever fairly take funds from one person and distribute them to those who really need it: who are not indolent; and, who are not in a condition of need because of their own carelessness and their own laziness.

Help in necessities is to be governed by the reason that one is in need of those necessities. If somebody is going out and spending his money at the racetrack, and now he is starving, that does not make him a good candidate for financial help. You might give him a meal or two, and tell him that this is the end of the line. If he chooses to spend his money in such a careless way, then he must suffer the consequences of the hunger pains in his stomach as well. The kind of help that we're talking about has to be given by those who are in close proximity to the person who gets it. And when you know the person, you know whether he's a deadbeat, and you know that he is a person who genuinely deserves your help. And those who are close to the individual can make these decisions. Those at a distance, such as government, cannot. Government simply confiscates and, in a nondiscriminatory way, scatters what other people have earned.

What this passage here in Romans is talking about is specifically dealing with Christians helping to take care of other Christians. It's just kind of a picture. As one writer says, it's like, in the old days, when people burned coal. And some of us grew up in homes where we remember the coal truck driving up. And there was always an opening (a window) on the outside that went to the coal bin in the basement. And the truck would drive up, and they put a chute from the back of the truck, and then aim it toward that window, and dump the coal. And it would go into the coal bin. Sometimes, they would actually have to shovel it into that coal bin shovel-by-shovel. But the picture is that we, as Christians, are taking our money, and we are shoveling it into God's bin.

However, the interesting thing about that is that God is standing down in the bin, and He's shoveling it back over to our side faster than we can shovel to His side. And if you have not learned that yet, you have not learned a great experience with God. The faster you shovel your money into His bin, the faster He's shoveling it back over to your side. That is the principle upon which He works. Therefore, this makes a lot of sense – to shovel His money out to people who need it, and to help the Christian, because God always has a bigger shovel, and He keeps ahead of us all the time.

There's a great deal of personal satisfaction for shoveling into God's bin. It's like one young man told me up at camp. He said, "It is a matter of great personal satisfaction to me." We were talking about these kids at camp, and the needs that we see. He said, "You know, it's a great personal satisfaction to me to know that I've contributed to the camper's aid fund, and there's a boy here who would not have been here had I not done that." And he was exactly right. What he's saying is that here is a need – a genuine need. And he has used his shovel to move some of his money over to God's bin. And I can assure you that God is already there shoveling it back.

So, we will not be the poorer for sharing with other believers in the time of their need. Even if we have less as a result of our giving. I can assure you that you will have more in terms of your rewards in heaven.

This caring for other Christians, of course, was clearly the pattern of the New Testament church. At the very beginning, in Acts 2:44-45, we have that indicated: "And all that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need." This was a time of voluntary Christian communal sharing of what was needed in a society that hated the Christian, and was seeking to do everything it could to keep him from having the necessities for survival. Acts 4:32: "And the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither said any of them that any of the things which he possessed was his own. But they had all these common." This was a voluntary sharing, and they did not consider that what they had was theirs and theirs alone.

In Acts 4:34-37, we read, "Neither was there any among them that lacked. For as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them down at the apostles' feet, and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need. And Joseph, who, by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, which is being interpreted 'the son of consolation,' a Levite of the country of Cyprus, having land, sold it, and brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet." This was a great and gracious and kind thing to do. And it was the custom for Christians to help take of Christians.

There is a time coming in human history when this principle of believers helping other believers to keep body and soul together is going to become very, very important, and that's in the tribulation. We Christians will, at that point, be long gone and out of the scene. But nevertheless, this principle is still going to operate – that there are going to be some people who are going to need to be helped. As a matter of fact, when the Lord returns, and He identifies certain tribulation believers as saints (sheep who are going to go into the millennium), He indicates that: "I knew that you were believers. You demonstrated that you were worthy of going into the millennium, because you were born again people, by the way you responded to the needs of other believers, particularly," Jesus says, 'My people,'" meaning the Jews. After we have been taken out as the church, there are going to be believers in the tribulation who are going to help the Jews to survive. And that's going to indicate that they themselves are believers, or they wouldn't do this. You can read about that in Matthew 25:35-40.

**Pursue Hospitality**

So, the apostle Paul makes a very significant statement: "Sharing with the basic life necessities of other Christians." Then he expands that a little further. He says, "Given to hospitality." The world "given" is this word "dioko." I want you to notice that word. We're going to look at it again in a moment in the next verse. This word means "to pursue," but "to pursue actively." You Christians are to take care of other Christians when you see they have some need.

Furthermore, you are to pursue something very actively. You are to seek opportunities to do something, and that is hospitality. The word looks like this: "philoxenia." "Philoxenia" literally means "love for a stranger." And it connotes providing that person again with care for the necessities of life. You have to understand this on the background of the time – the isagogics here.

In New Testament times, Christians often traveled about in preaching ministries. Other Christians were on the move to escape persecution. Both kinds needed a safe house. Both kinds, as they traveled through, needed temporary care on their journeys. There were few public accommodations, and the Christians weren't all that well-off to be able to afford such as there were. So such care, that he's speaking up here in terms of hospitality, is for helping out Christians who may be perfect strangers to you, but who are on God's mission – who are on a mission of the Lord's work. We don't run into too many people like that today. But in the time of which Paul spoke, this was commonplace. Christians were passing through that you didn't know, but you just found out they were fellow believers. To some extent, we do have that experience.

In Hebrews 13:2, we read, "Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them, and them who suffer adversity as being yourselves also in the body." Remember people who are coming through, and who are under adverse conditions, and who need your help.

One of the reasons the Bible says, "Be careful to exercise hospitality," is that this has happened on occasion, where people have extended hospitality, and they didn't know that they were giving it to angels. In Genesis 18:1-8, you have a historical experience recorded of Abraham, where the angels, who had been sent by God to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, came by to inform Abraham what was going to happen. Abraham extends to them hospitality. Why did he do it? He didn't know these people. They were strangers to him. He didn't even know they were angels. But he knew they were people passing through, and that they needed food and shelter and care. So, he extended it to them, and later, lo and behold, he found that he had extended this to the very angels of God. And the Bible indicates that that has a special and a distinctive, unique blessing upon it.

You should not begrudge extending hospitality. One of the problems we have is that when somebody comes through, and he is a stranger, and is a child of God, and is on a mission of the Lord, or, for some reason, needs your help, it's often not very convenient for us to do that. It's interruptive. It's inconvenient. And hospitality has to be something that is done at the expense of our own convenience.

In 1 Peter 4:9, Peter lays out this same principle, when he says, "Use hospitality one to another without grudging." Don't be complaining about the fact that you had other plans, and all of a sudden, here's some Christian coming through that needs a place to sleep for the night as he passes through on the Lord's service. But do it without complaining.

2 Timothy 1:16 says, "The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain. But when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently and found me." Paul says, "Thank God for Onesiphorus, a good Christian friend. Many times I traveled through in his territory. I came through the city, and he gave me hospitality at his home. And when he came to Rome, here I am, a prisoner in chains, and his hospitality is extended to me even by coming by to see me:" "The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day, and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus you know very well." So, Onesiphorus can expect a very superior blessing someday in heaven, in terms of his reward for having done this act of hospitality for a man like Paul.

In Hebrews 6:10, the writer says, "For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love, which you have shown toward His Name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister." So, don't be so busy and preoccupied with yourself that you cannot extend hospitality to another Christian who, at some point in time, needs that help. Christians live as aliens in Satan's world. The world does not welcome them. It is our privilege to welcome other believers.

Helping the necessities of another Christian, you should remember, is also viewed by God as helping the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. That principle is laid out in Matthew 10:30, where we read, "He that receives you receives Me. He that receives Me receives Him that sent me." When the Lord was sending out His disciples as missionaries (itinerant preachers – the very kind that most needed this kind of hospitality), Jesus said, "Anybody who receives you has received Me."

Now you know that if the Lord Jesus Christ walked up to your house and said, "I am the Lord Jesus Christ, I'd like a meal and a place to sleep for the night," you wouldn't say, "Oh, we were just going out to K-Mart. I'm sorry, we can't." Man, you'd say, "Come in, Lord." But if it were somebody that that was just an ordinary Christian, you might be tempted to pass him by. But Jesus says, "If you take that ordinary Christian, and you extend that cordiality of hospitality to him, it's just as if I were standing there, and you've done it to Me." And that God does not forget.

Matthew 25:40 add this: "And the king shall answer and say unto them, 'Verily, I say unto you, and as much as you have done it unto one of the least of these, My brethren (here, the Jewish people), you have done it unto Me." So, when you help God's children, you help the Lord himself.

Some of you (many of you, and probably most of you – I can't speak for all of you) I know are very good at this. You are sensitive to this. You are concerned for this, and you go out of your way to see that somebody passing through may need your care and your hospitality. I should caution you that you do not misunderstand this Scripture by interpreting it to mean that you should become a social madam, running dinners and parties for fun for all the saints. Please do not go home and upset your husband and family by saying, "From now on, I'm going to run dinners and parties all the time for the saints.

Several years ago, we had a kind lady who did that. She decided that the church needed more hospitality, and she was going to provide it. She divided everybody into groups, and every Friday night, for two or three months solid, she held a dinner party. And gradually, all the members got invited. Unfortunately, I had to attend every one of them, and it just about killed me. I had had about all the hospitality I could stand for a long time. She had a dinner party week after week after week. This is not calling upon you to become a social madam. Now that is OK. Don't misunderstand me. If You want to run parties and invite people over, that's great. And I'm sure they appreciate it, and they like to do that. But don't do that under some sense of obligation that that's what this voice is calling upon you to do.

Those of us who are in the ministry, we do have an extra burden in this direction. Titus 1:8 says, concerning the pastor-teacher: "He must be a lover of hospitality." Therefore, he must be one that is ready to extend it when it's needed. This is an opportunity that doesn't come our way very often, because we live in a country that's too prosperous. But we pursue hospitality as it comes our way. And for other Christians in other parts of the world, this verse is very important. They are under persecution, and they do need that kind of care. So, we pursue hospitality. We do not pursue that which is injurious to people. Christians are aliens. They're scattered through Satan's world. And we need on occasion to be ready to help each other.

**Bless your Persecutors**

In verse 14, Paul speaks about a forgiving believer, another one of these practical admonitions. It says, "Bless them who persecute." The word "bless" is the word "eulogeo." This is the word we get our English word "eulogize" from. When you stand up and eulogize a person, you say nice things about him. This is what this word means. It means to speak well of someone. Here it connotes asking God to do good things for certain people. Bless (eulogize) a certain group of people. It is present tense. You should do this all the time. It's active. This should be done by the Christian. And here's something you won't see in English. This is a command. This is imperative mood. This is the first one we've. Paul has been bouncing out one admonition after another. But this is the first time he says, "Now, I'm telling you this, and there are no options here. This you must do. It is a divine command.

I think the reason for it, in part, is because this is not easy to do, as soon as you see who it is he's asking us to be nice to, and who it is he's asking us to say nice things about. This word for "eulogeo" is used in Ephesians 1:3, just to give you another idea of how it's use: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Who has blessed us (and there's the word) with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Here he is talking about God bestowing spiritual good things of heaven on us in our experience as Christians.

Well, who are we to bless in this way? The persons who persecute us ("dioko"). Bless the person who persecutes you. "Dioko" – didn't we just have that word? We sure did. There it is: "dioko." Here, in verse 13, we had "dioko." It was translated as the word "given." It meant "to pursue," There it was to pursue hospitality. Here we come, and "dioko" again means "pursue," but this time pursuing something else. Here it means to pursue in the sense of persecute. Here it is a continued abuse (a deliberate action) on somebody's part.

So, in verse 13, we had the idea of: "pursue hospitality." In verse 14: "Bless those who pursue you." That's how we put it in English. Verse 13: "Pursue hospitality." Verse 14: "Bless those who pursue you." But in verse 13, "pursue" means to practice hospitality. In verse 14, those who persecute you are the ones that you're blessing. And the people that you are to bless – this is so emphatic that he repeats the word "eulogeo" again: "Bless them who pursue you for persecution." It is stressing the fact, as a command from God, that you are to do what? Well, you are actually to pray that God would send good things on your persecutors. Now that's not natural, and that's not easy to do.

The person who has just double-crossed you in a business deal, God says, "Go to the Lord and say, 'Lord, I want you to do good things for that man.'" The person who has just done you a very great personal injury to your family – say, "Lord, I want you to bring great blessing upon this man." Whatever this tragedy; whatever the abuse; and, whatever the treatment has been, you turn around and say, "Lord, I want to ask you to bring great blessings on this person." When the Bible says to bless them, that's calling for good upon the person. You remember we learned in Romans 8:28, which speaks about all things working for good, that there are three kinds of good. This is what we're praying for when we turn toward somebody who has abused us. The first good we pray for is the good of salvation. The second good is experiential sanctification, such that they may become a godly person. And the third good in Romans 8:28 is a reward stored in heaven because they have been good Christian servants.

Now that is a terrific thing to be asking God for. You say, "God, this person has really done me dirt, but I would like to pray for good." What you are saying is, first of all, if he's not a Christian, bring him into salvation. Then I'd like the good of causing him to be a Spirit-filled Christian, so that he is walking in a godly life; and third – that he would serve You in such a way that he would earn rewards and treasures in heaven. This is not easy to do, and it is really tough to do when the abuse is the result of our doing something good for a person.

1 Peter 3:13 observes that: "And who is he that will harm you if you be followers of that which is good? But, and if you suffer for righteousness sake, happy are you, and be not afraid of their terror; neither be troubled, but sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you for a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear; having a good conscience that where as they speak evil of you as of evil doers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good manner of life in Christ. For it is better if the will of God be so that you suffer for well-doing then for evil-doing." How true. How true. The unbelievers and the carnal Christians, I can assure you, are hateful toward godly believers. They don't like people who are filled with the Holy Spirit, and acting on that basis, because they don't like the divine viewpoint, which is the way that you operate.

So, Paul says, "Bless the people who persecute you." Then he says, to make it even stronger, "Do not curse." The word "curse" is the Greek word "kataraomai." This word means "to call down divine judgment." This means to look up into heaven and call down God's judgment upon a person. It has the negative. It says, "Don't do that. Don't call for suffering on somebody even though they deserve it. And again, this is a divine commandment. God says, "Just don't do that." Ask for God's blessing, but don't ask God to bring suffering on somebody else. Persecution of godly Christians is so unreasonable; it's so mindless; and, it's so unjust that it's very easy for us to want to retaliate, because we have a just ground for resenting it.

I want to show you something else. When Paul says, "Do not curse," in the Greek language, this is a present tense with the imperative mood. That means that they're already doing it. When you have a present tense with the imperative mood, he's saying, "I want you to stop it." The Christians in Rome were already calling down the curses of God upon their persecutors. They were asking God to make it hot for these people. They were asking God not to bless these people so that they would change. They were not pitying these people for the terrible things they were doing. But instead, they were calling down these curses, these divine judgments. Paul says, "Stop doing that." Hatred is to be countered with love and with prayer for enlightenment by God. God's vengeance is already moving toward the person who's persecuting you. Don't forget that.

It's so easy to forget. When people are abusing you, and especially when you have done them good, and they start abusing you, get your eyes off yourself, and get them on the Lord. And then you will realize that God is already up there, sharpening up His sword, and putting a keen edge on it, and His vengeance is about ready to cut that person down, whether he's a Christian or an unbeliever. Now when you think about it that way, you know, it's just no fun, and you have very little motivation to look to God, because God is going to exercise vengeance. He's already going to do that, but He will do that in the proper way. The person really should be pitied. Anyone who abuses a godly Christian reveals his own spiritually benighted condition. He is not motivated by the true God. We ought not to wish for, nor should we take any pleasure in seeing, bad things happening to those who abuse us; to those who make fun of us; or, to those who treat us as garbage. We ought not to wish for tragedies upon them, and we ought not to take pleasure when we see it coming.

The grace-oriented Christian is a person whose hand is restrained from evil, and his soul is kept from bitter feelings. Paul's teaching here actually is reflecting the words of Jesus, which is a good summary for all that we have said today. Matthew 5:43-48 – Paul knew this. He knew this by oral tradition, and he knew what Jesus had said. And this is what he was reiterating: You have heard that it has been said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say unto you, 'Love your enemies; bless them that curse you; do good to them that hate you; and pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you." You should know very specifically how to pray for them. Stage one, salvation; stage two, personal sanctification; and, stage three, earning rewards in heaven. That's the ultimate good.

Verse 45: "You do this that you may indeed be the sons of your father who is in heaven, for he makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. For if you love them who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors the same? And if you greet your brethren only, what do you more than others? Do not even the heathen so? Be therefore mature, even as your Father, who is in heaven, is mature." Spiritual maturity responds in a different way than we normally would respond.

So, what the apostle Paul is saying on the basis of the background of what the Lord Jesus has taught us, is not just that we're going to take the gaff from our persecutors, but we're going to turn right around and seek to bring something good down upon their heads, as they seek to bring something evil down upon our heads. In Luke 6:27, the Lord says, "But I say unto you that here, love your enemies; do good to them to hate you; bless them that curse you; and, pray for them who despitefully use you."

1 Corinthians 4:12: "And labor, working with your own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure it."

1 Peter 3:9: "Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing, but on the contrary: blessings; knowing that you are called to this: that you should inherit a blessing." After all, the greatest is ahead for you. You have nothing to fear. The person who is abusing you has a lot to fear, and great tragedy is ahead for him.

So, the response of the Lord Jesus to abuse is the example for us. One of the great examples of that was on the cross. As you know, early on in that experience, the two thieves both abused Him. Here was this terrific greatest man that ever lived – the God-Man. He's there, hanging naked, in shameful humility, bruised and beaten to the point of death. Shock was almost upon Him from the loss of blood. And there He hangs with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit turned away from Him, as he bears upon Him the sins of the world, including those two thieves. And these thieves are ridiculing him; scoffing; and, making fun. Now how would you react? This is the picture we're talking about. The very time when you're doing good things, and when you are investing your life for peoples' benefit, and then they abuse you, that's when it's tough to turn around, and to ask God to bless those people.

The Bible does not tell us what was going on in the heart and the mind of Jesus at that point. I suspect that He was following the principle of asking blessing upon them. And because He did not respond with abuse back to them, as we would say: "they certainly deserved abuse back." He did not respond. Before the two thieves were dead, one of them changed his mind; repented; came to Christ; accepted Him as Savior; and, later in the day, walked into paradise with the Son of God, just because Jesus Christ followed His own advice and did not return abuse for abuse, but brought blessing in place of abuse.

It is easy to say these things, and easy to read them, but only those of you who are mature Christians, operating on the basis of the filling of the Spirit of God because you're keeping your known sins confessed, and who are staying in the study of the Word of God, and learning day-by-day new doctrinal insights, and refreshing old ones – only you will have the spiritual capacity to take a punch in the mouth for Jesus Christ, and to respond with blessing rather than with cursing.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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