***Respond to Abuse with Peace
RO163-01***

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Please open your Bibles to Romans 12:9-21. Our subject is "Christian Conduct," and this is segment number 13.

In Romans 12, the Holy Spirit has been giving us some practical guidelines for personal Christian conduct. The standard set forth here is not optional. It comes, as a matter of fact, as a divine command to all of us who are believers. And it is important for us to understand that. This is not just good advice that you might want to consider. This is good advice from God that you had better consider. God does not command Christians to act in a way that is impossible for them to obey. If God says, "Act this way," He says it because you *can* act that way. So, any degree of violation of these principles cannot be excused by the Christian as being beyond his power to obey. It is only beyond his choice to do so. It is never beyond our power to obey the principles set forth in this chapter. It is only beyond our choice to do so. The issue is whether a Christian is willing just to do right by God's instructions rather than claim that his situation is an exception, because that's not true.

**Professional Counselors**

Perhaps you've already been struck, as I have, by the fact, as we've studied this chapter, that if people lived by these divine viewpoint interpersonal relationships, the professional counselors in our world would have a lot less business. Do you realize that? We have been speaking on things that are a direct undermining of all those who earn a living by listening to people's problems, and trying to help straighten them out. Most people go to counselors because they want tips on how to have their own way in life. Something is frustrating them, and there is something they want in life. Somebody is a bulking obstacle to something that they want in life. So, they go to a counselor, and say, "Here's my problem. I want to talk this over. It's upsetting me. I'm all in a turmoil. And how can I have my own way?

However, Bible doctrine tells a believer how he must act toward other people in Satan's world in order to live effectively. A counselor who can really help people get mentally and emotionally stabilized, so that they can function in life, is the counselor who will give them the very same information that a faithful pastor-teacher gives his congregation every time there's a church service. Never forget that. You can get nothing from a psychologist or psychiatrist that is of any very genuine help that you could not have gotten had you been a faithful attender of a doctrinally instructing pastoral ministry. Over the long-haul, you'll get it all. Hey, that's a good phrase. Over the long-haul, you'll get it all. And indeed you will. That is very, very true.

**Dealing with Abusive Treatment from other People**

Romans 12:17-21, therefore, give us divine guidelines for dealing with abusive treatment from other people. Verse 17 sets forth the principle of integrity. Christians are not to repay equal treatment with evil. The Bible forbids a tit-for-tat spirit. Christians are told instead to think ahead, in this verse (verse 17), so as to maintain personal integrity in the eyes of everyone in terms of what they do. Christians, in other words, are to be the world's truly beautiful people.

Verse 18, we discovered, directs the Christian to live peacefully with everyone. So far as a Christian has control in a relationship, he should live without conflict. Christians are not to contribute to the disruption of peace, even if another person has broken it. The Christian, thus, acts with a forgiving spirit, giving the benefit of the doubt, and putting the best motives on what other people do. If you do that, you will find that you will have a lot less internal turmoil. You'll find you'll be a lot less rising up with indignation against what somebody else is doing. You'll find you'll be a lot less inclined to try to straighten out people. And you'll find that life will be a lot more peaceful for you.

**Peace**

Christians are to be at peace with others. However, that peace is not to be maintained, we have pointed out, as the Bible points out, at the expense of Bible doctrine truth. A compromised peace (and you can't get a peace by compromising the truth) is merely a lull in the storm. You cannot have genuine peace between people, nor can you have genuine love between people outside of the realm of what is true. You're only kidding yourself. You can pretend that somebody is something that he really is not. You're lying to yourself. A lot of lousy marriages are created by people who get into marriages because they pretend that the person they're marrying is something that they really are not. They have not entered a marriage on the basis of truth: the truth of what you are; what he is; what she is; and, what the relationship can therefore be. Love cannot exist outside of the realm of truth. You cannot enter a relationship of love except on truth. You cannot maintain and continue in a relationship of love, except on the basis of truth.

For this reason, the great apostle John, the only apostle that died in bed, lived his life out completely to the end, and was not a martyr. He has this to say out of his great wisdom of walking with the Lord, and instruction of the Holy Spirit: In 2 John 4-6 he says, "I rejoice greatly that I found of my children (his converts) walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father. And I beseech you, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto you, but that which we had from the beginning: that we love one another. And this is love: that we walk after His commandments. This is the commandment that, as you have heard from the beginning, you should walk in it." Here the apostle John says, "I'm delighted to hear that my converts, whom I've taught in the Word of God are continuing that Word. They're walking in truth. And I am glad for that, because now they will have peace, because they will be able to live in the context of love with one another." The reason they can live in genuine love is because they're living under the real world that is portrayed in the Word of God, not the imaginary world of the liberal mentalities of our society with their humanistic outlooks and viewpoints.

So, if you're going to love, you better be a person who knows the Word of God. If you're going to marry somebody for the object of love, don't marry a woman or a man who is a dumbbell dodo in terms of Bible doctrine principles. You will live to regret it.

In 3 John, he emphasizes the same thing. This is one of the last letters he wrote. In 3 John 3-4, he says, "But I rejoiced greatly when the brethren came, and testified of the truth that is in you, even as you walk in the truth." Here he emphasizes again his delight in hearing that this person to whom he is writing is a person who walks in Bible doctrine truth: "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth." And that is true indeed to this very day.

So, coming back to Romans 12:18, with this background, as much as it is possible to the extent that you have control over the situation, see to it that you live in peace. If somebody comes up and is tirading, chewing, aggressive, and attacking, you, at least, back off and try to avoid contributing to the problem. You cannot prevent the disruption of peace, but you can contribute to making it worse, to acerbating the situation. Live peaceably with all men.

Now, having said that, we must recognize indeed that it's not always possible to do that. And we must fully expect that people are not going to treat us Christians with kindness on the whole. The people of the world do not like Christians. The people of the world find that Christians are a very great threat to their lifestyle and their ambitions. And they're going to do everything they can to bring Christians down.

**The Apostle Paul**

No one found this out more forcibly than the apostle Paul himself, who has written this epistle. The Christian soldier, Paul found, must on occasion abandon his devotion to peaceful relationship and take up the battle. In the ministry of Paul, this great, good soldier of Jesus Christ, and the preacher of the gospel of peace, there were many occasions when he had to do battle with human viewpoint ideas; with carnal Christians; with his fellow countrymen; and, with unbelievers in general.

**Paul's Reaction to his Sufferings**

Please notice some of the kinds of abuse and attack that this great man of God had to suffer. And his reactions will perhaps give us the perspective on how we should respond to the attacks upon us as Christians, which can only increase, I assure you, in American society today.

In Acts 13:8-12, Paul is on the island of Cyprus with Elymas the sorcerer: "But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpretation) withstood them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith." People had been converted. Important people had accepted Jesus Christ. This sorcerer did not like it. So, he comes after Paul.

"Then Saul, who is also called Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, set his eyes on him." Here is the man who preaches the gospel of peace. He is under attack as a witness of Jesus Christ. And now he cannot live peaceably. He must take up the battle: "And he said, "O, full of deceit and all mischief, you child of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness. Will you not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord? And now behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you shall be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness. And he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand. Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord."

That was very impressive. You and I do not have miracle working powers such as Paul had. Paul was capable of having this kind of power and not abusing it. Most of us probably would not be. But Paul met the opposition with the power of the Word of God. And notice what his indignation was about. He was not indignant because he personally had been attacked. He was indignant because the Word of God had been attacked – because the living God had been attacked by the sorcerer. And that was the perspective on which Paul went into battle.

**Paul was Driven from Antioch**

Turn to Acts 13:49. On this occasion, Paul was driven from Antioch in Pisidia by persecution. He had come to bring eternal life to these people. Verse 49: "And the Word of the Lord was published throughout the region." People got the Word: "But the Jews stirred up the devout and honorable women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their borders." They literally threw them out: "But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Spirit."

Here's an interesting reaction again. These are the swine that we were talking about a little earlier today. Here are people to whom Paul has brought the enlightenment of eternal life through trusting Christ as personal Savior. They understand the message, and the Jews hate him for it. So, the Jews stir up certain important women who bore some influence in this area, and other leaders, and were able to get Paul thrown out of the territory. What does Paul do? Does he stand across their lines, and say, "Same to you, fella?" If you don't want to believe the gospel, it's OK with me. Just go to hell." What could he say? We could get very powerful here as to what he should have said, and how he could have carried on: "Hang it on your nose, you dodos." We could think of wonderful things to say to these people. Did they deserve it? Yes, they deserved it. What does Paul say? "I'm sorry. You've made a very great mistake. And I'm demonstrating to you that, while I regret what is going to happen to you down the line in the lake of fire, it won't be my fault. And he demonstrated that by kicking the dust off his sandals, demonstrating, in this act, that he was free of any responsibility toward them, and he was leading them to the consequences of their rejection.

So, the next time somebody rejects the gospel, turn around and knock your shoes on the ground as you walk off. It'll impress them. And if they ask you why, tell them: "This is my way of demonstrating to you that I am no longer responsible for where you are going to spend eternity, and it's going to be bad, buddy. I have only one last word of advice to you. Don't die, because it's going to be bad if you do.

**Paul is Abused**

Turn to Acts 14:1-7. Here Paul is assaulted in Iconium: "And it came to pass in Iconium that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spoke, that a great multitude, both of the Jews and also the Greeks believed. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren. A long time, therefore, they abode there, speaking boldly in the Lord, who gave testimony unto the Word of His grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands. And the multitude of the city was divided. And part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles. And when there was an assault made, both of the gentiles and also the Jews, with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, they were aware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and into the region that lies about them. And there they preached the gospel."

Here again, abuse was received at the hands of people to whom they had opened the marvels of eternal life. And again, the opponents, stirring up other people against them, ganged up on them, so that they were under attack, and had to flee. And when it says, "They had to flee," that means so they wouldn't end up dead. They were fleeing for their lives.

What was the result? Discouragement? Distress? No, they were delighted that they had had an opportunity to proclaim the Word of God. And wherever they went, they kept on telling the message. They kept preaching the gospel.

**Paul is Stoned to Death**

In Acts 14:19-20, the worst happens to the apostle Paul. This is something that you and I have never experienced. Finally, there comes physical attack. In this case, Paul is stoned to death: "And there came there certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium who persuaded the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead. Nevertheless, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city, and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe."

As we compare this passage with the part of 2 Corinthians 12, where the apostle Paul discovers an experience that he had, where he saw heaven itself, and saw the very throne room of God, and was indeed a very personal observer of the grand and glorious future that was to be his, and which on that occasion, God said, "Now I let this, Paul, because I want to encourage you that this is real. With all the flak you're taking, I do not want you to get discouraged, but I do know that you're going to have a hard time not getting emotional about this, and saying things, and telling people what you have seen up here, but you must not do that. Don't go beyond telling people that heaven is a great place, but don't go too far, because they'll all be committing suicide on us to get on up there." That is a very serious sin. You should not do that. Life is to be taken by God.

So, He said, "In order to help you remember, I'm going to give you a physical ailment. I'm going to permit Satan to do this to you. And every time you feel this twinge of pain, it's going to be a reminder to keep mum about what you saw up here." On this occasion, therefore, it is my impression that the apostle Paul indeed *was* stone. It's very hard to have a gang of people throwing big rocks at you (at your head, and every bone in your body) such that you don't end up with bones broken all over you, and your head smashed. And life is just literally crushed out of you. It would be very hard to go through that, and for them to have failed to kill you. What happened here was the miracle of a resurrection after Paul had had that marvelous experience of seeing heaven itself.

**Paul's Reaction to Abuse**

What did he do? Act with bitterness, and said, "That's it? I'm through with this with this missionary work. I've had it. I'm not going to do this anymore." No, he planned now where he would go next time.

In Acts 15, at Antioch in Syria, his grace teaching was opposed by the legalists in the church there. The apostle Paul was the great teacher of grace. And remember that the reason he was such a great teacher of grace is because, after he was saved, he spent three years out there in the Arabian Desert with just him and the Lord Jesus Christ, who was teaching him all these great things about the church, in distinction from Israel, that are recorded in the New Testament epistles. It was there that the Lord Jesus was explaining to Paul how Israel had its program, and God would yet fulfill those promises and those covenants, from Abraham on down, and would pick up the nation, but that now something new was going to be done in the body of Christ, the church. That's where the Lord Jesus Christ explained to Paul how to instruct so as to avoid the mistake of amillennialism and of postmillennialism, and to make it clear that Jesus Christ was coming back to create a millennium, so that the premillennial view was what Paul was to teach, and which he so effectively did. Paul knew what the grace of God was all about. He knew the distinction between Israel and the church.

So, in Acts 15:1-2, we read, "And certain men who came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, 'Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved. When, therefore, Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem, unto the apostles and elders about the question. Here was Paul, teaching, and being attacked. He was teaching that salvation has no human element involved: "It is nothing that you do, but it is all of what God does." These legalists said, "No, you're wrong. There will be no male that goes to heaven unless he goes through the Mosaic right of circumcision." Paul says, "You're wrong. Out in the desert, Jesus explained to me that Judaism is dead. For now, it is put aside, and the era of Christianity is based upon the free working of the grace of God."

Notice verse 5: "And there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees who believed, saying that it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the Law of Moses." So, the apostle Paul, who knew what he was talking about, was being snapped at by these characters who did not know what they were talking about. And that is when you really need the grace of God. When you know what you're talking about, and when you are a student of the Word who understands the Word of God, and then you get these clowns who come on charging in, ridiculing and attacking, that's what you are very much inclined to respond to evil with evil. And that's where Christian majority is really demanded. And the apostle Paul had it.

**The Fortune Teller is Saved**

Notice Acts 16:19. At Philippi, Paul again suffered physical abuse for teaching the Word of God. Here in verse 19, a girl, who had been a fortune teller, and made a lot of money for her masters, because the demons were able to give information about people. The demons were able to arrange the situations of peoples' lives so that they could predict what was happening. And then the demons executed what they had predicted. Everybody said, "This is wonderful. This girl really has a power from the gods." When she became saved, because Paul cast the demon out of her, the demon was no longer there, and the girl could no longer tell anybody's future or fortune. And this enraged her masters. That's the background.

**Paul is Jailed in Philippi**

Acts 16:19: "And when her master saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace and unto the rulers, and brought them unto the magistrates, saying, 'These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city, and teach customs which are not lawful for us to receive; neither to observe, being Romans.' And the multitude rose up together against them. And the magistrates tore off their clothes, and commanded to beat them. And when they had laid many strikes upon them, they cast them into the prison, charging the jailer to keep them safely; who, have received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks."

Here in the city of Philippi, they are beaten for having done such a wonderful thing as freeing this girl from a filthy, vile demon, and who now had her eyes set upon the living God, and her masters were indignant. They brought down this kind of abuse upon Paul and Silas. You know the rest of the story. What was their reaction? They're there sitting in stocks. They're hurting. Their bodies are cut. What a terrible thing to do to somebody who has just opened up eternal life to a lot of people. Instead, the jailer, who knows that his life will be paid if these people escape, puts these two men into the inner prisons, and then puts them in stocks so that they cannot move. They are immobile and hurting. At midnight, they start singing hymns.

Right away, the jailer knows that something is very strange here. Well, you know the rest of the story. He found out how strange indeed this situation was with the earthquake and the release of these prisoners, and yet they did not flee, and the Philippians jailer was converted, along with his family.

So, here's a man who is abused. What's his reaction? Returning evil; shouting insults; or, berating the people who were such ingrates? No. The apostle Paul always look beyond people, and he knew where they were going. And it was so sad that he did not have the heart to do anything but pity them except.

**Paul is Forced to Flee from Thessalonica**

In Acts 17:5, he is forced to flee from Thessalonica: "But the Jews who did not believe, moved with envy, took unto them certain vile fellows (who were the baser sort), and gathered a company, and set all the city in an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people. And when they did not find them, they threw Jason and certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying: 'These that have turned the world upside down are come here also, whom Jason has received. And these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying, 'There is another king, one Jesus.'' And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city when they heard these things. And when they had taken security of Jason and the others, they let them go.

So, here the apostle Paul was being misrepresented. That makes you mad too. Here they are saying that Jesus was suggesting that Caesar was not to be the king; there was a king to replace Caesar; and, that was Jesus Christ. And that's a misrepresentation. The kingdom of Jesus Christ is a future kingdom, and it is not the kingdom that was competing with Caesar. Jesus was not a king competing with Caesar. It was a false accusation. And they were angry at this man, Jason, who was willing to send hospitality to these men, and to listen to their message of eternal life.

**Paul and Silas in Berea**

The result was that Paul and Silas had to beat it out of town to the city of Berea. Notice Acts 17:10. And this is the context of the passage from which we have named our church: Berean Memorial Church, in memory of the people of Berea who believed: "And the Brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night onto Berea, who, coming there, went into the synagogue of the Jews. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the Word with all readiness of mind, and searched the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so."

We have named our church Berean Memorial Church because we seek to emulate these two objectives: that we will be a people who receive the Word of God with all readiness of mind; we will be teachable; we will come to be taught; and, we will be open to doctrine. And secondly, we will be sure that the preacher is not conning us. We will search our Bibles so that we will confirm that what he says is really so. You are not a good Berean if you do not walk in here with a Bible in hand, and some of you, I notice, have not been doing that. And that's bad business. And just because you're a teenager does not excuse you from the fact that you are responsible for your own knowledge of the Word of God. You cannot enter the Word of God if you do not have a Bible.

Verse 12: "Therefore, many of them believed, also of honorable women who were Greeks, and of men, not a few. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the Word of God was preached by Paul at Berea, they came there also and stirred up the people. And then, immediately, the brethren sent away Paul to go, as it were, to the sea. But Silas and Timothy abode there still. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens, and, receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timothy to come to him with all speed, they departed."

**Paul is Forced to Flee from Berea**

So the apostle Paul had to flee from Berea because the gang up in Thessalonica, the Jewish mob, heard that Jews in Berea were listening and believing in Jesus Christ (listening to the gospel, and believing in Jesus Christ). So, they came down and stirred up trouble, and the riot again became so great that Paul could not stay in this city. And here again you could see that Paul has reason for really getting fed up with this hounding from city to city, under attack for doing what people really need to have done for them – explaining the Bible to them. But always there was a seed left behind, because he kept plugging away. He kept cranking out the Word. Always the seed was planted, and always there was a body of believers left behind to carry on notice.

**Paul in Athens**

Notice Acts 17:16. Paul has been sent on to Athens. Now here he really gets hurt. You must understand that Paul was a little different than the other apostles who were basically uneducated fishermen. They were good men, but without academic backgrounds. That was not true of Paul. Paul had university background. And furthermore, he had been the student of the Gamaliel, one of the all-time great teachers of the ancient world.

**Paul on Mars Hill**

So, Paul is anybody's equal when it comes to Greek philosophy. And on Mars Hill, outside the city of Athens, was the forum where the intellectuals gather to discuss the topics of the day, and to see if anybody could learn something new. Now that's the background. Acts 17:16: "Now while Paul waited for them at Athens (for his associates), his spirit was stirred in him when he saw the city wholly given over to idolatry. Therefore, he disputed in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the marketplace daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans and of the Stoics encountered him. And some said, 'What will this babbler say?' Others said, 'He seems to be a setter for the strange gods,' because he preached unto them Jesus and the resurrection."

Well, right away, these intellectuals look upon Paul as one of those stupid, backwoods, redneck fundamentalists. And he was. He was a stupid, backwoods, redneck fundamentalist, as are all of you, because he believed the Bible to be the inerrant Word of God. He functioned, of course, out of the Old Testament at that time, but it was the Word of God that he was proclaiming. These super intellectuals look down upon this man who believed in some God called Jesus, who had died, and been brought back to life.

So, they took him, and brought him unto the Areopagus, the forum area, saying, "'May we know what this new doctrine of which you speak is? Tell us about this new doctrine. For you bring certain strange things to our ears. We would know, therefore, what these things mean.' For all the Athenians and strangers who were there, spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new things."

So, he starts talking to them about the altar he saw that they had to an unknown god. They have an altar to every god under the sun in Athens. And then, in case they missed one, they put one up to the unknown God, to cover him too. Notice in verse 29, after he talks about the true God: "The one God who has made all mankind, the Creator" – not the evolutionary concept, but the creation concept. That's what Paul is talking about here. He says, "You guys are wrong here. You're intellectuals, but you're ignorant intellectuals, because you are operating out of the evolutionary thesis." This is where evolution began: "And the truth of the matter is, you should be operating out of the creation thesis of a living God who produced everything you see, including yourselves.

**Paul Preaches the Resurrection**

So, in verse 29, Paul says, "For as much then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that God is like gold or silver or stone, carved by art and man's device. And the times of this ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he has ordained, concerning which he has given assurance to all men, in that He has raised Him from the dead."

Uh-oh, that that's it. Now he has really done it. He has talked about the one thing that every philosopher standing on that hill that day knew was impossible. No human being could ever come back to life. Philosophically, they have proven that. Philosophically, they had established it. There was no question about it. And this joker (this fundamentalist preacher) says that God has raised someone from the dead – a Man by Whom He will now judge all the earth. He is referring to Jesus Christ.

**Paul is Mocked**

Their immediate reaction is in verse 32: "And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked." Now I remind you that Paul is an educated man of great experience, and these people are making fun of him. That's not easy to take: "And others said, 'We'll hear you again of this matter," which is like patting him on the head and saying, "Very interesting, sonny. Come on back again and we'll talk about this another time: "So, Paul departed from among them." That's a horrible verse. He did the right thing. He had now identified the swine, and he has cast no more pearls of doctrine to them.

"Nevertheless, certain men joined him and believed, among whom were Dionysius, the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them." Hurrah for them. God's grace had won some, while the intellectuals, now at this moment, writhe in the agony of Hades, wishing that they had listened more carefully to Paul, and not treated him with such contempt.

However, Paul's reaction was not abusive. That's the point here. His reaction was: "OK, I've told you. You do what you want with it. You have been informed, and I'm shoving off." And he left them with that responsibility.

At Acts 18:7, we have another example. Here in Corinth, his presence and teaching caused insurrection. Now you must remember that Corinth was the good-time city of the ancient world. It was the vilest, filthiest, most degraded city on the face of the earth. Every corrupt and perverted sexual practice known to mankind was practiced in the temples at Corinth. This is the city now that Paul enters. He looks around him. Here is this man bearing the torch of the light of the Word of God, and proclamation of the gospel. How in the world are they going to treat him?

**God Speaks to Paul**

Acts 18:7: "And he departed from there, and entered into a certain man's house named Titus Justus, one who worshiped God, whose house was next door to the synagogue. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and, many of the Corinthians – hearing, believed, and were baptized. Then spoke the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision: 'Be not afraid, but speak, and do not hold your peace."

God, knowing what was coming, feels that He must encourage Paul. In those days, God did communicate like this. Paul could say what you and I cannot really say. Paul could really say, "The Lord said to me. The Lord told me." That is bunko when you say it, unless you say, "Te Word of God has told me. The Word of God has indicated to me." Then, indeed, you may say that God has spoken to you via the Word of God. But do not claim that you are receiving some kind of direct communications from God. You may say that: "On the basis of what I understand of the Word of God, and what I understand is the will of God, my heart is inclined to do this, and to believe this. Paul here, indeed, had a direct communication from God because Paul is going to face something that would indeed cause him to have the reaction to return evil for evil.

Remember that one of the greatest evils that Paul could have done was to abandon his mission. You don't have to say nasty words and act ugly to people to be guilty of evil in response. Just collapse. Just let people put you under attack for your ministry; for your witness; for your stand for the Lord; knuckle in; slither off; and, leave the field of battle. That is the greatest of all evil indeed.

So, verse 9 says: "Then the Lord spoke the Word to Paul in the night by a vision: 'Be not afraid, but speak and do not hold your peace, for I am with you. No man shall sit on you to hurt you, for I have many people in the city." I know that was comforting to Paul. He'd been beaten. He gives us, in one of the Corinthians letters, the list of all of the times he had taken physical beatings, and suffering, and hunger, and abandonment, and without shelter. And it's hard to say, "Now, tomorrow I'm going to talk to this crowd, and they're going to hit me again. They're going to hound me again." That's intimidating. That's why the Lord says, "Don't be afraid. I'm not going to let them hurt you. I want you to really sound off."

"So, he continued there in this man's house a year and 6 months, teaching the Word of God among them. And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made an attack with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, saying, 'This fellow persuaded men to worship God contrary to the Law."

**Paul Faces Evil in Ephesus**

So, here again, Paul was faithfully doing the job of teaching doctrine, and he is misrepresented by his attackers that he is not teaching the truth about the Word of God. In Acts 19:23, the whole city of Ephesus goes up in riots against the apostle Paul. This is an interesting example of facing evil. How should you respond? Acts 19:23: "And at the same time, there arose no small stir about that way." "That way" is referring to the gospel of grace – salvation: "For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, who made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain onto the craftsmen." The goddess of Ephesus was Diana. They made little silver statues and sold them, because the people used these statues in worship very much as Roman Catholics used the statues of saints today for their worship.

Verse 25: "Whom he called together with the workmen of like occupation and said, 'Sirs, we know that this craft we have is our wealth. If people don't buy silver statues of Diana for their worship centers, and for their shrines at home, we're going to go broke. Verse 25: "Moreover, you see and hear that not alone in Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul has persuaded and turned away many people, saying that they are no gods which are made with hands. So, not only this, our craft, is in danger to be set at nought, but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and all the world worships."

Isn't it so much like today? Isn't this a real political statement here? It doesn't raise the question of whether Paul is telling the truth, but only the fact that, if people believe what he is saying, their business will be hurt, and they'll lose their source of profit. It doesn't matter whether some factory isn't making money, don't allow the owners to close it. And don't allow them to close it without giving long-term notice, so they can be sure to really go broke, and not be able to survive to create new jobs in some other way. You thought all the crazies were just in our day. No, they've been back here too.

Verse 28: "And when they heard these things, they were all full of wrath, and cried, saying, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.' And the whole city was filled with confusion. And having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theater." And you can go to Ephesians today, and you can rush with one accord into that theater yourself, because they have it there, uncovered, that these people rushed into.

"And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples did not permit him." Paul said, let me go and talk to them. They've got this all wrong. Let me tell them. I'll give them my testimony." But the people said, "No, Paul, this is dangerous. This is a riot. They're out for blood"

"And certain of the chief of Asia, who were his friends, sent unto him, beseeching him, that he would not venture into the theater. Some therefore cried one thing and some another, for the assembly was in confusion, and the greater part did not know for what reason they were come together." How political. After a while, the rally got so bad, part of them didn't know what in the world they were there cheering about or yelling about. They're all yelling, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians. What's this all about? I don't know. Great is Diana of the Ephesians. Do you know what's going on?" And they just kept yelling and carrying on. It sounds like a political convention nominating a president.

Verse 33: "And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forth, and Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defense unto the people. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice, for about the space of two hours, cried out, 'Great is Diana of the Ephesians.'" Now you got to be a real crazy to stand yelling, "Great is Diana of the Ephesians" for two hours. The only mitigating, valuable result of all this was that they probably couldn't talk for several days thereafter.

Vere 35: "And when the town clerk had quieted the people, he said, 'You men of Ephesus, what man is there that does not know that the city of Ephesus is the worshiper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter? And seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, you ought to be quiet and do nothing rashly.'" Here, in their error, they were saying, "We know we're right. Don't talk to us. What are you getting upset about? We know that this statue (that we manufactured) fell from the sky to us at the hands of Jupiter. Why are you even talking to these crazies – these Christians? Forget them." They were dismissing truth with a lie.

"'For you have brought here these men who are neither robbers of the temple nor yet blasphemers of your goddess. Wherefore, if Demetrius and the craftsmen who are with him have a matter against any man, the Law is open, and there are deputies. Let them accuse one another. But if you inquire anything concerning other matters, it shall be determined a lawful assembly. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar – there being no cause for which we may give an account of this concourse.' And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly."

So, the man who was in a position of authority pointed out: "You're attacking a man who has done us no harm; who has only expressed his opinion; and, who has told us what he thinks, and we don't believe what he thinks, and what do we care what he says? But if you keep pushing this, you will get in trouble with the authorities for creating a riot."

So, the apostle Paul was not permitted to speak. His life was spared. And again, he was treated as a simple nincompoop. This was a prime condition for retaliating with indignation and evil.

We have one more in Acts 21. Here, Paul is in the sacred city of Jerusalem. He has looked forward with great anticipation to spend this time in Jerusalem. He has brought an offering for the poor saints of Jerusalem who are suffering a famine condition. In Acts 21:27, Paul has been trying to establish the fact that he is really not opposed to anything of the righteous principles of the Old Testament Scriptures, but that he is really preaching the fulfillment of what those Old Testament Scriptures promised in the form of a Messiah Savior. Then he makes a serious mistake. Some of his well-meaning friends say, "Paul, why don't you go in the temple and take one of these seven-day vows – these Nazirite vows. Then all of these people will see that you're really not opposed to the Jews; that you're still a faithful Jew; and, that you still respect the Old Testament Scriptures." And Paul, unfortunately, made the serious mistake of listening to that bad advice. He who knew life under grace should have said, "No, I cannot compromise by pretending that there is any virtue or value in my performing these religious ceremonies before God. For all of these things have now been accomplished by Christ, and I would be contradicting myself to do this.

However, he went along. That decision cost Paul four years of freedom. Out of this event, a sincere attempt to show that he was not an enemy of Israel, but its greatest friend, came his incarceration, including two years here at Ceasarea Philippi, eventually, where they took him for protective custody, while they're trying to sort all this out. And finally, what he saw that it was going nowhere, he said, "I'm appealing my case to Rome. I want to argue this before Nero." As a Roman citizen, it was his right to do that. So, that's why they put him on the boat; took him across the Mediterranean; and, landed him (among other adventures) in Rome. But it took two years under house arrest, with a personal guard of the elite Praetorian Guard watching him, and guarding him, and chained to him. It took two years more before his case came before Nero. And finally, he was declared not guilty, and freed for a short period. Indeed, we got the great prison epistles out of that time when he was in prison. And God made the time profitable. But it completely restricted his freedom of movement in the ministry because he made the mistake of listening to the legalists.

Well, here in verse 27: "And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews, who were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, crying out, 'Men of Israel, help. This is the man that teaches all men everywhere against the people, and the Law, and this place; and, further, brought Greeks also into the temple, and has polluted this holy place' (which he did not do). For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus, an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple. And all the city was moved. And the people ran together, and they took Paul and drew them out of the temple once the doors were shut."

Through verse 36, you have the attacks against him – the misrepresentation, while the Roman soldiers are trying to keep Paul from being torn limb from limb. And finally the crowd yelled, "Away with him. Away with him."

The result of it was their having to take him into custody. In Acts 23:11, Paul is now really down in the mouth. This thing has turned out so badly. Everything has come apart from what he had attempted and hoped to do. But again, the Lord comes to his comfort: "And the night following, the Lord stood by him and said, 'Be of good cheer, Paul, for as you have testified of Me in Jerusalem, so, must you bear witness also at Rome.'" So, the Lord said, "This is bad, Paul. But I want you to take courage. You've been mistreated. I don't want you to react in the wrong way. And I want you to know that out of this, you, who have spoken here in Jerusalem, are going to be able to speak at the hub of the ancient world, in the city of Rome itself.

These examples out of the life of Paul: a man who is doing good; who is doing what is right; and, who is under attack, and who yet never responds to evil with evil. The Christian is a law-abiding person, but when he is involved in conflicts, it is because they have been instigated by the enemies of God and the enemies of the Word of God.

This is the principle which is set forth for us in Hebrews 12:14, where we read, "Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord God."

God the Holy Spirit, in Matthew 5:9, you will remember, pronounces a special blessing upon the peacemakers.

Romans 12:18: "If it be possible, as much as within your control, live peaceably with all mankind." The apostle Paul is a great, great example of someone who did just that.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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