



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 12:13-21

"Four Triplets of Duties"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The scripture reading is from Romans chapter 12 and we're reading this morning verse 13 through verse 21, as the apostle continues his exposition of the practical side of the ministry that he has been inculcating through the principles that have preceded. You should smile when I say practical because, you know, one of the things that I've been saying all along is that the most practical thing that we can have is the doctrine of the word of God. And practical is not really a good adjective to describe these chapters in which the apostle inculcates the issues of the truth that he has been unfolding. Perhaps ethical will do. But the apostle is continuing his ethical injunctions addressed to believers and he writes in the 13th verse of Romans 12,

"Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality, Bless them who persecute you: bless, and cursed not. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. (That word honest now connotes something slightly different from the text at this point which has simply 'provide noble things in the sight of all men.')

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably

with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

In our studies in the Epistle to the Romans, we've been looking at the latter part of the 12th chapter of the epistle, which is the beginning of the ethical section of the Epistle to the Romans. And the subject for this morning is a continuation of that particular part of the 12th chapter in which the apostle sets forth a number of triplets of duties. It is rather unusual that these verses are arranged in triplets, and I think you will notice that as we continue the exposition of this section. So the subject for this morning is "Four Triplets of Duties," and we hope to finish the 12th chapter.

Benjamin Breckenridge Warfield was one of the better, perhaps in some minds the best, of the systematic theologians of the 20th Century, at least in the English speaking world, and he is the author of a number of very interesting works dealing primarily with the person and work of Christ, but with other subjects as well. Warfield was the professor of systematic theology at Princeton Theological Seminary. He began in the right place. He began in the south. He was born in Kentucky, but he migrated north, and I know that our Yankee friends will say he knew which way was better. And so he went east and north and became one of the really outstanding men of the 20th century among evangelicals.

He's written, I say, a number of interesting things and one of the things that he wrote some years ago, I have always enjoyed reading and I've read it more than once. In the midst of this work called "The Right of Systematic Theology," Professor Warfield says, "What, after all, is peculiar to Christianity is not the religious sentiment and its working, but its message of salvation, in a word, its doctrine. To be indifferent to doctrine is thus but another way of saying we are indifferent to Christianity." Now that is an important

thing and we have through the years in Believers Chapel, in the ministers of the word of God who have ministered here, we've sought to emphasize the importance of biblical doctrine or of systematic theology. And we've tried to lay a great deal of stress upon it. Now Warfield knew, as we all know, that good systematic theology or good biblical doctrine leads to Christian life and a life according to that doctrine. In fact, if we were simply studying doctrine in order to study doctrine, then of course we ourselves would not think that that was necessarily the greatest thing in the world. But we study doctrine in order that that doctrine may have its issue in a certain form of life.

Warfield knew that quite well, and he went on to say some things about that that I will refer to in a moment. Why I'm saying all of this is that it's so often the case in our evangelicalism today that systematic theology is the object of, in my opinion, ill-advised attacks, because ultimately it is an attack upon Christianity. Warfield was right "To be indifferent to doctrine is thus but another way of saying we are indifferent to Christianity."

The Bible is a book of doctrine, in fact, the Bible is simply a compilation of theological propositions, Warfield says in another of his works. And so when we attack doctrine, we are attacking really Christianity, attacking the Bible. So when a person says, "We're not interested in theology, we're interested in life." you can just mark it down, that's an attack on Christianity. Now the individual may not mean that, but that's ultimately what it does mean.

This was suggested to me by a title of a chapter of a book that I read not long ago. It was entitled "How to Hug" and was suggested by a story that the author once heard. A man was walking down the street and as he passed a used bookstore, he saw a book in the window with the title "How to Hug." And he was of somewhat romantic nature and so he went to buy the book. To his chagrin he discovered that it was a certain volume of an encyclopedia and covered the subjects "how" to "hug". [Laughter] Now the author went on to say that he had often thought of the church like that, that everyone knows that the church is a place where love ought to be manifested, and many people

come to church hoping to find a demonstration of love, only to discover an encyclopedia on theology.

Well, I guess I'm a little sensitive to that because we do preach systematic theology so often here, not only in this meeting, but in our adult Sunday school classes, and in fact in all that we do at Believers Chapel. And if we didn't have any excuse at all, we have a good one in the fact that it is so much neglected by the Christian church that we have to over emphasize it in order to even out the proper stress upon systematic theology as over against its issue in the ethical side of our faith.

Well, he went on to say, "Thank God that hugs are returning to the churches. In the early church the Christians actually greeted one another with a holy kiss. You don't see that too often these days," he says, "but perhaps it's coming back." Well, I don't object of that. The only thing I object to is that "how to hug" has replaced the study of Christian doctrine in the church, and unfortunately, the end result of that has to be a lower level of Christian living.

The apostle does not fail to stress the ethical outworkings of his doctrine. He does not fail to stress that out of true biblical Christian doctrine, there does come Christian love. But he knows that one must lay a foundation, and that foundation for the ethical response in Christianity is in Christian doctrine.

Warfield goes on to say that "with Paul, doctrine was extremely important and it was always first with him, but then life followed that." And he said the transition at the opening of the 12th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans is a typical example of Paul's practice. He spends eleven chapters in the Epistle to the Romans giving a doctrinal exposition, and then follows the eleven chapters of doctrinal exposition by five chapters of precepts that are to succeed the study of the doctrine. And he introduces it by one of his, to use Warfield's expression which he borrowed from someone else because he put it in quotes, "the eleven chapters are followed by one of his tremendous therefores." "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a

living sacrifice." So the exposition of the mercies of God is followed by the presentation of our bodies as a living sacrifice.

It is this tremendous "therefore" that marks the transition from doctrine to life and the apostle does not fail to stress both of these things. And we do not fail, I don't think, to stress both of these things. But we want to be sure, since so many have neglected the study of biblical doctrine, that it be shown to be the necessary foundation of a Biblical Christian living.

The theme of verse 9 through verse 21, in which we have a number of ethical precepts, is probably given by the first line of verse 9, "Let love be without hypocrisy." And so the apostle expounds a non-hypocritical love with reference to the church in verse 9 through verse 13, and then with reference to the world primarily in verse 14 through verse 21. "Let love be without hypocrisy," in other words, let there be reality in the Christian life. "Hypocrisy," a French writer once said, "is the homage which vice pays to virtue."

The Greek word for hypocrisy is a word that means "to judge under" literally. And it was used particularly of actors who put on a mask. And so they spoke or they judged under the mask. Their mask was the mask of a certain character that they played in their plays. But the voices were the voices of individuals who were not actually connected with the mask. And so to speak out of a mask, or from under a mask, is the background of the word hypocrisy. So a hypocrite is a person who has a mask on, and he speaks contrary to his mask, or he speaks out of a different locale.

Well, the apostle here has just stated in verse 12, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing diligent in prayer;" and we looked at that in our last study. So now we move from the innermost region of communion with God to the wide field of duties in relation to men, or as another student of Romans has said "from the secrecies to the publicities." The secrecies, "Rejoicing in hope; patient in tribulation; continuing diligently

in prayer;" but now the publicities of, "Distributing to the necessity of the saints; given to hospitality" and the series of other injunctions that follow.

There are four of these triplets, and I'd like to just spend our time this morning on the four of them. The first is found in verse 13 through verse 15, and it can be called the law of concern. Possibly we could call it the law of love, but when we say the law of love we mean biblical love. We don't mean the sentimental, mushy gushy kind of love which the world thinks of as love. We mean love that is in accord with righteousness and holiness.

The apostle writes in verse 13 of the law of concern in needs, "Distributing to the necessity of saints; given to hospitality," or as The New International Version says, "Share with God's people who are in need; practice hospitality." Sometimes we forget that in our affluent 20th century evangelical church. Most of the evangelicals over this particular land, in fact over the Western world, get along quite well materially. It was not so in the early church. Individuals had great needs. It's not surprising the apostle should write share in the needs of the saints and practice hospitality.

Sometimes we forget that there are, however, occasions among us in which people need some very definite material help. We have Social Security. We have welfare. We have unemployment insurance. We have Medicare and Medicaid. But these things are not necessarily enough. And there are individuals and Christians who have great needs.

Now, the apostle says, "given to hospitality" according to the authorized version text that I'm reading, but strictly speaking, the Greek term is a word that means "to follow after or pursue." It suggests that not only are we to be responsive to needs that are brought to us, but we should go out of our way in order to seek out opportunities to practice our hospitality.

Now, in the ancient times it was particularly necessary because hospitality was hard to find. You didn't have any hospitality motel inns on the highways. In fact, the

ancient inns were notorious as being dirty places and above all immoral places. And you will find, for example, in one of Aristophanes plays, Pericles, one of the characters, asks his companion where they're going to lodge for the night and the answer comes back "where the fleas are fewest." So they had flea bags in those days and it was very helpful for Christians as they traveled around the field that when they went into a strange place, hospitality would be given to them.

Plato speaks of innkeepers being like a pirate who holds his guests to ransom. And they had, what were called in those days, guest's friendships. Over generations certain families had made arrangements with one another to exercise hospitality. For example, let's just assume there was a family by the name of Johnson in Rome, and then a family by the name of Smith in Jerusalem. Well, they might have worked out an arrangement, guest friendship, by which they agreed to exercise hospitality towards members of the families. As this arrangement went on through the years, individuals and their families would be unknown to the others. And so they identified themselves by means of what were called "tallies", that is an object was broken and one part was given to one family and another part to the other family. So, in case the Johnson family, some member of it, which might be a rather large tribe now, wanted to take a trip to Jerusalem and wanted to be sure they had hospitality, they would take this object which had been broken, and when they reached Jerusalem, they would seek out the family that they had this arrangement with, and would present it. And then when that family would take its part of the object and compare it, if they matched, well then they would extend hospitality to them.

Well, we don't have need for things like that, but we do have need for hospitality. And so the apostle tells us that we should share with God's people who are in need, and we should pursue hospitality. That's one of the ways in which our Christian life may be manifest.

Now, sometimes we tend to think that our Christian life is manifested by our growth in the knowledge of systematic theology. Well, that's important, but now it is good for us to see how our systematic theology issues in our daily life. And so here is an opportunity for the saints of God to do the things that please the Lord. It's a very concrete kind of thing. Seek out opportunities to exercise hospitality to others. Now, that's one part of that fourth triplet of this section, the first that we're looking at this morning.

The second one is found in verse 14, "Bless them who persecute you: bless, and curse not." This is the middle of the first triplet. Now, he's speaking principally of duties to society, not to Christians, when he says, "Bless them who persecute you: bless, and curse not." Of course, if you should happen to be persecuted by some Christian, well then this would apply. But it's evident the apostle is thinking about those who are not Christians when he says, "Bless them who persecute you: bless, and curse not." So, the duty is to society generally.

This even is something that comes right down to the daily life, the daily round, the experiences that we have even in, shall we say it, Dallas traffic. So when someone cuts in on you, as one commentator said, "You don't roll down the window and shout out 'melon head!'" [Laughter] That's what they do in California. In Boston they have things worse than that to say to you, and in case you've never gone to Boston, you've not really seen that historic city until you've also traveled on its roads and listened to its taxi drivers when you do something that displeases them. Down here in Texas, we usually just say, "Idiot" and we don't bother to lower the window because it's too hot to do that. [Laughter] But anyway, what Paul says is, "Bless them who persecute you: bless, and curse not" as a good opportunity to carry out the application of the word of God. And we do have plenty of opportunities down here in the state of Texas.

Now in the 15th verse, the apostle gives us the third side of this triplet, the law concern, for he says "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep."

Here is a word that simply means really "to adjust to other's moods and tragedies." We rejoice with those who rejoice, we weep with those who weep. Now we've noticed, no doubt all of us, how much easier it is to weep with those who weep, than it is to rejoice with those who rejoice.

Chrysostom noticed that fifteen hundred years ago. He remarked that it was easier to weep with those who weep than to rejoice with those that rejoice because nature itself prompts us to weep with those who weep. But envy stands in the way of the latter. We don't really like it nearly so much when some great blessing has happened to one of our friends in the Lord. We don't like it nearly so much to rejoice with them in their good fortune. But we find it much easier to weep with them. In fact, sometimes it's not even the right kind of thing to do to be cheerful when others are having difficulties. I remember also reading in one commentator who said that there is nothing worse than a cheerful person when something has gone wrong with you. Well Paul really what he means here is adjust to circumstances. When there is rejoicing, rejoice. When there is an occasion for a weep, weep; in other words, be the kind of person who has some empathy with the Christian brother. Well, that's the first of the triplets. It's the law of concern.

Now the apostle speaks of the law of selflessness in the 16th verse, and notice again, it's arranged as a kind of triplet. "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." There is a verbal resemblance here in that 16th verse that we cannot really capture in English, but the word, which has as its root the meaning of "mind", is found three times here. "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate." And then the word for wise is also related to mind. "Be not wise in your own conceits." All three of these clauses of verse 16 deal with mental attitudes and their explanatory of the preceding commands. In other words, the inward fountain of the external outflow of the Christian life results from what is stated here in these mental attitudes. "Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, condescend

to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." And if this verse is one that we are able to live up to in measure, we shall find the others naturally flowing out.

First of all the apostle speaks of the law of selflessness in harmony. He says, "Be of the same mind one toward another." Now, I don't think that the apostle is calling upon us to see all things exactly alike. This is not the same idiom as seeing eye-to-eye as F. F. Bruce points out. To be of the same mind speaks of a deeper unity, but one which does not necessarily reflect itself in identity of viewpoint on particular issues. In other words, I don't think that the apostle here is saying something that is opposed to a wide diversity of opinion.

One of the commentators has illustrated this by the little pools of water that remain on the shore when the tide has gone out. But when the tide comes in, those pools of water now become one vast amount of water. So that when the tide of the oneness that we have in Jesus Christ dominates us, then those differences, true differences, true divergences of viewpoint exist, they are not the most significant thing. We will never reach the place where all Christians think alike on all points. Whether that's good or bad, well, that's for you to decide, but at least we know in this life, there will always be divergences of viewpoints. It would be nice if everybody agreed with us, but nevertheless, it's something that is impossible.

The apostle, however, says that it is possible for us to be of the same mind one toward another, that is, when we come to the truly great fundamental issues that mark us out from the world by. Even Arminians and Calvinists can get together around the person of our Lord Jesus Christ and the salvation that is ours in grace through him. Now the apostle continues "Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate."

A most recent commentator on the Epistle to the Romans, on the Greek text, has commented upon the fact that it is likely the apostle did say "to be carried away by men of low estate." But others have taken the view that the apostle is speaking of things in the light of "mind not hide things, but be carried away by the low things," and they have

suggested that what this means is that the apostle is exhorting us to fill the lowest spheres of life. In other words, it's not necessarily proper for all of us to have great ambition to be the last word in our particular sphere of activity.

We frequently tell Christians that you should be the best kind of lawyer or the best kind of doctor, or the best kind of professor, or the best of whatever profession you may be involved in. But sometimes it's better for us to make a decision to be carried away by the lower things of life, for ambition does make it often a fact that such who are consumed by it find that it becomes a festering disease within their inmost being and the interests of the Lord God suffer as a result of it. There is something to be received when a person is carried away by the low things of life. Like Bunyan's shepherd boy who discovered that the flower of heart's ease grew in the lowly valley. And so some of the greatest experiences of life are the experiences of those who have not been consumed by ambition to the extent that the Lord's things have been neglected. "Mind not high things, but be carried away by the low things."

And finally, "Be not wise in your own conceits," literally, "be not wise with your selves." The apostle is speaking about intellectual conceit so easy for us to fall into. Mr. Moody met a man on the street one day who said to him, "You know, Mr. Moody, I'm a self-made man." Mr. Moody replied, "Young man, you've relieved the Almighty of a great responsibility. [Laughter]

The third of the triplets is found in verse 17 and 18 and it we might call the law of non-hostility. The apostle writes "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." These last words of this chapter from verse 17 through verse 21 deal mainly with duty in the face of hostility. We're lambs in the midst of wolves. And we have as the authority for that the Lord Jesus Christ. In more than one place he comments upon the fact that we are lambs and we are in the midst of wolves.

Now, in one sense, we who believe in the doctrine of the grace of God are especially lambs in the midst of wolves. You remember Thomas Erskine said that "Calvinism is a sheep in wolf's clothing while Arminianism is a wolf in sheep's clothing." I like that. I think that's true, because Arminianism comes to us with the natural reason. And we tend to think "yes that's right, that's right," but we discover once we embrace it, that it's really a wolf and contrary to the grace of God.

On the other hand, Calvinism comes to us with all of the outward apparently seeming hardness and coarseness of a God who elects on the basis of distinguishing grace. But ah, when we have come to an understanding of what it means that he has loved us, loved me and given himself for me, then that which appears to be a wolf becomes the most blessed kind of animal, the doctrine of the grace of God. What more wonderful thing can there be than to realize that God loved me and gave his son Jesus Christ for me. I'm interested in what he says here that I should do as one who has been so blessed by God.

This week I read a lengthy article in "Christianity Today" by Francis Schaeffer's son Frankie Schaeffer the fifth, the title of this article: "In Penetrating a Biased Press, Where Principles are Masked as Propaganda." It's really a protest on the part of Mr. Schaeffer over the fact that when Mr. Schaeffer's series of films had been presented, and particularly in Washington, the media reacted with a great deal of hostility to it. The media reacted with hostility, for one of the reasons these films, as you know, are antiabortion, and that's one of the issues of the day, and so consequently, the media reacted very negatively both in the Washington Post, the New York Times, Newsweek, Time, all.

And then since C. Everett Koop, Doctor Koop is the nominee of the President for the United States Surgeon General, since he was the nominee and associated with the film, that of course made the films even more a matter of propaganda. And so the attack against them was "all that these films are is just simply propaganda for that particular position." And so Mr. Schaeffer goes on to say that the United States TV and press

journalists use the same shallow glib technique with their own negative code words such as speaking about Koop and speaking about these films: "They were fundamentalist. They were pro-life. They were conservative. They were right wing." But on the other side, such positive code words were used as "pragmatic, moderate, pluralistic", and it's a protest by Frankie Schaeffer over the fact that the news media are not responding to, well, to the things that he feels are set forth in holy Scripture.

Well, that is no surprise. The Apostle Paul tells us "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness to him; neither can he know them, for they are spiritually discerned." Who expects the media to understand Christianity? If the media were a group of people committed to Christian principles and who had experienced the Christianity, then we could expect that they would understand and we could also listen with a great deal more interest when they were negative, because Christians can make mistakes and can look at things from an unscriptural viewpoint. But you cannot expect people who do not know Christianity to respond to it properly. They just do not understand it.

In fact, as we said last week, what happens is that when a person represents the Lord Jesus Christ, he cannot expect to be above his master and his master said, "The world has hated me and it will also hate you for the servant shall not be above his master." It is a continuation of the world's quarrel with Jesus Christ. So we should not be surprised. When we read the newspaper with a sense of humor, we can say "Ah, there is 1 Corinthians 2:14 again; there is Romans chapter 8 verses 7 and 8 again, the application of the word of God."

It's, you know what it is to me, it's one of the encouragements that the Bible is the word of God, that the media reacts the way it does. It is an encouragement in the sense that we have in the word of God the exact delineation of the principles that affect their activity. So then when we read here in verse 17 and verse 18, "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things noble in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as

lieth in you, live peaceably with all men," I know exactly why Paul is saying that, because it's so difficult for us who think that we do have some insight given us in grace from God to properly respond to the negative kinds of criticism that we've found.

In verse 17 when he says "Recompense to no man evil for evil," that incidentally is not something new. Socrates taught that, but unfortunately, Socrates was unable to impart a disposition to obey those injunctions. In Christianity, we have provided through the Holy Spirit who indwells all believers the power to fulfill the things that the apostle sets forth as imperatives. "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men."

That, by the way, implies that evil men do have a notion of what is morally correct, because he says, "Provide things noble in the sight of all men." It is a fact that the worst of men have rude senses of duty that top the attainment of the best of men. We do all of us know what is right and what is wrong. It is something implanted within us by the fact that we are created in the image of God. And the knowledge of the existence of God is the possession of every believer, of every person. But unfortunately, the Bible also says that that knowledge that we have is something that we hold down, that we fight against, that we repress and suppress until by the grace of God we are brought to the knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now this is a remarkable attitude the apostle says that we should have. "Recompense to no man evil for evil." It's very difficult for me not to respond to the Washington Post, to the New York Times or Time magazine. I take Time magazine; I take it in order to read what my enemies are saying. And it's very hard, it's very hard to read that magazine and respond, "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things noble in the sight of all men."

In fact, some people regard this as a kind of weakness. Thomas Paine said that Christianity when it inculcated things like this, inculcated the spirit of a spaniel. "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men." Now Christians cannot

live at peace with all men objectively. Objectively it's impossible. Our principles are contrary to the principles of the world. We have on the one hand, we have a Lord who follows the teaching of holy Scripture or whose whole desire is to inculcate that. And on the other hand, we have the world and the spirit of the world is lodged in its master Satan, and he operates according to his principles. So there can be objectively no peace between these two kingdoms, they are constantly at war with one another.

But subjectively the apostle says here, "If it be possible, as much as lieth in you." In other words, let not the cause of our difficulty with the world be in us, but let it be in the world's objective hatred of the principles of Christianity. There is a line, someone said it was a song, I've ever heard this song, but I know it simply as a little saying, "It takes two to tango." But it also takes two to tangle. One of the commentators says, "But let not that one be you."

And finally, the apostle in the last three verses gives us the last of the triplets, and this is the law of non-retaliation. It's a denial of our natural instincts. A dog stretches out its neck if you're going to pet it, but if you pick up a stick and began to strike the dog, he will snap at the stick. So our tendency is to avenge ourselves when someone has done us wrong.

The apostle writes, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath." Now it is likely he means unto God's wrath as the text of Scripture follows, "for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord."

The motto of the great country of Scotland is "No one treads on me unpunished." Now there is a nation that is supposed to be grounded in the principles of the word of God, but that does not sound as if it were a motto derived from Pauline teaching. No one treads on me unpunished. Vengeance belongs to the Lord. What Paul is saying here, my Christian friends, is that divine justice is to be ministered by the divine being. And let's not remember that, and let's not forget rather that he is saying that it is proper to exercise vengeance. It's proper to have retribution. But the retribution should be measured out

by the supreme Judge. The Christian shouldn't have the slightest desire to administer the justice himself, particularly in reference to his own wrongs. But he should rejoice in the fact that there is an impartial judge of his universe, and that he will render to every man according to his deeds.

We're seeing the application of many of these things in our struggles right here in the state of Texas and in many of the other states over our legal system and particularly the correctional institutions. Now let me say that punishment, in the biblical sense, in its restricted and proper sense, is not for correction but for requital and it does not aim at the improvement of the criminal. Consequently punishment in its nature is endless, because the occasions are forever.

That's why we have eternal punishment. A sin against an eternal God is always a sin, and always the same amount of sin. Time does not reduce guilt against an eternal God. So it doesn't make any difference if I sinned in nineteen hundred and thirty, and I do not sin again, in nineteen hundred and eighty, I'm just as guilty as I was in nineteen hundred and thirty. That's why the Bible teaches endless or eternal punishment, that sin is sin against an eternal being, and that is its proper judgment. And there is no forgiveness by time, no forgiveness by delay, but only forgiveness if the debt is paid by someone else.

So what we are seeing in our human society in the struggles is really, in the final analysis, the result of an inadequate understanding of the divine principles that are behind the universe. So really, the problem is in the understanding of the Bible. Ultimately when we read in our newspapers the struggles "one man one cell," that ought to be, I imagine, the motto of today. One man, one cell. Human rights for criminals. Well most of what is going on is the result of failure to comprehend the principles of God's universe as set forth by him. But since the world is an antipathy to God, they are not going to the Bible for the solutions and consequently, they will always have no solution.

The apostle writes, "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head." That's probably a metaphor for keen anguish, "for in so doing thou will heap coals of fire on his head." He will call to account, call to reckoning his shame and reproach as a result of what he has done.

I heard a story many years ago, I cannot find the exact details of it, but I think it was of a wife who was angered over the acts of her husband. And finally she was asked by a Christian friend if she had tried pouring "coals of fire upon his head." And she replied, "No, but I tried pouring scalding water down his back and it didn't work."

Paul concludes this ethical section by saying, "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Have you noticed the emphasis in this chapter is on "being" first and then "doing". "I beseech you therefore brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice." The apostle begins with being and then that issues in doing. It's always that way. It's what we are that is important. And that will manifest itself in what we do.

There's a story I like about Hudson Taylor, the great missionary to China and the founder of the China Inland Mission. Many years ago, one of the younger missionaries was going home on a furlough and Mr. Taylor was speaking to him before he left and he said, "When you get before your audiences in your homeland, in order to tell them about the things that have happened on the mission field, never mind about China." He said, "Never mind about China, but when you get before audiences may this be your constant prayer, that you may be able by the Spirit of God to bring all those who hear you face to face with Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ will take care of China." And so if we take care of our character by the Christian offering, then our conduct will largely begin to conform to the ethical standards the apostle sets forth.

In fact, there is no doubt about it, that chapter 12 verses 1 and 2 fulfill is the only thing that can bring to pass chapter 12 verses 3 through verse 21. There is no need for us

to talk about these injunctions if that fundamental relationship to the Lord all through the Christian offering is not brought to pass.

I think in one of the messages on Romans 12 a couple weeks ago, I made mention of Dr. James M. Gray who was the president of Moody Bible Institute some years ago. He was speaking on Romans 12:1, and he leaned over the pulpit and said in his quiet and impressive way, "Have you noticed that this verse does not tell us to whom we shall give our bodies. It says simply that we're to present our bodies a living sacrifice, and that will be acceptable to God." He went on to say, "It's not the Lord Jesus who asks for our bodies for he has a body," and further he said, "It is not the Father who asks for it, because he remains upon his throne." Now he said "Another has come to earth without a body, referring to the Holy Spirit. God could have made a body for him as he did for the Lord Jesus, but he did not do so" Mr. Gray said. So God gives us the indescribable honor of presenting our bodies to the Holy Spirit to be his dwelling place on earth.

Well, really, we could turn that around. All of us who have believed in Jesus Christ, are indwelt by the Holy Spirit and Paul says, "Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are the Lord's." It is a great privilege to be the representative of the Lord God and to have indwelling us permanently the Holy Spirit. And may God enable us to offer the Christian offering. No need to talk about Christian living, principles of Christian living, if we have not, by the grace of God, been able to offer the Christian offering, our bodies as a living sacrifice. May the Lord enable us to do that.

If you are here and you've never believed in Jesus Christ, we remind you that you cannot offer the Christian offering until you become a Christian. And we become a Christian, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ who's offered the offering that takes away sin. May God give you grace to come to him.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these remarkable words that the Apostle Paul has written. We confess that, naturally speaking, they are far beyond us. Oh

God, enable us to offer the Christian offering and enable us by Thy grace in measure to respond to the world and to believers in a way that will bring pleasure to Thee. Go with us as we part. In Jesus' name. Amen.