



THE EXHORTER

“And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.” Acts 2:40

The Palmer Road church of Christ, Westland, Mi. (prchurchofchrist.org)

Sept. 30, 2012

JUMP START #567

Romans 12:17,18- “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.”

Peace-what a wonderful word. Peace in the world, peace in the church, peace at home, and peace in the heart-those are things that most of us would love to see. The opposite of peace is war, turmoil, or trouble. We know what that’s like- it’s illustrated all around us. Soldiers are overseas because there is tension among the nations. Churches split and divide because there is lack of peace within the congregation. Parents and grown children fuss at each other because peace is missing in their relationship. People can’t sleep at night because of shame, guilt, and sin. Peace is missing in their hearts.

Jesus came to give peace-not a temporary, external peace, but an internal, lasting peace, that begins with a relationship with God. It’s hard to have peace anywhere, if it is not first with God.

Paul’s words in our verse today illustrate that we often hold the key to peace. The practical section of Romans illustrates what Christian living looks like. Here, Paul addresses the idea of what to do when one has been hurt by another. The first reaction is to bust them in the chops. Can’t do that. It’s not the “Christian” thing to do. Remember what Jesus said, about turning the cheek? Paying back evil for evil, makes you on the same level as the person who wounded you. By your use of evil, you become evil. Your counter attack starts the argument, the fight, the war. It’s just like nations that go to war against each other. One nation will fire a missile. The other nation feels compelled to retaliate, so it will fire a missile back. A war soon breaks out. This is the same tactic and ingredients that lead to an argument. Someone says something that is hurtful, so the other person fires an insult back. The war begins. This happens in the home, in the church, at the work place and among nations.

Paul’s words are clear. First, NEVER pay back evil for evil, to ANYONE. Never. That just about covers every situation, every angle, every time. Never. Not most times. Not just to fellow Christians, but NEVER to ANYONE. Don’t stoop to evil. Don’t break God’s rules just to make you feel like you’ve had the final word, the final act in all of this. Don’t go there. Don’t do that.

Second, respect what is right in the sight of all men. ALL MEN is like the ANYONE Paul stated in the previous expression. This is the positive side of what was just said. The negative: never pay back evil. The positive: respect what is right. What is right? Christ. Treating others as Christ would want you to. The golden rule. Respect carries the idea of caring for another person. Respect comes in the tone of your voice, and the choice of words that you use. Respect comes in the care of another person’s property.

Third, be at peace with all men. Paul puts a qualifier on this, "as far as it depends on you." Some things are beyond you. Some things you can't fix, but there are areas that we can. We can offer forgiveness instead of hatred. We can put aside selfishness. We can be patient. We can overlook things done to us. There are the things we can do. Can't change another person. Can't make them apologize, do right or even be right. But I can do things. If there is a war, it won't be because of me.

Now in all of this, a person can't give up his position with Christ. There can be no selling of truth or compromising of what God said. There is a stake in the ground, and that stake cannot be moved.

I wonder how often pride keeps us from doing what the apostle says here? Someone hurt us. It isn't right that they aren't hurt back. That's how our thinking goes. Somehow they should feel and experience what they have done to us. So our mind gets busy thinking of ways we can turn their world upside down. Pride keeps us fixated upon pain rather than restoration. Pride won't let go. Pride won't seek solutions. This is why Paul says, "as much as depends on you." Much of it does depend on us—we could make things better, if we tried. We think the other person ought to be the first to come to us. We think they ought to offer the olive branch first. We wait, for a short while and nothing happens. Pride and impatience takes over. We fume. We fuss. We complain. Finally, we decide that we have to do something, and what we settle for, often isn't good.

These are hard things to do. This is why the Christian way is always the higher road, the best choice, and often the hardest choice. The easy thing to do is smack the person back, fire the missile, start the war. We don't live by human nature any more. It's the nature of Christ that governs us. It's Christ's ways that keep us in check. We remember the Christ who uttered no threats back when crucified. We remember he could have called down angels, but he didn't. We remember the Christ who prayed for his Father to forgive the crucifiers.

Never pay back evil for evil—Jesus didn't. We shouldn't. It's hard not to, but you can, when you walk with the Lord.

Roger Shouse