

Bless And Do Not Curse

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[0:00] And I'd like you to turn in your Bibles, if you have your own copy of the Scriptures with you, then open up to Romans chapter 12. If you're using one of the few Bibles that we have scattered around in the chairs there, just turn to page 948. You don't even have to find Romans, just turn to page 948.

But if you have your own Bibles, Romans chapter 12, we're going to begin reading this morning in verse 14 and go all the way down to verse 21, though we're not going to be covering all of those verses this morning.

I want you to be able to see the context and where Paul is heading with some of the things that he's saying. So I want to ask you guys, if you would, as you turn there, to stand to your feet as we honor God's Word and read together.

The Apostle Paul writes, Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

[1:23] If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, Vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

We give you thanks, Father, that your Spirit inspired Paul to write these words. And we ask that now that same Spirit would give us insight and understanding and would shape and mold our hearts after the Word.

We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. You guys take a seat. We've seen so far in Romans chapter 12, Paul has turned this corner from defining and defending the gospel throughout the first 11 chapters to now showing us how we ought to live in light of the gospel that he has defined and defended so well throughout this book.

But one of the things that strikes me as we read through Romans chapter 12 and then in a few weeks as we move into chapter 13 and even chapters 14 and 15 is that a lot of the things that Paul tells us to do, a lot of the ways in which he tells us we ought to be living in light of the truth of the gospel, a lot of these things are hard.

[2:48] They're just not easy. They don't come natural to us because we're sinful people. We're fallen people. Even though we are indwelt by the Holy Spirit, we still wrestle with sin.

We still struggle with our old ways and old patterns of behavior so that many of the things that he tells us to do in here are they're difficult. They're hard to do.

And some of you see a challenge and you really just like to attack the challenge. You like to take it on. Somebody puts something in front of you that's difficult and you're going to do it or you're going to die trying.

Others of you, when you see something that's hard to do, you have a tendency to just sort of back off, to just shrink back and try to find another route, try to find an easier way to get there.

I have a little bit of a problem because whenever I see something that's kind of difficult, that's kind of hard to do, I think, I can do that. I can do that.

[3:44] And sometimes it's completely ridiculous. There's no way in the world that I can physically do the thing that's in front of me. In fact, the boys now know if dad looks at them and says, the way

that we're going to solve this, boys, is by feats of strength.

They know when they hear that phrase that dad's going to do something that might work, but there's a good chance that it's probably not going to work. That's the phrase. That's our code word. Feats of strength.

That means I don't know if I can do this, but I'm going to give everything that I've got and see what happens. In fact, just a few weeks ago, Justin and I were working over the new building. And when we got to the building, some of you have been up there, some of you haven't.

But early on, when we first got there, the room that we're going to be having worship in was a big room, and it was used for gymnastics. They didn't use it for that in quite a while, but it has these thick about two-inch, maybe even three inches, but at least two-inch pads on the floor, covered the entire floor like carpet.

It wasn't glued down or anything. It was just laid out there. And it's these six-foot-wide rolls. And so they're about six feet wide, and they run the length of the room, so they're almost 50 feet long. And so we had to get them out of the room, okay?

[4:47] We didn't want them in there. They're kind of squishy and soft when you walk on them. They were kind of old and didn't smell the best. So we wanted to get them out of the room. And so we rolled them up, which was really difficult in the first place.

Rolling those things, I mean, it's thick padding, and it's long. And so getting it rolled up was difficult. We had to both put all of our weight on it and do it little by little until you finally get it going, and then it would roll on up.

But we were also trying to keep it as tightly rolled as possible so that we could get it through the door. Because the first one that Joe had done was about eight feet wide. There was no way it was going through the door.

So Justin and I thought, we're going to roll these things up really tightly. And we rolled one up really tightly. We put some Velcro around it, and we had it ready to go through the door. We got it over to the doorway, and it was clearly, I mean, it wasn't even close to fitting through the door.

I mean, it was probably at least six inches wider than the door. But I thought in my head, it's foam, so it's squishy. And Justin was looking at me. He's going, we can't get that through the door. And I said, I think I can do it.

[5:45] He's like, you cannot get it through the door. And I said, feats of strength. And so it was laying on it kind of long ways, and I thought if I shove it hard enough, I can get it to get going.

Once we get it going, we can get it through. And so I put everything that I had into it, and I really hit it hard, and I felt like one of those cartoon characters that's just running in place because nothing was happening. But I didn't give up immediately.

I kept pushing, and I kept trying, and I kept doing this. And then I stopped, and I turned around, and there's Justin with his phone, just recording me, making sure that he'd have a record of my failure for all time.

Because that is a lot of times the way that I approach things. Sometimes that's helpful. Like, for instance, when you feel called to plant a church, but you think, I can't do that, then you go, I think we can do this.

Let's do this. Let's give it a try, right? Sometimes it's very helpful to have that attitude. Sometimes it's not helpful to have that attitude. But the reality is, as I look at some of these commands throughout Romans chapter 12, I look at them, and I think, those are really difficult.

[6:47] And these are not something that any of us can build up enough strength to accomplish. These are not things that we're able to just power our way through because it's not a matter of physical strength. It's not even really a matter of moral fortitude.

To do the things that Paul requires us to do requires us to have a different kind of heart than we naturally have. In fact, last week we saw Paul sort of describing what unhypocritical, genuine, real love looks like.

And if you look up at those verses, we said that verse 9 is like a heading over this section that just says, really, quite literally, it just says unhypocritical love. No verb or anything, just unhypocritical love.

And then what followed in the couple of verses after that was a description of what that love looks like. Now, we're not finished with the idea of real, genuine love, but Paul does turn a corner in verse 14 because no longer is he describing love.

Now, he's actually giving us some straightforward commands. Now, I know that's difficult to see a distinction in our English translations because verses 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 look like a string of commands, but it's not a string of commands.

[7:57] As I told you last week, it's love and then a description of love. There's actually not a single straightforward command in those verses. But now here in verse 14, we have a straightforward command.

We're not done with love, but we're not looking at a straightforward description of love. Now we're being told, do this. This is what you will do if you have this kind of genuine love.

And what we see is a collection of commands that are somewhat just kind of, they seem like they're almost haphazardly thrown together. In verse 14, if you take a look at it, he begins by addressing how we're supposed to respond to people outside the body of Christ.

In fact, people who come against us and persecute us and cause trouble for us. But then immediately in the next verse, verse 15, he switches back to dealing with relationships within the body of Christ, rejoicing with those who rejoice.

We should weep with those who weep and so forth. And so he describes our relationships with other believers. And then you get down to verse 17 and he switches back to the theme of verse 14 and he begins again to talk about how do we respond to people who come against us.

[9:06] And it seems as if it's kind of disjointed and not put together in a neat fashion. And to a certain extent, that's true. There's not a logical progression through here.

But it shouldn't surprise us that Paul is now jumping back and forth because he did that in verse 13 when he was describing love. In verse 13, he tells us how we should treat those within the body of Christ.

He says, contribute to the needs of the saints. And then he tells us that we should show hospitality. That is, we should demonstrate kindness to strangers. And so there he flip-flops from, here's how you treat people in the body of Christ.

Here's how you treat other people. And he's doing the same thing here in the passage that we just read. Verse 14, what do you do when somebody comes against you? Verses 15 and 16, relationships within the body.

Verses 17 to the end of the chapter now, what do you do again when people are coming against you? And I don't want to rush us through any of these instructions by the Apostle Paul because they are so challenging and so powerful and can have such an impact on the ways in which we live day to day that I want us to soak them in.

[10:17] I want us to examine ourselves to see, are we doing this? And then I want us to ask questions. How do we do this? How can we approach this? So this morning, the only thing I want us to do is focus our attention on verse 14.

We will come back next week to verses 15 and 16 and look at how we can love one another. And then we will come back and we will return to the theme of verse 14 with verses 17 down through verse 21.

We'll spend more time dealing with this. But this morning, I want us to zero in here on verse 14 and ask some very basic questions. Let's read it together again real quickly and I'll tell you the questions.

Verse 14 says, Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. I have three questions that I want us to ask and try to answer this morning related to this verse.

Number one is a simple question of we need to know what does Paul mean by blessing and cursing? It's just a question of what does the text mean? What is he saying here? What exactly do these terms mean? And then question number two though is going to broaden out and say, how are we supposed to understand this particular command in light of the rest of the scriptures?

[11:27] Particularly in light of some of the things that we see in the Old Testament. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. How do we square that with some of the things that we see particularly in the Old Testament and some of the Psalms and the book of Joshua and other places and how Israel engages with those around her?

How do we square this with that? And then the last question, after we've gotten through those two, which help us to kind of wrap our minds around, understand exactly what Paul is telling us to do.

The last question I want to ask is, how do we do this?

I mean, how is this even, how can we do this? How is this even possible for sinful people like us to get to a point to where we bless our persecutors, we bless them, we don't curse them.

So first of all, let's talk about those words, bless and curse. What do they mean? It's not complicated. This is an easy point for you to get down. It's very simple. To bless someone, literally the word means to speak well of someone.

Really, biblically though, it means to call upon God to do good to others. That's what we're asking. It's a form of prayer. It's a calling upon God to do good to others.

[12 : 35] Even when you have a straightforward, you know, the Lord bless you and keep you, that seems very clear. But there are other places. Jesus in the Beatitudes speaks of blessings. Not the same word, but the same concept.

He speaks of blessings. But all of those are things that God is going to do. So when we bless someone, we are speaking well of them, but we are really asking God to do good things for someone.

We're asking Him to intervene and in some way improve their lot, their situation, their life. Do something good for them. And then to curse someone is exactly the opposite.

It is to say unkind words towards someone, but more specifically, it is to call upon God Himself to intervene and do something to this person. Bring justice, God.

Make things right. They've done wrong to me. They have hurt me. I want you to come in and judge them. Do something to them, God. That's what it means to curse someone.

[13 : 34] It's not curse as in we speak of curse words like we're cussing someone. That's not what He's saying here. There are other passages of Scripture that deal with that. But this here is specifically Paul is saying, when you're dealing in prayer with those who come against you, the way to approach God is to ask God to do good things for them and not to ask Him to bring harm upon them.

It's a very simple, very straightforward command. Not easy to do, but it's easy to understand. But how do we square that with some of the things that we see, particularly in the Old Testament?

So that if you turn back to the book of Joshua, the story of the entry of the people of Israel into the land of Canaan, where God calls upon them to exterminate the people who are already living in the land, to wipe the slate clean, that's what God calls the people of Israel to do.

Now, it's not a question of whether or not the people there were these innocent bystanders. They weren't innocent bystanders. In fact, we read in Genesis that God, one of the reasons that God sent the people of Israel into Egypt for 400 years was so that there would be a time period in which the people in the land of Canaan would become so engrossed in their sin, they would go so far in their sinfulness that they were deserving, they were worthy of the judgment that God would bring upon them through the people of Israel.

So it's not as if He's sending them in to fight against and to remove from the land innocent, nice, kind people. These are people who are given over to sacrificing their children, to doing all sorts of horrible, wicked, evil things.

[15 : 11] They're so sunken down in their sin that it's time for the judgment of God to come upon them. But God sends Israel in to judge them.

How do we square God's command for the people of Israel to make war and kill and slaughter these people with the command of the Apostle Paul here reflecting the commands of Jesus to bless those who persecute you, to do good to them, to not harm them?

In Jesus' words, to love your enemies. How do we square that? It's not just the book of Joshua and other accounts of the warfare of the people of Israel.

There are also the Psalms. You read through some of the Psalms and it seems as if, and indeed the psalmist is cursing their enemies. They are calling upon God to do harm, to bring judgment upon their enemies.

That's the exact opposite of what the Apostle Paul says here. So what do we do with that? How are we to think about that? How can we rightly respond to this command if it looks as if God said the exact opposite in the Old Testament?

[16 : 26] How do we wrap our minds around that? I think the first thing that we begin to think through is, what's the difference between the context in which Paul writes this and the context in which he sent the Israelites into the land of Canaan or in which the psalmist prayed those kinds of prayers.

What's the difference? Because there's an entirely different setting for what Paul says here and indeed for what Jesus says when he tells us to love our enemies and what the people of Israel were facing under the Old Covenant in the Old Testament.

It's a different setting. It's a different situation. Let me show you what I mean. I want you to turn back to the Gospels. Turn back to the Gospel of Matthew so that you can see Paul is drawing here upon the teachings of Jesus.

This is such an important command not merely because it's recorded for us in Romans. This is an important command. This is an important concept because it reflects the teachings of Jesus.

And in fact, Paul doesn't only teach this here. He teaches it in 1 Thessalonians 5. Peter teaches the same concept in 1 Peter 3 so that the apostles are drawing upon more than once the teaching of Jesus concerning our treatment of those who oppose us.

[17 : 36] But I want you to see what Jesus says and see how it's related to what we find in the Old Testament. So in Matthew 5, verse 43, in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says this.

He says, You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. Now obviously, the first part of that is a direct quotation from the Old Testament, from the law.

Love your neighbor. That's from the law. That's commanded. The second half of that is implied.

We'll see why in a moment. Love your neighbor, hate your enemy.

And then Jesus has something else to say. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust.

For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? So Jesus, inciting the Old Testament, says, Yes, it says you should love your neighbor.

[18 : 43] And by implication, hate your enemies. But I'm taking you beyond that. Jesus does that because there's a change. There's a shift in the situation faced by His disciples and by the early church and by us even in the situation faced by the people of Israel.

Turn all the way back in your Old Testaments. We'll see where Jesus is drawing this from. Turn all the way back to Leviticus chapter 19. Leviticus chapter 19. In verse 17, Moses writes, So there's the love your neighbor command.

But notice how it's situated. Notice the way that Moses words this. You shall not hate your brother. You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against the sons of your own people.

That sounds very similar to what Paul says about vengeance in Romans chapter 12. And yet, here it's not your enemy, the persecutor. Here, it is very clearly your brother, your own people, which is where Jesus draws the implication, love your neighbor, but it's implied, hate your enemy.

That's been the approach so far. Why would that be the approach of the people of Israel and not of the New Testament church? Because the people of Israel were not only the spiritual people of God, but they were, in fact, a political nation.

[20 : 34] There was no distinction between here's the role of the state and here's the role of God's people. They were found together. They were merged together so that there was no separation of church and state, as we call it.

There was no concept of a distinction between a secular government and then a religious establishment over here. There was no distinction. It was one and the same.

So that when we're reading in Romans chapter 12, where we're going to arrive in a few weeks is at the reality that our refusal to take vengeance does not mean that people are not punished for their wrongdoing.

It's just not our job. It is, in fact, Paul says, that is the job of the government. It's not your job to take vengeance. God ultimately will take vengeance and God works out His vengeance in this world, obviously ultimately in the final judgment, but in this life and in this world, God meets out justice through the agency of human governments.

But in Old Testament Israel, the government and the people of God were one and the same. But now under the new covenant, they are no longer the same.

[21 : 50] Because the new covenant people of God are not a political entity. We don't have physical borders. We don't have political leaders. That's not who we are.

We're a spiritual people comprised of those from every tribe and tongue and people from nation scattered all over the world so that there's a fundamental shift between the situation of the people of God under the old covenant and the situation of the people of God under the new covenant. So that Paul's instructions in Romans 13 about God exacting justice through the government actually happened through the people of Israel. And as they waged war, they were the instrument of God's justice.

It was not a personal vengeance on their part. It was the waging of war just like governments do today in order to bring God's justice into the world so that they were merged and now they are no longer merged.

We no longer have the obligation to seek vengeance in any sort of form because we leave that to God to accomplish through the means that He Himself has established.

[22:54] So that unless you're a member of the military, unless you're a part of law enforcement, you're not directly involved in justice being done against wrongdoers in the world.

Oh, there are things that we do. There are things that we participate in. We should seek after. We should long for social justice. We should want racism to come to an end. We should fight against human trafficking.

We should stand against abortion. There are things that we should do, but we are not the agents who bring about justice in the world. God does that primarily through human governments, and we are entirely distinct from them.

It's a different setting. What about those psalms? What about the places where the psalmist pray that God would bring justice upon their enemies?

If you look through those psalms, they're called imprecatory psalms. You don't have to remember that term, but if you ever come across it, you'll know those are the mean ones. Those are the nasty ones, all right? That's what they are.

[23:56] We don't sing those generally on Sunday morning, okay? We'll sing some other psalms. We don't generally sing those psalms. They don't make their way into our hymns and our contemporary songs. They just get left out because there are some pretty harsh things in there, and you begin to think, okay, I understand that Israel was also a political people, and the men of Israel were the army of Israel.

So I understand it's a different situation, but here we have individuals praying that God would curse their enemies. How does that not contradict the teachings of Jesus and the teachings of the apostle Paul and of Peter as they reflect upon the teaching?

How is there not a contradiction there? Because if you look through those psalms, and we don't really have time to do it this morning, but if you look through those psalms, almost all of the imprecatory psalms are written by King David.

Almost all of them are written by David or attributed to David or about David. Almost all of them so that those are not the prayers of a normal, average, individual person within the people of Israel saying, I don't like this guy down the street, God.

I need you to bring justice. This is the king himself who represents the people of Israel saying, God, bring justice into the world. Subdue our enemies.

[25:10] Attack those who attack your appointed representative. That's significant. Even David himself, when Saul was the king, when he had the opportunity to exact vengeance upon Saul.

And who would have faulted David for this? Saul is still clinging to his kingship when clearly Samuel has said, David is now the anointed one of God. Saul is trying to kill David.

He's sending his men to chase David down. Who would fault David for when he has a perfect opportunity to take out Saul? Who would fault him for doing it? Even David's men wanted him to do it. And David said, no.

He's the king. He's anointed by God. David recognized that Saul was representative of the people of God. And he would not personally take vengeance upon him.

And now when David stands as that representative of the people of God, when he stands as that representative, now David is able to call upon God to bring justice into the world and exact vengeance upon his enemies because it's not about a personal vendetta.

[26:18] This is, again, the unique situation of the people of Israel under the old covenant in which they are both a spiritual and political people and they have a political head who represents them.

So we can't read through those psalms and go, I'm just going to make that my prayer because I'm really angry at this person at work who has done wrong to me. They stole my ideas. They took credit for what I did.

So I'm going to pray like David prays that God's just going to bring it down on them because they deserve it. We can't do that. We're not the king. We're not in David's place. We can't pray in those sorts of ways.

Now we know how to pray. Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse. So that what we're seeing in the teachings of Paul and of Jesus is not a contradiction.

But what we're seeing is a change of circumstances. A fundamental reordering of how the people of God relate to the world around them. No longer a political people, now a spiritual people whose task it is to spread the gospel to the ends of the earth and to trust that God through these other means will bring justice into the world as he himself sees fit.

[27 : 30] There is no contradiction. There's a change and a shift. And oftentimes, our failure to rightly understand the Bible stems from our failure to see the shift that occurs between the Old Testament and the New Testament.

It's not that the Old Testament is done away with and thrown away. Absolutely not. Jesus is quoting the Old Testament. Jesus himself says that he did not come to abolish the law, to do away with it. He came to fulfill it. The law was pointing toward these things. The Old Testament was pointing ahead. And if you doubt that, let me show you one spot later on in the Old Testament where we see the teachings of Jesus and Paul.

We see almost like an early form of them. Turn to Proverbs chapter 24. I want you to see this very clearly because we have a tendency to sometimes read those things that Jesus says and think, wow, Jesus came up with something completely new and different here.

And yet, what he says is rooted in the Scriptures. Proverbs chapter 24, verse 17, Do not rejoice when your enemy falls and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles.

[28 : 45] Already here in the Old Testament, there is sort of a seed form of this concept of saying, I'm not going to exact personal vengeance. In fact, if you read the next verse, the Proverbs tell us that we should trust that God's going to exact vengeance on his own.

Lest the Lord see it and be despised and turn away his anger from him. You want to try to seek vengeance on your own, you're not trusting that God himself is going to do it. Why would he do it when you're trying to step in and take his place?

So that what Jesus says and what Paul says and what Peter says is not something entirely new. It's reflecting the trajectory of the Old Testament. Yes, Israel stands uniquely.

Yes, David stands uniquely. But the individual Israelite who needs to hear these Proverbs shouldn't be seeking to exact vengeance on their enemies down the road or next door.

Not personally. No. There's no contradiction. There's a movement from one set of circumstances to another.

[29 : 50] And the things that Jesus has to say are not unprecedented in the Old Testament. We find them there in seed form. So that we're not at all dealing with contradictions.

We're dealing with a shift of focus and a shift of situation so that now the command comes to us clearly. There's no way to wiggle out of it. There's no way to say, well, David did this so I'm going to listen to what David says over here.

There's no way to say, well, the people of Israel did this and so we today need to pursue this action and we shouldn't take this from those who come against us. We need to attack with equal force. No. Not at all. Not at all. There's no excuse for that. The command is straightforward. Bless and do not curse.

So that when your co-worker takes credit for your idea, you don't then in everything that you do from that point on seek to set things right by going after them. Vengeance.

[30 : 47] I'll get them back. I'll turn this around. I'll embarrass them. I'll show them. Or when your neighbor does something, when your next door neighbor does something to embarrass you or to make you look poorly or when they begin to spread rumors about you or they talk about you, your response is not, I'm going to get them back.

I'm going to set things right. No, your response is to begin to pray for God's blessing upon them and not for their cursing. Whatever the circumstances, we're going to face all sorts of things.

We see the word persecute and we think that it's got to be directly related to my faith, but it's all opposition that comes against you, all the various ways in which those around you try to do harm to you.

And Paul says we don't respond to that by trying to make things right. We respond to that by praying that God would bless them. That's what we pray for. Just as Jesus on the cross prays, Father, forgive them for they know not what they're doing.

We pray for our enemies. We pray for those who come against us. God, bless them. God, do good things for them. It's not natural to pray that way.

[31:55] It's not natural to think that way. We just, we don't. We want things to be set right. We want to see it. We want to know that justice is happening. So this is difficult for us.

This is a hard command to obey. So how do we go about this? How can we be so transformed that our response to others coming against us is to pray that they be blessed by God?

How can we be so changed and transformed? Remember the context. Remember where all of this began in chapter 12 where Paul tells us that we have to be transformed.

Our minds have to be changed. Our thinking and our hearts have to be radically rearranged. Go back to Romans chapter 12. You can see it very clearly at the very beginning in verse 2.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.

[32:58] How are you going to do this? How are you going to be the kind of person that responds to persecution in this way? You're going to have to be changed. Your heart's going to have to change.

Your thinking is going to have to be changed. You're going to have to be transformed. So how is that going to happen? It's going to happen primarily through the power of the Word of God shaping and molding our hearts.

As the Spirit of God Himself comes and takes the Word and begins to apply it and begins to form and fashion us, we find ourselves changing. We find the way that we view the world, the way that we view others around us, we see those things begin to change because the Word of God comes in with great power.

I was talking to someone not long ago and they were very frustrated that they've tried and tried to change in certain areas, but no matter how hard they try, nothing changes.

Things just seem to be the same. And so I ask a very simple question, it's not complicated, I said, when's the last time you read your Bible? I mean, I don't know, I mean, I read it every once in a while, but I don't know.

[34:11] Well, how, I mean, how frequently do you read your Bible? Well, not as much as I should, okay? How much time do you spend on a regular basis pouring over the Scriptures?

Not a lot. Now, mind you, they believe the Bible, they know that it's true, yet they don't make use of its power. This book is power.

You understand that? It comes with great power into our lives and into our hearts. Not in a magical sense, like all you have to do is read the words, but when the Spirit of God who inspired the Word comes and He brings the Word as you read it into your heart, it comes with great transforming power, and you need to be in this book, you need to be reading this book, and thinking about this book, and meditating on this book, and you will begin to be changed because it is powerful.

You cannot complain about your inability to actually live the kind of life that God desires you to live if you don't make use of the power that He supplies for doing it. You can't say, woe is me, you can't say, God's not helping me, God doesn't want to change me, when you don't make use of the means that He provides for your fundamental transformation, and it is right here.

I'll give you two examples that relate to what we're talking about here. What does the Scripture say? How can the Word of God powerfully transform our hearts so that we find it within ourselves to be able to bless those who persecute us?

[35:51] How can we love our enemies? Starts by remembering what God has already done on our behalf.

So that Paul says in Romans chapter 5, while we were enemies, Christ died for us. We were once God's enemies, opposed to Him, against Him, and Christ died for us.

How can you be so dead set on taking vengeance upon your enemies when God did not take vengeance upon you when you were His enemy?

Word of God comes with transforming power. It really, really does. And you take time and you take that one verse and you meditate on it.

And you think of all the ways in which you were God's enemy. All the ways in which you did not live for His honor and His glory. And you begin to think of all the wrath that ought to be upon you.

[36 : 58] All the punishment that you deserve. It's massive. Even if you by the world standards have lived a pretty good life, to refuse to give honor and glory to your maker is infinitely evil.

And so infinite wrath rests upon you. And Christ says, I have taken it upon myself while you were my enemy. And now turn and see your enemies.

See your grumpy co-worker, your angry neighbor. And you ask, are they as much your enemy as you were His? Are you required to do as much to bless them as Jesus is required to bless you?

And that one verse comes with transforming power when you meditate on it and think upon it. But we don't even have to really travel outside of Romans chapter 12 to find power in the Word of God for helping us to bless those who persecute us.

let your eyes drop down closer to the end of chapter 12 where we'll be in a couple of weeks. And listen to what Paul actually says. He says in verse 19, Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

[38 : 25] vengeance is mine, God says, I will repay. In other words, God says, I will mete out justice. It's not your job. You don't have to pray for it.

You don't have to seek after it. Not the kind of justice you want. I will do it. And a part of the secret of becoming the kind of person who can bless those who persecute you is trusting in God's power and sovereignty and truthfulness to His word to do what He has promised.

When you began to seek after the punishment of others for the wrong that they've done to you, you are making the assumption that God will not do what He says, in fact, that He will do.

It is not your job, it is not your role, it is not your task to ensure that people are punished, for the wrongs they do against you. Rather, it is God's.

And remembering that and resting in that and believing that God actually has the power to do that and He has the truthfulness and the commitment to bring that about transforms your treatment of others.

[39 : 38] No longer do you need to seek after their punishment. Leave that to God. It will be meted out in one of two ways. justice for all people upon the face of the earth.

They will either directly face the judgment of God for their sins and God will indeed exact vengeance upon them or their sins will be punished in Christ.

Either way, more than you could ever imagine, more than you could ever accomplish on your own, more than you could ever ask for, justice will be served.

And when we believe that and we rest in that and we trust that, no longer does it fall upon us, no longer are we burdened to try to pray justice into their lives so they might get punished or try to bring it about ourselves and take vengeance ourselves.

It's not our task. When we believe what the Bible says about who God is and what God's like and what God is going to do, we are changed and transformed from a people who tries to set everything right ourselves to a people who trusts in God to do that in his own ways and in his own time.

[40 : 48] This book, meditation upon it, thinking about it, taking it in, transforms you and makes it possible for you to do the really hard things that Paul says we should do.

Let's pray. Let's pray.