

Trusting In Gods Righteousness

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[0 : 00] And I'd like you to grab your Bibles and open up to Romans chapter 12.

! We are continuing through Romans. We are this morning arriving finally at the end of chapter 12.! I know for the last couple of weeks you thought we were at the end because we read all the way to the end. But we weren't quite done with chapter 12.

I think that after this morning we might possibly be done with chapter 12 and move on to chapter 13 next week. I said I think possibly so that could change.

But here we are in Romans chapter 12. I was just thinking the other day because one of the boys asked me. They had been watching some of the, I guess it was Discovery Channel shows and NASA shows and things about, you know, space and the vastness of the universe and stars that had been discovered and looked at through telescopes a long way away.

And they asked me, why is it so big? Like why did God, why did He make it so large, so enormous? And my answer was because God wants to show us how big He is.

[1 : 18] He wants to show us how awesome He is. You know, the Bible says that the heavens declare the glory of God. The entire creation is telling us and is showing us and revealing to us the awesomeness of God, our Creator.

But we have something even better than that. Every week as we get together, and I hope every day as you open your word by yourself, we have something better than the voices of the stars.

We have God Himself speaking to us through His word. So we're going to jump in this morning here in chapter 12 with verse 17 and read down to the end. And I'd like you guys, in honor of the word of God, to stand along with me.

The Apostle Paul tells us, Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. 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.

[2 : 23] 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.

Father, thank You for this word. God, thank You for inspiring the Apostle Paul to write this down for our benefit. Teach us through the power of the Spirit this morning, we ask in Jesus' name.

Amen. You guys take a seat. So I read an article because I read a lot of random, strange things. I prefer to read things rather than watch the news or listen to the news, so I just read a lot of stuff.

Some of it online, some of it not online. But I read an article online where they were quoting from a really well-known, famous Hollywood director, and they were asking him what he thought about the fact that it seems as if, or it doesn't seem as if, it's actually true, that the box office, that attendance at the movies, money that's made at the movies, is dominated by all of these sci-fi superhero movies.

And it has been now. I mean, if you look back, it has been now for at least 10 years, just dominated all the major movies every summer, and even some of the ones that come out at Christmas time. They're these superhero sci-fi movies, which is great for guys who like those kinds of things, not so great for their wives, all right?

[3 : 43] But I have boys, and so I have an excuse to go see all of those movies, and Allie doesn't have to go see all of them with me, but I have boys, and that makes it okay. But they asked him what his opinion about that was, because he's certainly not the kind of director that would direct any of those.

And his opinion was kind of scoffing, and he kind of said, well, they'll go the way of the westerns. They'll go the way of the westerns. I mean, those were popular for a long time, but eventually they faded from the scene, and only occasionally now do you have a western pop-up.

But it used to be that all the movies, all the big hits were westerns, and a lot of the big television shows were westerns, and these will go the same way. And he might be right. He probably is right. I mean, we go through cycles, and we go through trends.

But what that got me thinking about was the kind of connection that there is between the superhero movies that are playing today and the westerns that were popular for a previous generation.

And I thought about, what's the connection there? Why do men of my dad's generation love westerns? Why do men of my generation and younger, why do they love these superhero shows? There's got to be some sort of common thread there, and I think there is.

[4 : 47] I think the common thread is that you always have an individual, a sort of rugged individual who can do things that we honestly can't do. I cannot shoot a gun out of somebody else's hand from across the room.

It's never going to happen. I can't even shoot the guy from across the room, much less the gun out of his hand. It can't happen. And none of us have super strength. We're not going to pick up cars and do anything. But there are these guys who have an ability to do things that we simply cannot do.

But that's not the important thing. That's not the most important thing, because even the villains can do that, and we don't look up to them. What we like about them is that they set things right. When there's a crisis that the cops can't solve, or when there's something happening that there's no justice served, then you can have a cowboy ride into town, and he can take care of the bad guy.

Or you can have Superman fly in, and he can deal with the bad guys. And we like the idea of the lone, rugged, powerful, manly individual who can come in and save the day.

We like that, but because we know that deep down, we're not capable of actually doing that. But there's a part of us that wishes that we could. There's a part of us that wishes that we could be the ones to set things right.

[6 : 00] Be the ones to bring justice into the world, and to make people pay. That's what a part of us wants to be able to do. I'm convinced of that, from little boys all the way up to grown men.

And I don't think it's just men. And I think women too, they may express that in different ways. But I think there is a desire among all of us to sort of be the person to make things right, if necessary, to exact vengeance on those who do wrong to us.

And yet, when we come to a passage like we're looking at this morning, we find something that runs contrary, entirely contrary, to that impulse that lives within us.

Take a look carefully at what Paul says. I want us this morning to really think about what Paul says, and ask ourselves, really examine our hearts to say, are we really in our hearts, not necessarily in our outward actions, but in our hearts, do we desire to respond in the ways that the Bible tells us to respond to evil around us, and in particular to evil that comes against us, or do we in our hearts wish that we could be the ones to set it right?

And do we at times look for opportunities to do that? Notice what he says in verse 17. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

[7 : 25] He essentially restates that at the end of the passage in verse 21. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

It's the idea of not exacting vengeance on someone, not being the individual, not being the one who has to see to it that you repay those back who've done wrong with something equally painful to them.

And this thinking in this way is not something that is new or novel in Paul's time. In fact, the impulse to do that is not necessarily born out of our sinful nature.

The impulse to make sure that things are done rightly is born out of a desire to see justice in the world. And that's a good thing. And in fact, what Paul is combating here is our attempt to do everything on our own, is our assumption that we have to be the ones to make it right when someone harms us.

It's a deeply rooted mindset. In fact, it's rooted even in the Old Testament because this idea of paying back someone with exactly the same sorts of things that they have done to you, that's rooted all the way back in the ancient world.

[8 : 39] We see it several times in the Old Testament. In fact, hold your places here in Romans. I want you to turn all the way back to the beginning of your Bibles. I want you to go all the way back to the book of Exodus. Exodus, of course, being a portion of the law that God gave to Israel through Moses.

And in Exodus chapter 21, we see language that we are probably somewhat familiar with. You don't even have to know it from the Bible. It's just such well-known language that you may recognize it.

Take a look here in verse 23 of Exodus 21. Moses says, if there is harm, if someone harms another person, he has a specific set of circumstances in mind, but he says, if there is harm, then you shall pay life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.

In other words, you're going to pay them back with something that is equal to the offense that they've given. Eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand. This is language that you've probably heard before, that you've probably heard from others before.

And this is not the only place where we find it in the Old Testament. It's further in the law. You can just flip a little further ahead in your Bibles if you want to, to the book of Leviticus. It comes right after the book of Exodus. And in Leviticus chapter 24, verse 17, we read this, whoever takes a human life shall surely be put to death.

[10 : 07] Whoever takes an animal's life shall make it good, life for life. If anyone injures his neighbor, as he has done it, shall be done to him. Fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, whatever injury he has given to a person shall be given to him.

Eye for eye, tooth for tooth. It's right here in the law of God. But one of the things that we talked about a couple of weeks ago when we were looking at when Paul addresses something very similar further up in Romans chapter 12, where he tells us to bless those who curse us.

To bless them, do not curse. One of the things that we saw there was that we are dealing with an entirely different set of circumstances, a different situation than the people of Israel were dealing with.

So that sometimes we will read the law, we'll read Exodus, we'll read Leviticus, and we'll think, okay, there he says, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, so I'm going to be the person to make sure that that happens.

And yet, we're living in a time period, we're living in an epic of redemptive history in which God has said, no, you are not personally responsible to mete out justice.

[11 : 25] And it's not that Paul has invented this concept, or it's not that this was introduced with the Apostle Paul. Jesus himself teaches us this. Paul is reflecting the teachings of Christ here in Romans chapter 12 when he tells us how to deal with our enemies and how to face off against those who come against us.

He's not making this up. He's applying the words of Jesus. Turn to Matthew if you would. I'll try not to make us turn around too much more this morning, but I want you to see the words of Jesus. Matthew chapter 5 in the midst of the Sermon on the Mount.

One of the greatest places if you want to see sort of a summary of the things that Jesus taught throughout his ministry, go to Matthew chapters 5 through 7, read through the Sermon on the Mount a few times, and you'll get a really good feeling for the kinds of things that he said over and over throughout his ministry.

But look at Matthew chapter 5, verse 38. You're going to hear something familiar to start with. Jesus says, You have heard that it was said, An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.

Well, of course we've heard that. We just read that in Exodus and Leviticus. We've heard that. We know that. But notice what he says next. But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil.

[12 : 38] But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

Give to the one who begs from you. And do not refuse the one who would borrow from you. You've heard it said, eye for eye and tooth for tooth. It's not going to be that way with my followers.

My disciples will live in the world in another way. They will not seek justice in that way. And he goes on to say some words that we read a couple of weeks ago.

Verse 43, You have heard that it was said, You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy. 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. If you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?

[13 : 33] And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? In other words, Jesus says, I'm now holding you to a higher standard than that. I expect more of my followers than eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

We're going to live by a different ethic. We're going to live by a different moral code. One that is given to us directly from the Lord Himself. And Paul in Romans chapter 12 is trying to show us how to apply that in the midst of a situation in which it is entirely possible that we will face persecution.

Persecution sometimes for no reason at all. Persecution at other times because of our relationship with Christ, because of our stand for Christ. But we will face persecution. There will be those who come against us.

They will insult us. They will slander us. Our brothers and sisters in Christ across the world will face death, will face imprisonment, and there is an ethic that is given to us to cling to in the midst of that.

And it is not eye for eye and tooth for tooth. Check your heart. One of the things that I have seen over the last few years, maybe even over the last ten, but certainly over the last four or five, one of the things that I have seen that has grown in its strength is this idea among many, even Christians, especially among Christians in America, is the idea that we will set things right.

[15 : 03] It will be eye for eye and tooth for tooth. And we like to cloak it with political language. We like to pretend as if our desire for vengeance is simply a desire to hold up the Constitution.

That's what we do. And so wherever you fall on the political spectrum, I don't preach about politics, okay, I'll deal with morality, with abortion, with homosexuality, when the Scriptures deal with it. I don't talk about politics and those sorts of things.

So wherever you sit on the political spectrum, you cannot deny that there is a shift from saying, oh, I want us to protect the Second Amendment to saying, I've got a gun, why don't you come at me?

I have heard many believers say, yeah, well, I'm just waiting for somebody to try to come into my house. I'm ready. I'm armed. Because there is deep within us a longing and a desire to be eye for eye, tooth for tooth.

Jesus and the Apostle Paul say, no. It's not the way you'll live. It's not the way you'll think. And it should not be the direction of your heart.

[16 : 17] He says the direction of our heart ought to be, so far as it depends upon us, to live at peace with all men. There will be time when peace is impossible.

But it's not impossible because we feel the need to escalate things. It's impossible because the world refuses peace. It's impossible because the world slaps us in the face.

But we have not slapped them in return. We have not stolen back from them what they have stolen from us.

Sometimes peace is impossible because the world doesn't want peace. But peace ought to never be impossible in our lives because we won't live peaceable lives and we insist on eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

Take a look back in Romans chapter 12. Let's get back to our text so that we can see this. Repay no one evil for evil but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

[17 : 18] This word honorable is actually simply the word for good. Give thought to do good things in the sight of all. That is, in the sight of those who do good to you, do good to them. In the sight of those who do evil to you, do good to them.

Do good things to and for others regardless of how they treat you. Do good to them. And he goes on, if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

That's the positive statement of the ethic that Paul is trying to instill in us. As far as it depends on you, live peaceably. Now he's going to give us a negative statement.

He's going to give us a negative command to help us to really understand what he means by this. He says, beloved, never avenge yourselves. So that's the negative statement.

The positive is, live peaceably. The negative statement is, but don't avenge yourselves. And now we come to the core. Now we come to what I think is the root of what Paul is saying.

[18 : 20] It is, in fact, the ground of the ethic that Jesus and Paul are teaching us. There is a reason. There is a cause. There is a ground beneath the kind of morality that's being taught in the New Testament.

Here it is. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, and now we're going to quote Deuteronomy chapter 32, for it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

Never avenge yourselves. The word means never take it upon yourselves to set things right. In fact, it has, the word avenge has the same root as the word for righteousness or justice.

It is not our duty to ensure that those who have done wrong to us face justice. It's not our duty to make sure that those who've harmed us receive what is rightfully their due.

That's eye for eye, tooth for tooth. Paul says, no, you're not the one who sets things right. And the ground of all of that, God is the one who sets all things right.

[19 : 32] The ground of an ethic of not returning evil for evil, but returning good for evil, the ground of that is a firm, fixed belief that God Himself can and will set all things right, which is rooted itself in God's righteousness.

So that I really believe that our failure to live according to this ethic is rooted in a failure to trust in the righteousness of God.

That's what it is. If we think that we have to pay back evil for evil, if we think that we need eye for eye and tooth for tooth, then we don't believe that God Himself, the Judge of all the earth, will uphold righteousness in the end.

We do not believe that He Himself is righteous enough to ultimately ensure that all things are put right. And so we try to do it ourselves.

And this whole idea of God being a righteous God, it is a stream that runs through the entire book of Romans. It binds the book of Romans together.

[20 : 44] Romans is all about the righteousness of God displayed in the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what this book is about. We should know by now, if you've been here for most of this series, and that means you've been here for over two years, so maybe you haven't been, but if you've been here for most of this series, then you should already be filled with a knowledge that says God is righteous, because that's what Romans is about.

It's about the defense of the righteousness of God. Let me show you what I mean. Hold your place in chapter 12, turn back all the way to chapter 1, to the very beginning of this book where we started.

Romans chapter 1, verses 16 and 17 sort of are like the thesis of the book of Romans. Here's the theme laid out for you that Paul's going to spend the next several chapters unpacking.

But notice the centrality of God's righteousness in it. Paul says, for I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek, for in it, that is in the gospel, for in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.

So the gospel is fundamentally a message about the righteousness of God. That's what it is. You cannot divorce the good news of Jesus Christ from the righteousness of God.

[22 : 09] You don't have good news if you don't have a righteousness that comes from God. You simply do not have it. And Paul is obsessed with the righteousness of God in Romans.

Turn over a page in your Bibles, look at chapter 3. Verse 5 of chapter 3, Paul asks a question. If our unrighteousness serves to show the righteousness of God, what shall we say?

That God is unrighteous to inflict wrath on us? I speak in a human way. By no means. For then how could God judge the world? So Paul says when the question comes up, is it possible that God might be unrighteous?

His answer is by no means. In fact, our unrighteousness, our sinfulness displays the righteousness of God. It's a display for it. Look further down in chapter 3, you can see how our sin leads to a display of God's righteousness.

Verse 21, But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

[23 : 25] So the righteousness of God is manifested. It is put on display. It is set forth through faith in Jesus Christ. When Paul says that in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed or made known, what he means is that through the death of Jesus Christ, God's righteousness is vindicated because sin is punished.

All sin, all sin, will be punished in one of two ways. Either, those who have committed those sins will endure eternal, everlasting punishment in hell, in which case God has upheld righteousness by punishing the wrongdoer, or sin will be punished on the cross of Christ where he bears the weight of the wrath of God for the sins of all those who trust in him.

But never is there a time and never will there be a moment where unrighteousness overcomes righteousness and where sin avoids justice.

There will never be a time. And this book is devoted to the defense of the good news, of the availability of a righteousness that comes from God to us as a free gift.

But this book also upholds the great truth that for those who are not in Christ, God will display his righteousness and judgment one day. He will do it.

[24 : 57] It will happen. It will happen because he himself is righteous. That's the foundation. Vengeance, setting things right is mine, says the Lord.

It belongs to him. It is his prerogative. And he can meet it out in any way he chooses. If he chooses in one epic of history to say eye for eye and tooth for tooth, I want you to go out and set things right.

If he chooses to do that, that's fine. But if he says it another time, no longer eye for eye and tooth for tooth, I will handle this myself. Then all the better.

And he says to the followers of Jesus, you don't have to bear the burden setting everything right. You don't have to. Because I will set all things right.

Notice how strong the language is. Never avenge yourselves. Never. Do not avenge yourselves. Leave it to the wrath of God. God's wrath will most assuredly come because he is righteous.

[26 : 09] Never avenge yourselves. Leave it to the wrath of God because it is written, vengeance is mine. I will repay, says the Lord. So what do we do?

If it is not our job, if it is not our task to make sure that those who do harm to us pay for their sins, then how do we respond to them?

Paul says the same thing that Jesus says. He does it by quoting from the book of Proverbs. To the contrary, he says in verse 20, 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. Now that last little phrase, by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head, has caused people a lot of problems, because it sounds as if when we do good to others, we are actually hurting them.

But I don't think that's precisely the point of the text. I think the point of the text is when you don't seek vengeance, you are leaving room for the wrath of God.

[27 : 12] In other words, you are entrusting it to him and he will take care of it, so that when you feed your enemy, when you give him a drink, when you meet the needs of your enemy, you are saying, judgment belongs to the Lord.

I will trust him to take care of it. It's not my job. Not my job. And these things, this way of living fleshes itself out in a thousand different ways in our lives.

Because let's be honest, not many of us face what we typically picture in our minds as persecution. Do we? I mean, we usually picture in our minds people being martyred, people being killed, or people being imprisoned.

And that is happening right now as we speak around the world. That really is happening. That has happened throughout church history. That's a reality that we need to face.

That's a reality that we may someday face personally. But for the most part, most of us will never face imprisonment or death. And yet, opposition comes at us in a lot of other ways.

[28 : 17] Sometimes it's subtle, sometimes it's not so subtle. But it comes at us in a lot of different ways. It comes from your neighbor, it comes from your co-workers, it comes from your family members.

And whatever it may be, whether they're gossiping about you, saying rude things about you, whether they're making you look bad at work, or they're criticizing your parenting, or whatever the form might be.

Granted, it's small and slight compared to the persecution that our brothers and sisters have to endure. That's true, but it doesn't mean that it's not real, right? It's still real, it's still there, it still affects us, and what we need to remember in the middle of that, right as we're experiencing that, is, I don't have to correct this, I don't have to fix this, I don't have to make this right, I don't have to respond to them in the ways that I'm tempted to respond to them, it's not my burden to bear, it's not what I have to do, what I have to do is respond to evil with good, overcome evil with good, as far as it depends upon me, live peaceably with all.

It's not our responsibility because we have a righteous God. God, we have a righteous God who cares so much about righteousness that he's willing to send his son into the world so that he might forgive sinners and yet remain righteous.

That's how righteous God is. God is so serious about upholding his own righteousness and justice that he sacrificed his own son so that at the end of the day he could say, yes, I will forgive sinners, but no, I will not be unrighteous in my forgiving of them.

[30 : 04] We have a God who is wholeheartedly committed to upholding righteousness because for him to uphold righteousness is to uphold and display his own greatness, worth, and glory.

And I promise you, he is committed with all of his being to doing that very thing so that ultimately we are not called to be John Wayne or Bruce Wayne or anyone else who might think that they've got to take vengeance.

But we are called to be like Christ. Let's pray.