

## Sunday School Lesson for April 2015

### What The Bible Says About Vengeance!

(Matthew 18:21-22)

Peter's question, "*How many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?*" reflects our struggle with the problem of vengeance. Because of our fallen nature, our instinctive reaction is to fight back, to lash out at those who infringe on our rights.

Jesus, of course, had a great deal to say about this in His Sermon on the Mount, radiating from His basic and startling command, "**Love your enemies!**" That kind of attitude was totally unheard of, even among the most religious in Judaism. In fact, the exhortation of the rabbis was "Love your friends and hate your enemies." The Apostle Paul expanded on Jesus' theme in Romans 12:14-21. In rapid-fire succession, he provided a list of exhortations that deal both directly and indirectly with a Christian's attitude toward vengeance.

#### I. "Bless them which persecute you: Bless, and curse not" [Rom. 12:14].

- A. The Living Bible translates this verse, "*If someone mistreats you...don't curse him; pray that God will bless them.*" This is the true spirit of Christianity. On the cross, Jesus prayed for those who were crucifying Him. In so doing, He demonstrated the proper attitude of a Christian towards his enemies.
- B. To retaliate against those who mistreat us is to push them further away from God. We will more likely win them to faith in Christ – or if they are Christians, win them to repentance of their wrongdoing - if we disarm them with our love rather than castigate them with our vengeance.

#### II. "Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep" [Rom. 12:15].

- A. What is the principle demonstrated in this exhortation? Whenever something good happens to our fellow Christians, we need to share their joy rather than sulk in jealousy.
- B. Weep with those who weep. We may be inclined to criticize those who suffer, thinking, "Well, they got what they deserved!" Instead, we should feel deeply and meaningfully with others in

their sorrow. To weep with those who weep means to enter into their sorrow, to empathize with them. Jesus was a prime example of this principle at the graveside of Lazarus, even though He would soon turn that scene of sorrow into joy.

### **III. “Be of the same mind one toward another...condescend to men of low estate” [Rom. 12:16].**

- A. Paul does not mean that we must agree with others in every respect. Rather, he means that we must make allowances for one another. We are not to sacrifice the harmony and good spirit of the body of Christ merely to win a point. This kind of stubbornness is most often the result of pride.
- B. The word “condescend” in this verse does not mean to patronize or talk down to, as it means in modern usage. Rather, it suggests that we are to deliberately seek out the lowly and the meek. In so doing, we deal a deathblow to sinful pride in our lives.

### **IV. In verses 17-21, Paul lists four distinct methods by which we can triumph over vengeance.**

- A. ***“Recompense to no man evil for evil”*** (v.17). In other words, never repay evil with evil. Retaliation is part of our unregenerate human nature, but turning the other cheek is divine.
- B. ***“Provide things honest in the sight of all men”*** (v .17). The New International Version translates “Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.” Christians are to be above reproach in all of their dealings with others. Nothing provides more ammunition for unbelievers in their attacks against the Christians faith than inconsistency or questionable principles in the lives of Christians whom they observe.
- C. ***“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men”*** (v.18). Paul was a realist; he knew from personal experience that the gospel would be resisted with great violence wherever it was preached with power. Although it is not always possible to live at peace with everyone, we should always strive to be peacemakers.
- D. Finally, in verses 19-21, Paul sets out his fourth principle: repay hatred, opposition, and persecution with good. One of human nature’s greatest temptations is to pay back – to get even with the person who has wronged us. This is not the way Christ taught His followers.

We belong to God, so we need to avenge ourselves. God always protects His property! Instead, we are to love our enemies – not just with words, but also with our deeds. We are to actively express the Christian attitude of concern and Agape love toward them.

Nowhere did Jesus promise us that the world would be kind to us. On the contrary, He said, “*In the world ye shall have tribulation.*” But He also added, “*Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world*” (John 16:33). Only in His strength can we overcome unchristian attitudes that issue forth in acts of vengeance.