

“The Christian Response”—Romans 12:16-18

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Christian Response”, is Romans 12:16-18 → *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. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

*Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord* (cf. 1Timothy 1:2). Amen.

Jack worked nights loading trucks for delivery during the day. His work environment was characterized by a constant barrage of misusing God’s name accompanied with every form of vulgar language imaginable. The abrasive manor in which the workers spoke to each other was accompanied by constant complaining about wages and doing nasty things to get on the supervisor’s nerves. It was a rough environment in which to work filled with a feeling of negativity, rebellion, self-righteous criticism and darkness.

However, Jack focused on his area of work, striving to simply do what he was told to do. He worked hard at not assimilating the vulgar

language as can easily happen to anyone when spending so many hours a day hearing it. He strove to avoid getting caught up into discussions complaining about the company, the union, wages and so forth. He made every effort to treat his supervisors and fellow employees with respect, avoiding the temptation to react when accused of messing up the loading procedure. He worked hard at accepting responsibility for his own actions in the work place, being willing to correct his behavior. *So far as it depended upon him, he strove to live peaceably with all of them.*

One night a fellow employee asked Jack for a ride home. Before dropping him off at his house he and Jack visited in the car for quite some time. The co-worker opened up the discussion by verbalizing his observation of Jack's behavior, taking note that he acted quite differently than the other guys, and wondered why? Jack responded by sharing the source of his peace in that environment, even though he struggled so much with the sinful behaviors and words of so many of those workers and his own temptations to react sinfully. Jack shared the fact that he too could easily take on the actions, concepts and words of his fellow workers because of his own sinfulness. However, Jesus has already dealt with the power of all that sin by His death on the cross for the forgiveness of his sins. He could take that peace into his work environment and respond on the basis of God's Word instead of react

on the basis of his own sinfulness.

The words of our text place before you the Christian response in the midst of the environment of sinful reaction. The commands Paul places before you in Romans chapters 12-15 come only after Paul had laid the foundation of your utter sinfulness in God's sight (cf. Romans 3:9-20), your forgiveness of sins and salvation by faith in the Person & Work of Jesus alone (cf. Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-8; 6:23), your connection to this forgiveness in your baptism in order to live a new life (cf. Romans 6), and the Holy Spirit's power at work in you to keep you living in the steadfast love of your dear Father in heaven as His child (cf. Romans 8). As Romans 5:1 says: *Therefore*, that is, because God has forgiven you all your sins and makes you His dear child for all eternity . . . *Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have **peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ***. This is the basis for the Christian response in the sanctified life of serving your neighbor through your works and words.

The first application of these words is to the Church as we function together to bring the Gospel of Jesus Christ to sinners and, from there, extends to others. Verse 16 instructs us to *live in harmony with one another*. While the concept of harmony may conjure up images of people functioning together in a pleasing, happy, struggle-free, perfect accord with each other, literally the Greek text tells us to have "the same mind toward one another." It harkens back to Paul's statement in verses

1-2 of this same chapter as he began his discussion of the Christian response: *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 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.*

(cf. Romans 12:1-2)

The Christian response flows from the mind of Christ toward you as He humbled Himself to bring you peace with God in the forgiveness of your sins through His sacrificial death on the cross (cf. Philippians 2:5-8). This is the mind or attitude we are to have with one another. Christians display *genuine . . . love . . . with brotherly affection* (cf. Romans 12:9-10) because they are forgiven sinners together under the cross of Jesus, not simply because they function as a “family” in the congregation. Christians *abhor what is evil and hold fast to what is good* (cf. Romans 12:9) with discernment, filtering all ideals, activities, attitudes and so forth through the mind of Christ revealed in God’s written Word. Christians show *honor* and respect to others because they are serving the Lord Jesus (cf. Romans 12:10-11; Colossians 3:23-24), desiring to be faithful to Him in their vocations and relationship in life. **The Christian response is governed by God’s grace in Christ Jesus as a forgiven sinner empowered by His Holy Spirit.**

Thus the injunction in verse 16 of our text: *Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.* Again, this injunction against sinful pride and arrogance harkens back to what Paul said earlier in this chapter in verse 3: *For **by the grace given** to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment.* (cf. Romans 12:3) The Christian response requires the Christian to never forget who he is: a forgiven sinner because of *the grace given* him in Jesus. Do you remember Whose you are when you have been wronged? Do you remember Whose you are when conflict and strife reveal their ugly faces in your presence? Do you remember Whose you are when you are tempted to react with *evil for evil* (verse 17)? When you fail remember Whose you are and cling to the forgiveness of sins offered you in absolution, the Lord's Supper and the written Gospel Word—not as a pretense to do more sin as you walk away forgiven, but with desire to give the Christian response by the power of the Holy Spirit.

It is such complete forgiveness of sins through faith in Christ which brings you peace in a world flooded with so much darkness, conflict, strife and unrest because of sin. Thus, the command in verse 18 of our text takes on a sanctified meaning: *If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* Notice it does not say you create peace. Notice it does not say you control the outcome of discussions with

others or have to make them think your way in order to *live peaceably with* them. The Christian response is not meant to convince anybody of anything. It is meant to confess Jesus as Lord, to discern good and evil according to the truth of His Word and give the forgiveness of sins to repentance sinners. The Christian response cares first and foremost about sinners having peace with God through faith in Jesus Christ in the forgiveness of sins. This is what Jesus meant when He said in Matthew 5:9 → *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*

The world turns things upside down and inside out because of idolatry. Many look to relationships (e.g. marriage; family; friends), political dynamics (e.g. leaders; groups; ideals), new activities (e.g. a new job; hobbies; a cause) and things to give them peace in a sin-turmoil life. What happens when you look to those things for peace? Since this sinful-tainted world with all its sinners living in sin-tainted relationships with sinful ideals cannot give them what it's not built to give (i.e. peace) they are sadly disappointed and redirect their search only to be disappointed over and over again. What is needed is a heart cleansed of sin and a mind made new in forgiveness.

Thus, the most effective way to *live peaceably with all*, to *live in harmony with one another*, to *not be haughty or wise in your own sight*, to *repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in*

*the sight of all* is by practicing confession and absolution with one another. James 5:16 says: *Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.* The Christian response flows from the heart healed of sin to bring the peace of Christ to heal your relationships, conversation and activities, not look for them to give you peace.

This does not mean that your life will always lack strife and struggle in your dealings with people. Neither does it mean you will always be happy, having no struggles emotionally, physically and spiritually. In fact, confessing Jesus as Lord and the truth of God's Word in the midst of many of those situations and conversations may cause others to attack you. The Christian response expects sin to rebel against God's Word. That's why Paul also included in this chapter his injunction to *bless those who persecute you* instead of cursing them (cf. Romans 12:14; Matthew 5:44; 1 Peter 3:9; 4:12). The Christian response confesses sin as sin and confesses Jesus as Savior from sin and Lord over all. Thus, we enter the struggle at peace to bring the Prince of peace to others.

Oh . . . and by the way, remember we left off with Jack telling his co-worker why he functioned as he did at work. His co-worker walked into his house that night at peace. Why? Because when Jack shared the good news of forgiveness of sins in Jesus with him, the co-worker confessed specific sins that he had done to Jack. And what did Jack do?

Get flustered and tell him to make an appointment with a pastor? React in shock that he had done such things? Sit in silence not knowing what to say? Scold him for such terrible behavior? No. As a forgiven sinner, at peace with God through Christ Jesus, He immediately announced absolution to him: In the name of Jesus your sins are forgiven. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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