

Seeking Justice and Practicing Self-Defense

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- [0 : 0 0] How do you respond when people mistreat you? What's your general way of responding? Well, you know, the answer really depends on how we're mistreated.
- As I'm going to point out as we go through this message this morning, we live or we have been going through over the past several weeks now Romans chapter 12.
- We've been studying that chapter of Scripture. We've learned how God wants us to live in a right relationship with Him and how He wants us to live in relationship with other people.
- When we got to Romans chapter 12 verses 14 through 21, we found that we are expected, called by God, to do everything that we can to live peacefully with people.
- Do everything that we can to avoid conflict, if possible. I want you to note some examples. We'll look at them quickly. This is from Romans 12.
- [1 : 1 0] Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable or right in the sight of all.
- If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
- Where in the world would Paul get something like that? Well, he learned it from Jesus. That's what Jesus taught. As we looked at last week in Matthew chapter 5, verses 38 through 42.
- I want us to look at it quickly. What Jesus said. You have heard that it was said, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil.
- But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. If anyone would sue you and take your tunic, your shirt, let him have your cloak, your overcoat as well.
- [2 : 1 1] 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.
- Next week, we're going to look at Matthew chapter 5, beginning in verse 43, where Jesus told us to love our enemies. Now, in light of all this, in light of what we've just read, we need to be thinking, is God telling us we've got to give up on the idea of justice in this world?
- Is Paul and Jesus telling us that a Christian could not serve in the military, could not be a law enforcement officer, are these verses, are they actually saying that we could never defend our families or ourself?
- Well, the answer to all three questions is no. That's not what's being said. Christians may and we should seek justice.
- We can and should defend our families and even our own lives when they're threatened under certain circumstances. Christians may certainly serve in the military or be law enforcement officers.
- [3 : 3 6] God not only allows, but He expects us, as we live in this world, as Christians, as faithful Christians, He expects us to seek justice, to protect our families, even our own lives, just make sure we do it in appropriate ways.

That's what we're going to be looking at as we go through this message. But first, I want to do a little quick reminder from last week. First of all, God prohibits us from seeking revenge or retaliating against our enemies.

If you weren't here last week, I'd encourage you to go online and listen to that message. God prohibits us from seeking revenge or retaliating against our enemies.

God expects us to treat people better than they treat us. And what He wants us to do is learn to exercise restraint.

Don't just have a mindset, whatever somebody does to me, I'm going to do it back. I'm going to do it worse. I'm not going to get mad. I'm going to get even, as I said last week.

[4 : 45] That's not how we are called to live as Christians in our relationships with other people, even our enemies. That doesn't mean we've got to let the bad guys win.

That doesn't mean they're going to win because they won't. Paul stressed that God will make sure that the bad guys don't win.

That justice will prevail. But what we've got to do is learn to trust Him. We've got to learn to trust that God's going to make things right.

That's what Paul talks about in Romans 12, verse 19. He says, 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.

Here's what we need to understand. There's a lot of bad in this world. There's a lot of evil people in this world. There's a lot of people who will hurt you, who will hurt your family, who will hurt this country, who will hurt people.

[5 : 49] And the idea is not God's telling His people, well, you don't worry about it. Just let it go. It'll be all right. No.

Scripture's telling us, among other things, we need to learn to trust God that He will make things right. He will avenge His people.

We can trust Him. And Paul said, elaborated on this in writing to the Thessalonians, that church, as they went through persecution, going through a lot of mistreatment.

I want you to look at how he said to respond. We looked at this a few weeks ago, 2 Thessalonians 1, but I want us to look at it again, what God is going to do. He says, God is just.

He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with His powerful angels.

[6 : 55] He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His might on the day He comes to be glorified in His holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.

This includes you because you believed our testimony to you. Does that sound like Paul is thinking, well, God's just going to let things go and so should we.

Not at all. Paul is assuring us we can trust God to make things right, to settle scores, to do what needs to be done in the lives of evil people who cause harm to God's people or to just people in general.

Paul personally trusted God to do that when someone harmed him and what he was trying to do in his ministry. I want you to look at 2 Timothy chapter 4. Look at it.

Listen to it. Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Beware of him yourself for he strongly opposed our message.

[8 : 16] Paul doesn't sound like a pacifist, does he? Whoever this guy was, Alexander the coppersmith, he did Paul harm. He interfered in what Paul was doing and trying to preach and teach the gospel.

Paul's mentality was, yeah, I can't get revenge. I'm not going to retaliate. But I am going to trust God. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

And Paul took this guy and his trouble making seriously and told Timothy who he's writing to, you watch out for him too. See, Paul's not saying, oh, I'll just let it go.

He said, this is a bad guy. God's going to get him. And Timothy, you watch out for him. Don't let him cause trouble for you if you can help it. But he will if he can.

That's what Paul's saying to him. Now this doesn't mean that, doesn't mean that Paul didn't pray for his salvation. But at the same time, Paul didn't have this unrealistic understanding of life and evil and evil people.

[9 : 32] He knew that people could be evil. He knew that he was done wrong. And he knew that somewhere along the line, God would settle the score. God would make it right.

But in the meantime, he warned Timothy, his associate. He warned him about this guy. He's a troublemaker. Every New Testament writer warns us that Christians will experience persecution in this world.

We have been blessed in our country, throughout the history of our country, where we have been able to live out our faith, attend, worship, live like we want to live as Christians, and not be persecuted.

We've had the privilege, historically, of even having laws that protect all of these rights, all of these privileges to worship and live out the Christian life.

But in the big picture of the history of the church, most Christians experience persecution. Most Christians suffer for the mere fact that they believe in Jesus and seek to live a Christian life.

[10 : 44] We're warned that's going to happen. We're warned to expect that. But we're not supposed to retaliate or seek revenge when it happens to us. Instead, we need to trust God to deal with our enemies.

We have to trust God to deal with our enemies in His way and at His time. But one of the ways that God works to right wrongs and bring about justice in this world is through human government.

That's the second thing we're going to look at. God provides for our protection through governmental authority. Paul writes in Romans chapter 13 about this.

God has assigned government the responsibility of providing justice in our society. Rewarding right and punishing wrong behavior.

I want you to look with me at verses 3 and 4 of Romans 13. It's on the screen. He says, For rulers are not a terror to good conduct but to bad.

[11 : 44] Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good and you will receive His approval. For He is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong be afraid for He does not bear the sword in vain.

For He is the servant of God and avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. Paul is telling us here that governmental authorities are God's servants to the world to ensure that justice take place.

Right now, think about it this way. our elected leaders, judges, law enforcement officers. They are unconsciously and imperfectly serving God's purpose of administering justice.

Right now, for our benefit. Paul is emphasizing the authority of government here to punish lawbreakers.

even to the point of administering deadly force, including the death penalty when needed. I want you to note in verse 4 the phrase, bear the sword.

- [13 : 05] For He does not bear the sword in vain. When Paul says that the government is authorized to bear the sword, he means that the government has been given authority by God to use the sword for the purpose that people used swords for in the first century, which was to put people to death, which was to protect themselves.

This would apply to the government having authority to wage war, to carry out capital punishment, and to use lethal force when necessary in enforcing laws.

Our government has the God-given right and authority to wage war against terrorism. Our government has the God-given authority to be engaged in the fight against ISIS right now.

If you read the front page of this week's newsletter, I put an article in there by Russell Moore from the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission of the Southern Baptist Convention. He talks about how there is no contradiction for us praying for our enemies that they might come to know Christ, but also when they're acting as our enemies, like ISIS is, for example.

It's not wrong to kill them, to inflict major force firepower to take them out, to destroy their lives if possible.

- [14 : 44] That is God's way of enabling civilization to experience the most peace, for justice to prevail, for properly authorized force to be inflicted on evil doers of whatever strife.

Paul emphasized that God intends for government to be his instrument of justice to make things right in this world.

Now I want to reiterate, we are not to seek vengeance for personal offenses. Look again, 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.

Instead, as a general rule, we are to look to the government to provide police and a court system in order to do this.

Look at verse 4, for he is the servant of God, that is, he's embodying government, personifying government here as he writes, for he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

- [16 : 03] This is the general way that we're supposed to seek justice in the world. The police and judges are called by God, put in place by God to be the good guys of society who enforce laws, who administrate justice.

Therefore, it's not only acceptable, but it's ideal for Christians to fill these roles. It's good when a Christian serves as a police officer, when they're in the military, when they're serving in some way in our court and legal system.

They're the best ones to administer God's justice. And we need to respect everyone who serves in these roles, everyone who serves in these offices, by virtue of what they're doing, God's agent, God's servant.

We should respect the office. We should respect them. We as a society, and especially here in our country, we need to hold all governmental officials to a high standard.

We need to hold them accountable. We need to have the expectation that they're going to do what they do in a fair and impartial kind of way. That's the only way you can have justice, isn't it? But no matter how many law enforcement officers we have, they can't be everywhere.

- [17 : 33] So sometimes we, as private citizens, sometimes we're faced with situations where our lives or our health is threatened.

Our families are threatened, and there's no time to call the police. what are we to do then as Christians? That's the third point.

God allows us to protect ourselves and others we are responsible for or have an opportunity to protect. We are not to be pacifists in this world who just sort of stand by and whatever happens to us happens to us.

It is not wrong. It is not sinful. It is not contrary to Scripture for us to defend ourselves and look to the resources God gives, provides to defend us.

First, we can look to God to help us to defend ourselves. Jesus promised this kind of help to His disciples when they experienced persecution.

[18 : 37] Look at it in Luke chapter 11. Jesus said, And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.

Jesus is talking about here religious persecution. He's talking about when His disciples are brought up before the courts, before the magistrates, before whoever, because they're preaching and teaching about Him.

And we read that in the book of Acts. And Jesus is saying when that happens, you can defend yourself and you can depend upon the Spirit of God who lives within you to equip you to know how to defend yourself in those kind of situations.

Number two, we can use the legal system to defend ourselves. Paul did this on several occasions. As you read about his life and ministry in the book of Acts, you'll find there are times when the situation was such that he exerted his rights as a Roman citizen to avoid punishment, to avoid being beaten, to avoid death even.

You see it on the screen, Acts chapter 16 and Acts chapter 25. In Acts chapter 16, Paul was improperly imprisoned. He was a Roman citizen.

[20 : 03] And to make a long story short, Paul required the citizens of that country, the officials, the magistrates, it says, the magistrates of Philippi who had improperly imprisoned him, when they heard about it, they were going to just let him go and hope he'd just go off quietly.

Paul said, no, they've got to come and let me out. He made a big deal about it, big to do about it because he was a Roman citizen and they had violated his rights. And then in Acts chapter 25, Paul's life is being threatened.

If he stays where he is, he's probably going to be assassinated. There's a plot to assassinate him. The only way that he sees to get out of that is to appeal to Caesar as a Roman citizen and he does that.

That enables him to be protected and taken to Rome where he'll stand trial before Caesar himself. We can use the legal system to defend ourselves.

That's not wrong. That's not not trusting God. use the system to demand justice, to protect yourself and your family, your home.

[21 : 15] We have biblical precedent to do that. Number three, we can use lethal weapons to defend ourselves. Peter did and so did some of the other disciples.

Look with me at Luke chapter 22 verse 35 and 6. Jesus said to them, when I sent you out with no money bag or knapsack or sandals, did you lack anything?

They said, nothing. Prior to the end, near the end of Jesus' ministry, he sent his disciples out to preach and teach and they were so well received at that time, people took care of them.

people provide them with a place to stay, food to eat. But now, public opinion has turned. Jesus is about to be arrested and crucified.

It's a different world. And so look what he says. He said to them, but now, let the one who has a money bag take it and likewise a knapsack.

[22 : 29] Let the one who has no sword sell his cloak and buy one. There's a lot of controversy among New Testament scholars over was Jesus literally talking about telling his disciples to go out and buy a sword or is he just using that as just sort of a figure of speech to prepare yourself for coming opposition.

The truth is, it doesn't matter. Look at what Jesus said. He used a money bag, a knapsack, and a sword in positive ways to describe how they needed to prepare themselves for the future and how people were going to persecute them and oppose them.

Jesus had no problem using that sword along those other items in a positive way. Peter not only kept the sword on his side, but Peter used his sword on one occasion.

Look at it. And when those who were around him saw what would follow, they said, Lord, shall we strike with the sword? And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.

That was Peter. Other gospels tell that same story. They tell more details. That was Peter. But Peter was wrong to do that. Peter should not have used his sword like that on that occasion.

[24 : 06] Jesus rebuked him. Jesus restored that man's ear. See, it was God's plan. This was the time when Jesus was going to be arrested, when he was going to be condemned and executed.

This was God's plan for when Jesus would die on the cross in order to save us, provide for our salvation. And so it was not going to be stopped.

But the point I want to make is, I want you to listen to this. Jesus did not prohibit his disciples from carrying swords. And the only reason people would carry the sword was for self-defense.

See, the disciples were with Jesus for three years. He taught them about all the things they need to be and do as his followers, but he never taught them you can't carry a sword.

He never taught them to be pacifists. He never taught them they couldn't be armed. In today's terms, he would not have prohibited them from having a concealed weapons permit.

[25 : 15] They didn't need one back then. They carried for self-defense. Jesus never said a word. He even spoke about swords in a positive way.

I really believe that what Jesus and Paul taught about loving our enemies and overcoming evil with good was usually directed at people who were persecuting Christians.

They weren't describing how to deal with evil people who were out to kill, rape, rob, or terrorize whoever crossed their path. Theologian John Frame, very respected theologian, writes a lot about ethics.

He points out this distinction. Look at what he says. He says, what Jesus prohibits in Matthew 5, 38-42, is not self-defense, but vengeance.

Jesus was talking about our response to an insult, a lawsuit, forced labor, and a request for a loan. If someone seeks to kill you or a family member and there's no help available, it is right for you to ward off the attack by force if necessary.

[26 : 29] Individuals may sometimes fight or even kill to preserve a life, but they should not use more force than is necessary in a given situation.

Two other respected theologians, Norman Geisler and J.P. Moreland. Geisler has written a lot about ethics as well. They're more forceful in emphasizing the importance, even the necessity of Christians sometimes using force to stop evil.

Look at what they say. To prevent murder when one could have prevented it is morally wrong. To allow a rape when one could have hindered it is an evil.

To watch an act of cruelty to children without trying to intervene is morally inexcusable. In brief, not resisting evil is an evil of omission.

And an evil of omission can be just as evil as an evil of commission. Any man who refuses to protect his wife and children against a violent intruder fails them morally.

[27 : 45] We, as Christians, we have the moral obligation to oppose evil that we can't oppose, intervene, help someone, prevent the act from taking place.

We have a moral responsibility to do that. If that includes using lethal force, then so be it. You know, today, one of the ways our government has chosen to protect us as citizens in addition to law enforcement is to allow citizens to own and carry guns.

Now, I want to be real fair here. Every Christian does not agree with this, but a logical application of what Paul says in Romans chapter 13 verses 1 through 4 is that owning and carrying guns is a morally and legally acceptable option for Christians.

I've always believed that. I have always practiced that my entire life. Now, I know accidents happen.

Guns are dangerous. So are automobiles. So are drugs. So are knives. You've got to be very, very, very careful if you own a gun, if you carry a gun.

[29 : 16] You don't get second chances a lot of times when accidents happen with them. That is a fact. The fact that some people use guns to commit sinful acts does not mean that guns are the problem in this country.

The problem in this country is sin. the problem in this country is that sinful people do sinful things. The truth is since the beginning of humanity people have been killing one another with and without weapons.

From a biblical perspective, the ownership of guns for protection, that's your option. That's a personal choice you can make.

do what you think is right for you. Act on conviction. If you think you shouldn't have a gun as a Christian, then you shouldn't have one.

You're not acting in faith. If you violate your conscience on that, that in itself is an act of sin, James tells us. But I also want you to understand there is absolutely nothing unspiritual or sinful about owning a gun and if necessary, using it.

[30 : 35] That should be under very few extreme circumstances. But gun or no gun, it is morally right to defend other people, to defend yourself against the actions of evil people, to refuse to intervene against a would-be murderer, rapist, or other violent attacker is a morally evil act of omission.

I'll just be real honest with you, I can't understand a pacifist who would not intervene to save or protect the life of one of his loved ones.

To me, it is contrary to the way God made us as human beings. We are called by God to be peaceful people.

To not have this attitude, I don't take nothing off nobody. That's wrong. We're called by God to not be vengeful, to not retaliate, to not always be trying to pay somebody back.

Our goal needs to be that we avoid violence when possible. That we try to find ways to overcome evil with good. That is our calling as Christians.

[32 : 09] That's what I want you to remember as we leave here today. If we're going to be known for just one thing, we don't need to be known for the guns we have and the way we conceal them and all that kind of stuff.

We're going to be known for one thing. Jesus said we need to be known for our love for one another. And we need to learn to do the loving thing.

And sometimes that may be to protect someone. To resort to lethal means to protect someone. one. But that will be a rare case and never happen in most of our lives.

So let's learn to act in love, even loving our enemies. Let's pray together. Dear God, show us now how we should respond to you and your message this morning.

Father, help us all to understand that we're not to be spiteful, vengeful, unforgiving people.

[33 : 20] But help us to see, Father, that you do hold high justice in what is right and opposing evil.

Help us just to be able to do it the right way. Help us to trust you. Help us to look to government authority in a positive way and use that, rely upon that.

Help us, Father, to pray that there won't ever be a time that we have to use deadly force. in protecting someone.

But dear God, help us to not be inactive, passive in the face of evil. Help us to act where we need to act.

Help us not to be guilty of that sin of omission. And just in an attitude of prayer, let's listen to the Lord and respond to Him. I'd be happy to pray with you here at the front.

[34 : 29] If you want to come during this time. I'd be happy to pray with you now. Let's pray with you now. Let's pray with you now. Let's pray with you now. Let's pray with you now.