



Fall Bible Memorization Project

Introduction

We are continuing to see Paul discuss our relationships with others. Relationships are a vital part of the Christian life, aren't they, so it is no wonder that Paul has spent the better part of the last 10 verses talking about our interactions with others and he continues on in that same thought process for verse 19.

Just recently I was telling someone about how the Lord has changed me over the course of the last 13 years. One of the things I shared was that I used to struggle with extreme loneliness. Sometimes the loneliness would engulf me and I wondered would I ever have strong and solid relationships in my life on a day to day basis. But... I went on to share about God's transforming work that He has done in my life through His Word. He has transformed so many things for me including my lonely state. He has taught me much in regard to relationships, and I very rarely struggle with loneliness any longer. I now have a wealth of rich friendships. What a blessing! What abundant life! God is so good to give us His Truth, Truth that permeates into every nook and cranny of our lives.

Relationships permeate into every crevice of our lives too, don't they? Even when we would like to get away from them, we really can't. We would sometimes like to fool ourselves into thinking we can isolate ourselves, but it really isn't possible. I think that is why Paul spends so much of this chapter talking about our interactions with others. Our relationships to others, Christian and non Christian, are a direct reflection of our walk with Christ. So let's look at Paul's focus on relationships in Romans 12:19.

Looking at the verses and looking at our lives

Paul's focus in verse 19 is revenge. If you really look at the Romans 12 closely, he was also talking about revenge in verse 17 as well. What is the definition of revenge? The English dictionary defines it as "the punishment of somebody in retaliation for harm done or the desire to punish somebody for harm done." The original Greek word is indicative of that same idea. We have all felt the desire to take revenge at one point or another. Perhaps we have even acted on it and attempted to take our own revenge. Is that God's plan for us? How does Paul address it in Romans 12? Let's look at several versions to get a good perspective.

[Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.] (NIV)

[Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.] (NASV)

[Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. "I'll do the judging," says God. "I'll take care of it."] (Message)

[Dear friends, don't try to get even. Let God take revenge. In the Scriptures the Lord says, "I am the one to take revenge and pay them back."] (CEV)

[My friends, do not try to punish others when they wrong you, but wait for God to punish them with his anger. It is written: "I will punish those who do wrong; I will repay them," says the Lord.] (NCV)

I don't think we have to wonder what Paul is trying to say here. God never desires for us to take revenge. I really love it when the Bible is so direct. It puts the choice clear in front of us. So what is God's instruction about revenge?

- Don't take it
- Never take your own
- Don't even try to get even

God couldn't be any clearer. Taking our own revenge is not ever in God's plan for us. Why would that be so? I believe one reason would be the Bible teaches us that our lives are to be a reflection of God's grace. (II Corinthians 4:6-18) Just as we discussed in the last devotion, God had every right to take revenge on us and yet He has offered us grace instead. In the same way He calls us to be full of grace towards others. He set the example for us to do that. Looking at verse 19 closer though, I believe we can gain other insight as well. Let me share with you what I see...

Whatever has hurt you is really sin against God

Notice the phrase, "but leave room for God's wrath." We need to remember every sin that is committed against us is really committed against God. God is love but He is also just. We may not be able to fully comprehend the two but we can still get direction from it. The Bible is clear that there will be a judgment day. God's wrath against sin will be brought forth. Ultimately God has given all of us the choice of grace and life in Him. Hopefully even the person who may have hurt you will choose His grace and experience the same forgiveness of sin that you have experienced. When we try to take our own revenge against something that was really done against God, we are stepping in to a place that is not ours. When someone sins against us, we need to remember the one they are really sinning against is God. He is the one to take revenge. We can rest in the wisdom of God in that. He knows so much better how to handle situations so we need to leave Him room to do that.

Following God's plan here is really a matter of trust

God is telling us to let it go and trust that He will take care of it, in His time, in His way. When we feel as if we need to step in and get even or hurt back, then we are really saying that we don't trust God and His ways. Do we trust God enough to take care of it? Do we trust God enough to handle the situation correctly? Be honest with yourself! Sometimes we are hurt so severely by someone else's actions toward us, so we feel we have to take revenge in a hard, drastic way. We think they should get what they have coming! Could it be we might not be willing to leave it up to God because we aren't sure He will give it to them hard enough! Have you ever felt that way? We know God is so loving and grace filled that we are afraid He might let them off too easy, so we feel we need to step in and make sure they are hurt like they hurt us. God has had to transform my heart many times in this area. We need to trust! Our God is omniscient, all powerful, loving, just, kind, grace filled and compassionate. He is also wise, wiser than we will ever be. He doesn't need our input! If we feel the need to take revenge, we might need to consider how deeply we trust God because He has been very clear in this passage that we are never to take revenge, but to trust Him to take care of it.

One other thing

There is one other thought that we need to ponder here. If you look back at our dictionary definition of revenge it includes not just the action of taking revenge but the desire to take revenge as well. While we may not actually take the action of revenge, we need to also check our desire to do so alongside this passage. When the desire to get even invades our heart, we need to allow this passage to cleanse it. God has a better plan.

Consider

Ask the Lord to search your heart about this issue. The clouds of revenge can roll in so easily. Ask the Lord to show you how you "punish" others when they hurt you. We must remember that sometimes revenge can be very subtle. When someone hurts us we may not directly attack them back, but we may ignore, or steer clear of them, we may speak against them, we may harbor negative feelings about them, we may put up walls in our relationship to them. In a sense these things are just as much revenge as more direct attacks. God doesn't intend for us to carry that load. In fact, in verses 20-21, He is going to tell us what to do instead, so be ready for His direction!

Pray

"Lord help me to put me eyes on You at all times and in every situation. Help to realize You will accomplish what concerns me. Help me not to even desire to take revenge, but to trust You, knowing that You have it all under control. I know that only You can mold my heart in this way, and I am humbly asking You to transform me."