



Fall Bible Memorization Project

Introduction

Well we are moving along, nearing the end of an awesome chapter full of rich images for the Christian life. Has God been changing you? The Word of God is designed for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness (II Timothy 3:16-17) so if you have been experiencing those things you are allowing God to work through His Word in your life. Which one of those words has been the most prominent for your experience as you have been memorizing Romans 12? Make sure to take a moment and thank God for His Work in your life through His Word.

As we move on to verses 17-18 Paul continues his call to selfless living. Remember the only way that we can even approach that kind of lifestyle in this self focused world is to have a transformed life. A life cut out of the pattern of the cross, not the pattern of the world. The more I study this chapter, the more I see it as the opposite of everything that the world "preaches". Thankfully now that these words are hidden more deeply in our hearts we can listen to their sermon everyday. So let's listen in as God continues to preach His message of living to us.

Looking at the verses and looking at our lives

Verses 17-18 have some very direct statements. Let's look at them in the different versions.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (NIV)

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. (NASV)

Don't hit back; discover beauty in everyone. If you've got it in you, get along with everybody. (Message)

If someone does wrong to you, do not pay him back by doing wrong to him. Try to do what everyone thinks is right. Do your best to live in peace with everyone. (NCV)

Never pay back evil with more evil. Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honorable. Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone. (NLT)

There are really three instructions in these two verses so let's look at them one by one.

Never pay back evil for evil

There is a very important word in this phrase. It is not listed in all the versions but in the original language it is implied. The word is "never". That word makes this statement all the more direct for us to follow in our living day to day. Without that word, we can make exception for our circumstances. Isn't that what we do so often in so many areas? We justify our actions according to our circumstances. We make exception for ourselves because someone's actions "really hurt us, wounded us or wronged us". The wording here however does not leave room for that kind of thinking or living. It says "never" and that is what it means. When evil is directed our way we must be very careful not to allow our response to be one of any kind of evil because evil takes many forms. Our actions always must be measured alongside the character of Christ.

Let's explore that a little deeper. Christ set the example for us in taking this approach. No one will ever hurt us deeper than the way our sin wounded Christ. He did not repay us with evil, instead He poured out His mercy on our behalf. The only way we will ever be able to live in this same way is "in view of God's mercy". That phrase should be very familiar! Christ blessed us in spite of our evil toward Him. We must keep that view of mercy in the forefront of our mind to make sure that we never repay evil for evil to anyone who sins against us.

There is also another very important word in this phrase and it is the word "anyone". Here again we tend to make exceptions. We won't repay most people evil for evil but there are a few people or one person that we just can't allow to fit into that category. Aren't we glad that God didn't categorize us in that way? He didn't pay back any of us evil for evil and we can't make exceptions either. "Never" and "anyone", two powerful words don't you think?

Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody

I imagine that conversation about this little phrase could go on and on because in some ways it does seem a little vague. However we know that God's light shines brightly, if something isn't clear to us we need to look a little closer. Once again I hear the undertone of "live selflessly". Do you hear it too? This simple phrase can reach into so many different situations. We can talk it to death and do the "what if" scenario again and again. Instead I believe we need to press into the heart of the statement. Let's consider that. First of all the idea of "be careful" is important to note. This implies that we need to be aware of our actions and lifestyle at all times. We need to take care over it, making sure that we have lined our life up with the lifestyle of Christ, a selfless lifestyle.

I don't see this as an urging to be a people pleaser though. I believe the idea is to not give people a reason to point at your life and say there is some inconsistency with what you say you believe. That can happen if we ever pay back evil for evil as stated earlier or if we live with our selfish preferences at the forefront of our lifestyle. We have to be careful to live consistently with what we profess. When we are willing to put others needs above our own it gives credibility to what we say we believe. We are to be careful to meet people where they are and minister to them with little regard for ourselves. Yes at times that may cause us to have to sacrifice something, a preference or an experience but we should be willing. The Message translation says, "If you have got it in you." We must remind ourselves that we do have it in us! The Spirit of Christ lives in us! He can give us the strength to live in this selfless way!

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone

Unlike the first instruction that we looked at, this one does seem to allow for exceptions. Interesting! I love the way this is worded, especially the part that says "as far as it depends on you". We know from reading God's Word that God loves peace. He gave His own life to have peace with us. Here again, He has set the example for us. He made the way possible for peace because as far as it depended on Him, He made peace with man. However we all know people who will not make peace with God. The same is true in our lives and what a great example to follow. We all have conflicts with people. The instruction here is to do our part to make peace, to follow in God's path and be the peace maker, offering peace. However we can't guarantee that the other person will accept the peace. We can only do our part. The main instruction here is to do our part, as people who are living transformed, selfless lives we are to follow God's example and live, exist in, abide in peace with people. It is just God's way!

Consider

Instruction 1: Are there any people or situations on your exception list? Take them to the Lord. Ask Him to remind you of His mercy toward you. Ask Him to show you ways that you can bless in spite of your hurt or feelings and then do it!

Instruction 2: Are you being careful? Are you considering your ways so as not to offend others or mar their view of Christ in your life?

Instruction 3: Is there a situation or relationship in your life where strife is reigning? How can you be the one to extend peace? Pray about that and then follow God's lead.

Pray

Lord help me to follow in Your example. My human nature prompts me to respond with evil but I want to respond as You responded to me. Help me to be willing to sacrifice my preferences with a selfless lifestyle. Help me to use Your strength and example to live at peace with everyone."