

INTRODUCTION

Please open your Bibles to the book of Romans 12. This is a great, great chapter. As I have been telling you, this chapter 12 of Romans is very practical. It teaches us about relationships. Since we're going to finish chapter 12 today, I want to do a little review. The first few verses of chapter 12 is talking about our relationship with God. We're to offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to God. Then it talks about our relationship with ourselves. We shouldn't think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Then it talks about our relationship with our church family, talks about spiritual gifts. And the circle keeps widening because it talks about our relationship to just people in general, how we're to show hospitality, kindness.

Today, the circle gets a little bit wider, because it talks about how we are to deal with our enemies. And today's message is, "How to Deal with Mean People." If you don't know ever know any mean people, you can get up and leave, because you don't need this message. But if you ever have to deal with any mean people, this is the message for you.

Will Rogers, one of the greatest humorists in American history said, "I never met a man I didn't like." Can anybody say the same thing? How many of you believe Will Rogers? Some of you are saying, "Well, Will Rogers never met my boss," or "Will Rogers never met my crazy cousin," or some of you may be saying, "Will Rogers never met my husband."

Somebody asked me, "This message, 'How to Deal with Mean People,' is it a message on marriage?" Well, it very well might be for some people, because it is all about how to deal with relational problems, when you're in conflict with somebody.

Do you know that there are some mean people out there? Do you know any mean people? I want you to turn to your neighbor and say out loud, "I know some mean people." Do that right now. "I know some mean people. I *know* some mean people." If you do, this message is for you.

I heard about a lady that got on board a bus. She was carrying her baby, and the bus driver said, "Lady, that is the ugliest baby I've ever seen." She didn't know what to do, she paid her fare and went and sat down. But she was visibly upset. And the lady next to her said, "What's wrong?" She said, "That bus driver just insulted me terribly and I don't know what to do." Well, the lady said, "You ought to get up and you ought to go give that bus driver a piece of your mind." She said, "Here, let me hold your monkey. You go talk to him."

There are just some mean folks out there. We've just got to live with them. You can't ignore it. You can't deny it. They're out there. How are you going to deal with them? Well, the Bible gives us some great relational principles here. I want us to begin looking in chapter 12:17. And here's how you deal with mean people.

"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. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written [and this is what God says about himself in Deuteronomy]" God says, "It is mine to avenge. I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary, here is a quotation from Proverbs 25, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give

him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Now, next week, starting in chapter 13, we’re going to talk about the relationship we have with our government, how we relate to that, because it is so very practical. Here we’re talking about how to deal with mean people, those people that we might call an enemy. Now, have you learned that you’re going to make some enemies throughout life? In fact, there is an English couplet that goes this way:

The man who has a thousand friends
Has not one friend to spare.

But the man who has one enemy
Will meet him everywhere.

Who is that person that you’ve already been thinking about for a few minutes in this message, that person you consider a mean person, somebody whom you just don’t like, you don’t get along with, there is a relational problem there? It may be your ex-spouse, because there are some of you in this room that your mate left you, forsook you, left you high and dry. And you just don’t like that person. Some of you were in business with somebody, and somebody did you dirty through a crooked business deal, and you resent that. You don’t like them. Some of you are having problems in your very family among family members or maybe a friend at school. Just somebody that did you dirty, insulted you, hurt you, and you don’t like that person. How are you going to deal with them?

Now, this passage of scripture is your answer. But I need to make a couple of qualifications, a couple of clarifications before we begin. First of all, this passage is talking about personal relationships, not national relationships. Some people have taken this passage of scripture as a justification for what you might call a position of pacifism. They are pacifists because they don’t believe in fighting any wars because of what this says. My friend, this is not talking about a nation. This is talking about an individual. And if America had applied this passage of scripture when Pearl Harbor was bombed, we might be speaking Japanese here today. Seriously. No, there is a doctrine in the Bible of national defense, and sometimes an army has to go to war and we have enemies that must be attacked. This is not talking about national; this is talking about personal.

The other thing I want to say about this, my friend, this is not some ideal that can’t be attained. This is something you can attain in your relationships. It is attainable, but only through the power of the Holy Spirit. Friend, if you’re here today and you’re not a Christian, you can’t do this. You need Jesus Christ living in you to give you the power to do this. Even if you’re listening to me this morning, and you’re a Christian and you’re not right with God, you can’t do this. Only when you surrender to the Holy Spirit can you follow these principles. I want to share with you four relational principles on how to deal with mean people. They are sort of like two pairs, because there is one that is passive and one that is active.

I. RESIST YOUR INSTINCT FOR REVENGE

You have got to learn to resist your instinct for revenge. That's a passive thing. You don't allow yourself to seek revenge. That is what verse 17 says. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Now there are several ethics of human relationships that you may observe. In fact, I want to share three rules of ethical relationships with you and you're probably following one of these three rules. The first one I call:

1. The Yellow Rule: "Do unto others what they do to you."

I call it the Yellow Rule because you're a coward if you live this way. "Do unto others what they do to you." In other words, what somebody has done to you, that is what you do to them. Now on one hand, if they treat you with kindness, you show them kindness. But brother, if they insult you and they hurt you and they treat you with meanness, you're going to give back the same thing for them. It is the idea of retribution or reciprocity. If you do something good to me, I'll reciprocate. But if you hurt me, I'll seek retribution. It's the old line from the movie that said, "You're the guy that gave it to my brother; now I'm the guy that's going to give it to you. You hurt me. I'm gonna get back at you." We call that payback – and what a cowardly way to live.

The second rule I call:

2. The Gray Rule: "Do unto others before they do unto you."

I call this the Gray Rule, because it is not quite black and not quite white. It can be either way. It says this: "Do unto others before they do to you." It's even some ways worse than the Yellow Rule because some people say, "Hey, before you hurt me, I'm going to get in the first punch. I'm going to hurt you before you hurt me so that you can't hurt me." But on the other hand, it could be a good rule if you say, "I'm going to do good to you before you do good to me." So it's gray in that sense. But of course, thirdly, this is what we have called:

3. The Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you."

Some people say the American Golden Rule is, "He who has the gold makes all the rules." But truly, the Golden Rule that Jesus gave is Luke 6:31. He said, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." You don't give back what people give to you. You treat them the way you would like to be treated.

Sure, there are mean people out there. And the way you deal with them is for just about two seconds, because that's about all you can stand, for about two seconds, you crawl in their skin. You walk in their shoes. You say, "Why are they treating me this way?" And as I've said before, it's hurt people who hurt people. They've got some kind of pain, some kind of problem that they're treating you that way. And so for just a couple of seconds you crawl in their skin and say, why are they acting this way? You don't treat them the way they treat you. You don't do unto them before they do unto you. You treat them the way you would like to be treated.

We all have a natural instinct to protect ourselves. These are natural instincts. For instance, if someone throws something at your face, or you sense something is coming at your face,

naturally your instinct is to blink, to duck. You don't have to really even think about it. It's just an instinct. If you lose your balance and fall, instinctively you're going to put your hands out to catch yourself. You don't have to think about it. You don't have to say, "I am falling. Hands, get out there and catch me." Instinct. Did you know you also have an emotional instinct when somebody insults you? Insult them back. If they give you a verbal jab, you respond with a verbal jab. That is one instinct, that instinct for revenge that we all have, that you must deny and resist, according to the scripture. We'll tell you why in a moment.

II. PRESENT THE OFFER OF PEACE

Here is the second principle. That was the passive one. Here is the active one of this pair. You present the offer of peace. Present the offer of peace to them. Verse 18 says this. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. I've often said before that attorneys and accountants love this verse because it contains a loophole. They're always looking for loopholes. What's the loophole? Look, at the last five words of that verse. "Live at peace with everyone."

My friend, it would be pretty terrible if that is all it said. But the words before it provides, seriously, a legal, spiritual loophole which says, "You do that only if it's possible." You do that only as much as it depends on you. You offer them peace. Now, think right now again about that person or someone or a group of people that may be you don't like, and right now you don't have a good relationship with them. My question to you this morning is, have you extended to them the offer of peace? Have you said to them, "Listen, I don't want us to have a problem in our relationship. I want to live peacefully with you." And you extend to them the position of peace. Now, if you do that, one of two things are going to happen.

Number one,

1. Peace is possible when you offer it, and they accept it

If that's the case, everything is great. You have won your friend, and now everything is better. On the other hand:

2. Peace is impossible when you offer and they refuse

Sometimes to live peacefully with someone else is impossible. You extend the offer of peace, but they reject it. Now, listen, friend. You cannot find peace trying to please everyone. If you go through life just simply trying to please everybody else, you won't live in peace with yourself and you certainly won't live in peace with God.

Listen to me. If your desire is to please God, he'll even bless you by letting you get along with some of your enemies. That's the promise. Proverbs 16:7. Look at it. "When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, [not to others,] he makes even his enemies live at peace with him." Let me try to explain that. There are just some people out there whom you are not going to live at peace with them. You know why? Because the Bible says it may not be possible. As much as it depends on you, if it is possible, live in peace with them.

Now I told the earlier crowd, this should have been a blank for you to fill in, because this is the point I'm trying to make. So just write down this statement:

You may create enemies from your position, but you should never create enemies from your disposition

You may create some enemies because of your position, what you believe, but you can never create enemies because of your disposition. You know what a disposition is? That's just being mean, being angry, being hateful. Your disposition has to stay sweet and loving. But, when you stand on a position, sometimes you're going to create enemies just because of your position.

For instance, there are some people that don't like me because my position theologically is, that the only way to go to heaven is through Jesus Christ. There is no other way to be saved other than Jesus Christ. Now let's say somebody comes along who doesn't believe that. And they say, well we need to leave at peace, so you need to compromise your position so that we can live in peace. And I can't be ugly. I can't be hateful, but I can say as sweet as I know how, "No, that's my position. I will not compromise my position, but I want to live in peace with you, even on this disagreement." Some folks say, "Well, no thanks." You've made the offer.

I happen to believe that the Bible teaches homosexual behavior is a sin against God. There is never one excuse for it anywhere in the word of God. That is my position. But I'm not ugly about it. I'm not mean about it. I'm not hateful about it. There's a whole group of folks in America today who would say I'm bigoted, I'm homophobic, I'm old-fashioned. And they say, "Listen, you need to step down off your position so we can live together in peace." Well, excuse me, I'm not going to leave my position, because it is in the word of God, but I want to be kind about it. I don't want them to hate me because of my disposition, but they may hate me because of my position. In that case, it is not possible to live at peace with them.

I happen to believe the Bible teaches that abortion is murder, it is killing unborn babies and there are people out there that don't believe that. I can't be hateful or harmful or hurtful about that, but that is my position. You hear what I'm saying? You have your position, and you must stand on it and speak the truth in love, but when you do that, some enemies may be created. That is why the Bible says, "If it is possible, as much as it depends on you, live at peace."

Now who is that person that you're not living in peace with right now? Some of you feel guilty about it. May I say to you that as far as you know, you have done everything you can, as much as it depends on you, to extend the offer of peace without compromising your position, if they have not accepted that, my friend, I want to say to you this morning, you are free. You are clean before the Lord. Don't let Satan cause you to feel guilty about some relationship, as long as you've done all you can and you've extended peace, and you still may not be living at peace with that person. The Bible says it is not possible to live in peace with some people. But as much as it is possible, do it.

III. GET OUT OF GOD'S WAY

Here is the third principle, and this is my favorite one, and it is this: Get out of God's way. When

you have to deal with mean people, the best thing to do is just get out of God's way, because God is trying to do something. I want you to look at verse 19 again. This says it all. Verse 19. "Do not take revenge my friends, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, [now this is what God says] It is mine to avenge. I will repay." When it says leave room for God's wrath, it means if you get in that situation and you try to exercise revenge or pay back, you're getting in God's way, so get out of the way and let God do what God wants to do.

There are two sides to this. Number one, you need to understand that:

1. God repays evil

That is what He says. "I repay evil." Once again, can I ask you to think about that person, those people who have insulted you, who have hurt you, who treated you dirty? You want to get back at them. My friend, don't! Just get out of God's way and let God do what He will do, because God will always repay evil.

Now, if you're sitting there saying, "All right, sic' him, God! Go after him! Make him miserable!" You're sitting back watching it happen, and let's just say somebody you hate, their house burns down. You kind of go, "Ha, ha, they deserved that." Let's say they buy a brand new car, and the next week somebody scratches it down the side. You go, "Ha, ha, ha!" When misfortune happens to those people you don't like, if you're happy about it, my friend, you have just blown the whole situation.

Look what the writer of Proverbs says in 24:17. "Do not gloat when your enemy falls. When he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice. If you do, it says the Lord will see and he'll disapprove and he'll turn his wrath away from him." Now, God's going to repay evil. Some of you are sitting there saying, "Well now, I don't know about that, Pastor, because some people have treated me dirty, and it sounds to me like they're getting along just fine right now, thank you." All I can say, my friend, is God's not finished yet. God is not finished yet. Get out of the way and let God do what God wants to do.

The greatest example of this, I believe, is in the New Testament the night before Jesus was crucified. He and the apostles were in the Garden of Gethsemane, and suddenly a mob came to arrest Jesus. They were being threatened; they were being attacked. Simon Peter did what was a natural instinct, what most of us want to do. You know what he did? He pulled out his sword. He was going to defend himself, he was going to defend his Lord. Here was this guy coming at him. And Peter, who was a fisherman, not a swordsman, went whoosh! and tried to split that guy right between the eyes. The guy jerked his head to the side, and Peter sliced his ear off and made a bloody mess. Jesus said, "Whoa, Peter, whoa!" He said, "Put your sword away, Peter, because the person that lives by the sword is going to die by the sword. Peter, don't you know, by the way, if I wanted to, I could call down twelve legions of angels, 72,000 angels? They could come here and rescue me right now. Peter, you're about to mess up the show. Put your sword away!"

Sometimes when your enemies treat you wrong and insult you and hurt you and you try to get revenge and you try to do something about the situation, all you do is make a bloody mess of it. There are some of you right now, you've got that sword in your hand, and if you had the chance,

you would get back at them. You would hurt those people who have hurt you. And if Jesus doesn't say anything else to you in this service, it may be that Jesus just tells you to put your sword away. Some of you just need to put it in the scabbard, because God is going to repay evil. But there is another side to this experience that maybe you've never thought about.

When you do get out of God's way, not only does God repay evil, but

2. God rewards endurance

He will reward your endurance when you endure insulting, and when somebody treats you ugly.

In fact, I want to tell you a story in the verse printed there. It's kind of the culmination of the story, but I've got to tell you the story first. It is from 2 Samuel chapter 16, in King David's later life. His grown son, Absalom, rebels against him. He kicks his dad out of the palace and says, dad, you're old news. I'm the new king. Absalom gets on the throne, and he brings an army with him, and David could have attacked Absalom and fought for his throne that was rightfully his. You know what David did? He was demonstrating some relationship principles. He just turned and left. He turned and walked out. He just left Jerusalem. Here is Absalom on the throne, even shaming David publicly by taking some of his wives. Here is David, his head hanging down, broken-hearted because his child has caused him such grief. And some of you folks that have lived long enough know that sometimes grown children can break your heart.

Well, David was just dragging. He had a few of his most faithful men with him. On their way through Bahurim, a little town outside Jerusalem, and there, a character by the name of Shimei came out to meet him. Shimei sees David and sees he is hurting and he is disappointed and going through a lot of trouble. Are you familiar with the old expression "kick them when they're down?" That's exactly what Shimei did. He picked up a bunch of rocks and started throwing them at David. He pelted him with rocks and started cursing him, according to the Bible. He said, "Oh, you man of blood, you're just getting what you deserve. Good for you! You're getting just exactly what you deserve!" David was walking along with the rocks being thrown at him. One of David's mighty men, one of his Secret Service agents comes up to David and said, "David, don't you let that dead dog talk to you that way. Sir, you just give me the word, and I'll take my sword and I'll cut his head off so fast, he won't know it until he tries to sneeze. Come on just give me the word. Just give me the word. I'm ready." Swish! His sword was pulled out. That was the setting. And this is what David said. "Don't do that." He said, "It may be that the Lord will see my distress and he'll repay me with good for the cursing I am receiving today."

Is anybody in this room ever been cussed out? I have. Anybody just unloaded on you verbally? My, you just want to get back! Just endure. Just keep on walking. It may be that the Lord will reward you because of your endurance. You know, somebody said one time, even when a dog barks at a parade, the parade doesn't stop. It just keeps on going. And friend, when you're following God, there are going to be people who are going to try to turn you away, criticize you and hurt you, but you just keep on going. God will reward your endurance. So get out of God's way.

IV. KILL YOUR ENEMIES WITH KINDNESS

Here is the final relational principle in this passage of scripture. Number four, how to deal with mean people, you kill your enemies. That's right, you kill your enemies. You kill your enemies with kindness. That's right. You kill them with kindness. That is what the last couple of verses in this chapter is all about. If your enemy is hungry, feed him. Do the unexpected. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. They don't expect that. It just blows them away. It so surprises them, that it says in the last part of verse 20, "It's like putting hot coals, burning coals on their head," and you're sitting there saying, "Yeah, I want to see 'em smoke like crazy. I mean, I just want them to suffer!" No, friend, that is not the motive. What kindness does, is it lets them burn with shame.

So here is your goal. In relationships with mean people

1. Your goal is not to burn them, but to bless them

And when you show kindness to somebody who showed anger and evil toward you, they burn with shame. They may not show it outwardly. They may not say, "Well, I'm just burning with shame by your kindness," but it does, it affects them.

Booker T. Washington, a great American gentleman said this, and I quote, "I will not allow any man to make me lower myself by hating him. The only way I can destroy my enemy is to make him my friend."

Let me tell you a little true story. I love this story. It occurred in the Great Depression in America. There was a certain man by the name of Judd Brewster who was a mean, hateful man. Nobody liked him. There was a family named Jansen who lost their farm and all their possessions during the Depression. They heard of a sharecropping farm they could work. The only problem was, that property adjoined the property of Judd Brewster, this mean man. Everybody in the area said, "Oh no, you don't want that farm, because you would have to live next to Judd Brewster, one of the meanest men on the planet earth." Mr. Jansen said, "I tell you what, if this Judd Brewster gives me any trouble, I'll just kill him." That is what he said.

So they moved in and started working this sharecropping farm. One day, their chickens got loose and got over in Judd Brewster's yard, and Brewster came stomping over to the Jansen's house, pounding on the door, "Get those chickens out of my yard! If you don't, you won't see them again!" So they ran over there, and got the chickens and put them in a henhouse and locked the henhouse.

A couple of weeks later, Jansen's pigs got loose and got into Judd Brewster's garden. Once again Judd Brewster came storming up to the front door, pounding on the front door. He said, "Jansen, your pigs got in my garden. But they'll never get in my garden again. Here they are." He jerked his thumb over his shoulder, and there in the wagon that he had ridden up in was a pile of dead pigs. He had shot every one of the Jansen's pigs. Jansen didn't do anything except bury his pigs. One day several months after that, one of Jansen's sons came running in saying, "Dad! Dad! Get your gun, get your gun quick, because Brewster's pigs are in our garden!" Already he could taste

the sweet flavor of revenge. Jansen said, “No, we’re not going to kill them. Boys, round them up. Load those pigs in the wagon.”

You know, it’s a whole lot easier to load dead pigs in a wagon than it is living pigs. But after a lot of work, that’s what they did. They rounded them up and put them in the wagon. He pulled the wagon over to Brewster’s property. He walked up to the front door knocked on the door and Brewster came to the door, “What do you want?!”

He said, “Brewster, your pigs got in my garden today.” And all the color just drained out of Brewster’s face, because times were hard and nobody could afford to lose their livestock. Jansen said, “What do you want me to do with them? I brought them back.” Brewster, knowing he killed them, said, “Pile them behind the barn. I’ll take care of it later.” Jansen said, “Well, I can’t do that. If I put them behind the barn they’ll just get loose again.” And Brewster realized this man was showing kindness toward him.

That very afternoon, they had a long conversation. When Jansen left, Brewster had given him half of his pigs. And the next Sunday, for the first time in as long as anybody could ever remember in those parts, Judd Brewster was in church. And he became a Christian. Someone asked Jansen, “What did you mean when you said you were going to kill him if he gave you any trouble?” He said, “That’s what I did. I killed him. I killed him with kindness, because that old mean neighbor we used to have is no more.”

You say, “That’s a pretty good little story, where did you hear it?” To me, this is the best part. It was told by Judd Brewster’s grandson, who is now a preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ, I think mainly because somebody was willing to obey this passage of scripture and show kindness when they had been insulted.

There is one final point here. This is my conclusion. Your goal is to:

2. Treat others the way God has treated you

That is what this passage is all about. You treat your enemies the way God treated you. You say, “Wait, wait a minute. Are you telling me, I was once an enemy of God?” Yes. We were all the enemy of God at one time, because of our sin. Look at Colossians 1:21. “Once you were alienated from God, and you were enemies in your mind because of your evil behavior [notice the word *enemies*]. But now God has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in His sight without blemish and free from accusation.”

You and I, because of our sin, we were alienated from God as enemies. God said, “Listen, I’m not going to give you what you deserve.” Because you know what I deserve? I deserve death and hell, I deserve separation from God forever and ever. But God said, “I’m not going to give you what you deserve. I’m not going to pay you back for your sin. I’m going to show you the kindness of my grace and my forgiveness and my mercy.” God is just saying, “I want you to treat your enemies the same way I’ve treated you.”

OUTLINE

I. RESIST YOUR INSTINCT FOR REVENGE (17)

1. The Yellow Rule: "Do unto others what they do to you."
2. The Gray Rule: "Do unto others before they do to you."
3. The Golden Rule: "Do to others as you would have them do to you." *Luke 6:31*

II. PRESENT THE OFFER OF PEACE (18)

1. Possible when you offer and they accept
2. Impossible when you offer and they refuse

When a man's ways are pleasing to the Lord, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.
Proverbs 16:7

III. GET OUT OF GOD'S WAY (19)

1. God repays evil

Do not gloat when your enemy falls; when he stumbles, do not let your heart rejoice, or the Lord will see and disapprove and turn his wrath away from him. *Proverbs 24:17-18*

IV. KILL YOUR ENEMIES WITH KINDNESS (20-21)

Your goal is:

1. NOT to burn them – but to bless them
2. To treat them the way God has treated you

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. *Colossians 1:21-22*



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes