

## **My God and My Lord!**

**Sermon Text:** Psalm 35

**Study Texts:** Romans 12:14-21

**Sermon Recap:** The main idea of this week's sermon is this: The servants of the LORD look to the Divine Warrior for vindication and deliverance. Take time before your growth group to review the key points you noted from today's sermon.

**Sermon Connection:** Psalm 35 teaches us to seek the help and protection of God in the midst of hardship and persecution. More than this, the Psalm instructs us to trust God's wrath against sin and not to take vengeance into our own hands. Paul takes up this idea in Romans 12 and explains how such an attitude is a mark of a true Christian. In this text, Paul not only calls us to leave vengeance to God but calls us to radically rethink how we perceive and deal with those who would do us harm. He writes, "*Bless those who persecute you...*" Such an attitude is not possible without the divine help of God, and it is certainly impossible without having an unshakable hope in the eternal justice of God against sin.

### **Lesson Plan**

**Lesson Goal:** To see that God calls His people to faithfully trust Him in the midst of persecution while doing good.

#### **Lesson Points:**

**Point 1: The Marks of Christian Living in the Face of Hardship** (vv. 14-18)

**Point 2: The Hope of Christian Living in the Face of Hardship** (vv. 19-21)

**The Context:** The letter to the Romans is a fantastic book of the Bible, a favorite to many Christians. As some have noted, Romans is Paul's "Handbook on Christianity" in many ways. He lays out humanities' problem of sin, how God deals with our sin through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and in the portion which we are studying here, Paul explains how the gospel calls Christians to a new way of life.

**Opening Question:** Is all anger sin? Have you ever had righteous anger against someone or something? How you ever been tempted toward revenge?

### **Point 1- The Marks of Christian Living in the Face of Hardship** (vv. 14-18)

What does Paul mean in saying, “*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them*”? Why is this so hard for us? See also Mt. 5:44; Lk. 6:27; 1 Cor. 4:12.

This is not a call to bless any and all wicked people who persecute others. Paul has a specific person or group of people in mind who are persecuting you; this could also be understood to be one’s personal opponent. His instruction here is, contrary to our natural human instinct, to *seek the good* of our opponents. While many of us might be content with not retaliating, we often fail to *actually seek the good* of those who seek to harm us. Here is what Paul has in mind: We should do such things as pray for these people, seek to bless them in spiritual and physical ways, and seek their flourishing.

This is so very difficult because it is contrary to our worldly nature, and, if we are honest, it can feel wrong. But that is Paul’s point. Such behavior is only befitting of one who is indwelt by the power of the Holy Spirit. One pastor notes, “A beginning of obedience to this command is possible for those who stop allowing themselves to be fashioned after the pattern of this evil age and continue to let themselves be transformed by the renewing of their mind (Rm. 12:2).”<sup>1</sup>

In verses that follow, Paul returns to how Christians are to relate in community. Read over the next few verses, 15-17, and think through how the gospel influences and shapes each of these commands...

*Rejoice with those who rejoice:* Paul instructs us to rejoice with those who rejoice, meaning that we should join in the celebrating of good in the lives of others. Success in others’ lives can sometimes prove a source of envy—which is what makes this command difficult for some of us— but in the context, Paul is speaking of the radical work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of Christians. Therefore, instead of jealousy, we are able to rejoice with others in their successes.

*Weep with those who weep:* While it is often easier to mourn with the sufferings of others than to rejoice in their successes, Paul calls us not just to sympathize with others’ sufferings but to enter into them and make them our own. Just as he notes in Galatians 6:2, we are to “*Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.*” Bearing one another’s burdens is an act of Christlikeness toward one another by the power of the Holy Spirit.

*Live in harmony with one another:* The Roman church was diverse, containing both Jewish and Gentile believers. Paul’s point is that the gospel so overcomes worldly distinctions that harmony through the gospel should pervade the gospel community and create new life.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary on Romans*, 417.

*Do not be haughty/arrogant, but associate with the lowly:* Here again, we see the radical change of worldview the gospel brings to the people of God. Not only are we to put away pride and haughtiness, but we are to act in the opposite way. One theologian notes that “we are to give ourselves over to humble tasks.”<sup>2</sup> Again, we see that the gospel calls us, not only to put away sin, but also to embrace a life of holy living.

*Never be wise in your own sight:* Those who have no regard for the suffering, who think too much of themselves to live in unity with another, and who pride themselves on who they are and what they’ve accomplished are likely to think much of themselves and their own wisdom. Such people are not likely to associate with the humble and lowly. And yet, here again, we see the gospel remaking the people of God into a new people. “The redeemed community of God should be marked by humble concern for one another and all should be treated as valued persons made in the image of God and redeemed by Him.”<sup>3</sup>

*Repay no one evil for evil:* Even though Christians are sometimes severely mistreated by others, they must never forget that they are deeply loved by God and have been eternally redeemed in Him. The command against retaliation is grounded in God’s eternal love that keeps them forever. The Christian can rest knowing that God stands for them.

*Give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all:* Here we see the benefit of such a radical view of life. Paul here explains one reason why the Christian is to choose mercy over getting even, to rejoice with those who rejoice, to weep with those who weep, to live in harmony, and to be humble...all these things preach the gospel to a watching world. The word “*honorable*” also means “good,” and the highest good for all people is the gospel of Jesus Christ.

*So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all:* And here is Paul’s point. The gospel should have such a deep hold and controlling effect on the Christian that Jesus’ fame and glory in the world should drive all we do. Because we are loved by God and held eternally safe in Him, we are at peace and free to live in humble submission to all for the sake of the gospel.

## **Point 2 - The Hope of Christian Living in the Face of Hardship** (vv. 19-21)

According to v. 19, why is the Christian never to take wrath and revenge into his/her own hands? How does this accord with Psalm 35?

Paul instructs that Christians are not to take wrath and revenge into their own hands. As we have noted, this is opposed to our natural tendency, but the gospel speaks a better word to us. Paul’s point in referencing Deut. 32:35 is to show that God’s wrath is kindled against all

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<sup>2</sup> T. Schreiner, *Baker Exegetical Commentary, Romans*, 668.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 669.

evildoers and He will, on the last day, repay all evildoers for what they have done. When we are wronged, we place the fate of our enemies in God's hand because He is just.

It is important to note that this passage suggests the Christian's ability to control anger and retaliation. Our emotions and feelings do not control us. Rather, we are to submit to God's righteousness in such moments. He is just, and He will ultimately set things right. This is entirely the Psalmist's attitude in Psalm 35.

How does such a truth/mindset translate into daily living and our response to evil? See v. 20. We are seeing how the gospel speaks a different and better word to us. As we are trusting God—Whose eternal justice will deliver a blow far more devastating to evildoers than anything we could do—we are actually seeking the good of those who commit evil against us. Paul goes so far as to provide the specific example of feeding the enemy and providing him with drink, both of which communicate doing those things which the person genuinely needs. Paul says that in doing so we *“heap burning coals on his head.”* This means that our underserved grace will bring deep shame upon our enemies.

Paul writes that we are to overcome evil with good as we resist evil in our own lives. In light of the entire passage, how are we to do this?

Believers “are called to [overcome] every evil by doing good, and what gives them the courage and strength to do so is the belief that God is a righteous Judge Who will set straight every wrong that is done.

### **The Big Picture - “*Vengeance is Mine...says the Lord.*”**

Evil and wickedness exist in our world and in our own lives. Often times, it can seem as though evil and wickedness are prevailing. Times arise in each of our lives where we suffer from various forms of evil, and during such times, we may find ourselves seeking vengeance and planning ways to retaliate. But the gospel speaks a different word to us in such moments...a better word. While the desire for righteous justice is not evil in itself, the gospel shows us that God is not mocked by evil (Gal. 6:7), and that He will have ultimate justice. God is aware of every evil deed committed, especially against His people, and He will repay evil with eternal righteous judgment. We cannot deliver such judgment. In fact, through the gospel, we have been delivered from such judgment. So, when we find ourselves facing evil of one kind or another, we turn our anger over to God knowing that He possesses all righteous anger, and that He will repay us for any injustice committed against us. At the same time, the gospel so radically transforms our hearts and minds that we actually seek to pray for and serve those who do us wrong, and this flows from how God has served us in Christ.

## **Application Questions**

- In what ways are you facing evil or hardship currently? Are you turning it over to God or trying to handle it yourself?
- Does your growth group know about your struggle(s)? Why or why not?
- How are you seeking to do good to opponents in your life?
- How are you teaching your children to trust God's justice?
- How might your growth group embrace and exercise these truths in community?