

Romans 12 (Part 3): 3-21 - Gifts of Grace

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Romans chapter 12. We covered verse 1 a couple of weeks ago, a few weeks ago. We covered verse 2 last week, and today we're going to get through the rest of the chapter. And I'm not just bragging because I actually did it in first service, so we'll see if we can, we'll see if we can make it here today as well. But this begins in verse 3 for you and I. Romans 12:3. Paul writes and says,

“For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, (your Bible may say, sound judgment) each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.” (ESV)

Now stop there for just a moment if I could. Paul is going to be talking here in the next several verses about spiritual gifts and just gifts that God has given the body of Christ to function with. And so, in order to preface that, a little study there for you and I, he begins by saying to us, don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think. I thought that was an interesting thing for him to say, as he begins to preface this whole thing about spiritual gifts, and I wondered why.

I wondered why would you start off a talk about spiritual gifts with a statement saying essentially, don't think of yourself too highly, but think of yourself with sober judgment or sound judgment, according to the faith that you've been given? And it dawned on me that a proper personal assessment of who we are and what God has gifted us to do is really critical and very important when it comes to being used by God. You see, if I assess myself above what God has called me to do or to be in the body of Christ, then I'm always going to be overreaching.

And I might be even looking for things, expecting God to do things through me that He never ordained that would be accomplished through me. And by the same token, I think when Paul tells us to have a sound assessment of ourselves, he's telling us not to think too lowly of our calling or our gifting either, because frankly, too low of an assessment. And I'm probably, I'm not, I'm probably not going to be expecting the Lord to do what He has in fact ordained to do.

And my faith won't be reaching out in a sense of having an expectation of God to work through me. When I think of a couple of Biblical characters that are an example to us on either side of the scale, I think of Peter. He's on the scale of probably thinking, assessing himself a little too highly and had to be brought to a place of making a more sound assessment of his abilities, his gifting.

And I think of somebody who probably thought too lowly of themselves, and I think of Gideon in the Old Testament, whom the Lord desired to use greatly to deliver his people from the Midianites but Gideon had absolutely no expectation of the Lord using him at all. And had to constantly go back and get a confirmation from the Lord that in fact, this was His dealings.

But I think one of the things we need to ask the Lord in light of what Paul is saying in this verse here, in verse 3 is, what have You given me faith to do? Because again, he's going to talk about spiritual gifts in just a moment. He's going to talk about all the different things that the body of Christ is given to do, and he's not going to mention all of them, but he's going to mention some of them.

Some of the other gifts are mentioned in other books of the New Testament, but whatever your gifting is, you need to be asking the question, Lord, am I functioning in this properly, or am I overreaching beyond what you've called me to? Or am I not having an expectation of as good of a work as in fact, you have given me to do? What is, am I serving in keeping with my calling?

A verse that we ought to hold on to when it comes to whatever the Lord has given us to do is a passage in Philippians. Let me show you this. It says Paul wrote this to the church in Philippi. He said,

Philippians 4:13 (ESV)

I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

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Now, I sometimes hear this verse being quoted by people as if it's like your superman verse in the sense that we are able to leap tall buildings in a single bound sort of a thing. I can do all things through Christ.

Listen, you are who God has made you to be. You are gifted according to the giftings that God has given to you. And within the context of the gifting and the calling that the Lord has placed upon your life, there is nothing that you can't do in Christ Jesus.

But this verse isn't necessarily a promise that you're going to be a super apostle, or you're going to be just like somebody else who you might really admire, or whatever the case might be. I don't know if you've ever run into our Calvary Chapel magazine that we make available in the entryway from time to time. This is the latest one that came out, it's Winter 2015. So anyway, it's a magazine. It's probably good.

If you see one of these, we don't charge anything for them, just grab it and read it. And it tells about what a lot of Calvary chapels are doing around the world. And I grab this from time to time and I read it, but I find that I have to be careful when I'm reading it because a lot of these guys that they're talking about here, I know either personally or through email or something like that.

And I'll be reading an article and go, oh yeah, I know that guy. And wow, he's doing stuff in East Africa right now. And then I go over and read this other thing about this pastor who's planting churches in some other country or whatever. And I can get done reading this magazine and I can put it down and I can think, God, I don't even think you're using me.

Because we compare ourselves with other people, and the gifting and the calling that God has placed upon their life. And we're not looking at ourselves with sound judgment according to the faith or according to the calling that's on our personal lives.

I mean, I was called to Ontario, Oregon to start a church 25 years ago and to teach God's Word. And for the most part, I'm pretty happy with that and I'm pretty satisfied with that calling.

But all I've got to do is leaf through a few pages of this magazine and I can start to doubt that I may be doing all that I should be doing. But then when I really assess myself soberly with sound judgment, I go, you know what, though, I don't have the faith to do what these guys are doing. I don't have the grace. They do. And they've got this just, and I have to come back and say, it's okay. It's okay to be whoever God has called you to be and to just to view yourself according to the faith that God has given.

And that is what Paul is telling us to do in this passage. This is the exhortation. Assess yourself accordingly to the faith, to the calling that God has given to you. And he's going to go on here now and he's going to talk about the body of Christ and the giftings that we have received. And he's going to exhort us to use those giftings. All right. So, here's what he says.

He goes on in verse 4 and he says, *“For as in one body we have many members, (And he's talking about your physical bodies as in your physical body, you have a lot of different parts to the body. He says) and the members do not all have the same function, (Aren't we glad about that? He says) ⁵ so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.”* Or as the NIV says, *each member belongs to all the others.* And then verse 6 is the key look at this, *“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them.”*

Now stop there for a moment because he's going to go through and talk about some of those giftings in a moment. But I want to look at exactly what he has said to you and I up to this point. Having gifts that differ, let us use them. See, it's okay to look at somebody else and they're gifting and say, that's different from the gifting that God has given me. And that's all right, because just as in the physical body, I don't expect all of my parts to be the same and they have a very different function. My feet work really well getting me from point A to point B, but once I get to where I'm going, I usually employ one of the other parts of my body. It could be my hands. Could be my mouth if I'm teaching the Word or something.

I'm really glad that my feet aren't responsible for teaching the Word of God because they wouldn't do a very good job of it. Different parts have a different function, and that's what Paul is saying to you and I. That's okay. It's okay for us to be different. Let's just do what we've been called to do. Let's just be involved and let's get busy.

He says here again, in verse 6, let's read it again, because we're going to go on and finish reading that verse, so we can see it in context. Verse 6 says, *“Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: (And then he talks about) if prophecy, in proportion to our faith;”*

Paul says, if you have a prophetic gifting, then use it in proportion to your faith, in proportion to the calling that God has given to you.

Now, there are some people that don't even believe that you can have a prophetic gifting today and I respect their opinion, but I respectfully disagree. Why not? Some people will say, well, there's no need for prophecy today because the Bible has been written and it's completed, it's done, and we don't need that sort of an element of the gifting of the Spirit any longer. Why not? I, you guys know how I feel about the Word of God.

I teach through the Bible, and I agree. The Bible is done. It's written, it's finished. That revelation is done. So, does that mean God can't talk anymore? Does that mean He's got nothing else to say?

This morning, Sue got up and just felt led of the Lord to share a Scripture and an exhortational prayer with you. Do you understand that that is the essence of prophecy? People think that prophecy is foretelling some future event. In the Bible, we do see a lot of that, but it's also just forth telling.

It's just speaking. It's just God speaking to people. It's all it is. It's very simply, it's very simply God moving upon the heart of one of his children instead and to say, hey, I got a message for that person right over there. Would you do that? Would you just go give that to that person right over there? And they walk over to that person and say, hey, I think God has a message for you. I just really feel like He's laid it on my heart. Really? What is it? Could be something as simple as, God just wants you to know this, He loves you.

Do you guys understand that is the essence of prophecy? It's not this big, thus saith the Lord. I need to put echo on there to really make it sound good. Thou shalt judge, and one week hence, this shall. That is an element of prophecy, again, that we see in the Word, and God is wonderful at knowing the end from the beginning and being able to speak of things as if they've already happened, but don't limit prophecy to that element and that aspect.

It is as simple as being led to say to someone, God has a message for you. And I just, I've been praying and as we were worshiping here today, God has a message.

In the Book of Acts, we see that the believers got together up in Antioch, and they're worshiping the Lord, and they're fasting, and they're praying. And God moved upon somebody with a prophetic gifting to go over to Paul and Barnabas and say, hey, set apart Paul and Barnabas for the ministry to which they've been called. And they laid hands on them, and they prayed for them, and they sent them off. And thus began the missionary journeys that we have written in the Book of Acts. But it started with a prophetic word. Somebody just simply saying, I have a message from God, and I want to speak it out.

Now, does that mean people can't abuse the gift of prophecy? Well, of course not. Of course, and they have, and they do. But you know what? People abuse everything so, are we going to shut the whole shooting match down because it gets abused? Here's what we're supposed to do people are supposed to test everything by the Word of God. It's supposed to measure up to the Word of

God. I mean, if somebody comes off halfcocked and they say, thus saith the Lord, and they give you some really dopey statement, it's like, you know what? I'm going to test that by the Word.

Frankly, I've had people say things to me, claiming to give me a prophetic message that I, that never came to pass, and I knew wasn't the Lord when they said it. I just, there wasn't a, there wasn't a witness in my spirit, and I was just hey, thanks a bunch, I'll take that to the Lord. And 30 years went by, and it never came to pass, but that's okay, hey, they tried and they failed. But that doesn't mean the gifting isn't genuine.

Paul says, if you have that gifting of prophecy, then use it. And do it in proportion to your faith. Verse 7, he goes on to speak of service. He says, *"if service, (then) in our serving;"* Do it in proportion again to your faith. By the way, the word that he uses here for service, or serving is the word that we translate, deacon elsewhere in the Bible.

You guys understand what a deacon is? By the way, a deacon was never someone who ran the church, ever in the Bible. We've done that in church history. We have like deacon boards and the deacons rule. Deacons are servants. They put on aprons, they grab a broom, they walk around with a plunger, and they help deliver meals to people. That's a deacon. Deacon means servant. Okay.

It's a really simple sort of a terminology, but he's simply saying if you're gifted to serve, then serve. Do you know how fun it is to serve? Some of my best memories are just serving in the church. Before I started teaching the Word or got recognized for anything else that God had for me to do.

Oh, I loved those early days of just serving. When Sue and I, when God put our marriage back together and we started going to church and we were excited about just living for Jesus, and I was working in radio at the time. Most of you know that I was a disc jockey and so they assumed because I was a disc jockey, I knew all about sound systems. They made me run the sound system and I didn't necessarily feel like that was particularly my calling. I loved it. I loved getting there early and getting things set up. And getting the music going in the room and just so there's a worshipful attitude in the room as people came in and I just loved helping.

Whatever there was to do, whether it was just go around and check the garbage cans and make sure they're empty, and make sure the place is clean, and hey, there's a little place over there we need to vacuum, and let's be sure that's all

cleaned up and we want to just get this place ready for people when they get here so that they know that they're cared for and they're loved.

And we've got guys who get here before you do. We have ushers, we have greeters, we have building hosts. They're servants and they come, and they get the place ready for you, and I assume that they're delighted to do it because they just keep doing it and they meet you at the door with a smile and they shake your hand and they're just, they're serving.

Paul says if your gift is that of service, then serve! Do it! Don't sit back and hold back but be involved in what you're supposed to be doing. He goes on at the end of verse 7, he says, “...*the one who teaches, in his teaching;*” Do it also in proportion to his faith.

A teacher, by the way, teacher and preacher, they're different things. People mix them up from time to time. Paul doesn't even mention preaching. He will mention exhortation in a moment, which is largely what a preacher does. But a teacher is someone who has been gifted to explain the Word of God and to apply it, and to help the people listening to apply the Word of God to their lives.

In fact, verse 8 goes on to talk about, really, what is the essence of preaching. And that's in verse 8 says, “*the one who exhorts, in his exhortation;*” Again, he's saying let it be done according to their faith. An exhortation is, if you have an NIV on your lap there, your Bible says encouragement or encouraging. One who encourages. And that's the essence of what it means to exhort. To preach is to encourage.

I always think of preachers as like, it's that locker room talk that the coach gives before you go out and play the game. And that coach is, he's reminding you of the things that you've learned. Here's the things you guys learned. I want you to do this and we're going to go out there and we're going to do this and we're going to win this thing because Jesus is on our side.

And that's that exhortational gift, and maybe you have that gift. Maybe you have the desire, the gifting to go to people and just go, hey, let's do this thing, you can do this.

Jesus is in your life, and He will make you able and you can do it. I worked with a guy years ago up in Washington who was an encourager. He had the gift, and he could look just, he, you could be just depressed and ready to throw in the towel. And this guy had the gifting from the Lord to give you hope through his encouragement. And so, people would flock to our church just to hear him give

encouragements to people. It was a wonderful gift. He wasn't real strong on teaching the Word but he was an encourager. And I just, I really grew to appreciate that because I feel like I'm not so much that.

He goes on here in verse 8 to speak of, “*one who contributes to do it in generosity.*” Isn't that interesting? Have you ever thought about the gift of being able to give? We don't think about that so much, do we? The gift of generosity or the gift of contributing. Wow. He says, “*the one who leads, (do it) with zeal; ...*” Zeal means energy, passion. If you're called to be a leader, you guys understand that there's leaders and then there's we call them trench people the folks who are being led.

If you think of it as people digging trenches. I don't know why that is the picture that we've come up with over the years, but it just is. And when Sue and I are talking about people, we talk about whether they're trench workers or whether they're people who stand up above the trench and point where to go, because that's what a leader does. And it could be a leader of a particular ministry or a leader of servants or whatever it may be.

But you got people who just love getting down in the trench. They've got their shovel, and they just want to, they're just like, tell me where to go and they'll just dig, and they don't need to look up and see where we're heading. They got a leader to do that for them. They're just, and the leader's going, yeah, dig a little bit lower to the left. All right, you got it, sir. Boom. And the leader's standing up there above everybody else going, all right, that's far enough. Now we're going to go this way. And they're like, yeah, you know what I mean? It's really cool, but that's what a leader does. A leader leads. Isn't that deep?

But he says if you're called to do that, then do it with passion. Do it with zeal. He says, “*the one who does acts of mercy, (do it) with cheerfulness.*” Be cheerful about it. You know why he says that? Because oftentimes when you're doing an act of mercy, it's a sacrifice.

Being merciful to people is often a sacrificial act because many times they're very needy, very needy and it takes a real expenditure of your life to extend yourself to them. I was reading about a Christian woman who was giving a testimony about her own acts of mercy toward her mother.

Her mother, when she became old, needed someone to care for her, and she, the woman, said that we invited, she said, we invited my mother to come and stay with my husband and I. And so, this woman began to basically do everything, to take care of her mother. Cooking for her and cleaning, doing the washing,

taking her around in the car, generally caring for all of her needs. But she went on to, as she gave this testimony, she said that while I was going through all of the motions outwardly, I found that inwardly I was unhappy because I resented the interruption in my life.

My mother just got old and needed help and I was busy and enjoyed my life, but now I had to put everything on hold in order to minister to my mother. Finally, her mother came up to her and she said, you never smile anymore. Why don't you smile? And it got her to thinking about what she had been doing. She had been involved in showing mercy to her mother, but she wasn't doing it with cheerfulness because again, there was that sacrifice that went along with it.

And Paul understood that. When you're extending yourself to someone in mercy, many times it's going to mean you're going to have to give up something. And so he said, do it with an attitude of cheerfulness.

The bottom line is that whatever you're called to do, whatever God has gifted you to do, do it like Nike says, just do it. Be involved, be working, be active in what you're called to do and what God has gifted you to do.

This is a total guess on my part. Okay. So, you can take it as such. If I had to guess how many Christians in the body of Christ even knew what they were called to do? I'd have to say it was extremely small, somewhere around 10 to 15 percent. Christians actually know what they're called to do. I think we need to get busy.

I think we need to realize there's not one single one single person, there is not one person whom God has left out of the equation of His gifting and calling. I don't think anybody has been left out. I think there should be 100 percent participation because there's 100 percent gifting.

Now, again, like we've said here throughout the course of these verses, you can't sit and look at somebody else's gift, you can't compare yourself with somebody else's necessarily doing. You got to do what God's called you to do. What is your passion?

What are you seeing in front of you? What are your hands finding to do? Get busy. Serve the Lord. He's coming back. Let me tell you, you're going to thank me someday.

If the Lord comes back and you got busy because of this exhortation, you want the Lord to find you doing when He comes back, right? Not sitting and waiting.

Well, I was just waiting because God hasn't told me yet. You don't want to do that. If you're not sure where your calling is, just get busy doing something. We put up things every week that people can get busy and do, that we need help with.

And sometimes we put out the word for people to get busy and nobody says anything. I put out a note this last week asking just for somebody to put up our Christmas tree in the entryway for the angel tree coming up, which we're going to start on the first Sunday of December. I didn't get any responses. I was just looking for a family to maybe do it as their project. Nobody said anything. It's a small thing. It's just a ministry of helps. But we want people to get involved. And I know you're busy, but you've got to ask yourself the question, what are you busy with?

And I'm not trying to lay a guilt trip on anybody. I'm just saying that sometimes we get our perspectives, we're so focused on things that just aren't going to matter in the grand scheme of things and we're leaving the work of the Lord for somebody else to do.

You guys do know that in any given Christian church, about 10 percent of the people do 100 percent of the work. And that's just, that's a fact of the matter. It's an unfortunate fact because our bodies are made up so beautifully, physically speaking, in the sense that we have all these different things that function and we're really glad that they function.

But in the body of Christ, we have a lot of parts of the body that don't ever do anything. They're not really doing anything, but you're a part, nonetheless. So, Paul is giving these exhortations to be involved but do it in proportion to the faith that God has given you.

Look at verse 9 and following He says, *“Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good.”* Does that sound like three different exhortations to you? I think they're all part of the same one. The first one is the main one. Let love be genuine. What it means by the way, it's where genuine is where we get our word hypocritical. And he's literally saying, don't let your love be hypocritical.

But then he says two other things that show your genuine love. And one of them is abhor what is evil. That's hard to do in the world that we live in today, isn't it because we feel like we're just abhorring everything because the world is so incredibly dark.

But one of the ways that we show our love for other people. People that we love who are maybe involved in sinful activity is by abhorring what is evil and not acting like what they're involved in related to sin doesn't matter. You're not doing anybody any favors by looking at their sinful lifestyle and just winking at it and acting like there's no problem with it. That doesn't do them any favors at all. And people struggle with this because they feel like in order to say something to someone, it's going to, they're going to come off very unloving.

How can I do this? I love this person. Of course you love that person. That's why you have to say, that's wrong. I love you and I will never stop loving you, but that's wrong. Don't do that. Why? Why are we told to abhor evil? Cause it hurts people. It hurts people, you guys. We're not just saying it because we're trying to throw another rule in their path.

Here's another rule for you. Here trip over that one. No, it's bad for you. You know, when my kids were small, if they, if I saw them putting something in their mouth that was bad, I ran over to them and I took it out because I loved them.

Can you imagine if I said, oh, I love you. Go ahead and eat that thing. That'd be pretty stupid, wouldn't it? And I wouldn't be a very good dad if I'd have done that. But, oh, we have this mentality today in our culture, if you tell me that what I'm doing is wrong, you're telling me you don't love me. That's the dumbest thing anybody ever came up with.

Sometimes we have to just be strong and abhor evil. You know what, call it what it is. That's wrong and that's going to hurt you, and I love you, and that's why I'm telling you this. And then we're told, Paul tells us to hold fast to what is good.

Boy, it's getting that it's harder to hold on, isn't it sometimes, but verse 10, he says, *"Love one another with brotherly affection. (In fact, he says) Outdo one another in showing honor."*

Brotherly affection. In the Greek, that word brotherly is Philadelphia. Yeah, same word. That's literally where the word comes from. Philadelphia, as you know, is the city of brotherly love, so they say, but that's where the idea comes from.

What Paul is saying here is, love one another in a loving family, sort of a way. Brotherly affection that took a little while to take hold with me, because when I was growing up, I had, have a brother still to this day, he's 2 years older than

me, but while we were growing up, he pretty much pounded me every chance he got, and I think he thought it was fun. And I'm sure for him it was. But as I was growing up, brotherly affection didn't mean a whole lot. You know what I mean?

If somebody said, you need to have brotherly affection, I probably would have gone around punching people cause that, but I'm older now, he's older and he and I have a very good and very close relationship. But what Paul is talking about here is loving people with that attitude of family, really love one another like you really truly are part of the family of Christ. In fact, try to outdo blessing and honoring one another.

He says in verse 11, “*do not be slothful in zeal...*” Now, there's some terms we probably don't use. The NIV says, “*don't be lacking in zeal.*” Don't let your zeal slow down. In other words, your passion. But he says rather be fervent in spirit and serve the Lord. This is a great verse unless you're lacking in zeal. When you hear it, do you know what I mean?

It's like looking at somebody who's like lying on the ground, bleeding and walking up to him and going, don't bleed. It's like, wait a minute, they're already bleeding. You got to do something now. Sometimes we get it. We see a verse like this in the Bible says, don't be lacking in your passion and zeal for the Lord.

And you read it and you go, I am lacking in my passion and zeal for the Lord. There's no question about that. I just, I'm not on fire like I used to be. So now what are you going to do?

Now you confess it to God. I mean, that's all I know to do. You take it to the cross, right? Do you think in 30 some plus years of ministry I've ever been lacking in zeal? Kidding. Try maybe dozens of times. I mean, life just piles up on you, doesn't it, sometimes and you have to go to the Lord and say, God, I just, I need to ask you to forgive me because I need to confess that the fire is just real low. My zeal, my passion, my desire to serve you is just ebbing right now and I need to confess it and Lord, I'm going to, I want to ask you, I want to ask you to reignite that flame in my heart.

You remember those times when you used to be so excited about Jesus, you used to go and fill up your car at the gas station and give the guy who pumped your gas a Bible? Or you stood in line for something and if you started a conversation with anybody, Jesus always came up in the conversation. You remember those days? Those can happen again. But we get to just kind of lack,

we just fade a bit in our passion for the things of the Lord. We just get busy and distracted.

And pretty soon we find ourselves in a situation where I'm just not living for Him like I used to. I want to get back there. Don't you? I just want us like, Jesus, just light the flame again, please, and let it burn hot in my heart. I want to live for you. When you come back, I don't want to be sitting around, going through the channels. I want to be serving the Lord, so we're not to lose our enthusiasm.

Chapter or verse 12. He says, "*Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, (or hardship or challenge) be constant in prayer.*" You know why you and I can rejoice in hope? Because our hope is in Christ. And nobody's taking that away. Nobody can take that away from us. And that's why we can rejoice even when we're going through a time of tribulation. See, that lends itself to patience. When we're going through a difficult time, we have this patience that comes into the equation because our hope is in Christ. And that leads itself to a greater prayer posture in our lives. It moves us to pray when we might otherwise be tempted to despair.

Verse 13, "*Contribute to the needs of the saints...*" And by the way, saints there refers just to believers. I don't know if you knew that or not. If you're in Christ today, you are a saint. Okay? Don't go around and start calling yourself saint, whatever your name is, because that probably won't fit too well with folks, but you are a saint.

The Bible says you're a saint and it doesn't mean you're saintly. Okay? Wouldn't that be cool if one of you was named Nick? That'd be fun. But again, it doesn't mean that you're saintly it just means saint means one who has set apart for God. But notice what Paul is saying here, "*...contribute to the needs of the saints and show hospitality...*" Take care.

This is another way of saying, take care of people who are in the family of God. Take care of those people in situations. It can be challenging though, can't it to know who to help sometimes. It's a very, very difficult time in which to live because we don't know if sometimes if people are genuinely in need, and we struggle with that. The early church struggled with that as well. But nonetheless, Paul exhorts us to show hospitality.

Look at verse 14, "*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.*" When's the last time you had somebody curse you? Can I just say that blessing somebody when they curse you does not come naturally. I mean, if somebody gets like that far from your nose and you can, like, they're spitting on

you while they're talking and they're saying the most horrible, rotten things to you and literally just cursing and that sort of thing, it is not a natural response for you and I to say, bless you. Is it? It's to say what they're saying back at you, right? That's what comes naturally. But naturally refers to the natural man. You and I aren't called to respond based out of the natural man.

We're told to respond out of the supernatural man. That's why when we're yielding to the Spirit, we can respond to a cursing with a blessing. And that just messes with people's minds. They don't know what to do when somebody is like, just screaming at you and frothing at the mouth and just you and you come back, and you come back and just bless them. You say yeah. Can I pray for you to pray God's blessing on your life? What? Because they're in fighting mode. And if you decide I'm not going to do that, the book of Proverbs says a gentle answer turns away wrath.

You've got to try it sometime. It's amazing. It is really amazing. Sue and I had this happen not that long ago. We have a neighbor who owns a piece of property near us, and he thought that we were dumping on somebody's land. We weren't, I was brushing out just some debris out of the back of my pickup, like dust. I just didn't want to get it on my driveway, and so we just pulled over to this empty field. There was nothing there and we were just brushing out dirt and stuff like that, putting it on dirt. And this guy, our neighbor, was just, he came scooting over on his four wheel and he was just, don't, you're not supposed to be dumping on people's land.

And we just started. We just started talking really gently to him right away, and he was like, he didn't know what to do. He was completely just set off, and Sue started saying, by the way, your land over here, you're doing just a beautiful job with it. It looks gorgeous. He was, it was really something. It's crazy to watch some of those Bible verses come to life when you put them into practice. I personally wanted to deck him, but Sue was talking nice, so I thought, oh yeah, that's what we're supposed to do.

15, verse 15, "*Rejoice with those who rejoice*, (You know why that's hard? We don't like to rejoice with people who are rejoicing because we're usually jealous. We're jealous that they've got something to rejoice about, and we look at them and we go, how come God isn't doing that for me? And then he says) *weep with those who weep*."

That's sometimes a challenge thing too, unless you have a gift of compassion. But a lot of times we don't, we avoid people who are weeping. We see somebody crying, we look the other way. They're crying. But Paul tells us to be

involved, to enter into their joy or their sorrow. Cry with them. I've heard some of the most powerful testimonies of people ministering to other people by not saying a single word. I've heard just powerful, powerful testimonies of somebody who's just broken and weeping and somebody else comes along and they sit down with them and they cry with them.

And that person, that first person comes back later and says, that was the most healing thing that could have happened in my life. They sat there and they just shared my pain and carried it with me. Just cried. The last several verses all go together, so I'm going to do them together.

Paul says, ¹⁶ *“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, (that means prideful) but associate with the lowly. (that means people who might not have the things that you have) Never be wise in your own sight. (there's a toughie) ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”*

By the way, that verse right there answers the question about what to do if you want to live peaceably with someone, but they don't want to live peaceably with you because that happens, doesn't it? You don't have any beef or any problem, but they just don't like you and they've determined they're not going to live peaceably with you.

What do you do? Paul says, as far as it's in your power, make sure that it happens on your end of the equation. In other words, you're not the one stoking their flame, but you're the one who is doing your best to pray for them, speak kindly to them, potentially even resolve whatever issues there may be. In so far as it depends on you live at peace with all people.

Verse 19, *“Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God...”* That's a hard one too. You know why? We want people to hurt like they heard us. Don't we? We like there's something in us that wants people to hurt the way they hurt us. You see it in movies and stuff all the time. I want him to hurt, I want him to feel what I felt. And you know what they're doing, they're expressing that base human reaction. We might not verbalize it like they do in the movies, but it's there.

We want people to experience some level of pain because we think it's fair. Don't you think that'd be fair, God? So hurt him. Hurt him for me. No, Paul says no. Do not avenge yourself. Leave it to the wrath of God. He's much better at it, by the way.

“¹⁹....For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay. It says the Lord,” (no retaliation in the body of Christ. Verse 20) ²⁰“To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

What in the world is that talking about? Talking about causing somebody in the midst of their bitterness and anger to feel shame. It's that burning shame of knowing that they responded negatively and bitterly and angrily to you, and you came back with kindness. You came back with blessing. You came back with encouragement, and they're ashamed by what they've done.

Verse 21, *“Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.”* What does that mean? It basically means that if someone's hatred or bitterness causes you to hate them back, you've now been overcome by evil impulses. Don't let that happen.

Overcome evil with good. If somebody hates you, if somebody's bitter against you, if they're saying nasty things about you, you say good things. You speak words of blessing. You speak words of honor. Don't talk behind their back and do not allow their bitterness to poison you so that you feel the same toward them because again, if you do that, you're being overcome by evil, you are to overcome evil with good.

You say, well, pastor Paul, how in the world am I going to do that? Hey, don't ever forget. We serve that, you know that one guy who was like up on the cross and He hung there? The first thing He said was, Father, forgive them, they don't know what they're doing. You know that guy? You've heard of Him, right? He lives in your heart by faith and His power and His ability to say that on the cross is now living in you. You have that ability to say that you can look square in the face of those who are tormenting you.

You can say, Father, I pray a blessing upon their life, and I mean a blessing. I pray that you would bless this person. Bless their socks off. Listen, that doesn't come from the flesh you guys that comes from the Spirit.