

Rev. Seth D. Bode †† Sermon 464, 02-20-2022 †† Epiphany 7

“Lord God, you have appointed me as a pastor in your Church, but you see how unsuited I am to meet so great and difficult a task. If I had lacked your help, I would have ruined everything long ago. Therefore, I call upon you: I wish to devote my mouth and my heart to you; I shall teach the people. I myself will learn and ponder diligently upon your Word. Use me as your instrument – but do not forsake me, for if ever I should be on my own, I would easily wreck it all.”

“Sir, we would see Jesus.”

Romans 12

²⁰But: If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink. For by doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.



Who is your enemy?

The enemies finally did it. They arrested Pastor Richard Wurmbrand, a Romanian under an atheist, socialist government in the late 1940s. It was illegal to promote Christianity, and Pastor Wurmbrand was locked in solitary confinement for three years in an underground cell without windows or sunlight. He was routinely beaten for praying and preaching in his cell, and they once beat the soles of his feet so hard they were worn to the bone. Once, a guard finally asked Wurmbrand what he had left to pray for, Wurmbrand said, “You.” This guard was moved to faith.

Who is your enemy? We are told there is an impending Russian invasion of Ukraine and a Chinese threat for Taiwan. You are aware of militant Muslims who would love to dismember you as a Christian, but let’s put a face on our enemy.

Who is your day-to-day ‘enemy’? Oh, you may say you get along with anyone. No one is out for your blood, anyway. But let’s not miss the Lord’s point today. Who is making life difficult for you? Who is putting obstacles in your daily routine? Who is the one person you cannot get along with? That is your ‘enemy.’ The Lord wants you to think about, pray for, and bless that person today.

CHRISTIAN PAYBACK UNDERMINES THE EVIL

I. *A blueprint for keeping friends*

First, Paul says that we must consider our own motives, our own hearts. Our tongues were not given for cursing, but for blessing. Have we done this? No. You are forgiven. Now that you are forgiven, will you do this?

Will you be with those God has placed in your life through their joys and hardships? Which is harder: to rejoice with those who rejoice or mourn with those who mourn? Will you associate with the humble, low class? Will you respect one another?

Chances are, we will probably pattern friendships after the world. Christians may be in the world and do worldly things, to the glory of God. However, the disadvantage of following the pattern of the world is: those friendships are not influenced by the love of the One who died for us and gave Himself for us.

When you add the element of Jesus, our earthly patterns of friendship chart a different course. Our earthly friendships become a movement to really be with others in their life struggles and successes.

The common pattern is to think more highly of ourselves, by drenching ourselves in self-esteem. Then if anyone crosses us, you need to cut them out of your life and block them. Worse yet, it's payback time, according to common sense.

Paul here seems to say, Do not give people reasons to become your enemies. Chrysostom: "If you find fault with someone who is plotting against you, why expose yourself to the same accusation?" Why do we not bear with other people in their sorrows and joys? Sin curves us inward. Sin makes us greedy with the time God has given us. Sin makes us doubt whether people want us near.

Sin makes us want to leave people, especially our enemy, in misery.

An ancient Christian teacher points out the virtue of being there for someone: "If you weep with an unbeliever, you may provoke him to accept the Lord's teaching." Won't being there, even for the worst enemy, just to be there mean something?

II. **A strategy for payback with kindness**

Consider how you will pay that enemy back. But rather than a strategy for blood and violence, or even to make the enemy the fool of your joke, Paul says the payback strategy is kindness.

Find your enemy in need. If thirsty, give something to drink. If hungry, feed him. Give your enemy according to his need. Is your enemy the neighbor who borrows and never returns, always parks in the way on the curb of the road? Is your enemy the friend at school who acts differently when other people are around? Is it your brother-in-law who mistreats your sister? Is your enemy the loud, proud person at church? Is it the man in the robe? How are you going to handle that person and that situation?

God says that evil things are just better overcome with good. Paul here seems to say, "Do not give enemies unfounded reasons to *remain* your enemies." Give, help, feed, do what it takes to help your enemy see you in a different light. In so doing, you may help your enemy see the world in a different light.

If it is justice you seek, you may not exactly be wrong about who your enemies are. The Lord loves justice, and surely there are people who have harmed us, left us lonely, berated us and hurt our feelings beyond belief. They deserve God's outpouring of wrath just as much as any sinner.

Yet at this time, God says to leave room for His justice. Leave room for God in His wrath. He will take care of the justice at the appropriate time. You are not to take on the revenge or avenging. Leave room for God in relationships and wrath. You won't be shortchanged in justice, God assures you.

Again, God's wrath has been leveled at the direction of One on our behalf. Jesus was punished with all the weapons and wrath of justice. God exacted the fullness of His destruction for sin on Jesus when Jesus was on the cross. This was while we were still hostile sinners to God, that Jesus was exchanged for a relationship with us. So Jesus changes relationships among us.

Only through Jesus, we can afford kindness to our enemies.

Richard Wurmbrand knew a woman who was also tortured for her faith. She was excited to meet her torturers, because she couldn't think of a better way to share her faith than with those who hated her for it. How will those who torture us ever know Jesus Christ? No one has taught them. She believed God was giving her chances to witness in breaks and interruptions during the torturing. Even torturers get tired.

So she told her captor during a break about how nice his hands were. Isn't it better to use hands for stroking his wife's hair, not for beating his prisoner? How nice his mouth was. Isn't it better to use it to kiss, not curse? He clocked her. She got back up and then said she has a Man who loves her, and who told her how to love. He has shed His love into her heart. One does not love by hurting but by helping, not by blows but by caresses, not by curses but by kisses. Her captor finally punched her in the temple hard enough to knock her out.

When she came to, the torturer was sitting in his armchair, eyeing her. He asked who this One who loves her is, who taught her how to love in kindness not in hurting. It makes sense. She said, Jesus. "How can I meet him and know him?" This Romanian gal said, "You must repent, have Him as your Lord, and put your faith in Him, and you must be baptized to take away sins." He told her, "You must baptize me." She objected, saying it should be a pastor. But he unhitched his pistol and said, "You baptize me now." So he led her to water and she did so.

CW21 hymn #740

*4 Lord, let me win my foes With kindly words and actions,
And let me find good friends For counsel and correction.
Help me, as you have taught, To love both great and small
And by your Spirit's might To live in peace with all. (Ro 12:20) Amen.*

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.