

Cooking Up A Church

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Date: 09 March 2014

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[0 : 00] Please turn then to Romans chapter 12. So if you can find a Bible, you'll find that helpful. Romans chapter 12 is the bit that we're in. Last week we looked at the initial verses, the beginning, and we're going to look at verses 9 and onwards this morning.

And I'm going to do my best to present it clearly and to show the implications of it. And I'd like us to think this morning about cookery. And here's a thought cooking up a community.

How do you cook up a community? What do you put into the recipe? What would you do to make a community? And I said last time that the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, has this aim to form communities.

In the Bible they were called churches, although it doesn't use a particular spiritual word, it just means a sort of gathering and assembly. And the community that we're thinking about is Christ's church.

Now we said last time that the world admires community, but has great difficulties in forming community. And it would actually be true to say that the church doesn't find it that easy and has often failed spectacularly.

[1 : 28] But it is still the mission of the church to be a community. And it is not an impossible thing to do. If you were to say, in what way does heaven ever come down to earth, then the church, the way the real genuine churches of Jesus Christ operate, is one way in which heaven can be seen on earth.

Now, what are the basic ingredients if you're cooking up a church? Well, the ingredients are rather different to cooking up a community without God, because it begins with the compassion of God. So if we look at the beginning of the chapter, he says, Therefore I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, or his mercies. And everything works from that.

Because God is merciful, that's how this community can exist at all. It isn't based on human beings being talented, or motivated, or anything like that.

It's based on God being merciful. So it starts there. That's a very important thing. In view of God's mercies, etc. And you remember last time we said that a lot of where he goes from here is to do with how you think.

[2 : 57] So in verse 2, it says, Be transformed by the renewing of your mind. And he talks about in verse 3, Think of yourself with sober thinking.

So the way we think, the way we evaluate, the attitude we take, the way we respond, is absolutely vital.

And then we said last time that the Apostle Paul links being a Christian, belonging to Christ, with belonging to one another.

And he uses the idea of the body, verse 4. Just as each of us has one body with many members, etc. We form one body in Christ.

We form one body. So this is a very important idea of fitting together, like the parts of a body, with totality. Every bit is included.

[3 : 58] Unity as one body. Unity as one body. All the bits do different things, but they all pull together. So we thought about thinking gratitude, thinking attitudes, and thinking body.

And then the last bit that we looked at last time was action. So if you have a gift of whatever it is, encouraging people, well do it.

If you have a gift of giving, then give, and so on. So that is what we were looking at last time. And today I'd like to think about the next part of the passage.

And here's an idea of cookery, of flavors and balances, or what my Sri Lankan friends call spices and condiments. So if you're cooking up, you've got some basic ingredients.

We've got some other things that you put in there that give flavor. Now how do you do it? Here's the robotic method. So I've drawn a robot cooking. And if you ask a robot to cook, he will do it according to precise rules and a precise formula.

[5 : 04] So there'll be .001 grams of this and 10.325 grams of something else. And it will be mixed up for precisely 11.7 seconds and so on.

Robotic cookery. I don't think that Paul is saying that we can cook up a church using robot cookery. He doesn't give precise rules, but he gives something more like the way an intuitive cook would cook.

I know an intuitive cook who does it this way and says, no, it needs a little bit more of that. No, it needs a little bit more of that. A little bit, but not too much.

What is that in grams? Well, it doesn't have a definition in grams. It's just a little bit, but not too much. And you put in all the different flavors to get something which is balanced and tasty.

And there's a certain flexibility about it. And I think these next verses that we're looking at, the next sentences in the chapter, are like that. Cooking up using a bit of this and not too much and a bit of that and not too much of that.

[6 : 09] And put it all together and, you know, it needs a bit more of this and so on. I think that's sort of the way he's doing it. So, if you were to look at verses 9 through to 21, it does read a little bit strangely in English.

Lots of little sentences. And I have to say that having looked at the Greek, and I'm not an expert in Greek, but I could read the letters. In Greek, it's even more strange.

It doesn't seem to have a clear structure. Some bits of it don't seem to have verbs and sentences. You actually have to add them in in English to make it make sense.

So, for example, love must be sincere. As far as I can work out in the Greek, there is no word which says must be. It just says love sincere. So, you have to add in a verb to make it make sense.

It's rather unusual. And there are lots of bits where he says this and then tweak it a little bit. So, statement A and A with a little tweaky thing on it.

[7 : 17] Or statement A balanced by statement B. And he does lots of things in that way. So, for example, can I give you an example?

For example, verse 11, never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor. So, A and then tweaked version of A.

So, that's just to say that's the sort of sentences there are. And therefore, that's the sort of sermon we're going to, that's the best I can do, is the sort of sermon that has little bits in it.

And that is really reflecting the way Paul's written it. Let me tell you a little bit about the context that he's writing to.

It is called the letter to the Romans. And therefore, you won't be surprised to know that originally it was a letter to the Romans. It was written to the church in Rome. And we know a bit about the church in Rome.

[8 : 15] But enough to say, for this morning, it had two racial groups in it. Two racial groups. I'm just going to see, does that show up reasonably?

I can make it a bit brighter, actually. It doesn't make any difference. But anyway, you can see that, I hope. It was made up of Jews and Gentiles. Jews and non-Jews.

And if you think about it, that's a very divided church culturally. The Jews having the Old Testament, what we would nowadays call the Old Testament, and strong roots in all of that.

And the Gentiles knowing nothing about that, or probably nothing. And having their roots in the worship of the different Roman gods.

Very different ways of doing things. Different ideas about sexual ethics. Different ideas about food. Different ideas about worship and so on. So that the church would have clashing cultures within it.

[9 : 21] And it would also have, I think, the tendency for one group to look down on the other. So the Gentiles might say of the Jews, they're so hidebound, they're so old-fashioned, they're so constricted, you know.

Cut us some slack. And the Jews would be saying to the Gentiles, they're all over the place.

They've got no idea. They don't know how to do anything properly. They don't even speak properly. And so you would have get a clash of cultures.

Not only so, but as Christians in that time of history, they would have suffered persecution. And if they weren't persecuted, they might well have been marginalized.

And then, as well as that, in terms of their context and situation, the church was made up of human beings. I don't know if you've ever met any human beings, but you will find that they're quite odd creatures.

And they have all sorts of strange characteristics. And human nature is just the same now as it was then. And that provides its own set of interesting challenges.

[10:30] And we, too, live in our culture. And we, too, have a family background, which may be positive or it may be negative. We, too, bring our own temperament to bear within the church.

We may be extroverts or introverts. We may be people who are prone to being anxious or people who are prone to being, whatever the opposite is, overconfident. And we also bring our national characteristics to bear as well.

And I found myself writing a long list of national characteristics and then thinking I was probably going to be sued if I wrote them all down. But I did write some of them down. And I don't know whether you agree with this.

I think in some national characteristics being angry is a good thing. And you show you're a real person by being angry. Some national characteristics emphasize dogged reliability.

Other national characteristics emphasize spontaneity. Some national cultures are very tolerant. Some have quite deeply ingrained intolerance.

[11:39] Some national characteristics I suspect are suspicious. And some national characteristics I would suspect contain pride. Well, make your own list.

Whatever those factors are, we are asked by Paul to learn something new. And as he said, to be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

So whatever your previous obvious reaction to something. Somebody says that, well, we get angry about it. You have to stop and think, is that the Christian way of doing it?

Or is that something I learnt from my racial background, my family background, my temperament?

And if it is, I need to be renewed. I need to take my India rubber and the bit of me which says, if that happens, then this is how you react.

I've got to rub that out. And I've got to replace in my mental programming what Paul says here.

Okay? That's what we're going to look at. So I'm now going to go through the passage and give you the ingredients that Paul gives to cook up a church.

[12:59] Number one, love. He says, love. Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil. Cling to what is good.

In the way he writes it, all those three things fit together. Love must be non-hypocritical. And then he adds to it, hating what is evil and glued to what is good.

They're very strong actually. Hating what is evil. Hating it. And glued to, stuck to what is good.

Interesting, isn't it? That's the love that he says is the primary ingredient in the mix for making a church of Jesus Christ.

So I notice from this, I'm just going to make, as we go through, I'm going to make little comments which I hope are helpful. This love has a moral direction.

So it's not the same thing as being nice to people. Being nice, you pat them on the head, whatever they do, don't you?

[14:06] I just robbed a bank yesterday. Oh, well done. Perhaps you wouldn't have said that. But he is saying love has a moral compass.

So, for example, it's not love to help somebody commit adultery. It's love. We love each other. No, that's not. No, rub that out.

Rewrite that. Love doesn't cling to what is evil. It clings to what is good.

And it pushes away evil. It hates evil. So, there's my example. It's not loving to help somebody to cheat. It's not loving to help somebody to be unfaithful.

Whatever it is, Paul says, that's not love. So, love is the major ingredient. Let's move on. As he goes through, here's some ingredients to do with people and temperance and testing.

[15:12] And it doesn't at all show in the translation. But if you write it out in Greek, the way the lines line up is three of something and two of something and three of something.

And I've tried to write it out in that way in what I've written next. So, he says, as to brotherly love, cherishing one another as family.

So, I've retranslated, be devoted to one another in brotherly love. And then, honour one another above yourselves. I've retranslated, as to honour, putting one another first.

As to zeal, not slothful. What does he say? Never be lacking in zeal. As to spirit, boiling hot. Translating, keep your spiritual fervor.

As to the Lord, serving. You'll understand I put a very clunky, literal translation of the Greek. Pretty much in the same word order as the Greek.

[16:12] As to hope, joyful. As to trials, persevering. Joyful in hope, patient in affliction. As to prayer, extra steadfast.

Faithful in prayer. Three, two, and three, as you can see. So, my comments on that. What sort of thing is he saying that the church of Jesus Christ, this new community, should be like?

Well, he's saying it isn't a community of mere formality. See what he says? As to brotherly love, cherishing as family.

Feeling and acting and reacting and relating as Christians being precious, valuable, loved people. In some ways, even more close than your own biological family. As to brotherly love, cherishing them as family.

[17:15] As to honor, putting other people first. So, that's why I've put, it's not a community in which people are there to pursue their own selfish agenda. I know very little about politics.

I know very little about party politics. But it wouldn't surprise me if somebody said, The way such and such a person acts and moves in their political group is so that they can advance themselves and become, you know, whatever.

The mayor or a minister in the government or whatever. It wouldn't surprise me. I hope I'm not doing anybody an injustice. But I can definitely say that the church of Jesus Christ does not operate like that.

What does it say? As to honor, putting other people first. Honor one another above yourselves. And then another comment.

This community is not lukewarm and not can't be bothered. You see those sentences where it says, As to zeal, not slothful.

[18:19] As to zeal, not lazy. As to spirit, boiling. Zeontes, it's a word which means bubbling, boiling, hot. Interesting that, isn't it?

So, he's saying, if you've got a church, well, you're not meant to have a church of people who say, Oh, well, can't really be bothered. Oh, is it church again today? Oh, dear. I don't think I'd be bothered.

That whole attitude of being the opposite of boiling hot, being cool and being uninterested.

He says, that's not what the church is about. I have to say, Christians do get themselves into that way of thinking. And if that's you, you really are not in the right place.

And if that's you, you need, as a matter of urgency, to work out what has gone wrong and why it's gone wrong and put it right. Because it's not on for you to be saying, Oh, church, can't be bothered.

[19:27] As to spirit boiling hot. You see what he says? Interesting, isn't it? And then he does a little tweak on that.

As to spirit boiling hot. As to the Lord serving. So, he's saying, we're not talking about people that are full of enthusiasm but are totally unreliable. You see how he matches the idea of being boiling hot with serving the Lord.

It's an interesting combination, isn't it? He's not just looking for people who are, Wow! Who's going to be on the rotor for doing the cleaning or putting away the chairs?

He wants people who are enthusiastic and it translates into practical, nitty-gritty service. As to spirit boiling hot.

As to the Lord serving. And we're not talking about, so these are things that are not, not cheerless and pointless.

[20:29] So, I'm thinking of the sentence which says, As to hope, or the phrase which says, As to hope, joyful. Fascinating little phrase that, isn't it?

As to hope, joyful. And I'm picking up on this and saying, It's not talking about Christians being cheerless.

I remember going and hearing a talk at a conference and I was asked to do the recording at the ladies' meeting. And the ladies' speaker was Sharon Hulse.

Some of you will know her. She gave a fantastic talk. And she talked about the wives of ministers and the things that they had to endure and what it was like being a wife of a minister.

And one of the points that she said was about people suffering cheerfully. I'd never quite thought of that before. But the idea of being cheerful rather than letting oneself get just miserable.

[21 : 37] I know that people do get miserable. But he's saying that that's something that, you know, don't just let yourself do that. As to hope, joyful.

So this whole idea of not giving in to cheerlessness and not allowing oneself to say, Oh, it's all pointless. As to hope, joyful.

As to trials, persevering. Well, he's very realistic that the Christian life isn't just being cheerful. But he says there are trials. And then he says, As to trials, persevering. Another very important condiment to put into the mix. Cheerfulness and enthusiasm and tenacity.

Not giving up. As to trials, persevering. What do we call it? Stick? Stickability is what I was looking for. Stickability.

[22 : 38] Put that into the mix for the church. And then the last of this little section. As to prayer, extra steadfast. So when we're going through trials and troubles, that's not meant to make us distant from God.

In fact, and you might have experienced this, it's the trials and troubles that press us to prayer. You know, we wouldn't bother praying sometimes if it wasn't for the pressure that we feel of such and such a need or such and such a heartache or whatever it is.

And Paul picks that up. As to prayer, lost my place. Extra steadfast. Patient in affliction. Faithful in prayer. So that's people.

Brotherly love. Temperature. Hot. And trials and tests. Let's move on. So I'm now going to thirdly group together some other little sayings that he's got here about needs and opposition and different conditions.

So, the needs bit. Verse 13. As to the needs of the saints, fellowshiping is a clunky translation. As to hospitality, pursuing.

[24 : 05] And then a different sort of statement. Bless those who pursue, who pursue you. Same word for pursuing hospitality and being pursued in persecution.

Bless and do not curse. Rejoice with the rejoicing ones. And weep with the weeping ones. So I've grouped those together. Thinking of needs and opposition and different conditions.

So, looking first of all at those needs. His word is fellowship. Does it reflect that in the translation we have? It says share.

Share with God's people who are in need. More literally, as to the needs of the saints, fellowshiping. Fellowship. Interesting word, fellowship. Fellowship in the Bible is not mostly about deep personal feelings.

I know some people say, oh, we're not having fellowship because I don't really know what's going on inside somebody's deepest heart. Well, maybe you do and maybe you don't. But fellowship is usually used in the Bible about something much more practical.

[25 : 14] It's often used about food, about money, and about a place to stay. And here, it could be any of those. As to the needs of the saints, fellowshiping.

So, here's some, the saints means not, as you understand, not just a few elite Christians, but all God's people. If they're God's people and they need money, we'll help them out.

If they're God's people and they've come to visit or they haven't got a place to stay, then give them a place to stay. If they're God's people and they have nothing to eat, give them some food.

So, having fellowship in the needs of God's people. The next thing I'm picking up is hospitality. As to hospitality, pursuing it.

NIV says practice hospitality. It's a little bit stronger than that. And I'll just offer this comment, that the Greek word for hospitality is philoxenia, which means philo, means love.

[26 : 18] And xenia means aliens, foreigners. Yes. Xenophobic is a fear of foreigners. I'll just pop that in. That's the root of the word hospitality, a lover of foreigners.

Obviously, not written by some of our political parties. I go no further. Let's see what he then talks about.

The possibility of being persecuted or oppressed or marginalized. So, verse 14. Bless those who persecute you or those who pursue you as you were pursuing hospitality.

I was thinking about this. I'm not... Well, there's a whole range of things that you could call persecution.

So, on the internet it was saying that in North Korea, 33 Christians have been lined up or were lined up to be executed for being Christians. I'm not quite sure of the provenance of that report, but I don't disbelieve it.

[27 : 32] It would be a very strange thing if in the UK, 33 Christians were lined up for execution. But they might get a bad press. But they might find that things were set against them and perhaps more so now than in the past and maybe more so in the future than in the present.

So, whatever the position on that spectrum, he says, if they persecute you, you bless them. Bless them. And do not try to get your own back. Bless and do not curse. Bless and do not curse. That's what he says. And you're thinking, no, he can't mean that. Because I've got it programmed in. If somebody is rude to me, then I'm jolly well make sure I'm rude back to them. If somebody treats me badly, I'm jolly well going to make sure they don't get away with it. But Paul says, the judicial system, yeah, that's right. If you're a judge or a barrister, you should certainly keep that in your programming.

[28 : 38] But as a private individual, let's just rub that out and put, if they, what does he say? If they persecute you, you bless them. I was going to curse them.

No, it says, do not curse them. It's an interesting piece of reprogramming, isn't it? Very like Jesus Christ, there are subtleties to it.

It's not saying that you should just unquestioningly accept every form of mistreatment that you get. But it is talking about the way you address things and the way you redress things.

And he's saying, your personal attitude to these people is not to curse them back, but to bless them. And he'll return to that in a moment.

And then something about the different conditions that people have in life. There are going to be some who are rejoicing, verse 15. Rejoice with those who rejoice.

[29 : 39] And there are going to be some who are sad. Weep with those who weep. So here we are this morning rejoicing. And we're rejoicing as we think of the birth of a child.

There's an occasion for joy. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice. That wouldn't be so easy if you yourself had, for example, lost a child.

Or if you yourself were unable to have children. But nevertheless, he says, this isn't just focused on you. This is on the community.

And here are people in your family, your Christian family, who have joy. Rejoice with them. And then, he says, with refreshing realism. And there will be some in your Christian family who are here this morning with tears in their eyes.

And you might be feeling, oh, come on, cheer up. It can't be that bad. He says, no, no, don't do that. And do them the respect of, if they're weeping, you sit and shed a tear with them.

[30 : 48] Weep with those who weep. Think of, completely forgot what I was going to say. This, it seems to me, needs or presupposes good, open, sensitive communication.

So how do you know somebody's rejoicing if you don't have any communication with them? You just wouldn't know, would you? This is one of my things against having big, big churches. Because how can you know what the 3,000th person sitting over there is feeling? How can you rejoice with them because you've never even met them? That's why I'm a big fan of churches where we can all know one another.

We need good, open, sensitive communication. Sensitive communication. Somebody might not have to say a lot for you to pick up that they are open to the moon or that they are really not their normal selves and something must have gone wrong.

So number three, needs and opposition and different conditions. Number four, some things about thinking and attitude.

[32 : 08] So here we are. Excuse me. Verse 16. My clunky translation.

To one another the same thinking. Not high things thinking. But rather low ones going with.

Not become a thinking one according to yourself. That's my clunky translation. This is what the NIV says. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low condition.

Do not be conceited. So some comments on that. Thinking the same things. To one another the same thinking.

It's a little bit, what's the word? Enigmatic trying to work out exactly what he means. But I would like to suggest. He's saying that as a group we should take the same approach to things.

[33 : 12] We should think the same way. Rather than having lots of different and divided thinking. So cultivate combined harmonious thinking.

What do we think about. I don't know. What do we think about the songs that we sing. What do we think about the way we welcome people. What do we think about how we should use the money that God's given to the church.

We need to think the same. Don't we? We need to work on this together. And again that seems to me to imply communication. Good communication. Listening to one another.

It seems to me to imply that needs time. So what are we thinking? Why are we thinking that? Explain it to me. Explain it to me so that I can understand.

Explain it to me. I might, you know, I'm not terribly quick. I might need a week or two to get what you say. And I need to come back to you and say, Did you mean this or did you mean that? It needs time to cultivate harmonious thinking.

[34 : 15] It needs willingness. I'm not listening to them. They're always wrong. Well they might not be wrong. What do they actually say? What did they mean? Thinking the same things.

Are you willing to be persuaded? Well I'm dead against that. Yeah but hold on. Why are they saying that? What are the advantages of it? How does it fit in with the Bible? Thinking the same thing.

Combined harmonious thinking. And another comment here that pride is a big enemy. He does seem to say quite a few things about pride, doesn't he? He says, not high things thinking.

The translation here being, do not be proud. Yeah don't think in a lofty way. I'm so clever and I'm so special.

Don't think that way. Connect yourself with humble people. Be willing to associate with people of low position.

[35 : 17] And along with that, a sober view of self. Do not be conceited. Quite literally, don't be a thinking one according to yourself. I'm the only person who can see these things properly.

And understand these things properly. Everybody else is a bit stupid. He says, well I think you must have got that wrong. So all sorts of things can happen in a church, can't they?

You can get divisions. And people feeling superior and inferior. You could do it on a class basis.

Although potions stuck up. And they'll say, well they're not our sort of people.

And he says, don't think that way. Don't think that way. The church is one body. Don't think of yourself highly. Associate with people of low condition.

So that fourthly, thinking and attitude of mind. I'm just steaming on with this. Are you still with me on this? Yes. Okay. So, fifthly and the last set of ingredients in this cookery.

[36 : 29] There's quite a bit about difficult people. Now, difficult moving on to actually evil. So this is verse 17.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. You see, I said he'd return to this theme. But 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, it is mine to avenge. I will repay, says the Lord.

On the contrary. It is mine to avenge. I will repay, is a quote from Deuteronomy. On the contrary. 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. Here's a quote from Proverbs. And he concludes, do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

[37 : 31] Which is a rather beautiful thought, isn't it? So, some bits of translation. Do not give back evil for evil. They've given me evil.

I'll give it back to them. He says, don't give back evil for evil. More easily said than done. Take thought to do good in the sight of all people.

The idea of, the translation says, be careful. Be thoughtful. Actually give it some thought. What can I, how can I think this through so as to do what is good in the sight of all people?

And then another little bit of translation. As is your ability with all, be peace living or peace making or live at peace.

So, you can see the attitude that he's saying is the Christian attitude. So, this I would suggest if there's people in the office who are nasty to you.

[38 : 46] Who make sure that when you're in the queue for the coffee machine, you get there when the coffee's all run out. What a terrible thing to do.

You can think of nasty things that people do to one another and you might find that they do that to you. Don't give back evil for evil. So, we could, as I said before, be thinking of in the office, little snide remarks.

Things you don't get invited to apparently. Other people do. Right down to the thugs wielding baseball bats who target Christians and set fire to Christian assemblies and things like that. Which does happen. So, he says this is the Christian response. And I can pick out two reasons for it. Number one, you are loved.

And I'm now looking for this in the translation. I think it is my friends. It's stronger in Greek. It's beloved. Anybody got verse 19, beloved?

[39 : 59] Right, okay. ESV, beloved. Right, okay. So, there are translations that give it that strength. I think that's a strong thought. Don't pay back evil for evil because you're loved.

It's a very important thing to be clear on. How I am doesn't really depend on whether I won that particular battle with that particular person.

Maybe they got the better of me. Maybe I came out of it looking silly. Maybe they did a bad turn on me and I was left with egg on my face. But actually, I'm not too bothered about that because God loves me.

I'm beloved. I'm beloved. And he puts that in. I think that's a strong point. Don't let them get under your skin because the almighty God, the maker of heaven and earth, the creator of the universe, has set his love on you and sent his son to die for you.

And that counts a huge amount more. You're beloved. God will do his job in his time and in his way.

[41 : 27] You let him do his job and you do your job. It's rather an important principle in lots of bits of the Bible, but it's certainly a principle here. Verse 19.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, it is mine to avenge. I will repay. God doesn't say, there's no such thing as vengeance.

There's no such thing as putting it right. There's no such thing as paying people back because we're all much more civilized than that. God said, oh yes, people will get paid back in full. There is such a thing as deserving and I'll make sure that people do get as they deserve.

But God says, please note, I will do it. That's my job. I understand what motivated them. I understand the circumstances. I saw everything that went on.

I'll do the repaying. That's my job. You let me do that. You do your job. And what's our job? Well, our job is as far as possible to live peaceably.

[42 : 31] If we're cursed to bless. And as he spells it out here, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink.

And I've always been puzzled and I know some of you have been puzzled by the last bit. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. I'm still puzzled by it. But what I want to say is that I think what it's saying is that God's vengeance, which is his, which he will do, and our meekness and graciousness, they work together.

So you might be thinking, well, if I'm meek and gracious, then they won't get what they deserve.

And I'm not too happy with that. And he says, no, hold on. You do your bit. Be pleasant.

Return a smile for a frown. Turn the other cheek. Go the extra mile. And that and what God does actually work together.

So just be satisfied in that. And here's a little picture then of the Christian who is, I hope not all the time, but very conceivably some of the time, having evil and opposition coming to them.

[43 : 59] But the Christian who themselves is a beacon of good that springs out from their lives.

And they are able to do that because they themselves have this input into their lives of the love and the grace of God.

And that's the picture of it. And that's the picture of it. And it's a rather wonderful piece of cookery.

It's cooking up people, cooking up a community of people who it seems to me are miraculous.

I don't think this can happen without the gospel of Jesus Christ and the grace of God. It's a miracle. It's an ongoing miracle. And it's a beautiful thing.

There's lots of ugly and unpleasant things in this world. But the church of Jesus Christ is meant to be and can be a radiant or have some of the radiance that Christ died to give her.

It's miraculous and beautiful. And it's also possible. It is also possible. We should not allow ourselves to think, well, that could never happen.

[45 : 13] We should always be pressing for that. We should always be working and praying for it. And not only is it beautiful and possible and miraculous, but it's rather like Jesus himself, isn't it?

Do you not find that Jesus himself exhibited all those characteristics? When he was cursed, he blessed people. When he was insulted, he didn't hit back, but committed himself to the God who does justly.

So I want to ask you, is this you? Are you in the church of Jesus Christ so that you're saying, that's what I should be?

I'm very willing to reprogram and relearn some of the things that has been written in. I'm going to take my India rubber and rub those out and write in the things that Paul's just been saying.

Are you up for that? And then I'm going to say, maybe you're not even in. Because this isn't for human beings in general.

[46 : 25] This is for Christians. And maybe you're thinking, this is fantastic. I wish I could be a part of a community like this. I really do.

But you're not because you're not a Christian. And if you wind right back to the beginning, what was it built on? It was built on the mercies of God.

And that's the bit that you haven't yet got. Because you haven't said, I need God's mercies. And if you said, I need it, you haven't received it. That's where you need to go back to.

You're thinking, I'd like some of this. Well, you need to go first to Jesus Christ and get straight. I want to be in. I want to be part of what you have done.

I need what you achieved on the cross. And I need all that you are. And I need all the power that you are.

[47 : 23] And whatever it takes to make my life part of that, please do it. Are you in? And in the words of the old TV series, Ready, steady, cook.

Let's sing together.