

Dealing with the Unrepentant

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[0 : 00] Verses 17 through to 21. So, Romans chapter 12, beginning at verse 17.

Now hear God's word. Repay no evil, repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.

Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God. For it is written, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing so, you will heap burning coals on his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Just before we come back to God's word, there's a couple of things which I perhaps forgot to mention, which should have been mentioned.

[1 : 42] Firstly, Jean is fallen and broken her arm in the shoulder, unable to drive for a few weeks in tremendous pain.

So, if we can remember Jean in our prayers. And also, little Ivanka on October the 9th will be dedicated.

So, please remember to come. Please remember to support the family as they uphold a covenant commitment to the Lord in bringing up their youngest daughter, Ivanka.

So, that's August, October the 9th. Okay? That's great.

Well, let's pray for us as we read these words because they are not necessarily straightforward. Even though the message is straightforward, the implications are wider.

[2 : 41] Father God, we would ask this morning that you would look upon us with great grace and favor. That you would enlighten our minds with a view of changing our heart.

And that we would be moved according to your word. And not left unmoved by the hardness, perhaps, that can retain in our own heart towards the things of God.

We would ask, Father God, this morning that as we seek to worship you in spirit and in truth, that we would recognize that part of that is hearing and listening and following your word.

And so, guide us now, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So, the Romans 12 passage will not be the only passage I want us to focus our attention on.

But it is one that makes the message abundantly clear. And that is, over the last two Sunday morning messages which I have brought to you, the first of which was on bitterness and how to deal with bitterness.

[3 : 42] The second of which was on forgiveness. That is, the need to be forgiven and the need to forgive. We now come to a third part, which is obviously an overflow and joined easily.

Easy to understand. And that is, what do you do when you're dealing with a person who is unrepentant? How are you to relate to the person who has sinned against you and who perhaps is not repentant and takes no responsibility for what they have done?

Sorry, something really... What's that noise? Is it Sunday school, is it? No, no, it's fine. I just couldn't work it out.

And I was more bothered by the fact that I didn't know what it was than it actually happening. I can cope. I can cope with noise. Trust me, in a house full of children you work in, it's amazing.

And by the way, noise cancelling headphones do not work. I've tried them. What a waste of money they were. Probably because they were cheap. But anyway. Back to the point.

[5 : 00] So in the first message we looked at bitterness. In the second message we looked at the need to forgive and be forgiven. But now we come to this third part, which is how do you relate to a person who is unrepentant?

And that then spawns another question, which is, well, what actually is unrepentance? We know what repentance is. And so unrepentance shouldn't be too difficult to figure out.

Bitterness can damage you greatly. And it can damage your relationships with other people. Forgiveness puts you in a position before God where you are accepted.

And not forgiving others puts you in a position before God where God is going to have to deal with you. Because that is not where God wants you to be. But then this other consideration of being unrepentant.

And then what do you do with a person who has sinned against you, a brother and sister in the faith, and that is now unrepentant for their actions towards you. They take no responsibility for the sin that has been committed.

[6 : 07] They've just wandered off as if, not as if it didn't happen. But they're taking no responsibility. They're just, they've sinned against you. And they've just gone.

The other issue is, is that when a brother or sister in the faith wanders from the truth, and you know that they have done that, you also need to recognize that they've got there by unrepentance.

No one wanders into sin and stays there unless they're unrepentant. Okay, so when a person wanders in, wanders away from the truth, they do so by unrepentance.

There's, because repentance is God's way of saying you need to change. It's God's way of saying you're not supposed to be this way, you're supposed to be this way. And repentance is how you create that change in your life.

Now, of course, repentance for the Christian is not a one-time deal. It's not something you do once with no need ever to do again. But at the same time, repentance has to be genuine.

[7 : 15] So if you know a brother or sister in the faith that has wandered away from the truth, and you say nothing, and you do nothing as if to say, well, it's not my position to say anything, firstly, you are in danger of running into a whole world of unrepentance yourself, because it is your duty, according to James 5, if you are the mature brother or sister in the faith, to restore the weaker one.

And so if you're not doing it, if you're not saying, look, what you're doing is a sin, then you're also in sin by omission, as James says. You can sin by doing the wrong thing, and you can sin by not doing the right thing.

So these issues are very wide in the church, because what happens is you have a reduction to the very minimum, where if I can get away with it, someone else can get away with it, and no one is around to correct me.

But in a mature fellowship, everyone is bringing everyone else back from wandering away from the truth. We're not afraid to say, look, brother, what you're doing is sinful.

Look, sister, you are wandering into sin here. And the reason you bring them back is not because you haven't committed the same sin, or you haven't been sinful, but rather because you recognize it's sinful.

[8 : 37] So whether you've committed or not should make no difference to whether or not you then reach out to your brother and sister in the faith to restore them. But often what happens is people who have committed, let's say, sins in their life, and let's say we use a very worldly term of some sins are bigger than others, okay, what tends to happen is you then feel you can't say anything because that person will bring up your sin.

So I can't correct you from wandering away from the truth because you're going to look at me and bring something up about me and my past about when I wandered away from the truth.

And so there becomes this sinful tit for tat where no one is able to restore anyone, and so unrepentance then becomes the sort of default mode of most people's lives.

So we really need to get to the bottom of what unrepentance is. Firstly, the repentant person is not a person who has only done it once. The repentant person is the person who continually repents.

The reason your Christian life changes and the reason your Christian beliefs change over time and your practice changes over time is because you're constantly repenting.

[9 : 51] You're constantly trying to become more and more like Christ and follow the word of God. So people will say to me, well, you didn't do this 20 years ago when you were in ministry, or 15 years ago, but how come you're doing it now?

Well, it's repentance. The direction we try and move our life in or our life is being moved in is always along the track of repentance. There's no way you will ever change from the position you hold unless you repent of it.

And repentance is turning away from it. The unrepentant person is categorically unsaved. They do not want to follow Christ.

They do not want to hear the word of God. They are unrepentant. They are walking off in their own direction, and they take no responsibility for their life before God.

And so unrepentant is simply a person who does not want to do what God's word has revealed. That's clearly seen in a person who is unsaved.

[10 : 59] It's not always clearly seen in a person who is saved. But there are plenty of Christians who don't do it God's way. And therefore, if they're not doing it God's way, they too are unrepentant.

So we mustn't think that repentance is something that a Christian does at the beginning of their Christian life with no need ever to do it again. Repentance is much deeper than that.

So here's the summary of how we are to deal with unrepentance, and indeed an unrepentant person if they have sinned against us.

The passage in Romans identifies the subject of evil in the context of relationship, and that you are to repay no one with the evil that has been shown to you.

If a person remains unrepentant, we are to leave them to God. If they repent, of course, they receive the forgiveness of God. The quick answer when dealing with a person that you cannot come to an agreement with or will not repent is to have nothing to do with them, is to just walk away from them and leave them alone.

[12 : 11] That distancing is understandable, that if I can't get anywhere with you, we'll just go our separate ways. The trouble is it's not always possible, because what if the unrepentant person is your wife?

What if the unrepentant person is your husband? How are you going to walk away from that? Well, you can't walk away. So the unrepentance becomes really problematic within a marriage, because you just can't walk away.

Well, in some cases, people do, but biblically speaking, you can't do it if you're going to follow God's word. If you're going to be committed to God's word, you can't then be committed to getting a divorce, because it's contrary to what God's word actually teaches.

So the issues of dealing with unrepentance are serious, because there are some relationships you biblically cannot walk away from, though sinfully, people do it all the time.

It's perhaps a bit easier with a neighbor, because you can shut the door. They're in their house, you're in yours. But it's very difficult with a husband, a wife, or a child, or a family member. So it has to be dealt with.

[13 : 24] You can't just pretend it doesn't exist, though this is often what most people do. So verse 17 simply states that we are not to mirror the behavior shown to us.

That if someone has been evil towards us, we are then not to mirror that behavior back to them. So whatever they have done to us, we are not then to do the equivalent back to them, and just a little bit more, to make sure that the payment is equal and fair.

So repay no one evil for the evil that has been shown to you. You're not to mirror the sinful person, but you are to mirror the God who forgives.

And the reason it has to be stated in this way is because you cannot be like God in every situation. God is the one who will deal with a person who is unrepentant in a particular way, in a different way, than you will ever deal with them.

Your response to an unrepentant person is always to be willing to forgive. It's always to be willing to forgive. But at the same time, you're never to repay evil for evil.

[14 : 40] In terms of leaving them to God, Paul says they have to be left to God because they have to be left to the wrath of God. The wrath of God is upon all those who do not obey God in the gospel.

That's a frightening situation for an unrepentant person to be in. So when you leave them to God, one of the things that begins to happen in your own heart, which we'll see in a minute, is there's a different sense of compassion and a different urgency when it comes to actually preaching the gospel to your enemies because you know their future, and their future is the wrath of God.

And one of the difficulties that you have with unrepentance, with good people, is that the world is full of lovely grannies, I'm tempted to say of both sexes, in this current world, who are a little old and, you know, and just sort of weak-willed, good people who need to repent of their goodness.

Because it's their goodness that is getting them in the way from Christ and the gospel and repentance. And that's a huge problem. A huge problem. So you've got little old grannies that are good and you love them and they're beautiful people in one respect, but their future is the wrath of God because they are unrepentant.

Okay, so we tend, don't think that the unrepentant person is the person who's somehow committed this one big sin against you or against the world or against, and that's the person who the wrath of God is going to come upon.

[16 : 22] No. The wrath of God comes upon anyone who is unrepentant. That's what it says here. And that's how they're to be left.

What follows then is as we leave this person to the wrath of God, we, in turn, are to love our enemies. So our response to them is to love our enemies.

We are not to be overcome by the evil, especially if it's towards us, but we are to overcome the evil with good, which means, which means that the nature in your own heart towards the unrepentant person is one of compassion because now you understand their end, now you're even more motivated to tell them the gospel because you understand what they face in the future.

So instead of being overcome with evil and wanting to pay them back, the moment you understand that their life is heading towards the wrath of God, you're more compassionate, not less, because you'd have to be pretty hard-hearted to sit back idly and just accept the fact that this person is going to face the wrath of God without any gospel intervention from you.

I mean, you'd have to be a pretty hard-hearted person to not explain the gospel to someone who faces that future, wouldn't you? So I don't believe any of us are that person, but it's easy to become that person, especially if that person has sinned against you because now you think, well, I'm going to leave them to it.

[17 : 59] Let them get what they deserve, right? Let God deal with them. And there is an element of truth in that, but God qualifies it by saying, however, you're to love your enemies.

You're to do good to them. So we need to deal with two questions and then we will have addressed it hopefully clearly enough. The first is, what actually is an unrepentant person?

And then secondly, what are we to do in practically speaking when dealing with a person who is unrepentant towards who has sinned against us, perhaps greatly sinned against us?

What are we to do with them? So firstly, unrepentance or an unrepentant person is simply a person who does not want to live their life according to the will of God and therefore, an unrepentant person can be in the church or out of the church.

They can be a Christian or they can be a non-Christian because there are plenty of Christians who do not follow the word of God entirely. In fact, we saw last week that we have to ask God to forgive us our debts because we're not perfect.

[19 : 11] And so because we're not perfect and we are asking God to forgive us our debts, that's repentance. But imagine if you don't. Imagine if you go a whole week without ever praying, Lord, forgive me.

It means that you're not conscious of your own actions. It means that you're not conscious of... You either believe that you've got everything right, everything right, on every single day, or you're just not conscious of your own sin and therefore, you never say, Lord, forgive me.

I mean, that's the only two conclusions that you can come to. That if you go a whole week without praying, Lord, forgive me, you're either perfect and got everything right or you're just ignorant of your own ability to sin or even what sin is.

And there's plenty of examples as well where people commit sins as Christians and they don't even know it's a sin until it's pointed out to them. And that comes down to a lack of knowledge of God's word.

I never thought that was a sin. And I've met plenty of men and women who when you bring something up to them, they go, well, that's not a sin. And you go, well, it is. Let me show you where it's addressed. And they go, I never knew that.

[20 : 25] Well, of course you didn't know. If you've not read God's word, do you think you're able in and of yourself to automatically work out what's sinful and what's not?

You can't. Your heart isn't pure enough. Your mind isn't smart enough to be able to figure out what is right and wrong. You need the word of God.

And so the unrepentant person is simply the person who does not live according to the will of God. The repentant person is the one who recognizes that they have not lived according to the will of God and they repent of their actions.

The trouble is is that a past action can have a future consequence. Okay? We've all seen examples where you don't live God's way in the past and years later you're left with the consequences of those actions.

So some sins don't go away or the consequences of the sins don't go away just because you have repented of them. They are still there.

[21 : 32] Now, given the fact that we have been addressing bitterness and forgiveness, what does it mean when an unrepentant person or a person who has sinned against us then remains unrepentant?

Where let's imagine for a moment that there truly is such a thing as an innocent party. I believe there is. I believe in some marriages that the breakdown can be due simply to one person.

You know, it won't be clearly 100% one person but by and large it is possible for one person to be repentant in a marriage and another person to not be.

And therefore, the breakdown is always due to the person who's unrepentant. Right? And this is the way all relationships work. All relationships break down along the line of unrepentance.

The persons who are willing to repent and willing to forgive and willing to ask for forgiveness and looking for that reconciliation are the ones who are making all the effort. But if you've got another person in the relationship who's not willing to do any of that and they remain unrepentant, they are then causing further harm by their unrepentance.

[22 : 49] Here's an example of Paul, what he says about Alexander the coppersmith. You'll remember in 2 Timothy, he says, Alexander the coppersmith did great harm to me but then he says, the Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

In other words, you may ask the question, well, why doesn't Paul say anything here about forgiving him? Well, because Paul is showing us here how to deal with an unrepentant person.

You don't forgive an unrepentant person. You can be willing to forgive. Not even God forgives an unrepentant person. You say, yes he does, Jesus said it from the cross.

Now, that's a simple misunderstanding and I wonder why people get it wrong so often. God does not forgive an unrepentant person. And the reason Paul doesn't mention anything here about forgiving Alexander the coppersmith is because he's showing what a biblical response is to a person who is unrepentant.

They must be left to the wrath of God. And he says, the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. What we're witnessing is a person who has sinned against Paul, done Paul great harm, and Paul's response is because Alexander is not repentant, is to leave him to the wrath of God.

[24 : 12] In other words, his deeds towards me will not go overlooked by God. I can't repay evil for evil. I must be willing to forgive him if he is repentant, but he must be left to God.

And some people at this point will say, well, that's just not true because Jesus said right from the very cross that we're to forgive everyone even if they don't know what they are doing.

But Jesus never actually said that, did he? From the cross. From the cross, Jesus said these words, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do.

Jesus didn't forgive them. Jesus is asking God the Father to forgive them, and God the Father will if they are repentant. but there's no automatic forgiveness because if there were automatic forgiveness, there would be no hell.

There would be no wrath of God. There would be no leaving a person for God to deal with their evil deeds. If forgiveness were automatic, then you could carry on sinning without any fear of judgment.

[25 : 29] forgiveness is an act of God's love towards the repentant. And forgiveness is always bestowed upon those who are repentant.

Paul doesn't forgive Alexander the coppersmith, but is he willing to? Of course. Is he willing to love his enemy? Of course he's willing.

But he's not to do something that God doesn't do himself. And so when Jesus says from the cross, Father, forgive them, he's asking God the Father to forgive them.

And God the Father will if they are repentant. And so here we understand both the seriousness of being an unrepentant person and also the beauty of forgiveness in Christ Jesus so that we don't reduce the death of Christ to nothing.

Because if everyone was forgiven automatically, then why did Jesus have to die? It's meaningless. Right?

[26 : 43] If my sin against you means nothing and it's just forgiven, regardless of the condition of my own heart, then everything becomes meaningless.

So we really have to understand what unrepentance is. An unrepentant person is a person who takes no responsibility for their own actions and living accordingly according to the will of God has revealed in his word.

Now the response is fairly simple. evil. And that is, now that we understand the serious condition that an unrepentant person is in, do we become more compassionate or less compassionate?

Are we more likely to repay evil for evil or less likely? Well, we are less likely to repay evil for evil. We are less likely to want our own back because we understand what that unrepentant life has ahead of them.

And all that it has ahead of them is the wrath of God. And so if we're really going to treat a person who is unrepentant properly, then we must lead them to the wrath of God.

[28 : 05] And then it says, if you read carefully in verse 20 and 21, to the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, he give him something to drink, for by doing so you will heap burning coals upon his head.

What a strange way of understanding the grace of God. I mean, this is hyperbole language, of course, but what it's actually saying is that when you go out of your way to love your enemy, your enemy, while receiving the good, receives it like another judgment because he is aware of how bad he has been towards you and you are not responding in a way that mirrors his behavior towards you.

You're responding in a way, you're treating him not according to his deeds and what they deserve. You're doing exactly what God does and this is where we must draw the distinction.

God does show grace. God does show forgiveness. This present world is a time of grace. But then this time will end and when it ends, those who are unrepentant will face the judgment of God.

So now think of an unrepentant person you know. Are you more or less likely to tell them the gospel? Think of a person who has sinned against you.

[29 : 42] Are you more or less likely to tell them the gospel? You'd have to have a pretty hard heart. And perhaps you have. And perhaps that's your problem this morning.

You actually have a hard heart and you're not taking these matters seriously enough. And therefore you're the unrepentant person.

let's have the exhortation then as we close. There's probably nothing more serious than unrepentance.

It is very serious in the person who is unsaved facing the judgment of God without the protection of Christ. Christ. The Christian who is unrepentant is not often completely unrepentant because if they were they wouldn't be a Christian.

But the Christian is often unrepentant in areas. Particular areas like we addressed last week. The unwillingness to forgive would be an area in which you would become unrepentant.

[30 : 55] if you know that you ought to forgive a person and you are not then you're not living according to the will of God and therefore you are unrepentant.

What does that mean then that the Christian then faces the wrath of God? Well not the wrath of God no but certainly the discipline of God because God wants his children to behave and walk in a particular way.

And so the point here is is that repentance sorry unrepentance is always dealt with there's always dealt with by God in the Christian it's always dealt with by discipline in the unsaved it's always dealt with by them facing the wrath of God.

And the way of escape for both is exactly the same. Repentance in Christ Jesus that Jesus is the only and will only ever be the way of escape.

And so if a person has sinned against you and they remain unrepentant there is nothing you should do other than one leave them to God and two if it is in terms of where you're in the same household or you're in a close relationship that you are not to mirror their behavior towards you but you are to mirror Christ's behavior towards them.

[32 : 17] You are not to repay evil for evil you're not to be overcome by their evil and then get your own back but you are to overcome evil with good.

In other words when you realize that you have left this person to God to deal with that is not a comfortable position for any person to be in. And when you truly understand that that's not a comfortable position your compassion for them increases tremendously because I can't imagine any of us truly in our heart of hearts if we were really pushed on the issue would want another person to suffer unless of course we have a righteous anger towards someone who is truly unrepentant where we would actually agree to the eternal punishment of someone like for instance Jimmy Saville in other words Jimmy Saville died and worldly speaking got away with it but he hasn't got away with anything because the unrepentant faced the wrath of

God where we find the difficulty is when we have a sweet old nan who's been good to you your whole life but it's not saved now our heart begins to well surely they can't face the wrath of God but the seriousness of unrepentance is is that yes there are degrees in hell and God deals with different sins differently and yes not all sins are the same Jesus said that himself Jesus said before Pilate greater is the sin in him who brought me to you even Jesus is making distinction between greater sins and lesser sins the issue is not is his sin bigger than mine the issue is what does God deal do with sin and he judges it and the only way of escape is in Christ Jesus and so in short if you have been sinned against and the person that has sinned against you is unrepentant then you are not to be overcome by their evil towards you but you are to overcome their evil with good by leaving them to the will of God and secondly by loving your enemy amen we are going to go back to icing this morning so we are going to stand and sing the final hymn thank you song what is singing song these disciples like here

I think upon your sacrifice You repaid nothing For more after death Many times I've wondered at your gift of life I'm in that place once again I'm in that place once again