**Lesson 35: What to Do When You Are Under Attack**

Text: Romans 12:14-21

**Introduction**

In the previous lesson, we considered genuine Christian love. Our love for God and man is to be free from pretense. If we truly love others, we will do that which is best for them. We will demonstrate a heartfelt concern that translates into kind words and actions. Instead of shrinking back from helping others, we will roll up our sleeves and lend a helping hand. It is genuine Christlike love that perseveres in the hard times. This way of living represents a new way of thinking (Rom. 12:2). In this final section of chapter 12, genuine Christian love faces its most difficult test: love for one’s enemies. It is one thing to perform acts of kindness for those who love you. It is entirely another thing to do so toward those who have hurt you or your family. Paul helps us to know what genuine Christlike love looks like when under attack.

1. **Genuine Christlike love prompts us to desire for our persecutors to be in a place God can bless. (v. 14; Matthew 5:44, Luke 6:27-28)** 
   1. There is a change in this verse from a focus on our relationship with other believers to our response to an unbelieving world.
   2. The word *bless* means “to ask God to bestow divine favor on” them. (Low and Nida). This is certainly opposite of how we would normally respond. Ask God to bestow His favor on them?! You might be more inclined to pray that He would bring down wrath and indignation! However, they were not to wish harm to come to their persecutors.
   3. *Persecute* carries the idea of one who is pursuing to do harm. It is pictured in the way Paul persecuted the church (Acts 9:4). At one time, Paul moved aggressively against those who named the Name of Christ. Now he instructed those persecuted to show kindness to their persecutors. What a transformation!
   4. This represented an extraordinary way of responding to hostility in their day, just as it does ours.
2. **Genuine Christlike love prompts us to identify with others. (v. 15-16)** 
   1. The natural tendency is to grow jealous toward those who rejoice. It is also the natural response to rejoice when hard times come to those who have opposed you. (v. 15)
      1. The proper Christian response is to be glad when good comes to others and to come alongside the hurting.
      2. “Identifying with others in both their joys and their sorrows is an appropriate way for Christians to demonstrate the sincerity of their love to non-Christians as well as Christians” (Douglas Moo). We are to make their joy our joy and their sorrow our sorrow.
   2. There is a certain mindset that is essential if believers are to live in this fashion. (v. 16)
      1. Paul said that believers are to “condescend to men of low estate.” *Condescend* means to associate with and to be in their company. You can’t say you love others and keep your distance.
      2. The reference “men of low estate” refers to those who are “of low position, poor, lowly, undistinguished” (Gingrich). As believers, we are to be kind toward those who are neglected. We are to reach out to the needy.
   3. “The biggest barrier to unity is pride” (Douglas Moo). We tend to think that we are right and others are wrong. We are also inclined to think that our opinions matter most. You cannot identify with others if you are keeping your distance.
3. **Genuine Christlike love prompts us to let God deal with the wrongdoers. (v. 17-21)**
   1. You are not to pay others back for the wrong they have done to you. (v. 17)
      1. It is natural to devote your energy in retaliation. Instead, you are to give your efforts to plan to how you might do good rather than causing them grief. Put the energy you would expend in revenge into reconciliation.
      2. We are to “provide things honest in the sight of all men.” We are to give ourselves to that which is morally good and praiseworthy regardless of the wrong done to us.
   2. We are to live in a way that keeps peace. (v. 18)
      1. As Christians, we are naturally going to have conflict with the world that opposes Christ (John 16:33). However, we should not live in a way that incites their opposition. We should work diligently to have positive relationships with the lost world.
      2. This verse instructs you to do your part. Part of keeping peace depends on your words and actions. There is also part of keeping peace that is beyond your control: the words and actions of others.
      3. You may reach a point where you have no other alternative but to disassociate with the individual causing problems.
   3. Instead of taking revenge into your own hands, you are to allow the Lord to handle the situation. (v. 19)
      1. *Avenge* is defined as “to repay harm with harm, on the assumption that the initial harm was unjustified and that retribution is therefore called for; to pay back; to revenge; to seek retribution.” (Low and Nida)
      2. Paul instructed those who have been wronged to “give place unto wrath.” This means that we are to step aside and let someone else more qualified handle it. In this case, the Person who is able to deal with the wrong is none other than the Lord.
      3. The word “wrath” is used of the judgment God will bring on the earth. Vengeance (punishment) belongs to God, not you. (Deutronomy 32:35)
   4. Paul used Proverbs 25:21-22 to explain the type of response we ought to have when mistreated. (v. 20)
      1. If your enemy suffers hunger, make sure that he or she has something to eat. If they thirst, give them something to drink. In other words, treat them with kindness even though they are mistreating you.
      2. The reference to coals of fire on the head is debated as to its meaning. It most likely means that acts of kindness could cause them to burn with shame for their wrong and turn to God in repentance.
   5. Christ’s form of love for our enemies keeps us from being overcome with evil. (v. 21) “Evil can overcome us when we allow the pressure put on us by a hostile world to force us into attitudes and actions that are out of keeping with the transformed character of the new realm” (Douglas Moo). New life in Christ enables us to follow the steps of our Savior when wronged (1 Peter 2:21-25).
4. **Central Idea: Paul instructed the believers to handle persecution by turning to God for their defense.**
5. **Application: When you are under attack, turn to God for your defense.**

**Conclusion**

There is much evil in the world. You may have some who seek to do harm to you or to your reputation. Following Christ’s example and heeding Paul’s admonition enables us to rise above the evil intents of those who would seek to destroy us. Christ’s love triumphs in the end. Let God take up your defense!