

33. God's rules of engagement

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In my opinion, the rules of engagement, a.k.a. R.O.E., for our military in Iraq and Afghanistan are purely political and beyond stupid. These are our soldiers fighting against insurgent terrorists in a war. But the same kind of politicians who ran the Viet Nam War to the ground are running this war as well. One of the current rules of engagement for our soldiers in those regions is "fire upon fire". Unless someone gets shot at or killed, our soldiers cannot fire at their enemies first.

In normal earthly sense, God's rules of engagement would make far less sense than the U.S. military's. Because He tells us to love our enemies; even to bless those who persecute us.

It doesn't make sense to our natural instincts. It probably made less sense to the original readers of this letter. The Book of Romans by apostle Paul was written to the believers in Rome who mainly were slaves. The majority of them had pagan and ungodly masters who thought very little about their slaves' lives, let alone the God of their slaves. Apostle Paul asked them to love those who persecuted and treated them bad. That required more than what natural men and women could endure, but God's love.

The secular world is not the only minefield, you also encounter enemies within the church as well, because a bunch of imperfect people get together to worship the perfect God. Thankfully, God gives us His rules of engagement in this study.

Anyone can love those who love them and hate those who hate them. But it takes God's intervention to love those who hate us.

A. BLESS THE ONE WHO PERSECUTES YOU

Romans 12:14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

We all have enemies: the boss who warns us to never bring our "religion" to work, the coworkers who look for opportunities to sabotage us, and the neighbor who thinks our yard is his dog's "potty spot."

Somehow we tend to think that it is impossible to do this. In our own strength, of course it is impossible. But we have the Spirit of God living in us who is more than willing to help us.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

Apostle Paul is telling us to resist the impulse to fight back, to yell back or to insult back when our enemies attack. Even more our God expects us to bless those who persecute us.

We can apply this valuable principle in just about any area of our lives. The person who attacks you can be your own spouse or ex-spouse. It is our tendency to say something back just to get back at that person. But the Lord says, "Don't do it." One insult will invite another and there is no end.

B. PUTTING YOURSELF IN THE OTHER'S SHOE

Romans 12:15-16 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on

high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.

This is empathy at its best, the ability to identify with another person's feelings. This is such a valuable lesson for all of us to learn how to treat all the people in the right way.

As I have said before, the people who are going through a great loss, like a death of loved ones, divorce, or whatever, don't need your sermons or Bible quoting session right away. They need your presence, your empathy and your arm around their shoulder.

I knew a brilliant young man from Calvary Tucson where Karen and I used to attend before we started this church. I've noticed that he was so quick to whip out Scriptures as soon as someone poured their hearts out to him. I pulled him aside and suggested him to wait upon the Lord for the right timing to bring up Scriptures.

If you are quoting a Bible verse without the Holy Spirit's guidance, it is nothing more than a hot breath. You might say, "Isaiah 55:11 says that His Word will not return to Him void." You are absolutely correct. But you need to read the whole verse and keep everything in context.

Isaiah 55:11 So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

If the Scripture does not come from God in His way in His time, it doesn't mean anything. A good example is satan quoting a Scripture to tempt Jesus in the wilderness during His 40 days and nights before He started His earthly ministry.

Apostle Paul is not encouraging us to be of the same mind toward non-believers. If that is the case, we would be dragged down to their ungodly level.

If we think that we can't possibly be wrong in any area and that non-believers who disagree with us can't possibly be right, that idea would give us nothing but an arrogant attitude. If we follow the Holy Spirit's guidance, His timing and His ways, we would be right all the time. But if we do the things in our ways, even if we have a right intention, we can be wrong. The best thing we can do at that point is being humble and vulnerable to ask for their forgiveness. You will be surprised how the Lord can use that situation to open a door to the non-believer.

We should not be Christian snobs, rather we should be servants. It is hard to wash other people's feet while we are standing on a pedestal.

Note what it says "*Do not be wise in your own opinion.*" The only opinion that matters is God's, nobody else's – that is including our own.

C. NEVER REPAY EVIL FOR EVIL

Romans 12:17-18 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.

Returning evil for evil, or good for good, is the way most people live. But the Christian must live on a higher level and return good for evil. If we pay back evil for evil, what are we different than non-believers? Nothing. Revenge is a bankrupt form

of spiritual economics that we should not get into. When people hurt us, we should seek to stop the harm by refusing to retaliate.

Then some Christians would say, "But that is not fair." We are not talking about fairness here, but being like Jesus. While we were still the enemies of God, Jesus died for us to reconcile us to Himself, not to retaliate for Himself.

What bothers my sinful nature are these two words "all men" – yes, including our enemies. All those people who are attacking and will attack the faith we cherish.

As you have noticed lately, more and more people are joining the liberal side against Christianity everyday. They already declare an open season against Christianity and Christians in America. Every other religion is respected and not to talk bad about, especially Islam, but Christianity. So should we attack them as they viciously attack us? No, we should take the high road.

Speaking of road, let's put this principle in a daily grind situation. You may say, "I don't repay someone evil for evil." But you might. What is your attitude when a driver cuts you off or waves at you with only one finger? How would you act if Jesus is riding shotgun in your car? Would you still yell at that person? If you wouldn't do whatever you've been doing before Jesus rides with you, why would you do that while the Holy Spirit is in you and not to mention that you do have a Christian bumper sticker on your rear bumper?

Some might ask about the justification of self-defense. There is a tremendous difference between restraining ourselves from insults and self-defense. When Jesus told us to turn the other cheek, He didn't mean to tell us to be a doormat of someone who physically attacks us and tries to hurt or kill us. In that case, protect yourself with whatever means.

But when it comes to insult, Jesus is telling us not to revenge ourselves. Because in majority of cases nobody dies from insult or even a slap on a cheek. He is telling us not to revenge ourselves. He does a whole lot better job than we can possibly do.

Not everyone wants to live in peace. Some are just impossible to make peace with no matter how hard you try. After you extend your peace as best as you can, if they still refuse, then it is not your problem anymore.

One of British preacher Charles Spurgeon's congregation told his preacher, "I never forgive." In response to him, Spurgeon said, "I hope you never sin."

Some people use v18 they try to make their way back to the original positions. Let me explain. Let's say there is a guy name Charlie who was the husband of Melanie. He cheated on her a couple of times. She graciously took him back because he begged her. When he did it again, she finally filed a divorce. Charlie quoted this verse and insisted that she should not only forgive him, but also has to take him back again. I say, "No." She has every ground to divorce that jerk. Forgiveness is mandatory, but reconciliation depends on the situation.

D. LEAVING ALL VENGEANCE WITH GOD

Romans 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord.

The Christian must not play God and try to avenge himself.

I am reminding this to all of my brothers in the Lord, because we, men, have a tendency to take care of things ourselves.

I am reminding this to all of my sisters in the Lord. we all know that hell has no fury like a woman's scorn. But it is better for you, ladies, to back off and let the Lord handle the revenge for you.

I have to remind this to myself as well. We had a few occasion to ask some people who used to attend our church not to come back because they were blatantly living in sin. After they left the church, some went around bad mouth about me and the church how they were mistreated and how unbiblical I was about the situation. Each time I chose not to do anything against their accusations. I wanted the Lord to handle them. I live by this principle: "If I defend myself, the Lord will not defend me." Is it easy? Are you kidding me?

Apostle Paul quoted this "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay*" from Deuteronomy 32:35. Only God, who is completely righteous and omnipotent, has the right and power to judge people fairly.

E. OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD

Romans 12:20-21 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." 21

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

The first portion of v20 sounds like Matthew 5, but it actually comes from Proverbs 25:21. It exhorts us to show kindness to our enemies.

Then there is the second half which makes our eyebrows to be raised. It sounds like, "After you feed and give a drink to your enemy, put coals of fire on his head." Wow, that would be some serious revenge, huh? What does it mean? We have to understand their culture and custom to really comprehend this verse.

In ancient times, when a person's fire in their home went out, they would borrow a hot coal from a neighbor's fire to get theirs going again since they didn't have any easy igniting device like now, and then they would carry the coal in a pot on their head. In this verse, we're asked to heap burning coals on their heads, suggesting that we should go beyond offering grudging, minimal help, but offer an abundance of the life-giving help to our enemies need – repaying their evil with bountiful kindness.

Folks, since the goodness of God brought us to repentance in Christ Jesus, shouldn't we extend our Lord's goodness to our enemies so that they may come to repentance? If that happens, we gain brothers and sisters into the Kingdom of God. Isn't that the Great Commission we have from the Lord?

Since you learned this truth today, our Lord may bring a challenge or two this afternoon or tomorrow or this week for you to practice what you've learned. Ask God for His help and extend kindness to the ones who are being mean to you. Who know, they may come to know Jesus because of your grace and goodness through Jesus.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) We must live on the highest level-returning good for evil. Anyone can return good for good and evil for evil. The only way to overcome evil is with good with God's help.

If we return evil for evil, we only add fuel to the fire. But even if our enemy is not converted, we have still experienced the love of God in our own hearts and have grown in grace.

2) Every action we take and every word we say should contribute to our goal of glorifying God and revealing His love to everyone we meet.