

## Do You Measure Up to God's Standard for Christian Living?

Some years back a Christian was defined by certain do's and don'ts to which they adhered. You were considered a "good" Christian if you didn't smoke, drink, dance, play cards, go to movies, and did go to church twice on Sunday, actually three times if you included Sunday School, and once on Wednesday. Furthermore, you associated only with other church people who did or did not do the same things. In other words, Christians were very legalistic even though many of them sincerely loved the Lord and tried to obey Him in their lives. Eventually Christians began to realize that this kind of legalism wasn't helping them win the unsaved to the Lord. Non-Christians looked at church people and thought there was no way they wanted to give up all their "fun" and spend all their time in church. So Christians began to drop their legalism and allow movies and dancing and many other activities, until today it is hard to tell Christians from non-Christians by just observing their lifestyles. They also dropped Sunday and Wednesday evening services. The legalism is gone but so are some other important things.

What would God say about the Christian lifestyle a generation ago? What would He say about today's Christian lifestyle? As we look at this next section in Romans we will find out what God defines as the appropriate standards for Christian living.

In Romans chapters 12-16 we come to the real purpose for Paul writing this epistle. An epistle, for those who might not be familiar with the term, is a letter that was adopted as one of the books of the New Testament. There are twenty-one such letters in the New Testament. Romans is one of those epistles (letters). The first eleven chapters of Romans are certainly filled with important truth. They serve, however, as necessary background for what we find in chapters 12-16, which deal with the foundation for Christian living. In Romans 12:9 Paul begins his description of the Christian lifestyle by describing a Christian as a person who is to have a genuine love for other Christians and not just fake loving others in order to look good.

Christians are to really love one another. They are to hate evil and cling to what is good, filling their minds with God's word and staying away from the temptations of this world that they know are wrong. They are to commit themselves to what they know is right.

In verses 10 -13 Paul outlines how Christians are to relate to each other.

We see that in verse 10 Paul emphasizes the importance of being tenderly affectionate to other believers, and to seek above everything else an ability to honor all members of the Christian family, rather than to seek honor for oneself.

In verse 11 Paul says that our service to Christ is to be total, enthusiastic, wholehearted, zealous, and obedient. As a result of that, verse 12 indicates that we're going to have

some trials and we need to rejoice in those trials because of the hope we have in Christ. We are to remain patient and prayerful during those trials, anticipating the glory that awaits us. Verse 13 reminds us also to be aware that others are experiencing trials as well. Paul calls us to be sensitive to the needs of others and to respond to those needs, even opening our homes to strangers if necessary. **These verses, therefore, refer to the family of God and how each of us should serve others in that family.**

In verses 14-16 Paul shifts his message to how we should live with everybody including unbelievers. He starts out with some folks that we might not be too inclined to like. Romans 12:14:

*14 **Bless** those who persecute you; **bless** and do not curse them.*

If anybody persecutes you, you are to respond by blessing them. Right now you might be asking, “OK, what does it mean ‘to bless’?” Paul is actually quoting Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount here where Jesus taught us some of what it means to bless others. He said we are to bless the people who try to hurt us. Jesus taught this principle in Matthew 5:44 where he said:

*44 But I say to you, **Love your enemies** and pray for those who persecute you.*

And similarly Jesus says in Luke 6:27,28:

*27 “But I say to you that listen, **Love your enemies**, do good to those who hate you.*

*28 **BLESS** those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.*

Now I’ll have to admit this is not my most spontaneous reaction to those who treat me like this. In fact I probably don’t do very well obeying Jesus in this area, and I know I must do better. We can learn a lot more about proper behavior by continuing this passage in Luke at verse 29ff:

*29 If anyone strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also; and from anyone who takes away your coat do not withhold even your shirt.*

*30 Give to everyone who begs from you; and if anyone takes away your goods, do not ask for them again.*

*31 DO TO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD HAVE THEM DO TO YOU.*

*32 “If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them.*

*33 If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.*

*34 If you lend to those from whom you hope to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to receive as much again.*

The response of people outside the Christian community for the most part is going to be

to respond to goodness with goodness and to love with love. To show them the uniqueness of Christian love we need to respond with love to those who hate us and with goodness to those who do evil to us. We need to bless them.

Catherine Marshall, in her book, *Adventures In Prayer*, talks about this prayer of blessing. She comments that this is very hard for us to do. But she encourages us to pray for blessing on those individuals who hurt us, actually saying we should ask God to pour out His blessings on these people. But then she goes on to explain what we are really asking for when we ask God to **bless** someone. What is the greatest blessing a person can have?

What is going to make them most happy?

To be a child of God, to know Jesus as personal Savior and be part of the family of God. It is also a great blessing to walk in God's ways and know God's Word thoroughly. So when we pray for God to bless someone, those are the things we are actually asking for. That's what **BLESS** means in verse 14.

How would you respond to someone who murdered one of your loved ones? Would you hate them and seek vengeance or would you pray that they come to know Jesus as their Savior? What about a person who broke into your house and took many of the things for which you have a deep sentimental value? Those are just a couple of examples of how our Christianity is tested. Can you demonstrate love for those who have invaded your privacy and taken what isn't theirs, who have done evil against you? This is the principle that is behind verse 14. This is what Jesus said on the cross: "*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing* (Luke 23:34)." It is demonstrated by Steven in Acts 7:60, who laying bloody beneath the stones that are crushing out his life, looks to Heaven and says:

*60 "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he died.*

It's so appropriate to see the example of Christ in this. Peter also writes about this in 1 Peter 2:18-23:

*Accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh.*

*19 For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly.*

*20 If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval.*

*21 For to this you have been called, because **CHRIST ALSO SUFFERED FOR YOU, LEAVING YOU AN EXAMPLE, SO THAT YOU SHOULD FOLLOW IN HIS STEPS.***

*22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."*

**23 WHEN HE WAS ABUSED, HE DID NOT RETURN ABUSE; WHEN HE SUFFERED, HE DID NOT THREATEN; BUT HE ENTRUSTED HIMSELF TO THE ONE WHO JUDGES JUSTLY.**

When they came against Jesus He never retaliated. This is distinctively Christian living.

Several years ago there was a study done at the University of California regarding stress. People today have high blood pressure and all kinds of anxiety related diseases. The study showed that most of the pressure and anxiety that comes out of the stress has nothing to do with long term assignments. In other words it isn't because you're overworked on your job. It isn't because you have a lot to do and a lot on your mind. Most peoples' **severe stress is related to little** things like not being able to find your car keys; someone takes the parking space that you thought you were going to get; having to wait in line for something; somebody cuts you off in traffic. Those are the things that cause stress that in turn can cause physical illness. It isn't the long-term difficult task. Rather **it's that short fuse** that so many people have. And it's all related to an ever growing egotism whereby people are consumed with their rights, and it has come to the point now that if you get in someone's way they're just as likely to kill you as look at you.

It's actually a little frightening to be alive in the world today because you don't know what people are going to do. Egotism has come to the point where you can't invade anybody's territory without hostility breaking out. Is it little wonder that so many marriages don't survive? Christians, however are not to be of this world nor respond in that manner. When we are pursued with intent to do harm, we are not to retaliate.

Moving on to verse 15 of Romans 12, Paul writes:

*15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.*

This is another distinctively Christian response. We enjoy someone else's joy, we enjoy someone else's prosperity. That demonstrates an absence of jealousy, doesn't it? We also grieve with others in their grief. In Proverbs 17:5, Solomon writes:

*5 Those who mock the poor insult their Maker; those who are glad at calamity will not go unpunished.*

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 12:26,27:

*26 If one member suffers, all suffer together with it (meaning the entire body of Christ);<sup>1</sup> if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it (meaning the entire body of Christ).<sup>2</sup>  
27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.*

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<sup>1</sup> Parentheses added.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

When one part of your human body suffers, your whole body is effected, isn't it? It's the same with the body of Christ. If you're hurt, I'm hurt. If you're happy, I'm happy. It's also distinctively Christian to be sympathetic, not indifferent. The world is becoming more and more cold-hearted. Let me give you what I consider to be an example. There are a handful of societies, with a lot of members, that exist to prevent mistreatment of animals, and that's OK. I like animals and don't want them to be mistreated either. But these are the same people who approve of abortion, which is nothing more than legalized murder and has taken the lives of over **40 million** children since the early 1970s. A grave and evil mistake for which this nation stands guilty before God. It's a strange contrast isn't it? We murder babies and save animals. Many of these people also believe euthanasia might be a good thing for the country. So we continue to save animals and now we not only murder children but the terminally ill and elderly as well. Save the whales, kill the babies, the terminally ill and elderly. What an oxymoron.

Another unexplainable contrast is the way people are so willing to help others who are starving half way across the world and yet don't think twice about ignoring the needy in their own neighborhood or community. Is it that they don't mind writing a check but don't want to get involved if it means giving some of their time to those who are hurting? Paul wants us to know that when you really care, you're willing to provide those who are hurting with the support they need and you can't walk away from such people until you do that. You care so much that you feel their pain and do whatever necessary to alleviate it. You care so much that you share their tears and sorrow. In Jeremiah 9:1, Jeremiah says something that really expresses what Paul is saying in verse 15, Jeremiah 9:1 (NCV):

*I wish my head were like a spring of water and my eyes like a fountain of tears! Then I could cry day and night for my people who have been killed.*

Jeremiah cared so much for the people of Israel and their salvation that he wished himself to literally be a fountain of waters who could weep night and day in order to pour out the sadness in his heart for those people who were perishing without a right relationship with God. I can relate to this because I often have this feeling about those who have no knowledge of God and have no desire to learn about Him. I know what's going to happen to such people and there's nothing I can do if they're not willing to give God a fair chance. That literally breaks my heart because I do really care about them and their eternity. Sometimes you just want to say to them:

*"How can you be so foolish? This is your eternity, **your forever** that we're talking about. How can you ignore the Creator of the universe who has made it perfectly clear to us that **we will spend eternity in Hell if we do not have our sins covered by the sacrificial death of Jesus.** There is no other authority in all the earth that can give us the truth about these things other than the Bible. Other religions are false religions and their promises are empty. One reason I'm assured of this is that the founders of all those religions are still in the grave. **Jesus Christ is the only one who rose from the dead** to prove that He can do the same for us. Who do you want to bet your eternity on, someone who has risen from the dead or*

*someone who is still dead in their grave? I can show you the inerrancy of the Bible, that it has one major theme from beginning to end and it is always consistent in what it says. Besides that **the Bible is the only religious writing that makes predictions that are found to come true hundreds of years later.** No other religious leader performed the proven miracles that Jesus performed. How much more do you need to be convinced?"*

But do you know what happens when you talk like that to an unbeliever? They dig their heels in even further, they get angry, and their pride takes over. **As a matter of fact pride and anger are the two emotions that most frequently prevent a person from going to Heaven.** I pray there's no one here today that will allow themselves to be part of such a terrible tragedy. Betty and I are ready to spend whatever time necessary to answer all your questions about God and the Bible. Please don't hesitate to ask us.

Now Paul has another thing in mind in how we treat other people and that basically has to do with three things stated in verse 16, Romans 12:16:

*16 **Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are.***

"Live in harmony with one another" in the Greek reads literally, *Think the same thing towards one another.* We are to be of the same mind and to live in agreement with one another. Paul emphasized this again in Philippians 2:2-5

*2 **Be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.***

*3 **Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves.***

*4 **Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others.***

*5 **LET THE SAME MIND BE IN YOU THAT WAS IN CHRIST JESUS.***

Once again we're reminded of the importance of a renewed mind (Romans 12:2). Since Christians have a renewed mind it should also be a common mind, sharing the same basic convictions and concerns. Without this common mind we cannot live or work together in harmony.

The second thing Paul tells us in verse 16 is "*Do not be haughty; but associate with the lowly.*" This simply means that we should not try and associate only with the rich, famous, and powerful. We shouldn't seek glory and notoriety. We should associate with the poor and needy and those considered of lower status. It doesn't mean we ignore the rich and famous, it simply means we don't pursue only them. There's no place for those who **consider themselves** to be of the upper crust, who think they are better than everyone else. Listen to what Jesus said in Luke 14:12-14:

*12 He said also to the one who had invited him, “When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid.*

*13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind.*

*14 And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”*

You invite the rich to your party and the rich will invite you back. You invite the poor to your party, guess who will pay you back? God will pay you back. So who do you want to get repaid by, the rich or God? The rich or the richest? The rich can't match what the Lord can give you. So the next time you have a party invite the poor, the lame, the blind; those who could never have you over, who could never pay you back.

Then the last thing Paul tells us in verse 13 is that **we shouldn't become wise in our own conceit**. Don't think that you know everything. Don't think that you're so smart that you wouldn't want to have certain people over because they'd be so boring. **There is no such thing as social status in the church** and no one is to consider themselves better than others.

Next we get into a very significant issue for 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans who are so concerned about “rights” and “getting what is due me” or “giving him/her what he/she deserves.” We are a society that talks about “pay back time.” Is that how God wants His children to think and react when something happens to hurt or offend them? Paul has an answer for that question as he [then] continues in verse 17, Romans 12:17:

*17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.*

Paul is now going to instruct us on **how to deal with our personal enemies**. First Paul tells us not to respond with evil when others direct evil toward us. It is a very natural reaction to do that. But we are told that we are not to engage in any revenge. We are not to retaliate. We see this instruction again in 1 Thessalonians 5:15:

*15 See that none of you repays evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to all.*

1 Peter 3:9 follows the same line of thought:

*9 Do not repay evil for evil or abuse for abuse; but, on the contrary, repay with a blessing. It is for this that you were called—that you might inherit a blessing.*

Instead of giving back evil, give back good. In the second part of Romans 12:17, Paul is telling us to **be prepared** for such attacks and be ready to respond in the proper manner.

We are to be just like the boy scouts. Our motto is to “**be prepared.**” Because if you’re not prepared as to what you’re going to do when someone attacks you, what do you think your response is going to be? It’s going to be evil for evil, isn’t it? That’s your natural reaction. So prepare yourself to respond with good when evil comes. Be prepared to give that blessing that we talked about earlier. To be prepared means to plan ahead. Plan what your thoughts and actions or reactions will be when you get blindsided by someone’s attack. That’s self-discipline, and a disciplined life has an ordered mind. Don’t allow yourself to depend on your raw emotions. Pre-plan your goodness so that you’re not caught unaware. Paul then adds another thought in Romans 12:18:

*18 If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, **live peaceably with all.***

Now there are some people you can try and make peace with and it’s impossible because of their anger. It takes two to make peace, doesn’t it? Just make sure you keep your side of the street clean and never let the conflict come from you. It’s amazing how an argument can’t continue when you don’t feed it with your own remarks. A very wise man, King Solomon, wrote in **Proverbs 15:1, NRSV:**

*A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*

Always try to make peace. We are to do everything we can to make peace unless it comes to a point where we would have to compromise the truth of the Word of God, and that is where we draw the line. We don’t get hostile about it and we continue to seek peace, but the Word of God is not to be compromised at all. If that’s what someone asks you to do to maintain peace, you don’t do that. In fact in Matthew 10:34-36, Jesus says:

*34 “Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.*

*35 For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law;*

*36 and one’s foes will be members of one’s own household.*

Jesus says He knows that even though He comes in peace there are going to be times when He can’t bring peace because He won’t compromise truth. And most often such conflict will be within one’s biological family. “*If it is possible, live peaceably with all people.*” Seek to be a peacemaker in a world that’s full of troublemakers. James writes in James 3:17:

*17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.*

**Are you a peacemaker or are you a troublemaker?** Don’t be a troublemaker. In fact let me give you an example of what happens to a troublemaker. Turn in your Bibles to Judges 14. I want you to hear this story about Samson. It illustrates perfectly what happens to someone who responds with evil for every evil that is done to them. Here’s a



story about a man who didn't know what it meant to be a peacemaker and what resulted. He was a guy who liked to retaliate and get revenge.

There was a small town in the land of Israel on the border of Dan and Judah, a town called Zorah. It's about 15 miles west of Jerusalem. In that town lived a man named Manoah. Manoah's barren wife was given a son late in life after an angel had visited her and given her the promise. The angel also told her that this son was to live a clean and holy life, he was to be a Nazarite, because God had a special mission for him. This son's name was Samson. To be a Nazarite meant to be separated from the things of the world all of his life. He was not to cut his hair, he was not to drink wine or strong drink, and a number of other things that were part of the Nazarite vow. He was given the task of delivering Israel from the Philistines who had really crowded Israel. Zorah was an Israelite village. Within an hour's walk was a Philistine village called Timnah, about 4 miles away. The Philistine army had moved into the area around Timnah so that they were within 4 miles of Israeli territory and were within 20 miles of the capital of Jerusalem. So God raised up Samson to protect Israel from the Philistines. Notice verse 1 of chapter 14:

*1 Once, Samson went down to Timnah, and at Timnah he saw a Philistine woman.*

That was his first mistake. He shouldn't have been hanging around that pagan Philistine village. But he had a problem. He had a lust for women and he saw a woman in Timnah that excited him. So what does he do? Verses 2,3:

*2 Then he came up, and told his father and mother, "I saw a Philistine woman at Timnah; now get her for me as my wife."*

*3 But his father and mother said to him, "Is there not a woman among your kin, or among all our people, that you must go to take a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"*

Samson's father and mother said: "What? You can't find a nice Jewish girl? You have to break your mother's heart and marry a Philistine? What will the family say? And you're going to violate the Law of God against mixed marriage!" (Exodus 34:16; Deuteronomy 7:3). But Samson demanded in Verse 3:

*"Get her for me, because she pleases me."*

Then verse 4 says:

*4 His father and mother did not know that this was from the Lord; for he was seeking a pretext to act against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel.*

It was not the Lord's will that Samson lust after a Philistine woman, but the Lord was going to use Samson's lust to accomplish His own will. Out of the lust of Samson and the

chaos that brought, God would ultimately bring about the destruction of the Philistines.  
Verse 5-9:

*5 Then Samson went down with his father and mother to Timnah. When he came to the vineyards of Timnah, suddenly a young lion roared at him.*

*6 The spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and he tore the lion apart barehanded as one might tear apart a kid (young goat)<sup>3</sup>. But he did not tell his father or his mother what he had done.*

*7 Then he went down and talked with the woman, and she pleased Samson.*

*8 After a while he returned to marry her, and he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion, and there was a swarm of bees in the body of the lion, and honey.*

*9 He scraped it out into his hands, and went on, eating as he went. When he came to his father and mother, he gave some to them, and they ate it. But he did not tell them that he had taken the honey from the carcass of the lion.*

By touching the dead body of an animal Samson had violated his Nazarite vow, another sin. This shows how giving in to one sin just leads to more sinning. Verses 10 and 11:

*10 His father went down to the woman, and Samson made a feast there as the young men were accustomed to do.*

*11 When the people saw him, they brought thirty companions to be with him.*

When they saw the size of Samson they probably wanted to make sure he didn't tear the place apart. So Samson decided to have a little sport with them, Verses 12-18:

*12 Samson said to them, "Let me now put a riddle to you. If you can explain it to me within the seven days of the feast, and find it out, then I will give you thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments.*

*13 But if you cannot explain it to me, then you shall give me thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments." So they said to him, "Ask your riddle; let us hear it."*

*14 He said to them, "**Out of the eater came something to eat. Out of the strong came something sweet.**" But for three days they could not explain the riddle.*

*15 On the fourth day they said to Samson's wife, "Coax your husband to explain the riddle to us, or we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us here to impoverish us?"*

*16 So Samson's wife wept before him, saying, "You hate me; you do not really love me. You have asked a riddle of my people, but you have not explained it to me." He said to her, "Look, I have not told my father or my mother. Why should I tell you?"*

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<sup>3</sup> Parentheses added.

*17 She wept before him the seven days that their feast lasted; and because she nagged him, on the seventh day he told her.*

Here was Samson's wife whining and crying and nagging him. There is no torture more painful to a man than this. And here was Samson at his wedding feast looking forward to a memorable honeymoon. The last thing he wanted was a wife in such an emotional state. So he told her the meaning of the riddle. Verses 17-18:

*17 Then she explained the riddle to her people.*

*18 The men of the town said to him on the seventh day before the sun went down, "What is sweeter than honey? What is stronger than a lion?" And he said to them, "If you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have found out my riddle."*

What Samson said about the heifer was simply a scornful reference to the way they used his wife to obtain the answer to the riddle and was probably grounds for releasing him from his obligation to pay them. But since he was an honorable man, he would pay them anyway. Now Samson was so furious, verse 19:

*19 Then the spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and he went down to Ashkelon. **He killed thirty men of the town**, took their spoil, and gave the festal garments to those who had explained the riddle. In hot anger he went back to his father's house.*

The first part of this verse does not mean that God inspired Samson to commit murder. Throughout this story we see that Samson has used the gifts God gave him impulsively. God had given Samson the strength of Superman to accomplish His will, but Samson used these gifts to satisfy his lusts and desire for vengeance and retaliation. Samson traveled 28 miles to Ashkelon, killed thirty men, took their wardrobes, brought them back to Timnah and gave them out to the thirty men there. Interesting comparison of numbers, isn't it? While Samson had gone to kill the thirty men in Ashkelon, his bride was waiting at the altar and her father's embarrassed, so he marries her off to Samson's best man, verse 20:

*20 And Samson's wife was given to his companion, who had been his best man.*

Well, just imagine Samson's reaction when he got back, Judges 15:1,2;

*1 After a while, at the time of the wheat harvest, Samson went to visit his wife, bringing along a kid (a goat).<sup>4</sup> He said, "I want to go into my wife's room." But her father would not allow him to go in.*

*2 Her father said, "I was sure that you had rejected her; so I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister prettier than she? Why not take her instead?"*

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<sup>4</sup> Parentheses added.

Samson brought a goat as a gift for his wife and her father. Kind of like a man today who would bring flowers to his wife after he had done something stupid. Then the father offered Samson his younger daughter. Why did he do that? Well, this is Samson and by now I think you understand why people didn't want to make him mad. So the father said, "*Here, take my other daughter. Actually you're lucky things worked out this way because she's prettier anyhow.*" Now Samson is about as enraged as he can get. He's not only enraged at the guys about the riddle, but now he's mad at the Philistines because of the pressure they put on the girl he was to marry, and her father. So, verses 3-5 of chapter 15:

*3 Samson said to them, "This time, when I do mischief to the Philistines, I will be without blame."*

*4 So Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took some torches; and he turned the foxes tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails.*

*5 When he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the vineyards and olive groves.*

Talk about cruelty to animals. First Sampson took revenge for the riddle by killing 30 Philistine men. Then they gave his wife away so he took revenge for that by burning down the Philistine fields. Then in verse 6:

*The Philistines asked, "Who has done this?" And they said, "Samson, the son-in-law of the Timnite, because he has taken Samson's wife and given her to his companion." So the Philistines came up, and burned her and her father.*

This is absolutely ridiculous. This thing is getting way out of hand. Why didn't they go after Samson? Because nobody wanted to mess with him. Don't forget he just killed 30 Philistines single handed. The closest they could get to hurting Samson was to do something to the woman he wanted to marry. So they killed her and added in her father for good measure. In verse 7 Samson says:

*7 "If this is what you do, I swear **I will not stop until I have taken revenge on you.**"*

*8 He struck them down hip and thigh with great slaughter; and he went down and stayed in the cleft of the rock of Etam.*

The term "*striking down hip-and thigh*" is an old Hebrew saying meaning *total slaughter*. When he got done he went into hiding because he needed to lay low for a while. The revenge is really escalating now, isn't it? Verses 9-16:

*9 Then the Philistines came up and encamped in Judah, and made a raid on Lehi.*

*10 The men of Judah said, "Why have you come up against us?" They*

said, “We have come up to bind Samson, to do to him as he did to us.”

11 Then three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam, and they said to Samson, “Do you not know that the Philistines are rulers over us? What then have you done to us?” He replied, “As they did to me, so I have done to them.”

12 They said to him, “We have come down to bind you, so that we may give you into the hands of the Philistines.” Samson answered them, “Swear to me that you yourselves will not attack me.”

13 They said to him, “No, we will only bind you and give you into their hands; we will not kill you.” So they bound him with two new ropes, and brought him up from the rock.

14 When he came to Lehi, the Philistines came shouting to meet him; and the spirit of the Lord rushed on him, and the ropes that were on his arms became like flax that has caught fire, and his bonds melted off his hands.

15 Then he found a fresh jawbone of a donkey, reached down and took it, and with it **he killed a thousand men.**

16 And Samson said, “With the jawbone of a donkey, heaps upon heaps, with the jawbone of a donkey I have slain a thousand men.”

Sampson takes a time-out here to compose a little folk song about a massacre. Now this whole thing has escalated to this point because of revenge and retaliation over a silly riddle. Are you getting the point Paul is trying to make in Romans 12:18? Now let’s continue in Judges 15:17-20:

17 When he had finished speaking, he threw away the jawbone; and that place was called Ramath-lehi.

18 By then he was very thirsty, and he called on the Lord, saying, “You have granted this great victory by the hand of your servant. Am I now to die of thirst, and fall into the hands of the uncircumcised?”

19 So God split open the hollow place that is at Lehi, and water came from it. When he drank, his spirit returned, and he revived. Therefore it was named En-hakkore, which is at Lehi to this day.

20 And he (Samson)<sup>5</sup> judged Israel in the days of the Philistines twenty years.

You know what happened after that? Samson saw another Philistine woman and he liked her too. But his lust was to be his undoing. The Philistines wanted him dead so badly, and now they knew they had him because they knew his weakness. So they went to **Delilah** and told her to find out the source of his strength and she did. You can read the details of the rest of the story in Judges 16. But the Philistines finally killed Samson, although he took about 20,000 of them with him. **The point here is that revenge never ended until everybody was dead.** And it could have all been prevented if just one person along the way would have attempted to be a peacemaker.

Now let’s go back to Romans. In Romans 12:19 Paul says:

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<sup>5</sup> Parentheses added.

*19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord" (Deuteronomy 32:35).*

Don't you do it. Let God do it. It is God's promise that He will deal with sin. No sinner will ever escape. You don't need to punish anybody because God is going to take care of it. God is a just God. Read Nahum chapter 1, Habakkuk chapter 1, Psalm 37, Psalm 94. God will repay evil.

**Romans 12:20:**

*20 No, "if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink; for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads."*

"*Heaping burning coals upon their heads*" is an interesting phrase. Tracing its origin we find that there was an old Egyptian ritual that was used when a person wanted to demonstrate publicly their shame and guilt and willingness to repent for what they did. The person would carry on his head a pan of burning coals which were to represent the burning pain of shame and guilt. So Paul is saying that when you treat an enemy with love and you feed him and quench his thirst, you put on their head burning guilt and shame for the evil they've done. I hope you understand the meaning of this.

So, if you are so angry at a person that you feel like getting revenge, "kill" them with kindness instead. Then watch to see what God will do.

Now in conclusion, verse 21:

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

To return goodness and kindness to someone who has treated us maliciously is distinctively Christian and by doing this we have victory over evil. Don't be a victim but be a conqueror. Now let's sum all of this up. What is a Christian and how distinctively are we to live? We begin with pure love, hating evil and holding fast to what is good. We're humbly and affectionately concerned with others, serving the Lord enthusiastically and with maximum effort. And when the inevitable resistance to that service comes we face it with hope, joy, and believing prayer. When we see others who are in the same kind of trials, we reach out to them and share our possessions and our homes with all who have needs. And when we're opposed by people in our service to Christ, we bless those who oppose us and persecute us. We reach out to enjoy the joy of others and to endure the pain of others. We have no desire for personal prestige. We seek neither position nor office. We love to fellowship equally with those who are on the highest rung as well as

the lowest rung of society. We're marked by a humility that knows no intellectual or social aristocracy. When people personally harm us we are not to retaliate by doing evil against them, but we desire to overpower them with good and we assign any vengeance and punishment to God. In the end we're the overcomes, the winners.

Take that with you as you leave here today and don't let go of it. Next week we'll begin chapter 13 and look at that difficult question regarding submission to authorities.