

# Vengeance (The Violence of Kindness)

Romans 12:1-21

*Romans (no. 35 in the series)*

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*Video and audio versions available online:*

<https://relentless-love.org/sermons/vengeance-the-violence-of-kindness/>

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*This document was prepared by Brett Eades using Peter's notes and the video version of this sermon. If you encounter any significant discrepancies or errors in this document, please let Brett know. Thank you!*

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## Message

In Romans 11:32 Paul reaches the pinnacle of his theological treatise explaining the nature of reality, and so he writes: God consigned all to disobedience that he may have mercy on all. From him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the Glory forever. Amen.”

And then, next verse, 12:1, Paul tells us what to do: I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies [a sacrifice—living, holy and pleasing] to God, which is your ~~spiritual~~ [logikos: logical] worship [service]. <sup>2</sup> Do not be conformed to this world [aion: age], but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, [the good, and pleasing, and perfected].

And then for the rest of chapter 12 it's like Paul is describing the Will of God, not prescribing, the Will of God. It's like he sees the Will of God incarnate. Paul saw him on the Road to Damascus, and the experience utterly violated his psyche—he lost his life and found it. And Paul must've seen him when he was caught up into the third heaven, saw paradise, and heard words he couldn't put into words. Paul saw what Isaiah saw when he was called to preach in Isaiah chapter 6. Paul saw what my daughter saw, many years ago, one night in worship.

As I told you last time, out the silence, in the car on the way home, she said, Dad, when people came forward for communion tonight, I saw these ‘cutter things.’ They like swung out of the walls and just like chopped off people's hands and legs and heads and stuff...” When I expressed some alarm she said, Dad... it was actually really cool. After they'd get cut, they'd like hobble to the communion table and take communion. But then, they'd, like, BUMP into each other, and when they'd bump into each other in the place where they had been cut, they would fuse together. And Dad they all, like, fused into this one huge man that could never be frightened and would never be hurt.”

See? I think she saw “the will of God—the good and pleasing and perfected.” She saw the Super Man, The Eschatos Adam, the Image of God. She saw us. She caught a glimpse of the Glory of God. “The Glory of God is Man fully alive,” wrote Irenaeus around 185AD (not “men,” but “man”). She saw this [Pipe-Man on communion table], or at least what this is trying to represent.

Last time, during the sermon, we constructed this rather poor image of the Super Man, the Eschatos Adam, the Body of Christ.

1. We're each like one of these vessels—pieces of PVC pipe, or pipe fittings [pulls a piece from Pipe Man].
2. Deceived by a lie, we each take knowledge of the Good, so we can do good and make ourselves good, but we don't fill ourselves with the Good, we only fill ourselves with ourselves, until we're just full of ourselves—an earthen vessel full of earth; that's a vessel of wrath.
3. And then in shame, we cover ourselves with more of ourselves, with more clay, just like Adam and Eve covered themselves in fig leaves and the works of the flesh—Paul told us, “The wrath of God is revealed... against all the ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who imprison the truth in the chains of their own unrighteousness.”<sup>i</sup>

You see the Truth—who is the Life—is somehow imprisoned in the soul of every sinner and that just invites the wrath of God.

4. So, when the Word of God, spoken to us as Gospel, AND the Word of God implanted in us like a seed, draw us back to the tree, and to the throne, there the Word cuts us—to “the division of soul and spirit;” that's the division of human flesh and the life of God, the division of Me-sus and Jesus.

So last time, I took a big knife, like the one's the priests used in the temple, and I cut away the clay from these vessels that I had filled with clay, and then encased in more clay. And with that judgment I turned vessels of wrath, into vessels of mercy [puts the piece back on Pipe Man].

5. Then we put this body together noting that we all connect at the point of the wound: the place where we bleed... not our strength, but our weakness.
6. That decision to bleed is called faith, hope and love, and it doesn't come from us—it's the logic of God, to bleed the Life of God.
7. The Life is in the blood, but the life is trapped in death whenever a member of the body refuses to bleed the life—that is refuses to love. A living body is a communion of faith, hope and love—the sacrifice of self.
  - i. Life is not the survival of the fittest; Life is the sacrifice of the fittest.
  - ii. Life is losing yourself and finding yourself all in the same moment.
8. Life is eternal. In other words, this is the way things are on the other side of the curtain—the curtain which separates this age from the age to come, which always is. In other words, this is reality and we're all insane, until we see it—until we discern the body—the body of Christ.

Paul just told us, “Be transformed—*metamorphoo*—be metamorphosed by the renewal of your mind (singular as if we all had one mind).” He didn't write, “Be transformed by getting more knowledge and trying harder.” That was actually Satan's suggestion to Eve and the first Adam.

People always want to know, “What does God want me to do?” I’m a people. So full disclosure: if you were to listen in on my prayer life over the last five decades you would discover that 99% of my prayer life has been just one question, “Jesus, what the hell do you want me to do?” Jesus is so patient. Over and over, he reminds me, “I want you to love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your mind, all your soul, and all your strength. And I want you to love your neighbor as yourself.”<sup>ii</sup>

So, I say, “OK Jesus, so how do I do that? And who’s my neighbor?” “Is Brett my neighbor?” [Peter asks Brett to stand up next to him]. Is Brett my neighbor? Now he is—my neighbor is the person next to me. Have you ever wondered, “How do I love God with all I am and all I’ve got, and have anything left over with which to love my neighbor?” You see it’s impossible to love God with all I’ve got, and then, love my neighbor as myself, unless God is in my neighbor and in me.

And you see that’s exactly what Paul is telling us: Love is not a law; Love is a life—which flows from the throne, and through you and your neighbor. And so, you don’t idolize your neighbor, but love God in your neighbor, even as they love God in you. When that happens, we all lose our lives and find them in this ecstatic communion that is the body of Christ. And then it’s easy for me to love my neighbor as myself, for I know that my neighbor is myself—Brett is me, and me is he—blood brothers and I’m profoundly grateful for Brett.<sup>iii</sup>

Now, I’m sure this would never happen, so this is totally hypothetical, and I’m sure Heather would completely agree that this would never happen. But what if, one day, Brett was just kind of hard to love? Wouldn’t give back the way I gave to him? Well, that would kind of piss me off. It would make me angry, Brett! It would fill me with a bit of wrath. Maybe wrath is like love that’s bottled up, maybe?

You know, for the last 1500 years, ever since the church became part of the Roman Empire, church leaders have argued that some people are “vessels of wrath,” and other people are “vessels of mercy.” Some argue that people are chosen to be vessels of wrath, others argue that people choose to be vessels of wrath, but either way they argue that God made some people knowing that they would suffer endless conscious torment as vessels of wrath and only wrath and he still made them. And yet, Paul has gone to incredible lengths to make just the opposite point, that God consigned all to disobedience (that’s a vessel of wrath) that he might have mercy on all (that’s a vessel of wrath that has become a vessel of mercy).

And now sometimes people say, “Well what difference does that make?” “It’s just theology; I’m into psychology. It’s just theo-logos, just the logic of God, just the Word of God, the Psyche of Jesus.” Well what difference does it make if I’m trying to love Brett? [Peter pulls two pieces from Pipe Man]. What if there’s a chance that Brett is just a vessel of wrath? Well, I would certainly think twice about loving Brett as I love myself, for fear that myself might be joined to Brett—a vessel of wrath. I’d be terrified to weep with Brett when Brett wept, or rejoice with Brett when Brett rejoiced. I’d act like I loved Brett, for love is the law, but my heart would be far from him.

And what if there's a chance that I'm just a vessel of wrath? If there's a chance that I'm a vessel of wrath and Brett is not a vessel of wrath, then I'll be utterly threatened by Brett, and I'll secretly compete with Brett in fear that I'll be judged by Brett, relative to Brett. I'll be terrified to be different than Brett, or less than Brett, and yet I'll secretly hate Brett—whom I'm trying to be. I'll hate his talents, his gifts, and most of all his kindness, for I'll perceive all of it as condemnation—not a blessing but the curse. I'll act like I love Brett, while I secretly wish him to hell in the name of heaven.

See? if there's even a chance that some people are vessels of wrath, I'll need to judge everybody before I love anybody And yet, according to Romans 2:1, to judge anybody, makes me guilty of the very thing I'm attempting to judge—original sin is attempting to judge. It's taking knowledge of Good, and so crucifying the Good, and making myself evil.

And so, trying to love, I can't love; I crucify love, so love is not a life, but just more law... entombed in the dungeon of my own soul. I become an imitation Christ, literally an anti-Christ spawning other anti-Christians, who dress like Jesus and hate like hell. And I'm filled with wrath for I secretly hate God—for what kind of God commands me to love my enemies, and then endlessly tortures his own enemies, one of which, I am secretly convinced is "me." So yeah, it makes a difference: what I see on the other side of the curtain [Thanks Brett and invites him to sit down].

In Romans 12:2, Paul tells us, Don't be conformed to this age but be transformed by the renewal of your mind. And now, Paul isn't giving us more laws—he's spent eleven chapters arguing that we can't be justified by works of the law. He's not giving us more laws; he's giving us a new vision. He's describing Life on the other side of the curtain, the age to come. So, if what I now read doesn't describe you, you mustn't simply "try harder;" you must present your psyche (your psycho logos) as a sacrifice and be transformed by the theo-logos, the head of the body (the psyche of Jesus).

Now there are hundreds of sermons that we could preach from chapter 12. But I'd just like to read to you all of chapter 12, for it seems we've chopped it up into hundreds of little pieces and missed the picture Paul is painting, as well as the point that Paul is making.

#### **Romans 12:3-8:**

**For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among [in] you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned <sup>4</sup>For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, <sup>5</sup>so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. <sup>6</sup>Having gifts [*xarisma*] that differ according to the grace [*xaris*] given to us, ~~let us use them~~: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; <sup>7</sup>if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; <sup>8</sup>the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. [the love genuine].**

The words in brackets are the more literal translation, and there are lots of words in brackets, for the translator has added 23 imperative verbs that aren't in the text—but Paul isn't prescribing law (the imperative); he's describing a revelation (the way things are in reality), an apocalypse<sup>iv</sup>.

**Romans 12:9-21:**

~~Let love be genuine~~ [The Love, genuine<sup>v</sup>] ~~abhor what is evil~~ [abhorring the evil] ~~hold fast to what is good~~ [being joined to the good]. <sup>10</sup> ~~Love one another with brotherly affection~~ [*phileo*] [in the brotherly love in one another, lovingly affectionate]. ~~Outdo one another in showing honor~~ [“in showing honor, outdoing one another,” (that is, “competing at putting others first)”. <sup>11</sup> ~~Do not be slothful in zeal~~ [“in the zeal, not slothful”], ~~be fervent in spirit~~ [in the spirit, fervant], ~~serve the Lord~~ [“in the Lord, being servant ”]. <sup>12</sup> ~~Rejoice in hope~~ [“in the hope, rejoicing”], ~~be patient in tribulation~~ [“in the tribulation, enduring”], ~~be constant in prayer~~ [“in the prayer, constant”]. <sup>13</sup> ~~Contribute to the needs of the saints~~ [“in the needs of the saints, sharing”] ~~and seek to show hospitality~~ [“hospitality, pursuing”].

<sup>14</sup> ~~Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.~~ <sup>15</sup> ~~Rejoice with those who rejoice~~ [to rejoice with the rejoicing], ~~weep with those who weep~~ [to weep with the weeping]. <sup>16</sup> ~~Live in harmony with one another~~ [thinking yourselves the same into one another]. ~~Do not be haughty~~ [Thinking yourselves not the high”] ~~but associate with the lowly~~, [but being led away with the low]. ~~Never be wise in your own sight~~ [yourselves]. <sup>17</sup> ~~Repay no one evil for evil~~ [repaying no one evil for evil] ~~but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.~~ [providing good in the sight of all] <sup>18</sup> ~~If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all~~ [being at peace with all men]. <sup>19</sup> ~~Beloved, never avenge~~ [not avenging yourselves, beloved.] ~~But leave it to~~ [give space to] ~~the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”~~ <sup>20</sup> ~~To the contrary~~ [*alla*: but, indeed, moreover, yes], ~~“if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”~~<sup>vi</sup> <sup>21</sup> ~~Do not be overcome by [the] evil, but overcome [the] evil with [the] good.~~

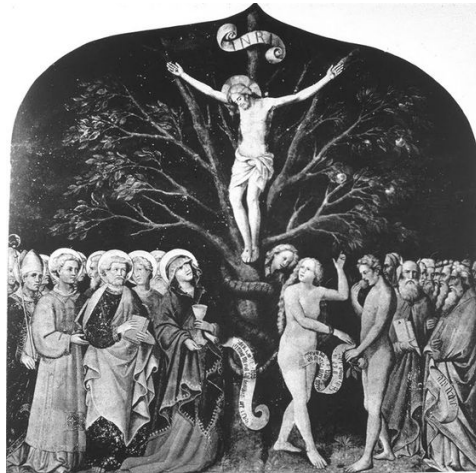
Now some will say, “Paul can't really mean this; if you really did this, you'd get yourself crucified and sacrifice everything you had worked for. Paul can't mean this,” they say. “Even God doesn't do this,” they say. So,

- Does God bless those who persecute him? Does God weep with those who weep? How about with those who “weep and gnash their teeth in outer darkness?” If hell is endless, then heaven would be endless weeping, for God and for us, if we weep with those who weep.
- Does God think himself into others? What a thought! And yet, Paul tells us that we have the mind of Christ.
- Does God think himself the high? Is God proud? (He does get pegged as proud.) Or does God associate himself with the low? Is God humble? Is God wise in himself? Or is he the wisdom in all?
- Does God repay evil with evil? Many people seem to think so—you commit some temporal evil here, and God will repay you with endless conscious torment there, which, to

me, sounds like repaying a little evil with infinite evil, which sounds like quit a victory for evil—the evil one, that is.

- Does God provide good for all? Psalm 145: “The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made... The Lord is... kind in all his works”vii
- Does God work for peace with all men? I’ve been told it’s only a few men, and for others it’s just the opposite. I’ve been told that he was the Prince of Peace the first time around, but when he comes back he’ll be totally different—he who is “the same yesterday and today and forever.”viii
- Does God feed his enemies and give them drink? In Luke 6, Jesus says “Love your enemies... and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Be Merciful, even as your Father is Merciful.”
- Is God overcome by the evil or does God overcome the evil with the Good? ix

So, what is “the Good?”



*"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena*

That’s what Adam and Eve wanted to know, and that’s what we all still want to know. And that’s what we are all coming to know.



*Gibson, Mel (Director). (2004). The Passion of the Christ [Motion picture]. USA: Icon Productions.*

Or perhaps I should say, that's the Good who came to know us. Any Christian theologian will tell you, Jesus is the ultimate revelation of God, and Jesus is the ultimate revelation of Man—the perfect image of the invisible God, the Eschatos Man. He is who we are on the other side of the curtain—the incarnation of Love, walking talking kindness, goodness himself.

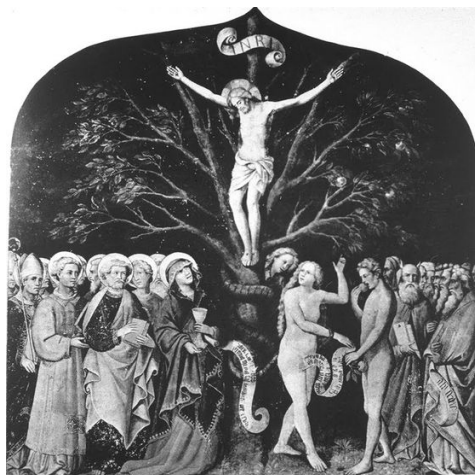
So, how do we explain this sentence: “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” And then, “To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him.” Right off the bat I should mention that the phrase “to the contrary” is one word in Greek, the conjunction *alla*. It shows up 638 times in the New Testament, and this is the only place that the ESV translators translate it as “to the contrary,” implying that vengeance is the opposite of kindness, and so we are being commanded to do the opposite of God—making ourselves more merciful than God.<sup>x</sup> Usually *alla* is translated “but,” but it's also translated “moreover, indeed, and even yes.” “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. Moreover, indeed, yes if your enemy is hungry feed him—be kind to him,” writes Paul.

Vengeance is the Greek noun *ekdikesis*.  
Avenge is the Greek verb *ekdikeo*.

- *Ek* means “from” or “out of.”
- *Dike* means “just” or “right.”
- *Dikaio* means “righteous.”
- And *dikaioo* means “to justify” or “make right;” It is to fix something.

So, Vengeance means to make right, and so, fix what's wrong. God doesn't make things right, by doing what's wrong. So maybe God destroys enemies, by making them friends (to quote Abraham Lincoln<sup>xi</sup>). “Vengeance is mine, I will repay,” is a quote from The Song of Moses, which Moses told Israel to sing when they had failed to obey the law in the foreign land to which they would be exiled in several hundred years.

In Deuteronomy 32:34, they were to sing: ‘Is this not laid up in store with Me, Sealed up among My treasures (literally: in my treasuries<sup>xii</sup>)? Vengeance is Mine and recompense (that is: I will repay<sup>xiii</sup>).<sup>xiv</sup>



"The Fall and Redemption of Man" by Giovanni da Modena

Through Paul we've learned that only God can pay, for all things are from him through him and to him. We took the life from the tree in the garden, and we must return the life to the tree in the garden, but even that decision to do so is a gift called faith.

The Song of Moses ends with this line which Paul will soon quote<sup>xv</sup>: "Rejoice, O Gentiles, with His people; (Do the math: that means, rejoice everyone. Everyone must now be "his people.") For He will avenge the blood of His servants and render vengeance to His adversaries; He will provide atonement for His land and His people."<sup>xvi</sup> So, according to the song (32:34), vengeance is laid up in God's treasury. It was in the treasury of the temple, according to John 8, that Jesus said, "I am the light of the World" and then he spoke about judgment, but not as if he judged anyone, but as if he himself were the judgment of God.

And so, do you get the picture? The Body of Jesus is the temple, and his life is the treasure in the treasury inside the temple, so when we broke his body, vengeance poured out. In him was life and the life is the light of men. The light shines in the darkness and the darkness cannot overcome it. This is the judgment: the light has come into the world, said Jesus.<sup>xvii</sup>

At the tree in the Garden, we took his life and that's evil. And on the tree in the Garden, he gave his life and that's the good. And when this comes to light it destroys all our arrogant illusions. So, what's my sin? Well, it's this: [pulls a piece from Pipe Man]. And what's God's Vengeance? It is to bleed for me. The Vengeance of God is absolute kindness; it's the treasure in the temple; it's blood that is wine and wine that is blood. It's the passion of God, the wrath of God, which avenges evil, but, NOT with more evil, BUT ONLY with absolute and unmitigated good—The Good.

Jeremiah 30:24: "The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intentions of his mind [and his heart<sup>xviii</sup>—What are his intentions? "Let us make man in our image and likeness"—In the latter days you will understand this." In the Revelation, the Seven Angels come out of the Temple of God and pour bowls of wrath on the earth, they burn away that Great Harlot (the old Jerusalem) and reveal the Bride (the New Jerusalem coming down). The wrath in the bowls is the blood of the Lamb, standing on the throne, for he has conquered all things and ransomed humanity for God.

Paul has been quoting Isaiah throughout Romans, and Jesus quoted Isaiah, basically, like, all the time. In his hometown synagogue He quoted Isaiah 61:1-2 "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me... to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." That's the Jubilee when all debts were forgiven. That's great news for debtors who know they can't pay, but painful news for lenders who think everyone should pay. Jesus announced, "The year of the Lord's favor." (Isaiah 61:2a). The next line in Isaiah is "and the day of vengeance of our God." (Isaiah 61:2b). Jesus didn't say that second part. But that's not because he wasn't proclaiming the Day of Vengeance, it's because people did not yet understand that absolute forgiveness is absolute vengeance—vengeance upon the self-centered psyche of fallen man.





Gibson, Mel (Director). (2004). *The Passion of the Christ* [Motion picture]. USA: Icon Productions.

On the Day of Vengeance, at the edge of time and eternity, Jesus cried Father forgive them, and when we truly see just who it is that is forgiven and what we are forgiven of, we will never be arrogant again, or alone. At the end of Isaiah, all humanity walks to the edge of the New Jerusalem, and looks at the corpses, the flesh of all humanity, being consumed in the valley of Gehenna, and then as one body in new flesh with one mind, they all praise God for saving them from themselves. They are Man (Humanity) on the other side of the curtain [puts the piece back on Pipe Man].

At the beginning of Isaiah, in Isaiah 6 in the year King Uzziah died. Uzziah died for he approached the mercy seat in arrogance, and it was like the Glory of God literally ate away his flesh.<sup>xix</sup> Well, that year, Isaiah sees the Lord seated on the throne, high and lifted up and the train of his robe fills the temple. He sees God in a body—which can only be Jesus. Jesus is “the radiance of the glory of God.”<sup>xx</sup> The Seraphim cry out “Holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is filled, is filled, is filled with his glory.” Think that through, and it can only mean that Isaiah saw all things filled with God through Christ Jesus and all things united in him in one body.

He saw Ephesian 1:10; he saw what Paul saw, and John saw, and even my daughter saw that night all those years ago in church. He saw the other side of the curtain—one eternal communion of sacrificial and ecstatic love that would have necessarily included Isaiah, King Uzziah, and you. Now that’s the part we usually sing about in church, but we often don’t sing what happens next. Isaiah cries out, “Woe is me, for I am lost! That Hebrew word translated “lost,” is also translated utterly cut off, undone, perished, and most often, destroyed.

Isaiah’s psyche is literally destroyed by the revelation of the psyche of God. “Woe is me, for I am lost. A man of unclean lips in a people of unclean lips.” That is, I’m a man that has believed the lie, among men that have believed the lie, and perpetuated the lie. We have each believed the lie, and so taken the Life, called it our own, and so assumed that everything is about this illusion that I call “me.”

In an instant, Isaiah sees that even “me” is a constant gift of “He”—the One on the throne. He is the Good in every moment, the Life in every breath, the Beauty in every sunset, every flower, and every sip of wine. And so, I am not my own; I am the constant expression of the kindness of

God, and anything else is just an illusion. One of the Seraphim flies to Isaiah with a coal from the altar, touches it to Isaiah's lips declaring "Your sin is atoned for."

Listen closely: It's the coals on the altar that burn away the flesh of the sacrifice. And it's our flesh—our flesh that only feels its own pleasure and suffers its pain—it is our psycho-logos, our psyche, our *psychikos* body, our ego, that traps us in ourselves, and so damns us to hell. And so, the burning coals are the kindness of God that sets us free—free to love and be loved; free to lose our lives and find them; free to let the life of God flow from us, through us, and back to us.

Jesus said that there is one sin that will not be forgiven, and it seems abundantly clear to me, that this unforgiveable sin is unforgiveness. Jesus also called it the Blasphemy of the Spirit. Paul told us, "The Spirit is life," and we know the life is in the blood, and we are justified by his blood flowing through us as a river. So, what's The Blasphemy of the Spirit?

- Isn't it to hang on to the Life as if it were your own Life and not God's Life?
- Isn't it to be forgiven the Life, and then refuse to forgive the Life?
- Isn't it to make yourself a blood clot, a vessel of wrath?
- Isn't it damning the River of Life?

And so, what's the vengeance of God upon a sinner like me? [pulls a piece from Pipe Man]. Well, it is to bleed for me. And that blood reveals the Truth. And it's the Truth that cuts to the division of soul and spirit, that cuts Me-sus from Jesus—like I cut the clay from these earthen vessels in that last sermon. And it's the Love that then fills them with Life and binds them all together as one in the Psyche of God, the Body of Christ—now rising from the dead [puts the piece back on Pipe Man].

That's a surgery—the circumcision of the heart, a heart transplant—that only God is capable of performing. So, Paul writes "...never avenging yourselves beloved. Give place to the wrath of God, for it is written "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." "OK," I say. But now, what if Brett, is just really being a jerk, and God is doing nothing about it? What can I do about it? What do I do with my desire for vengeance? Well, if I didn't discern the body the Body of Christ, wouldn't I feel the need to either fix Brett or cut him off? Vengeance is to fix wrong with right. But you see, fixing Brett is a terrible burden for me. I can't even begin to grasp all the things that are wrong with Brett. And yet, if I get frustrated and cut Brett off, well I also cut myself off; what I do to him, I also do to Jesus, and also do to me. [pulls off two connected pieces of Pipe Man].

But what if Brett hurt me, and I discerned the body? What if I stayed attached to Jesus, even if Brett cut me off? [re-attaches one piece, leaving the other unattached]. Well then, I could bleed for Brett the way Jesus bleeds for me, all the time, with all the Mercy that flows from the throne. I really can't judge Brett, but I can constantly forgive Brett—*aphiemi* in Greek—the word is translated forgive or allow or let. I can let Brett be Brett; I can be kind to Brett, and then, if he chooses to draw blood, I will be bleeding the Vengeance of God.

"Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." <sup>20</sup> ~~To the contrary~~ [alla: but, moreover, indeed, yes], "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so

doing, you will heap burning coals on his head.”<sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Now, if I’m trying to hurt Brett with kindness, it’s not kindness, it’s a lie about love, which is worse than flat out hate; it’s human religion. But if I discern the body, and I believe the things Paul has written, I know two things about Brett, and one thing about me.

I know Brett is worse than I can imagine, like “me.” I don’t think I’ve ever loved my neighbor as myself, except for maybe in a few unconscious moments that I can’t even remember. Well, both Brett and I are arrogant illusions that think we must create ourselves, and so crucify love, and render ourselves incapable of love; that’s the Old Man, the Old Adam. So, I shouldn’t be surprised if once in a while Brett disappoints me and I disappoint Brett. So,

1. We are both utterly incapable of Love. And,
2. We are both the incarnation of Love; the temple of the living God.

So, we are both 1 and 2. And,

3. I know that I am utterly unable to judge between 1 and 2!



Jesus taught that each one of us is like a field of wheat and tares. We can’t pull up the tares without also destroying the wheat. He said we have to leave that to the end of the age—The end of the age is the day of vengeance and the beginning of the Jubilee. The end of this age, and the beginning of the age to come, is the moment you forgive your neighbor; it’s the moment someone takes your life, and you give your life, for it’s not your life, it’s Christ’s life—which is the vengeance of God.

It’s not my job to fix Brett (that’s vengeance, *ekdikesis*, and it belongs to God). It’s my job to love Brett (that’s righteous, *dikaïos*, the righteousness of God flowing through me). And that Love will fix Brett and fix me; it’s the Life of God in us. So, if Brett and I really want to lose the Old Man and become the New Man, if we want to be the church and if we really want to change the world, it won’t happen by reading books and trying really hard; it will happen by bleeding one for the other because we want to.

Church is a community of people that present themselves a sacrifice to God in the temple that is each other. And how we change the world, is by bleeding the vengeance of God—That is feeding our enemies: giving them something to eat, and something to drink, not because we have to, but because we want to.

## Communion

And so, Jesus said “I have earnestly desired (I have so wanted) to eat this Passover with you...” And then, he took bread and broke it, saying this is my body given to you take and eat and do it in remembrance of me. And in the same manner he took the cup saying this is the covenant in my blood, poured out for the forgiveness of sins. Drink of it, all of you. You see, he gave them something to eat and something to drink. And Jesus offered this to all of his disciples. He offered it to Judas and he offers it to you.

But in First Corinthians, Paul issues something like a warning; he says this, “Anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body, eats and drinks judgment on himself.” By “discerning the body,” I don’t think he meant understanding how the bread could be body—you know, transubstantiation, consubstantiation, etc., etc.—that thing we fight and divide over for two-thousand years now. I think he meant seeing the people in this room and seeing the people that you bump into out in the street, for who it is that they actually are. If you don’t discern the body (and the blood), this will burn you like fire. If you discern the body, you will bleed for them—the people in this room, the people on the street—as Jesus bleeds for you and you will be joined to them. What you bleed is the mercy of God and also the judgment of God.

You know, Jesus bled once for all, at the edge of time and eternity but now, you are his body and through you, he bleeds every time you are kind in this unkind world. “It’s his kindness that leads us to repentance” wrote Paul.

I have all sorts of amazing stories about great acts of forgiveness that undo people and then make them one. But great acts of forgiveness can often be contrived and so difficult to believe. And so, I have this suspicion, that one day we’ll see that it wasn’t a few great acts of forgiveness that transformed the world; It was countless unremembered acts of kindness—and so the king on the throne will say, “You fed me, you gave me drink.” And you’ll say, “I don’t remember that.” And he’ll say, “Exactly you weren’t trying to be good, you just were good; you were bleeding me.”

- If the kindness is conspicuous to you, it’s usually not kindness.
- If the love is a law, it cannot be genuine.
- If forgiveness is a tool, it’s not forgiveness.

So how can the unkind actually become kind? There’s only one way. We must surrender our self-centered selves to the kindness of God. That, my friends, is our “logical service of worship.”

## Benediction

And so, Lord God, do you love your neighbor as yourself? Father, is Jesus your neighbor? Jesus, do you love your neighbor as yourself? Because you came and stood next to me. God I think that means that you feel about me, the way you feel about Jesus. And so, Lord God, I pray that you would open my eyes so I would feel about you the way Jesus feels about you, and the way Jesus feels about the people in this room, so that we could get on with the party that is reality and stop living in the darkness, weeping and gnashing our teeth. Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you have

conquered, that you have overcome the evil with the good. And Lord God, I pray now that you would help us to believe because we believe a little but help our unbelief. Thank you that you will because it is finished. In Jesus' name we praise you. Amen.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> Romans 1:18 Barth's translation

<sup>ii</sup> Whether you're rich or poor, pastor of a huge church or hated by a huge church, whether your smart or dumb, respected or rejected... just do that and your perfect. "Love God with all you've got and your neighbor as yourself. (Period)"

But, if for me, love is a law, then I'm not loving my neighbor as I love myself—like Paul says, "no man hates his own flesh."

If love is a law, I can't love my neighbor as myself, and I'm obviously not loving God with all I am for something in me is holding me back.

<sup>iii</sup> And it's easy to love my neighbor as myself for my neighbor is myself and we are actually God's Self—his psyche, his temple, his soul, his body.

<sup>iv</sup> Apocalypsis is an "unveiling," a revelation

<sup>v</sup> I always want to remind us that "God is Love," and so real love is God, and so we can't make Love, but Love is constantly making us—the incarnation of Love.

<sup>vi</sup> Proverbs 25:21-22 It's interesting that most of the scandalous quotations of Grace in the Book of Romans are nothing new, but actually quotations from the Old Testament. God has been telling the same story all along.

<sup>vii</sup> Psalm 145:9, 17

<sup>viii</sup> Hebrews 13:8

<sup>ix</sup> Is God overcome (*nikao*: conquered) by evil?

Does the evil one get his way?

If you're evil, will you get your way?

If you choose evil, is your punishment to get more evil, even though God is Good—that sounds like endless punishment for God.

<sup>x</sup> In one verse in the ESV it is also translated "on the contrary."

<sup>xi</sup> When Abraham Lincoln was criticized for being too courteous to his enemies and reminded that it was his duty to destroy them, he gave the great answer, "Do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?"

--Barclay, W. (Ed.). (1975). The Gospel of Luke (p. 130). Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster John Knox Press.

<sup>xii</sup> ESV, NRSV

<sup>xiii</sup> Septuagint

<sup>xiv</sup> NKJV

<sup>xv</sup> Romans 15:10

<sup>xvi</sup> Deuteronomy 32:43 NKJV

<sup>xvii</sup> John 1:4-5, 3:19

<sup>xviii</sup> Jeremiah 23:20

<sup>xix</sup> 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 26:16-21 "Leprosy" refers to any flesh eating skin disease.

<sup>xx</sup> Hebrews 1:3