

# “THROUGH THE BIBLE”

PASTOR SANDY ADAMS

## ROMANS 11-12

It's ironic that Paul speaks of the failure of the Jews in **Chapter 11!** Israel went *bankrupt, belly-up!* Romans 9 opens with a list of privileges God gave to the Hebrew people. But they failed to receive the righteousness of Christ. Rather than trust in Jesus, they relied on their own good works – *self-righteousness* rather God's *righteousness*. It caused them to go *spiritually bankrupt!* A people who were once were **elected** by God, were now **rejected**. Yet **Chapter 11** reveals God's reorganization plan. In the future all His promises to Israel will be **respected**. In the end all the Jews will be saved.

Romans 11 begins, "*I say then, has God cast away His people?*" Here was the big question on everyone's mind, "*Is God through with the Jew?*" And Paul answers the question with his own credentials... *Certainly not! For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.*" Paul was Jewish and he was saved. Though God put the nation on the bench, salvation is open to everyone who trusts in Jesus – Jew or Gentile.

Paul's first argument for God's faithfulness to the Jew is *personal*, but his second argument is *historical*... "*God has not cast away His people whom He foreknew. Or do you not know what the Scripture says of Elijah, how he pleads with God against Israel, saying, "LORD, they have killed Your prophets and torn down Your altars, and I alone am left, and they seek my life?"*" Recall Elijah's depression. He stood up to 400 false prophets, but one woman scared him. The wicked Queen Jezebel scared him. He tucked tail and ran. He prayed, "*Woe is me, I'm all alone. I'm the only faithful person left.*"

Sometimes we feel that way – like we're the last Christian standing. But Paul points out God always has a remnant of believers – even among the Jews, "*But what does the divine response say to him? "I have reserved for Myself 7000 men who have not bowed the knee to Baal."* Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace." Sometimes it's a skeleton crew, but God always has His people. Don't ever think God has abandoned you. *There's more of us than you think!*

And everybody who belongs to God was saved by grace! Verse 6, "*And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work.*" Paul is crystal clear, all believers are saved by grace – not works. *Grace is grace, and works are work.* They're like oil and water. They represent two distinct ways of approaching God. Work is what you do. Grace is what Jesus did! And it is grace that unlocks the door. Works slam it shut.

Verse 7, "*What then? Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded.*" Paul divides the Jewish people into two groups - **the believing minority** and **the blinded majority**. "*Just as it is written (in Isaiah 29 and Deuteronomy 29): "God has given them a spirit of stupor, eyes that they should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day."*" Paul brings up a concept

called “judicial blindness.” To me, this is the most frightening doctrines taught in Scripture. Natural blindness is the result of being born into sin, but judicial blindness is a specific judgment from God. If you harden your heart over and over - God will eventually let you have your way. You want to sleep... He’ll sing you a lullaby. Persist in your stubbornness and God will let you destroy yourself.

Paul also quotes Psalm 69. “And David says: *“Let their table become a snare and a trap, a stumbling block and a recompense to them. Let their eyes be darkened, so that they do not see, and bow down their back always.”*” David prophesied, “*“Let their table become a snare...”*” It reminds me of what occurs every Passover in Jewish homes. The Seder table is full of symbols that are ultimately fulfilled in Jesus. His body is the hidden matzo. His blood is the cup of redemption. The Jews stare at these symbols... but don’t see it! Why? Because blindness has happened to Israel.

One trip to Israel we had a tour guide named “Amnon.” He was a tank driver in the Yom Kippur War. He had chutzpah, and could tell a good joke. A *rabbi and cabbie die and go to heaven?* The cabbie gets in - the rabbi doesn’t. And he wants to know why! The angel says, “*When you preached you put folks to sleep, but when he drove he caused his passengers to pray.*” At night we ate dinner with Amnon and share with him our love for Jesus. We took him to the OT and showed him how it predicted Jesus, but he never budged. Finally, I asked him, “*Amnon, what do you think of Jesus?*”

His response broke our hearts... Amnon said, “*I don’t think about it at all. I’m not allowed to think about it.*” His rabbis teach their constituency that it’s a sin to even consider the Messianic claims of Jesus of Nazareth. His joke was no joke after all. Today’s rabbis are putting the Jewish people to sleep. We’ve all met people whose unbelief is irrational. All their honest questions have been answered, yet they still choose not to believe. They’re blinded. It’s a spiritual blindness. You open their eyes with love and prayer.

Verse 11, “*I say then, have they stumbled that they should fall? Certainly not!*” Recall the old Life-Call commercial – an elderly woman had fallen on the floor, and in a high-pitched tone she cried, “*I’ve fallen, and I can’t get up!*” Well, the Jews had fallen, *but they would get up!* “*(For) through their fall, to provoke them to jealousy, salvation has come to the Gentiles.*” The Jews rejected Jesus, but God was still reaching out. Here Paul introduces a concept... **jealousy evangelism**. You’ve heard of *mass evangelism, door-to-door evangelism, street evangelism, literature evangelism, life-style evangelism, media evangelism...* but God created a new form of evangelism to reach the Jews... **jealousy evangelism**. God saved the Gentiles to make the Jews jealous, and desire salvation for themselves.

My last two years in HS I was the starting quarterback for every game, but one. I opened my senior season with several bad performances, and for the first time in two years my coach benched me. The next game I didn’t start. But it was a stroke of genius! When I finally got into the game toward the end of the first half I immediately threw a TD pass – and I was the starting quarterback for the rest of the season. My benching was needed motivation. And this was God’s strategy with Israel. He benched the Jews, and exalted the Gentiles, to make the Jews jealous of the salvation that’s in Christ.

Verse 12, “*Now if their fall is riches for the world, and their failure riches for the Gentiles, how much more their fullness! For I speak to you Gentiles; inasmuch as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, if by any means I may provoke to jealousy those who are my flesh and save some of them.*” Understand how much the Jews despised Gentiles - they considered them kindling for the fires of hell. There’s an old joke among the Jews, “*Why did God create the Gentiles?*” Answer, “*Somebody has to pay retail.*” But Paul plays on this animosity. Why

should the lowly Gentiles be recipients of God's blessings, while the Jews stay on the outside looking in? Paul flaunted the salvation of the uncircumcised to provoke the Jews.

A scientist in Naples, Florida has invented a new way to kill mosquitos. He draws them into a trap with a tantalizing fragrance, "cow's breath." He's invented a synthetic chemical that mimics cow's breath. Mosquitos love it. We need to effect lost people, the way *cow's breath* effects mosquito. Do we live an attractive life? Is there a bounce in our step, and a peace in our heart? We should make people jealous of the joy we have in Jesus.

"For if their being cast away *is* the reconciling of the world, what *will* their acceptance *be* but life from the dead?" The Jews will one day be saved. "For if the firstfruit *is* holy, the lump *is* also *holy*; and if the root *is* holy, so *are* the branches." The salvation Gentiles enjoy was first offered to the Jews. We're the branches they're the root. One day they too will be saved.

Verse 17, "And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became a partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches." Before you came to Christ you were a "*wild thang!*" – "*a wild olive tree.*" The Jews were domesticated. They were the natural branches. They were planted as seedlings in God's garden. The Gentiles were wild shoots – they lacked a biblical foundation and a spiritual upbringing. They were grafted in.

"But if you do boast, *remember that* you do not support the root, but the root *supports* you." Paul was worried about *reverse discrimination*. The Jews were prejudiced against the Gentiles. Now Paul fears the Gentiles will return the favor... Let's not forget the Jews brought the world God's Word – both the Written and Living Word. God's Son was a Jew. The Gentiles owe the Jews a debt of gratitude. How can we be anti-Semitic? I love the quote, "*How odd of God to choose the Jew. But not so odd, as those who choose the Jewish God, and hate the Jew.*" As Christians we need to love, support, pray for, and witness to Jews - both at home and in Israel.

Verse 19 addresses the Gentiles, "You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well *said*. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in *His* goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off." Rather than *spurn the Jews*, we need to *learn from the Jews*. The Jews failed to persist in faith. They didn't continue in God's goodness. Let's not repeat *their mistake*, lest we suffer *their plight*. Paul is clear it's up to us not just to have faith, *but continue in that faith*. Belief is not a one time, sign-on-the-bottom-line proposition. We have to "*continue*" in our faith if we expect to be saved... otherwise we'll be "*cut off.*"

I read of a woman in Toledo, Ohio guilty of manslaughter. She shot her boyfriend. The article said it happened as they were arguing over the Bible. It wasn't reported... but I'll bet the couple had been discussing *once-saved-always-saved!* Some of the most hostile, vehement discussions I've had were with other Christians over this doctrine. Which is a real tragedy... I want to explain what I believe about *once-saved-always-saved*, but before I do, I want to admit there're good Christians on both sides of the debate. This is not a subject worth dividing over... We can agree to disagree.

So here's my position... It's nothing we do or don't do that earns our salvation. Neither is it anything we do or don't do that forfeits salvation.

The only requirement is faith! But if salvation is by faith, and you renounce your faith, how can you expect to be saved? You have to continue in your faith. Faith is not a date on the calendar – it's an attitude I grow and cultivate. Faith is like a plant. Starve it and it dies. Feed it and it'll live - and bear fruit. For the record, I don't believe in once saved always saved, but I do believe in eternal security. As long as you trust in Jesus you're eternally secure! If you want to study this further here're a few verses: [Colossians 1:21-23](#), [Galatians 5:1-5](#), [Hebrews 10:35-39](#), [1Peter 1:8-9](#) – and there are more if you need them. The perseverance of faith is taught throughout the Bible.

Back to 11:23, “[And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again.](#)” The Jews didn’t continue in faith and were cut off – but if they turn from unbelief they’ll be grafted back in. “[For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?](#)” A good horticulturalist will tell us it’s far more difficult to graft a wild branch into a vine, than to re-graft a natural branch that was broken off. God did the hard work saving the Gentiles. It’ll be much easier bringing home the Jews. I like the quote by CS Lewis on the salvation of the Jews. He explained, “[In a sense, the converted Jew is the only normal human being in the world. Everyone else is a special case dealt with under emergency conditions.](#)”

Verse 25, “[For I do not desire, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own opinion, that blindness in part has happened to Israel until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.](#)” A biblical “*mystery*” is a truth we learn through *revelation* not *investigation*. We wouldn’t know it if God didn’t reveal it – a mystery is a *sacred secret*. In the OT the Church was a mystery, hidden from view. God began salvation with the Jews – He’ll end salvation with the Jews. But today we’re in that gap where the Jews have been cut off and God is grafting in the Gentiles.

Notice, Israel’s blindness is temporary. When “[the fullness of the Gentiles has come in,](#)” God will re-engage the Hebrew people. And I believe this expression, “[the fullness of the Gentiles](#)” refers to a specific number. When the last Gentile gets saved – at that moment - the Lord will come in the clouds and snatch away His Church. If you’re the last holdout I wish you’d get on with it, and give your life to Jesus. The rest of us are ready for home!

Verses 26-32 have prophetic implications. “[And so all Israel will be saved...](#)” When the Church is raptured, God will turn His attention to the nation Israel. He’ll use seven years of great tribulation to purify the Jews. “[As it is written](#) (and here Paul quotes [Isaiah 59](#)): “[The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob; for this is My covenant with them, when I take away their sins.](#)” Every Jew alive when Jesus returns in power and glory will put their faith in Him and be saved. One day, *all* Jews will be Jews for Jesus!

Zechariah 12:10 tells us how it’ll happen. The Lord says, “I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son...” When the Jews see the Savior’s scars they’ll realize their mistake. They executed their Messiah. They’ll repent of their sin, and put their trust in Jesus. In a sense, Thomas is a type of *End Times Israel*. Thomas refused to believe until he saw His scars. Likewise, this is what will convince Israel.

Verse 28, “Concerning the gospel [they are enemies for your sake, but concerning the election they are beloved for the sake of the fathers. For the gifts and the calling of God are irrevocable.](#)” God’s promises aren’t a gallon of milk. They have no expiration date. They’re not “[for a](#)

**limited time only.**" You can reject God's blessings, but *you reject them* – God doesn't take them off the table. The gifts and callings designated for you, *are still for you!*

"For as you were once disobedient to God, yet have now obtained mercy through their disobedience, even so these also have now been disobedient, that through the mercy shown you they also may obtain mercy. For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all." We've all been in God's doghouse – both Jews and Gentiles. None of us should get the big-head. If you've received anything from God, or become anything for God – it's all because of God's incredible mercy.

For three chapters now Paul has pounded out some of the most mind-crunching theology in the Bible, but he closes his *theology* with *doxology*. We go from head-scratching to toe-tapping - from pondering to praise. If we could know all there is to know about God with our pea brains, He wouldn't be much of a God. That's why Paul closes Chapter 11 with praise!

Verse 33, "Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! If you think you've got God wired – you've got the wrong God. *His truth is like a river - so simple a child can stand, but so deep a theologian can drown.* The Bible is a reliable record of God's dealings, but if you've got to have every question answered, and every nuisance explained before you believe, *then you'll never believe!* Faith in God requires a certain amount of mystery. Always remember, "**What's over our head is still under God's feet.**"

It also requires a certain amount of humility. God calls the shots, not me. Verse 34 teaches us God has **no colleagues, no counselors, no creditors!** "For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor?" "Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?" God has no peer... He needs no help... He owes no one anything! God is in a class all by Himself... This is a problem for the proud, but a comfort for the humble. The chapter closes, "**For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.**" God is our all in all!

Chapter 12, "**I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God...**" For eleven chapters Paul has discussed the "mercies of God." We've been in awe of God's salvation! But after savoring its sweet taste it's time to realize the ramifications. *In light of God's love for us how then should we live?*

Here's the first step... "**That you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.**" The OT sacrifice was a butchered carcass, but God no longer likes His sacrifices well done. Today, he orders them rare. He wants a sacrifice that's still alive – that's still kicking and mooing on the plate. God is now into living sacrifices! Abraham's son Isaac, was a living sacrifice. He willingly offered his body to God, and was bound to the altar. He had no plans of his own - nothing to do - and no place to be - he was available to whatever the Father had in mind. Once a little girl was sitting at the end of the row at church. When the offering plate passed - she took it, sat it down in the aisle, and stepped into the plate. An usher asked, "**Honey, what are doing?**" She replied, "**I learned in Sunday School today that I'm suppose to give myself to God.**" She's right!

The first step is **give your body**. The second step is **renew your mind**. Verse 2, "**And do not be conformed to this world...**" I like the Phillips translation, "**Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mold.**" Resist the pressure to follow the pack – just go with the flow.

Remember, toilet paper goes with the flow, not Christians. *Stand out don't blend in.* A Christian is either a [thermometer](#) or a [thermostat](#). Some believers are thermometers - they conform to room temperature. They try to "be cool" and gravitate toward "what's hot." But God wants us to be a thermostat. Rather than register the temperature – set it! *Don't conform, be transformed.*

"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Here's the key to transformation... "*renewing your mind.*" Jesus changes our heart, but we change our way of thinking. It's up to me to *put on* a new identity, and cultivate character... As I *put off* the old logic, perceptions, habits. To walk worthy of God's mercies *give your body, renew your mind, and humble your heart.* "For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith." "*Soberly*" means "*in one's right mind.*" The idea is objectivity, honesty. It's seeing myself not as *others see me*, or as *I see me*, but as *God sees me*.

"For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, *being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.*" Paul refers to the Church as a body. If you're an adult of average weight, its amazing what your body does every 24 hours: "*Your heart beats 103,689 times, your blood travels 168 million miles, you take 23,040 breaths, you inhale 438 cubic feet of air, you eat 3.25 pounds of food, you drink 2.9 quarts of liquid, you lose 7/8 of a pound of waste, you move 750 muscles, and you exercise 7 million brain cells.*" *No wonder you feel tired at the end of the day!* Your body is made up of several trillion cells all linked together, all functioning as one unit. And so is the Body of Christ. *We're many members, but one body.* We're a blend of unity and diversity working together.

And each member contributes to the whole by using the gift God has given them. Verse 6, "*Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, let us use them...*" Upon his death, famous violinist, Niccolo Paganini, donated his instrument to the city of Genoa, Italy. But with a stipulation - *the violin must never be played.* It was only for *preservation* not *utilization.* When Jesus died He too gave gifts to His Church, but Jesus intends for His gifts to be used! The Holy Spirit has imparted to every believer at least one of the gifts listed in these next three verses. And understand spiritual gifts are not learned skills or natural abilities – they're supernatural enablings. Jesus didn't give us His gifts to sit on a shelf. He wants us to use them.

1 Corinthians 12:4-6 points to three types of spiritual enablement. Paul speaks of "*gifts, ministries, activities.*" I call them [motivations, ministries, and manifestations](#). 1 Corinthians 12 lists supernatural [manifestations](#) like speaking in tongues or healing. Ephesians 4 lists a four [ministries](#). While here in Romans 12 we find seven [motivations](#) provided by the Holy Spirit. God puts in the heart of every Christian at least one specific motivation. It's an implanted spiritual tendency that colors our perspective and pursuits.

First is [prophecy](#), "*If prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith...*" We associate this with *fore-telling*, but its primary meaning is *forth-telling*. It's said, "*A prophet was not known primarily for his hindsight or his foresight, but his insight.*" Here's a person who boldly speaks the message God gives him. Second in the list is [ministry](#), "*or ministry, let us use it in our ministering...*" This is a *supernatural knack* for helping others in practical ways. This person delivers sermons with sweat. He or she loves to serve in tangible ways! Third on the list is [teaching](#), "*he who teaches, in teaching...*" This gift helps *earthly minds* understand *heavenly truths*. He or she puts the cookies on the bottom shelf. The teacher makes complex truths understandable. "*A teacher's task is to take a roomful of live wires and see to it they're properly grounded.*"

The fourth gift is **exhortation**, “he who exhorts, in exhortation...” Teaching instructs us *what to do*, exhortation *encourages us to do it!* This gift is like the spiritual jumper cables. It jump starts brothers or sisters with weak batteries. The fifth gift is **giving**, “he who gives, with **liberality...**” Every believer should develop the discipline of giving, but the person with the *gift of giving* has a special knack for opening the wallet to bless others and further God’s work. I’ll never forget the guy who came to our church and gave **\$100 handshakes**. He’d shake your hand, and slip you a crisp new \$100 bill. I never missed shaking that fellow’s hand! He had this gift.

The sixth gift is **leading**, “he who leads, with **diligence...**” We could call this gift, “**spiritual management**.” It’s been said, “**Don’t agonize - organize.**” Here’s a person who strategizes in godly ways. 1 Corinthians 14:40 instructs us to do things “**decently and in order.**” This gift can help us mobilize for service. And the final motivational gift is **mercy**, “he who shows mercy, with **cheerfulness.**” Mercy is defined as “**Two hearts tugging at the same load.**” We all should show mercy, but the person with this gift exudes an extra helping. Paul’s point is whatever gift God has given you... **just do it!**

Of course people ask, “**How do I discover my gift?**” Here’s a helpful exercise... Let’s say a little girl came running down the center aisle carrying a potted plant she made for me in SS. But half-way down she slips and drops the plant - *crash* - dirt and pottery spill all over the floor. *How would you react?* If you’d jump up and start looking for a broom you have the gift of ministry. If you’d pull out your wallet to pay for the broken pot yours is giving. If you say to the girl, “**Young woman let this be a warning. Thus saith the Lord, there’re will be many opportunities to stumble in life!**” That’s prophecy. If your reaction is to show the little gal a clever foot maneuver she can use to right herself the next time she slips then your gift is the gift of teaching.

If you think, “**let’s rearrange chairs so this isn’t repeated,**” that’s leading. Or you’d give a pep talk, “**You’ll do better next time!**” That’s exhortation. Or perhaps you’d run up to hug and cuddle the child, and kissed her “**ittle-bitty-booboo**” – well, obviously you have the gift of mercy. But understand there would be seven diverse reactions among the people in this room - and all are valid, God-ordained reactions. This is why we need each other. We need all the gifts. A healthy church appreciates its diversity.

The rabbis had a method of teaching called “**stringing beads.**” As a lady places beads on a necklace, the rabbis would string together random truths... This is what Paul does for the rest of Chapter 12. Verse 9, “**Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil. Cling to what is good.**” It always amazes me how accustom I can get to a putrid odor. I was always the last to know when Mack had a smelly diaper. The stink was so strong it would knock a buzzard off a porta-potty. But by the fourth kid my nose had grown immune to the smell. *And the same can happen with sin.* We get use to stuff that God abhors. We allow sin to play on our TV screen we’d never approve of in real life... *Hate sin and hold on to what’s good.*

“**Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another, not lagging in diligence** (don’t be lazy), **fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation...**” Horse racing fans will remember the famed thoroughbred, Secretariat. In the Kentucky Derby, a one-mile race, Secretariat clocked a faster time in each successive quarter mile. The horse got stronger as the race progressed. God uses tribulation in our lives not to wear us out, but to build endurance and make us stronger! Through trial after trial we grow a patient endurance.

“Continuing steadfastly in prayer...” This is the greatest gift you can show a friend – consistent prayer... “Distributing to the needs of the saints...” We need to see and meet needs. It’s said, “Love seeks not limits, but outlets.” Paul goes on, “given to hospitality...” A man named John Thomas wrote an interesting letter to Dear Abby. He said, “I’m presently completing the second year of a three year survey of the hospitality, or lack of it, in churches. To date, of the 195 churches I’ve visited I was spoken to by someone other than an official greeter only once, and then it was to ask me to move my feet.” I hope John Thomas has never visited Calvary Chapel... There’s only one thing better than *Southern hospitality*, and that’s *Christian hospitality!*

Paul keeps stringing beads in verse 14, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.” There’s an old Chinese proverb, “If your enemy wrongs you, buy each of his children a drum.” That’s a funny thought... But we march to a different drummer. We’re called to bless our enemies. Recall Romans 5:9, “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us...” God took the first steps to reconcile us while we were His enemies. And in doing so He set a precedent. Like God, we make friends out of enemies by love.

“Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.” When we empathize and share life together we grow close. It makes for a thick, full, rich life. It’s said, “A sorrow shared is but half a trouble. A joy shared is a joy made double.” Real fellowship *divides our grief* and *multiplies our happiness*. Verse 16, “Be of the same mind toward one another.” Don’t play favorites or be bias. Treat everyone equally. “Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble.” Don’t just hang out with people who make you look good, or who occupy the next rung on the social ladder you’re climbing. “Do not be wise in your own opinion.” Be rock solid in your beliefs and convictions, but keep your opinions flexible and open to new input.

Verse 17, “Repay no one evil for evil.” This doesn’t mean be a sissy or a doormat. When men do evil, fight back – defend yourself, but do so with love. Fight evil with good. “Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.” “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” At times your stand for what’s true and right... or the other person’s stubbornness... might make this impossible. But make sure the problem is not your unwillingness to forgive, or be flexible – or your clutching on to a mere opinion... Your opinion is not as important as “(living) peaceably with all men.”

Verse 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 Law of Moses specified “an eye for an eye” – and why? Because our tendency is to one-up the person who harms us. Punch me in the jaw... and I’ll crack your jaw and kick you in the shins. This is why God is the only person who can be trusted to dish out what’s due. He handles the paybacks! Here’s what we should do. “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.” In ancient times folks didn’t have a pilot light on their furnace. If their fire died they went next door to retrieve hot embers to relight their fire. They carried it back on their head. “Coals of fire on his head” was a kindness. Here’s the big lesson, “You never win by trying to even the score.” Fight back - assert yourself - don’t just sit there and take it – retaliate - but not with evil! Retaliate in like kind and you’re no better than your enemy. Take heed to verse 21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”