

# Harmony in the Home

Romans 12:14-21

Preached May 16, 2010 by Dr. Dwight Kilbourne

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. 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." 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." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

**Introduction.** A few decades ago, Bill Backer, an advertising executive responsible for the Coca-Cola account, found himself stranded in an airport with many irate travelers. The next morning he noticed these same passengers talking, laughing and sharing a Coke. He pinned on a napkin, "I'd Like to Buy the World a Coke." Soon he capitalized on that idea and a jingle was written and aired on American radio in 1971 but it failed. In July, the commercial aired on television with a multi-cultural gathering lip-singing the lyrics on a hilltop in Italy. It became so popular that the producer and singers eventually re-recorded it without reference to Coke and it became an instant hit. More than 96,000 copies sold in one day. Soon more than 12,000,000 copies had sold ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I'd\\_Like\\_to\\_Buy\\_the\\_World\\_to\\_Sing\\_\(In\\_Perfect\\_Harmony\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/I'd_Like_to_Buy_the_World_to_Sing_(In_Perfect_Harmony))).

Do you remember the words?  
I'd like to build the world a home  
and furnish it with love  
grow apple trees and honey bees  
and snow white turtle doves

I'd like to teach the world to sing  
in perfect harmony  
I'd like to hold it in my arms  
and keep it company

I'd like to see the world for once  
all standing hand in hand  
and hear them echo through the hills  
for peace throughout the land

That's the song I hear  
Let the world sing today  
a song of peace  
that echoes on  
and never goes away.  
([http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/n/new\\_seekers/i\\_d\\_like\\_to\\_teach\\_the\\_world\\_to\\_sing.html](http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/n/new_seekers/i_d_like_to_teach_the_world_to_sing.html))

Why did the Coke jingle and later the full-length song so capture the imagination of so many people? I suspect that it has to do with a deep longing, a dream that most of us have regarding our world – we long for a world that lives in harmony and peace.

Ground zero for this dream for nearly everyone is in the home. Nearly every couple and family longs for a home where there is harmony and peace. When there is severe and on-going conflict, chaos and disharmony, life is difficult. No one is happy in that environment. Yet this dream for which we long for what seems so elusive and difficult to obtain.

It should come as no surprise that the dream of harmony and peace is one communicated in scripture. Paul wrote in the verses you heard, "Live in harmony with one another;" "Live peaceably with all."

It is easy for cynics to say, "Yeah, right – live at peace with all – nice dream but it will not happen." Their words might discourage us from dreaming this dream. But this morning for just a few moments, I want you to join me in dreaming this dream for our marriage, in our homes, in our families, in our faith community and our world. How can we live, so as to make our dreams a reality? Let's look at what I believe is the key step on the pathway of peace and harmony in our home and world.

## Responding to personal hurt.

Have you ever been hurt by someone you love – that person said something that offended you, betrayed a

confidence, took advantage of you, did something that brought you physical or material harm? What was your first reaction when you experience some type of hurt?

A few days ago, Patty and I went for a walk at Chester Frost Park followed by ice cream at Nana's. (Great combination, right?) When I pulled out on to Hixson Pike from Gold Point Circle, I underestimated the speed of the car that was coming toward us. As a result, it came rather close by the time I made it into the turning lane. Can you guess what the driver did? He blew his horn and saluted me with one finger. I guess he felt I had invaded his space and endangered his being. Hey, I have been where he has been. I have blown a horn and given mean looks. I try to avoid salutes because you never know whether it is a church member or not.

It seems that the normal reaction for someone doing us harm is some type of retaliation. Right? If your spouse says something that hurts you, you reply in like kind. If your child back talks you, you ground her for two weeks. We have this strong desire for justice and wanting to get even and return the hurt. Unfortunately, this type of reaction tends to perpetuate an on-going cycle of tit-for-tat and tat-for-tit.

Conflictive and hurtful encounters were common in Paul's experience. He knew what it was like for strangers to oppose his ministry and persecute him (he was stoned and run out towns) and what it was like to have allies disagree about how to do ministry. By the time he writes the Letter to Rome, he has had time to reflect on this. So he offers a key to harmony and peace in these situations. He advocates a position of "proactive reaction" in the midst of conflict. He exhorts his readers: *Take thought (forethought) for what is noble (good) in the sight of people.*

Those of you who are word-smiths know that "proactive reaction" is an oxymoron. Reaction is a response to something done to us while pro-action is done in anticipation of an act. How can we act proactively when reacting to being

hurt? If you stay with me for a few moments, we are going to begin this process of thinking about how to react before we have anything happen. Hopefully we can put into our minds and hearts things that help us when we face conflictive situations.

There are three things found here in our text that are helpful – one has to do with a way of thinking, the other a way of speaking and the other a way of acting.

*Take thought for what is noble* – this has to do with how we think. We need to decide before the encounters when we are hurt, offended, insulted, betrayed, belittled, abandoned or persecuted how we want to react. Am I going to act nobly or am I going to act like a jerk?

When I cut off the other driver and he saluted me, I was faced with a decision how would I react. Would I act nobly and remember whose I am? Or would I respond with similar venom – after all, I did not meant to cut him off and merit his responses. I could blow my horn and return the salute. I could take it another step. I could have wheeled around and followed him and gotten beside of him and given him a piece of my mind if he was smaller than me. To be honest, I would rather act nobly. What would be the noble response? Give sign of apology and go on my way.

When it comes to dealing with our spouses, family and friends, how will we react – nobly or like a jerk? (Our thinking on this will heavily influence how we respond with words and actions.)

Listen to another exhortation along in this manner: *Conduct yourselves honorably (or nobly) among the Gentiles, so that, though they malign you as evildoers, they may see your honorable deeds and glorify God when he comes to judge* (1 Peter 2:12). Not only do we have a stake in our relationships here but also in terms of kingdom matters.

*Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them* – this is about what we say in response to others who hurt us. Of course, the communication not only includes words but also gestures and expressions. It is important to understand here that this does not say we are to “justify” what the other person did or said, blame ourselves for their actions or excuse their actions. The communication response is aimed at

blessing the person – wishing them good.

Paul’s words certainly do contain the echo of Jesus’ words. Jesus said, “*Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you*” (Luke 6:27-36).

Jesus demonstrated the ultimate act of this when he was crucified. As Jesus was hanging on the cross and people were mocking him, he did not return insults and call down curses on them. Rather he came to the point where he prayed, “Father, forgive them.” Jesus turned their persecution into a blessing.

Solomon who had many wives understood the importance of this action. He wrote: Proverbs 15:1: *A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.* A gentle word of blessing can break a chain of conflict.

As an arguing couple traveled through the countryside, they passed a barnyard of donkeys. The husband said sarcastically, “Are those relatives of yours?” The wife responded, “Yes, my in-laws.”

Bless others in your response.

*Do not repay evil with evil but with good* – this is about our action. Most of us are tempted to repay evil done to us with evil. Most of us want to get even. We want justice. Doing good to anyone who has hurt us is tough.

Before we go deeper into this thought, it is important say a word about some boundaries when things happen on the extremes. When the hurt we experience comes in the form of physical or sexual abuse, mental torture or harassment, we must take measures to find protection for ourselves (and those under our care). Doing good does not mean a wife staying in a home where the husband is beating her. In that situation, the good comes in getting out of that situation and seeking help.

The scripture make it clear that retaliation is not a good thing if we desire to live in harmony and peace with others. Retaliation extends the battle for another round. Doing good generally has an impact on the other person. This type of living realizes that ultimate justice comes from God.

In your home, if you and your spouse is upset with one another, go ahead clean up the room and run the vacuum

cleaner. Fix your spouse her favorite meal. Buy flowers. Each of you is smart enough to know what good acts you can do that will be meaningful.

## Two stories.

I want to bring this message to a conclusion by sharing two stories that I hope will illustrate taking the step of proactive reaction.

Over 20 years ago, a situation occurred in my family where an uncle and aunt brought about accusations and expressed disgust over things that had happened in the past between members of our families. I watched as my parents reacted to their anger and accusations. My parents struggled with their anger and the relationship between them were stained for some time. I wondered if the we would break ties altogether because of that situation.

But I saw in my parents an amazing love. In the past few years, health problems have taken their toll on my uncle and aunt. They often call on my father to help them – go to the doctor, do tasks around the house, etc. My father willingly responds. While it has not always been easy, he has responded through the years with good.

The second story: On October 3, 2006, Charles Carl Roberts stormed a Lancaster County Amish School with a loaded gun. He shot 10 students and killing 5 before turning the gun on himself and committing suicide. (If that had happened in the school our children attended, how we react?)

Not long after the event the Amish community began to reach out to the family of the gunman and offered forgiveness. The world was stunned by this display of forgiveness – not rendering evil for evil. They felt that God would be the judge and they left that to God.

<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2006/10/04/national/main2059816.shtml?tag=contentMain:contentBody>

On a bone chilling evening in the autumn of 2004, Ryan Cushing along with a carload of delinquents took a joy ride in New York. After crashing a window of a car, they stole a credit card and went on a shopping spree at a video store and grocery store where their purchase included a 20 pound frozen turkey. Just past mid-night as their car

was head west, Ryan flung the turkey toward a east bound care driven by Victoria Ruvolo. The turkey smashed the windshield and shattered her face. Victoria faced months of rehabilitation and the community was in uproar about this senseless act.

On August 15 of the next year, the two faced each other in court. Ryan pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 6 months in jail, 5 years probation and community service. All wondered who was responsible for such an ridiculous and lenient sentence – It was the victim. When Mr. Cushing left the courtroom after pleading guilty, he came face to face with his victim for the first time. He said he was sorry and begged her to forgive him.

She did. She cradled his head as he sobbed. She stroked his face and patted his back. "It's O.K.; it's O.K.," she said. "I just want you to make your life the best it can be."

Listen to what the New York Times wrote: It's hard to imagine that those hurt by crime reliably find healing in the courtroom. Given the opportunity for retribution, Ms. Ruvolo gave and got something better: the dissipation of anger and the restoration of hope, in a gesture as cleansing as the tears washing down her damaged face, and the face of the foolish, miserable boy whose life she single-handedly restored.

(<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/17/opinion/17wed4.html>)

**As far as it depends on you.**

Can you imagine in your marriage, your home, your community and in the world people living in peace and harmony with one another? It is a beautiful dream.

Paul wrote: *As far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.* Realizing this dream begins with each of us taking the key step of proactive thinking, blessing those who curse us and doing good to those who harm us. Peace and harmony in our relationships begins as we take this important step.