

I. Introduction

- A. There's an old joke that's kind of funny, but not too funny... because it's kind of true.
1. Five guys were shipwrecked: 1 is a Catholic, 1 Baptist, 3 are Church of Christ.
 - a. They pulled together to survive, but then the subject came around to religion
 - b. After discussion, dialog and debate, it was decided they couldn't worship together
 - 1) So the Catholic guy established "*Our Lady of the Sea Catholic Church.*"
 - 2) Baptist guy built "*Shoreline Baptist Church.*" What of Church of Christ guys?
 - 3) They built Eastside Church of Christ, Westside C of C, and Southside C of C
 2. Like I said, that's only kinds of funny. So a more generic version of the same joke.
 - a. This version has ONE GUY shipwrecked on the island, and he's finally rescued.
 - b. He's showing his rescuers all the buildings he constructed while he was castaway
 - 1) "*There's where I lived... cooked... stored food.. church I prayed/worshipped.*"
 - 2) What's that hut over there?" "*Oh, that's the church where I used to worship.*"
 3. **Moral:** Our church won't be the perfect church even if we're the only member!
 - a. And if we did find the "perfect church?" They wouldn't have us for a member
 - b. Maybe we better make a better go with the church that God has given us
- B. That's what Paul is doing in our section of Romans for today— Romans 12:14-21
1. One of our elders had me read the book, *Don't Let the Jerks Get the Best of You*
 - a. Which elder was it? He moved to Indiana; I guess the jerks got the best of him!
 - b. Author, who also wrote *Boundaries*, suggests that there are three kinds of jerk
 - 1) **First Degree Jerk:** (40% of us) these are mildly selfish but mostly good folks
 - 2) **Second Degree Jerk:** (40%) the seriously selfish, bordering on narcissism
 - 3) **Nth Degree Jerk:** (10%) these are the severely selfish to complete sociopaths
 - c. Only 10% are not jerks but "*mature adults.*" Look around, it's probably not you!
 - 1) Meir gives suggestions for dealing with different types (*Nth Degree: Get out!*)
 - 2) Better, he gives text to help you decide where you fall on the jerk spectrum
 2. Paul could have used Dr. Meir's title here, *Don't Let the Jerks Get the best of You*
 - a. That's his subtitle; his main title is *Don't Be a Jerk!* Let's all try that for a week!
 - b. We're to BOTH not be jerks and get along to as many jerks as we can (**Rom 12:18**)

II. Who Are the Jerks That Paul Discusses?

- A. Which jerks is Paul discussing? He begins “*those who persecute you*” (**12:14**)
1. This is Rome, so the word “*persecute*” suggests the coliseum, gladiators, and lions
 - a. That makes it sound like the jerks we’re dealing with are out there in the world.
 - b. The context here is referring to how the church should treat each other (**12:15-16**)
 - 1) There’s no question who we’re to rejoice with or live in harmony with, right?
 - 2) So must wonder if SOME of those doing the persecuting are other Christians
 2. The word translated “*persecuted*” literally means “*to pursue*” or “*to press after*”
 - a. Yes, it’s the word used for persecution by outside agencies— like government
 - 1) It’s also the word Paul uses when he is “*pressing on to the mark*” (**Phil 3:14**)
 - 2) It’s also word he uses when discussing “*pursuing righteousness*” (**Rom 9:30**)
 - b. Other Christians might not “*persecute*” is in sense of Caesar and the Coliseum
 - 1) They sure can press on our last nerve and pursue us until they drive us batty.
 - 2) They can be jerks! What can be said here can apply in the context of church
- B. Paul moves from talking about being persecuted to talking about enemies (**Rom 14:20**)
1. Who is enemy? People who’ve wronged them (**17**) so they might take revenge (**19**)
 - a. Again, we might be tempted to apply this ONLY to their enemies outside the church
 - b. Remember the time we spent on talking about the background of the Rome church
 2. Jews (Jewishness) and Gentiles (Romans) in the church really didn’t like each other
 - a. Backstory: Then all Jews were forced to leave Rome for 5 years (*edict of Claudius*)
 - b. Gentiles weren’t crying in Dr. Pepper over it (*don’t let door hit you on the way out*)
 - c. Claudius had died; this new guy Nero has just let all the Jews return to Rome
 - 1) Jews were back; they expected to be welcomed & get leadership roles back
 - 2) Gentiles had been getting along fine without them— with all Gentile leaders
 - d. Tensions were running high; everyone was wearing their feeling on their sleeve
 3. So Paul writes, “*For the love of Christ will someone remember the love of Christ!*”
 - a. Enemies? Persecution? They didn’t have to go all the way to Coliseum for those!
 - 1) Just had to go to church! To quote Pogo, “*We’ve met the enemy and he is us!*”
 - 2) What should’ve been their sanctuary from the world had become as dangerous
 - b. The only antidote to all this was grace. They had to start out-gracing one another
 - c. And that’s what Paul is doing here—showing us how to show grace to the jerks

III. How Do Show Grace to the Jerks?

A. Before we get back to **Romans 12**, let's take a look at Paul source material.

1. It should be no surprise that Paul combines **enemies** and **persecution** (**Matt 5:44-45**)
 - a. Paul is pulling straight from Jesus in combining our enemies and persecution
 - b. **Question:** Who did the people who first heard Jesus think he was talking about?
 - 1) Not what apostles thought when martyred, or early church thought in area
 - 2) Contemporary church thinks if someone wishes us "*Happy Holidays*" (!!!)
2. Jesus' first audience here likely saw their enemies and persecution as jerks, right?
 - a. Jesus tells them to love and pray for those peoples in their lives who are jerks
 - b. You don't get credit for only loving people who are never jerks (**Matt 5:46-47**)
 - c. What to be perfect before God? Love all the jerks and never be a jerk (**Matt 5:48**)

B. In **Romans 12**, Paul tells us four things to keep in mind when dealing with jerks

1. **First**, bless and don't curse (**12:14**). Like "*pray for enemies*" but adds "*don't curse*"
 - a. Think of Jesus on the cross. Not only tortured, but taunted, "*If you're the son...*"
 - b. What could He have said? If most tell some to go you know where, empty threat!
 - 1) But Jesus spoke a blessing, not curse! You may be persecuted, not like that!
 - 2) Stephen was persecuted just like that... and he responded just like that!
2. **Second**, Paul then he says "*Never pay back evil with more evil*" (**Rom 12:17**)
 - a. Again, Paul is returning to the Sermon on the Mount for his source material, right
 - 1) This is "if someone hits you on one cheek... or sues you to take your shirt..."
 - 2) The human response is to always hit back to counter-sue, to defend our rights
 - b. We're to be "*careful to do what is right.*" Word for "right" is **καλός** or "*beautiful*"
 - 1) If someone is a jerk and you respond in kind back—what does that make you?
 - 2) You are part of a body— act so "*everyone can see you are honorable*" (NLT)
3. **Third**, "*Never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God.*" (**12:19**)
 - a. **Old Proverb:** "*Revenge is a dish best served cold*" Unknown origin (Klingon?)
 - 1) This is different than the second point; it does imply calculation and thought
 - 2) Paul says it implies a lack of faith in God's ability to settle score on His own
 - b. The opposite of revenge is serving—"*if he's hungry, give him something to eat*"
 - c. How is treating an enemy here any different than how you treat a friend? *Exactly!*
4. **Fourth**, the summary on dealing with jerks reminds us it's not about them (**12:21**)

IV. Conclusion

- A. I have 10+ commentaries on Romans— real books (not web or computer sources)
1. And they are getting more and more worthless as we get closer to the end
 - a. John McArthur (2 vol) has 531 pages on chapter 1-8; only 250 on chapters 12-16
 - b. Anders Nygren has 352 tiny print pages to chapters 1-8; 42 pages to chapters 12-16
 - c. John Stott's excellent commentary I've relied did not fill 4 pages on text for today
 2. Romans 1-8 is longer (5000 vs 2800 words), but why such a disparity here?
 - a. Romans 1-8 has all the theological dense stuff theologians love to write about
 - b. Once they comment on that dense stuff, they're worn out and then pack it in
 3. The real reason and my point— *we don't really need much a commentary here !*
 - a. Bless and don't curse the jerks who treat you poorly.
 - b. Don't respond in kind toward them— or you'll be a jerk too
 - c. Don't hold grudges or seek revenge— let God worry about justice
 - d. Treat people better than they deserve... just like God does you
 - e. Overcome evil with good; don't and just the opposite will be true
 4. We don't need a commentary; we need to decide if we're going to do it! Are we?
- B. I'm not backing off my original statement. All this is the point of Romans!
1. The reason Paul spent all that time on grace is so we'll DO grace to one another
 - a. Jewish Christian thinks Roman brother did him wrong, "*I won't stand for it!*"
 - b. Roman Christian thinks Jewish sister did her wrong, "*Can't just let that go!*"
 2. Paul: "*Grace them! Give them better than they deserve! Just like God does you!*"
 - a. That is what God calls each of us to do in the name of Christ. Grace each other
 - b. Paul reminds us that others are watching. The world is watching. (**Rom 12:17**)
 - 1) There is a word for Christian living together in unity & forgiveness—gospel
 - 2) We don't need commentary; we just need to decide if that's what we will do.