**THE HARDEST COMMAND IN THE BIBLE
part 2**

**Soldier of Christ – Stand Down**

Please read with me this text from the pen of Paul. As I wrote yesterday, this is the HARDEST commandment in the Bible, at least for me personally. Perhaps it is hard, maybe even the hardest, command in the Bible for you too. Paul said,

*14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. 17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 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. 20 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.” 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

In military terms God is commanding me to “Stand Down.” Soldiers on high alert for action are given orders to not engage the enemy, but to take their fingers off the trigger and relax their guard. There is to be no shooting. Peace negotiations have settled the conflict, or the danger is no longer the soldier’s concern. Back off. At ease soldier.

Our Commander-in-Chief is Jesus Christ. He has ordered us to “stand down.” In fact, as soldiers in His army, we are to disarm our weapons and become ambassadors of peace with the enemy. We wear Red Cross armbands and supply aid and comfort to those who were our adversary. Our Leader showed us the way while wearing a Rugged Cross as He said, “*Father, forgive them, they don’t know what they are doing*.” To “stand down” He had to first be “*lifted up*” (John 12:32). He who could have marshalled a force of twelve legions of angels (Matt. 26:53), which is about 60,000 (and we know that just one angel killed 185,000 elite Assyrian soldiers – 2 Kings 19:35), refused to order the command to destroy His enemies. What was the result of this restraint?

Some of those very antagonists would ask in less than two months, “*Sirs, what must we do* [to be saved]?” (Acts 2:36-37). The 3,000 converts on Pentecost, along with the future growing church of 5,000 (Acts 4:4), then a great multitude (Acts 4:32), were the result of Christ’s restraint from releasing His avenging angels. Thousands, and now millions, of souls will be in heaven because He refused to take vengeance on all those who yelled, “Crucify him!” They learned the meaning of Grace and Mercy and Love when Peter told them, “*Repent, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, and times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord*” (Acts 3:19). Instead of wrath they received refreshing. Jesus now tells us, “Go and do likewise.”

Paul labeled himself “*the chief of sinners*” (I Tim. 1:15). He had blood on his hands, and on his conscience. Just look at his resume and tell me how he slept at night:
*“I persecuted this Way to the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women”* (Acts 22:4). *“Indeed, I myself thought I must do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth. This I also did in Jerusalem, and many of the saints I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities”* (Acts 26:9-11). *“For you have heard of my former conduct in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it”* (Galatians 1:13).

Yet this is now the same man who commands us to:
*14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.
17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men.
18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.
19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath;
20 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.”
21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

How could he do this? Better yet, How can I do this? How can I bless, not curse, my enemies? How can I regard good things to all men (even my enemies)? How can I live peaceably with all men (even my enemies)? How can I choose not to join The Avengers (sorry Captain America, Iron Man, Thor, Hulk, Spider-Man, Hawkeye, Falcon, Ant-Man – as much as I would love to join you, you’ll have to save the planet without me)?

Up to this point in Paul’s list it seems I can just do this mentally. I can choose in my mind to “*bless … regard … live peaceably … not avenge*” my enemies. But then Paul turns this to more than an intellectual exercise, he turns it into a TO-DO List. If my enemy is hungry I am to take the time, trouble and expense to “*feed him … give him drink*.” I am to “*overcome evil with good*.” I cannot do good without action. I must get involved. I am to personally, and willingly, and cheerfully, be concerned with and occupied in my enemy’s life. Again I ask, How can I do this? Answer: 2 Cor. 5:14-20. Without my commentary I simply ask you to read this from Paul’s heart to yours.

What will this accomplish? “*For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head*.” That phrase has so intrigued me that I intend to spend a full article on it tomorrow. Stay tune. But whatever it means it will accomplish what God wants done to my enemy.

Soldiers of Christ, arise! Then stand down. Let us show the world, even our enemies, that we wear the armband of the Red Rugged Cross, willing to give aid and comfort to all men, regardless of their past. We are Ambassadors for Christ, wanting to share with a broken world full of evil that there is a Prince of Peace who holds out an olive branch to save them from their sins.

Until tomorrow … Stand down. Then rise up and tell your enemy these words …

“I love you.”

Rick