



Past Series #5 – Humble Analysis – Romans 12

- in his book **The Abolition of Man**, **C.S. Lewis** coined several unusual phrases, including the possibility of human beings becoming like “trousered apes,” or “urban blockheads,” or most famously, “men without chests...”
- He was defending the existence of objective value...and the importance of teaching people, especially children in our educational systems, to love what is good and hate what is bad.
- He quoted St. Augustine who defined virtue as **“ordo amoris” – the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind of degree of love which is appropriate to it.**
- He also quoted **Aristotle**, who taught that **“the aim of education is to make the pupil like and dislike what he ought.”**
 - the point was that apart from a belief in an objective standard and existence of right and wrong, and a corresponding love for what was good and hatred for what was evil...scientific progress would result in people becoming less human, not more...(the abolition of man)...
 - that is why he said – **“The right defense against false sentiments is to inculcate just sentiments” (p. 14).**
 - he also wrote against scientism – not because he was against science per se (the exact opposite was the case), but because he was against the belief that science could answer all questions, apart from moral value and ethical truth...
 - that’s what he meant by the terms “trousered apes” or “men without chests”...the concern was for people who had scientific advancements in their hands but no moral compass to guide their use...
 - it is important to know that this book was written in 1943 – the height of WWII, and in several different places, Lewis refers to the practice of **Eugenics – (“Eu”-well, “genes”—born) – “the study of, or belief in, the possibility of improving the qualities of the human species or a human population by such means as discouraging reproduction by persons having genetic defects or presumed to have inheritable undesirable traits (negative eugenics) or encouraging reproduction by persons presumed to have inheritable desirable traits (positive eugenics).” (Random House Dictionary, 2009)**
 - when you put all of that together, why would someone living in England in the middle of WWII be concerned about the practice of eugenics...because that is the theory that Adolf Hitler used to justify the extermination of Jews in Europe and the expansion of Germany to propagate a pure and superior race...
 - interestingly enough, the field of eugenics and even the term itself was first formulated by a man named Sir Francis Galton in 1883, who was drawing off the work of his now famous half-cousin who had published another earth shattering book...
 - would anyone like to take a guess who Galton’s half cousin was?...Charles Darwin...
- If you remove a belief in and a love for objective truth, morality, and beauty, you can justify anything that science or political/military power can achieve...and in so doing, you have become like an animal...whether you happen to be wearing trousers at the time or not...

- one more quote from Lewis and then we'll try to tie this together..."**The final stage is come when Man by eugenics, by pre-natal conditioning, and by an education and propaganda based on a perfect applied psychology, has obtained full control over himself. Human nature will be the last part of Nature to surrender to Man...The battle will indeed be won. But who, precisely, will have won it? (p. 59)**

- I believe that you could make the case that as a culture, we are living under the consequences of the abolition of man...
- for example, a person who takes the life of an unborn child through abortion (or the biological father or other family members encouraging or forcing her to do so)...just because they have the scientific ability of "legal right" to do so...is behaving like a trousered ape...
 - somewhere along the line, a belief in and love for what is right and true was lost...
 - the culture becomes like animals...men without chests...

That is why I appreciate so much friends like Ben Mitchell who has his PhD in Biomedical Ethics.

- now, to the subject at hand...it is important to note that as far back as 1943, C.S. Lewis would bring the topic of psychology into the equation...
- and I'm not here to bash psychology, or to paint the entire discipline with one broad and unreasonable brush...
- but one of the effects of our psychologized culture is a hesitancy or even refusal to hold men and women responsible for their choices...to treat them as if they are not made in the image of God and are therefore unable in certain cases to make decisions on the basis of a belief in and love for value and truth...
- Let me try to illustrate that to bring this down to where the rubber meets the road...
 - here's the point – Jan has worked for several years teaching Autistic children. Psychology says if the child is about to do something bad, you better warn those around hin/her

...well, suppose we're walking down the center court in the mall and one such child is unhappy and tempted to hit someone around him...what are we supposed to do?... The world's answer is you just need to warn the people around not to come close because the child can't control his outbursts...(something akin to announcing the presence of a leper)

- absolving a person from all responsibility to believe in, love, and act upon a standard of truth and righteousness, even in cases where there might be some form of diminished capacity...is not an act of grace...it is an affront to the essential dignity and uniqueness that comes from being made in the image of God...it is yet another consequence of the abolition of man...

- we're talking about **Finding Hope in Growing from Your Past...**

- one of the primary reasons that some people are stuck and having difficulty moving forward in their walk with Christ is because they have believed the notion that because they were mistreated the past...they were preprogrammed for certain emotions and behaviors and they had no responsibility for or control over their response to what has occurred...
- to treat a person like that is to deny or diminish the essential image of God, when after being redeemed by the power of the blood of Christ, can help them face and overcome any response to abuse that was not in line with Scripture...

What about if you have been wronged?

- with that in mind, please open your Bible first to Romans chapter 12...

- one of the primary points we've tried to make is – your past is not one big lump...
 - biblical theology allows us to sort or categorize things that truly differ...
 - so we've posed **2 clarifying questions:**
 - 1) Was this particular event initiated by your own sin, or by the sin of a particular person/or simply the pain of living in a sin cursed world?...**
 - so are we talking about something from your innocent past...a time where you were sinned against, or your guilty past---a time when you sinned and that's what initiated the event?
 - 2) How did you respond to what occurred?**
 - the innocent past where you responded well
 - the innocent past where you responded poorly
 - the guilty past where you responded well
 - the guilty past where you responded poorly

The appropriate response to bucket #1 was authentic suffering...

- and that isn't something that you repeat over and over and over...
- but if you have never processed a particular event through the grid of what Scripture teaches about suffering, you very well may have unfinished business with that aspect of your past...
- now it's time to reach into bucket #2...times where somebody sinned against you (they started it)...but you sinned in return...what should be done in those cases?...
- **Humble Analysis – Reaching into Bucket #2**

- now let's think about **6 questions that need to be answered regarding your response to mistreatment in the past.**
- to find the first one, let's read Romans 12:14-21 – **READ**

I. Did you Return Evil for Evil?

- this is yet another example of how much emphasis the Bible places on your past...
- Paul is talking about situations when someone was evil to you?...when?...in the past...

A. God's Word says that we should never do so.

- **Romans 12:17 - Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.**
- obviously that flies in the face of what many of us were taught, or at least grew up believing..."I don't get mad, I just get...even."
- that is why many of God's people are still stuck in the past...someone sinned against them, perhaps grievously, but then they sinned in return...with the excuse "he started it..."...[therefore I'm justified in whatever I did next...]...
- that belief doesn't seem to hold water with this particular passage, does it?...
- now verse 18 provides some helpful balance...

B. Seeking revenge is wrong.

- **Romans 12:19 - Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.**
- and notice that the passage says...you should never do that...

C. This does not mean that you are ultimately responsible to be at peace with every person who has ever been evil to you in the past.

- **Romans 12:18 - If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.**
- you have to desire peace, and work toward peace...but this verse makes it clear, that may not always be possible because of the choices of the other person...you are only responsible for you...
- and that's both good news and bad news (or at least challenging news)...how so?

- the good news – you are not responsible for what the other person did, or what they do now...
- but the challenging news is...you are responsible for you...
- that's exactly what we were talking about in the introduction...Paul believed that these Roman Christians were "in Christ"...he had spent 11 chapters developing the great doctrine of their salvation in Christ in a more thorough way than any other place in the Bible...
- and then he says...because of who you are in Christ...you can accomplish some very amazing things [including a very godly and unusual response when someone is evil to you]...you're not a dog...
- **Romans 12:1-2 - Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, *which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.***
- you don't talk that way to dogs...we also learn in this text...

D. You cannot simply accept a stalemate. You must attempt to overcome evil by actions of good.

- it's not enough to say – OK, I'll stop being evil in return...God calls us to something far more significant than that...
- **Romans 12:21 - Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**
- you might say – does that mean what I think it means?...yes, "overcome" is a military term...God wants evil to be defeated by actions of good...
 - you can't say "all right, I'll just ditch the person, or ignore the person"...that's not enough...God says that we seek to overcome evil with actions of good...
 - now, obviously what that looks like in a given situation varies, and it's always wise to draw some godly people around you who can help you think of the appropriate biblical response in a specific situation...
- here's the big point – some people are still struggling with some relationship in the past, or series of events in the past, because their response to mistreatment was the polar opposite of what is being taught in this passage...they returned evil for evil...and they have spent so much time focusing on the sin of the other person that they have given no energy or effort into dealing with their side of the equation...
- now, you might wonder this...

E. What if the other person's "initial sin against me" was far greater than my "responsive sin against them?"

- what is the answer to that question?...
- **Matthew 7:3 - Why do you look at the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye?**
- and I realize you might say – but that's the problem – their sin was larger, so that makes their sin the log and mine the speck...
- your part is always the log – why?...because that is the only aspect of the situation that you are responsible for...and in control over...you have to deal with your side first...
- **Matthew 5:23-24 - Therefore if you are presenting your offering at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and present your offering.**

- Proverbs 28:13 - He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, But he who confesses and forsakes *them* will find compassion.

- here's one of the take-aways this morning – is it possible that there are painful situations in your past where you've justified your sinful response and never dealt with it?...
- perhaps it's time to talk to God about that...and even (in some cases), to ask the other person's forgiveness...
- you're not responsible for what was done to you...but you are responsible for what you thought, what you wanted, how you spoke, and you acted next...
- isn't it great that being made in the image of God, and being remade in the image of Christ, makes it possible for us to fulfill such a high and glorious calling?...

II. Did You Develop Bitterness Toward God?

- look over if you would at the book of Ruth, chapter 1...- we're just going to touch on one aspect of this story this morning because I'm giving serious thought to leading us in a study of this book as opposed to the life of David this fall—we'll explain all that later...**read Ruth 1:1-6**

- you could summarize all of that with...

A. Naomi suffered greatly as a result of living in a sin cursed world.

- this clearly fits under the heading of the innocent past...
- Naomi has to decide what to do next...so she says...
- so she tells her 2 daughter-in-laws to return to the homes of their families, and one of her widowed daughter-in-laws does so...
- but the other, a woman named Ruth doesn't...
- so Naomi says...**Ruth 1:15 - Then she said, "Behold, your sister-in-law has gone back to her people and her gods; return after your sister-in-law."**
- that ought to be the first hint that something is wrong here...why would a Jewish woman like Naomi tell her daughter-in-law to go back and worship any old god she wishes, instead of Jehovah, the God of Israel?...
- and it is interesting, by the way, that young Ruth understands that...**Ruth 1:16 - But Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or turn back from following you; for where you go, I will go, and where you lodge, I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God, my God.**
- that was an expression of incredible faith...much more mature and developed than her mother-in-law...and here's what happened as a result...
- **Ruth 1:19-21 - So they both went until they came to Bethlehem. And when they had come to Bethlehem, all the city was stirred because of them, and the women said, "Is this Naomi?" She said to them, "Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. "I went out full, but the LORD has brought me back empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has witnessed against me and the Almighty has afflicted me?"**
- the word mara is the Hebrew word for bitter...

B. Naomi chose the path of bitterness because of the wrong view of God that was either exposed, or developed in response to her trial.

- now, this is where we have to be especially gentle...
- reaching into bucket #2, or encouraging someone else to do so, requires compassion and patience...
- this woman experience a series of incredible trials...
- and there is no evidence that she is responding with overt anger or rebellion...
 - there isn't a one-sized fits all approach to ministry...that's why Paul said...

- **1 Thessalonians 5:14 - We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.**
 - all appearances, Naomi (Mara) was more like a person who was fainthearted, or weak...we need to be very careful there...like Paul's wonderful metaphor in that same book...
- **1 Thessalonians 2:7 - But we proved to be gentle among you, as a nursing mother tenderly cares for her own children.**
 - but with that in mind, we should always be willing to ask...did the way I responded to mistreatment in the past enhance my view of God, or diminish it?...
- **“What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us” (A.W. Tozer, The Knowledge of the Holy, p. 1)**
- **“Soothing syrup may serve for peevish children, but an iron tonic is better suited for adults, and we know of nothing which is more calculated to infuse spiritual vigor into our frames than a Scriptural apprehension of the full character of God” (A.W. Pink, The Sovereignty of God, p. 16).**
- **Hosea 6:6 - For I delight in loyalty rather than sacrifice, and in the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings.**

- this too may be another way in which a person has unfinished business with their past...
- we are not responsible for the evil done to us...but we are responsible to let those trials mature our understanding of God, and draw us closer to Him as we seek to live in a way that is consistent with that new-found understanding...

III. Did You Develop an Unbiblical View of People?

A. The summary of God's commands.

- **Matthew 22:37-40 - And He said to him, “ ‘YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.’ “This is the great and foremost commandment. “The second is like it, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.’ “On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets.”**
- we would all say that “loving your neighbor as yourself” is challenging indeed...especially when you factor in Luke 10, where a religious teacher quoted this passage as an attempt to prove he could earn his own way to heaven...and after the man asked, “who's my neighbor”, Jesus told the story of the Good Samaritan, explaining that your neighbor is whoever God brings across your path who is in need...
- and the point is, apart from a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, it is impossible to love people properly...
- on the other hand, in Christ, we're called upon...

B. Do good to all men.

- **Galatians 6:10 - So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.**
- here's how that fits into this part of the study...
- some people were abused by a person of a particular gender, and they have now drawn all sorts of conclusions about every member of that gender, or that ethnic group...
- that again is another possible aspect of unfinished business in bucket #2...

IV. Did You Develop an Unbiblical View of Yourself?

- What about the terrible possibility of a child growing up in a home where they were fed constant criticisms and insults...

- this also is one of those places where we have to be incredibly gentle...
- but God calls upon us to think reject unbiblical ways of thinking about ourselves...
- in the same passage where we started this morning...
- **Romans 12:3 - For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.**

V. Should You Have Confronted the Abuser, and if So, Have You?

- this is where this subject gets even harder...
- the reason some people have unfinished business in their past is because someone sinned against them, and they have never confronted them...

A. The importance of confrontation.

- **Matthew 18:15 - If your brother sins, go and show him his fault in private; if he listens to you, you have won your brother.**
- now this establishes a principle that is taught in many places in Scripture...problems need to be addressed and solved...
- we have to balance this...Matthew 18 is written in the context of the local church and presumably with something that recently happened...so something that happened

B. If you have any question about the appropriateness of confronting an abuser from long ago, seek godly counsel.

- **Proverbs 11:14 - Where no counsel *is*, the people fall: but in the multitude of counselors *there is safety*.**
- so there may be some situations where after the facts are analyzed, it would be determined that personal confrontation is not necessary or appropriate...
- however, I am convinced that one of the primary reasons some people are stuck in their pasts is because there was a breach between them and another individual, and they never had the courage or the godliness to sit down and try to work things out...

VI. If You Confronted the Abuser and He asked for Forgiveness, Have You Granted It?

Mark 11:25 - Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions.

Ephesians 4:32 - Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.