

# LIVING AT PEACE IN A TROUBLED WORLD

## Introduction

*Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. **Live in harmony with one another.** Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, **live at peace with everyone.** Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good (Text: Romans 12:14-21)*

Romans is Paul's sixth letter. It was written while he was on his third missionary journey, probably from Corinth. It is the most theological of all Paul's books, but from chapter 12 onward, it becomes very practical. In the middle of this twelfth chapter Paul addresses one of the most important needs of humankind.

Perhaps the key verse in this passage of Scripture is the statement: "*If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, **live at peace with everyone***" (12:18). The word "peace" comes from the Greek word *eirene*. It is the word from which we get the name Irene. Hopefully, all of the "Irenes" you know are peace-loving ladies.

God originally created man to live in a very peaceful environment. When you read through the early chapters of the book of Genesis, you read of scenes of peace and quietness and tranquility. There was nothing there to disturb the peace. Even the animal world was at peace with each other. However, when sin entered the human race, that wonderful peace was lost. Many things entered the world that day including confusion, frustration, suspicion, accusations, deception and many other problems that drove peace from humanity. And since the immediate fall of the human race, things have even gotten worse.

- We have ethnic battles.
- We have political struggles.
- We have religious conflicts.
- We have inter-family quarrels.
- We have campus cultic clashes.
- We have inter-personal disputes.
- We have spiritual dissonance.
- We have inter-church crises.
- We have gender disputes.
- We have cultural wars.

All of these things further destroy the peace among human beings and in our society.

In addition, we human beings have conflicts within ourselves. We are not often at peace with ourselves. Conflicts often rage in our hearts. Here Paul's testimony:

*So I find this law at work: When I want to do good, evil is right there with me.<sup>22</sup> For in my inner being I delight in God's law; but I see another law at work in the members of my body, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within my members. What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? (Romans 7:21-24).*

Even though man has lost his peace, he has not lost his desire and capacity for peace.

- There is something in the heart of every person that longs for peace.
- There is something within everyone of us that reaches out and seeks after peace.
- There is something in us that is empty and incomplete when there is no peace.

That is what Paul is talking about in this section. This paragraph includes his practical suggestions about how to recover peace to the human heart.

Paul had earlier addressed the issue of peace in in Romans 5:1: *“Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The blessing of repentance which leads to justification gives us peace with God. Peace with God stops the struggle within the heart. Can you remember when you experienced that?

Paul also addresses the issue of peace later in the book of Romans. In fact the whole chapter of Romans 14 is addressing the question about how fellow believers can have peace among themselves even when they have strong convictions that differ from each other. Paul says in 14:19: *“Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.”* So in the earlier and latter parts of Romans, Paul addresses the topics of:

- Peace with God
- Peace with our fellow believers.

However, there are other areas of conflict and struggle and confusion that are part of our lives. Paul addresses those issues in the section we are examining in this sermon.

In an attempt to understand the statements about peace in this passage, I will divide Paul’s advice about peace into four sections and examine these in the order they first appear. However, because these thoughts are all related, I will jump back and forth in the section a bit try to get a comprehensive understanding of these various themes that lead to peace.

### **Being at Peace with your Enemies**

This paragraph begins, *“Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.”* Who are our enemies? They are the people who object to something about us and would not want us to succeed in life.

- There are political enemies.
- There are sports enemies.
- There are ethic and religious enemies.
- There are sometimes even enemies without our families.

Therefore, one of the reasons for lack of peace in our world comes from enemies

To make this very practical, let us focus on one particular kind of enemies—the enemies from other faiths, the non-Christians among us. There are times when these enemies will do things to keep us from succeeding and even to cause us harm. Here are two observations about these kinds of enemies.

Based upon our belief of the Bible, we believe that some day “*every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord.*” However, that is not likely going to be happen in our lifetime. The truth of the matter is that there are non-Christians among us today. We are not likely going to change them or at least all of them. Therefore, if we are going to learn to get along with our non Christian neighbors the focus must be on ourselves and not on them. We cannot control their actions. We can control our actions. Thus, we must focus on controlling what we can and allowing God to control what we cannot.

In this paragraph, there is a series of short statements related to enemies. These statements are based upon the teachings of Jesus and they help to give us Paul’s interpretation and application of the way we can have peace with our enemies or those who would somehow wish us harm.

### **Bless those who persecute you.**

#### ***“Bless those who persecute you” (12:14).***

The word “bless” is the word *eulogeo* which comes from two Greek words.

- *Eu* means good.
- *Logeo* means to speak.

So this word literally means “to speak good” or “to say good things.” The verb form of the word “bless” which is used several ways in the Bible.

- Jesus blessed food (Matthew 14:19).
- Jesus placed his hands on little children and blessed them (Mark 10:16).
- Elizabeth blessed Mary saying, “*Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!*” (Luke 1:42).

Paul is saying if you want to enjoy peace in your community and with those who would oppose and even want to harm you, say good things about them.

There are two ways you can bless your enemies.

- You can say good things about them.
- You can say good things to them.

Three times in the New Testament, we are told to bless our enemies, including this passage:

- Luke 6:22-28: “*But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **bless** those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*”
- 1 Corinthians 4:12: “*We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we **bless**; when we are persecuted, we endure it.*”

We know about blessing our children and blessing and we are good at that. However, It is contrary to human nature to speak well of those who speak evil or attempt evil against us. We can do this only in the power of the Holy Spirit.

***“bless and do not curse”***

The word “curse” simply means to wish or pray bad things on other people. Paul is very clear here about God’s will for us. We are not to curse our enemies. I am sure that you are aware that there has crept into our church in the last few years the practice of cursing our enemies. This is based upon the prayers of some of the psalms that pray that God will curse our enemies. We called these imprecatory psalms. For example, Psalm 3:7 says, “*Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.*” It is argued that since these kinds of prayers are in the Bible, we should feel free to use them against our enemies.

Here are some observations about that. This type of cursing was for an early part of the history of the world. Paul says, “*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me*” (1 Corinthians 13:11). Just as we as individuals change, the world changes as well. We have moved from an earlier time period when God was working through a nation to a different period in which God is working through the church.

Jesus says that cursing is no longer appropriate for us during this time period. This is what he said: “*But I tell you who hear me: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, **bless** those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you*” (Luke 6:22-28). There were other characteristics of the earlier period that we do not observe.

- We do not go to Jerusalem and offer sacrifices.
- We do not worry about whether our clothing is mixed with wool or linen.
- We do not take multiple wives.
- We do not tolerate slavery.

I do not think many of us want to go back to those old days. Therefore, let us not take part of those practices and not the whole.

Have you been guilty of cursing your enemies? My challenge is that you leave the former things and move up into the modern world and learn to bless your enemies.

**Do not repay anyone evil for evil.**

“*Do not repay anyone evil for evil*” (12:17). There is a law in physics that says for every force there is an opposite and equal force. If you push one direction, something will push back from the other direction. There is something like a natural law of retaliation in nature.

- If someone attacks you, you attack them back.
- If someone kills your brother, you kill his brother.
- If someone burns your house, you burn his house.

In other words, you retaliate at least to the extent that someone attacked you and, to teach that person a lesson, you may retaliate a little stronger.

In our Jos Crisis, several communities were attacked and suffered losses for the first 24 hours. Those communities then started retaliating and they responded with greater force than they received. This is the law of retaliation in the world.

In fact, this law was even enshrined in the Old Testament code of contact. Leviticus 20:19-20 says: *“If anyone injures his neighbor, whatever he has done must be done to him: <sup>20</sup> fracture for fracture, eye for eye, tooth for tooth. As he has injured the other, so he is to be injured.”*

This system of an eye for an eye sounds somehow fair. And, God has not annulled that law. The principle of an “eye for an eye” is still in place. However, God has removed the enforcement of that law from the individual and given it to government instead. And God has given the followers of Jesus a much higher law. It is the law of blessing those who want to harm you. It is the law of non-retaliation.

Another way of saying this is: *“Do not take revenge”* (12:19a).

I recognize that this is a difficult saying. It is a hard principle to live by. However, this is the clear teaching of Jesus. And we must accept the fact that God knows what is best for us. So whether we understand it or not or whether we like it or not, we must respond to circumstances the way Jesus said that we should.

### **Leave room for God’s wrath.**

*“Do not take revenge, , my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord”* (12:19).

The reason we do not take revenge is because the Lord is capable of taking revenge. There are plenty examples of God bringing about justice. For example, God selected David as a young man to be the king. However, Saul tried to kill him several times. David never retaliated a single time and even refused to say anything negative against him. Even when he cut off a corner of his garments when he was sleeping, his conscience bothered him.” Did Saul get by with all of the injustice he did to David? No, he eventually paid for his injustices on the battlefield when he was wounded and died.

God has many means at his disposal to punish people.

- He has even more wicked people who can punish less wicked.
- He controls the earth which can open up and swallow wicked people.
- He has angelic armies who can bring judgment.
- He has conscience that torments people.

Jonathan Edwards wrote a sermon two hundreds years ago entitled, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.” It was such a powerful sermon that people ran to the pillars of the church and held tight because they were fearful of falling into hell.

It is better to leave our enemies into the hands of God. He will make sure that they pay fully for their deeds. They may escape the hands of justice. They may even be honored in their communities for their violence. However, “*will not the judge of the earth do right?*” (Genesis 18:25) If the judge of the earth is going to take care of our enemies, there is no need for us to bother ourselves.

### **Treat enemies well.**

Not only must we say nice things to and about our enemies, we must also treat them well. Note these two statements in 12:20:

- “*If your enemy is hungry, feed him.*”
- “*If he is thirsty, give him something to drink.*”

Once again, this goes against all normal human reactions. If our enemy becomes hungry, we will likely smile. We would tend to say, “That’s what he desires.” If we could see that our enemy was dying from thirst, we would have a silent sense of satisfaction in seeing him suffer. However, God raises this amazing standard and tells us that we must treat our enemies well.

Why should we treat our enemies well? Paul continues the quotation by saying, “*In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.*” What does this mean? This is obviously a figure of speech which is describing the man’s conscience. The burning coals are like the burning conscience in his mind. If he is trying to kill you and you leave him food, this has to make him wonder if he is doing the right thing. If he is saying wicked things about you and you are saying kind and gracious things about him, that is something that gets his attention and forces him to think about who you are and what you believe.

How do we apply all of this in our lives? There are several ways that have been tried.

- We can ignore it. That is what many people do.
- We can try to explain it away. Some people try to say that Jesus did not really mean this because he urged Peter to get a sword. That is a serious misrepresentation of that passage.
- We can justify our actions. We can say, “Well, this is the only language these people understand.” Or, “We know it is wrong but we just have to do this anyway.” My conviction is that we have no other response that to obey and implement the teachings of Jesus and Paul.

Here is an important point: If we do not teach our church members how to respond to their enemies when they are attacked, they will do what comes natural which is contrary to what Jesus taught.

During the Civil Rights of the 1950’s and 1960’s, Martin Luther King, Jr. led the movement. The Supreme Court of the US had already ruled that the apartheid laws that were in certain parts of the US were null and void. However, it took several years for this to be practically worked out in these states. Therefore, Martin Luther King led a campaign of non-violence. He would go into a community and deliberately provoke the local law enforcements agents to respond. For example, he would go into a restaurant that was reserved for whites only. The police would come and arrest him and his followers. They would be taken to jail

but the jail would soon feel up and they would have to be released. The point I want to stress is that before Dr. King would provoke these responses, he would train his people very well. If the police beat you, this is the way you are to roll up. If the police arrest you, this is what you are to say. If they take you to court and you are asked certain questions, these are the responses you are to give. The point is this. Martin Luther King knew that if he allowed the people to follow their normal instincts and retaliate following their normal instincts, this would cause even more trouble. Therefore, he had to teach them in advance and even practice in advance what they should do.

All of you are aware that you live in a potentially volatile community. Therefore, I challenge you to prepare your people in the best way to respond to potential attacks. These responses could include any of those responses found in the Book of Acts including:

- Praying for supernatural intervention
- Running away to a safer place
- Appealing to the court system; taking advantage of the right of citizens
- Taking advantage of the security system

However, the early Christians never used violence.

### **Story of Rev. Sunday Gowmna**

I want to tell a story from the Jos Crisis that illustrates several of the points I have been making. During the Jos Crisis, Immanuel Baptist Church, the closest church to my house was burned. This pastor of the church was a young man named Sunday Gowmna who is one of my former students at UNIJOS. I was very proud of the way Pastor Sunday led his people during and after the crisis. I want to tell you a couple of stories associated with him.

About two and a half years after our crisis, the federal government suspended our governor and installed a sole administrator. Pastor Sunday was invited to make a presentation to this administrator while the state was under this state of emergency. In fact, all of the community leaders in the Angwo Rimi area were invited, both Christians and Muslims. When it was Pastor Sunday's turn to speak, he said something like this. "It is an unfortunate reality that my church was burned twice but that is not what I want to talk about. Your excellence, I want to tell you about the third time that people came to burn my church. On their third attempt, one of my Muslim neighbors came out and said to the would-be arsonists, "You are not going to burn this church. If you want to burn something, there is my house. You can burn my house if you need to burn something but you cannot burn a house of prayer." This immediately got the acting governor's attention and he demanded to know the name of the person who had done such a thing. His name was supplied to the governor. After the meeting, the Muslim community leaders came up to Pastor Sunday and said, "Pastor, thank you very much for what you said to the governor. We are most grateful." Pastor Sunday said, "There are other things that I could have said. I could have told him about the thieves that keep breaking into the church and I could have told him about some of your boys who come into the church compound and defecate. However, I thought that we are all mature people and we can solve these problems ourselves." The Muslim neighbors assured him that that is what they wanted to do. So on the following Sunday afternoon, Pastor Sunday invited them to his church. He reported that several of the Muslim leaders came and entered the church. When they entered the church, they all removed their hats. And they all took refreshments from Pastor Sunday. The pastor showed them where the people had been

breaking into the church and where the youths had been defecating on the church ground. And the Muslim neighbors assured him that this would never happen again.

About six months later, during the church service, a Muslim child threw a stone over the church wall and broke a window of a vehicle. A few minutes later, a little Muslim girl came and knocked on the church gate. She reported to someone inside that she had seen the boy who threw the stone and she was could take the church members to him. They followed and they soon caught the boy. He admitted that he was the one who threw the stones. The case was taken to the police. However, as soon as the service was over, Pastor Sunday was informed. He went to the police station. He learned that there were two boys involved and that their parents were Muslim neighbors to the church. The parents soon came and were very chagrined over what had happened. Pastor Sunday immediately withdrew the case from the police, assuring them that they were mature people and could handle the situation. The church estimated that it would cost about 15000 Naira to replace the wind screen. The Muslim families were poor families. Between the two families, they were able to come up with only 10,000 Naira. The windscreen eventually cost 20,000 to replace. However, the church absorbed the rest of the expense. When the Muslim neighbors discovered that the church had paid the other 10,000 Naira to cover up for the bad behaviour of their own children, they came back to Pastor Sunday with the greatest humility and gratefulness. They told him that they never wanted him to leave that community and that they would do all in their power to make sure that the Immanuel Baptist Church stays in the community and is protected from any further damage.

The Muslim neighbors saw a true picture of Christianity. I do not know whether any of them will become Christians. However, I know that there is certainly a much greater likelihood that they will become Christians after these incidents than before. Pastor Sunday and the Immanuel Baptist Church are well on their way to demonstrating a true picture of Christianity in the Angwo Rimi community.

Here is a fact: We are not going to convert all people from other religions to Christianity. Therefore, we must learn to live with him. How do we live with them? Jesus has given us the pattern. This is not really an issue of interpretation. This is an issue of obedience. Will you obey the New Testament teaching on how to have peace with your enemies? Jesus and his apostles have called us to live at peace with all men?

- Are you doing this?
- Are there some things that you can do to improve the peace in your community?
- Are there some barriers to peace that need to be removed?

### **Being at Peace with your Friends**

All of us have friends. We love our friends. We do not want to loose our friends. How do we go about maintaining those friendships and creating new ones? Note this statement from 12:15: *“Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”* What does that mean? It suggests principles for being at peace with our friends.

### **Rejoice with Those who Rejoice**

One of the greatest blessings of happy occasions is sharing them with others. Would you want to get married with just yourself and your spouse? Would you want to celebrate the

birth of a baby with no one else around? Therefore, on occasions where people celebrate, one thing that will help to solidify those relationships is to take time to go to those celebrations.

I am sure that Jesus was a busy person. However, even Jesus went to a wedding celebration. And by going to that wedding celebration, he forever established the principle that it is proper to celebrate special occasions. I have written a book that is at the press right now titled *Celebrate Life*. It is a book that focuses on this very point. It is good to celebrate.

## **Mourn with Those who Mourn**

It is an unfortunate reality that all of us will eventually suffer some kind of loss. Trouble and loss and misfortune and grief are a common part of our world and all people eventually pass through such times. God has designed us in such a way that we help people when we go and share in their sorrow and in their pain. Note 2 Corinthians 1:3-4:

*Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, <sup>4</sup> who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.”*

I shared this series of statements yesterday but they bear repeating in this context.

- The world is filled with hurting people.
- God expects us to help hurting people.
- God never gives us a job without preparing us for it.
- God prepares us to comfort others by comforting us.
- Unfortunately, you do not need to be comforted unless you hurt.
- Therefore, God in his infinite wisdom allows us to hurt and then he brings us comfort. We now understand what comfort is and are able to share it with others.

My oldest son got sick with spinal meningitis and died. At the funeral one of my friends walked up to me and placed his hand on my shoulder and squeezed my shoulder. That simple squeeze ministered to me and I remember it 32 years later. The reason it ministered to me is because that man had recently lost his father. And I knew that he knew the kind of grief that we were suffering at that time.

God is calling us to be friends to our friends, both when they rejoice and when they grieve. If you are a friend during these crucial times, you will have peace with your friends.

## **Being at Peace with Yourself**

Paul says in Romans 12:16b: *“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.”* I believe that these three statements give us insight into how to be at peace with ourselves.

### ***“Do not be proud.”***

The statement literally states, “thinking the same things. Do not be thinking high.” The two phrases are urging the readers to have a realistic view of themselves. Some people have a very high view of themselves. They believe they can do anything

I have discovered that Nigerians do not suffer from low image problems. Nigerians believe they could do anything. Once I needed to build a little guard shack. I asked one of the local people in the community if he knew anyone who could help me. He said he was a carpenter so I allowed him to do it. The building leaned to one side; it had a flat roof and I had to remind him to put a door in it. He had a high opinion of his ability that was not matched by reality.

Paul is calling us to have a realistic view of ourselves. There is no sin in admitting ignorance. Academics perhaps more than anyone else in society are free to admit their ignorance about various things. There is no reason we need to maintain some artificial high image of yourself.

***“Be willing to associate with people of low position.”***

This is an interesting statement. If we have a high opinion of ourselves we will not want to associate with little people. We are too good for them. However, Paul urges us to “*associate with people of low position.*” I like working with little people.

One of the very happy memories we have as a family is the time we packed up all of the little people who work for us, the drivers, cleaners, cooks, security guards and others and took them and their family to Yankari for a day or so. To see the joy and happiness in them was all the reward we needed on that occasion. I was a professor and some of them could not read and write but we had a common bond of humanity that brought us together and enabled us to enjoy being together.

Are you willing to associate with people of low position?

***“Do not be conceited.”***

This statement literally means “do not be thinking about yourself.” That is a statement about pride. That is also a statement about self-centeredness.

If the focus of our lives is on ourselves we are not going to be at peace with ourselves. God has created us to have an outward focus—to focus on the other person. If we allow that to be perverted, we are going to live with guilt and other problems.

### **Being at Peace with General Public**

This is a focus on doing the right thing. Romans 12:17b says: “*Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody.*” This statement suggests we must be concerned about the image we create in society. It is not good enough just to do the right thing. We must do what is right “*in the eyes of everybody.*” That means we must pay attention to the worldview of the community. That means that we must be sensitive to what others think is right and wrong in our communities.

God knows who we are; we think we know who we are. However, to other people, we are what they think we are. It has often been said that in many ways perception is more important than reality. All of us have helped to create an image and that is the way people think of us.

It is my conviction that we Christians must work harder and be more deliberate in cultivating an image of integrity and respect. Proverbs 22:1 says, “*A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.*” Immediately after Pentecost, Luke tells us that the Christian believers enjoyed “*the favor of all the people*” (Acts 2:47). It should be our goal to be like Titus who was “*praised by all the churches for his service to the gospel*” (2 Corinthians 8:18) and Demetrius who was “*well spoken of by everyone*” (3 John 12).

A positive image in the community or within your circle of influence enhances your ability to accomplish your goals. It also provides a positive example to those who are learning to do what you are doing.

Here is a fact. Many people of the other religion do not understand who Christians really are.

- ***They think we are drunkards*** because it is Christians who oppose the ban on alcohol in the north.
- ***They think we are violent*** because mosques have been burned and imams and ordinary Muslims have been killed at the hands of Christians.
- ***They think that we are immoral*** because it is Christian girls that dress provocatively and immodestly on our university campuses. And is it not the Christian areas of Nigeria that have the highest incidence of HIV, which is often a reflection of the morals in society?
- ***They think we are leading the country down the wrong road*** and are undermining the morals of the society. It is Christians who wanted to have the Miss World contest in which young ladies went around half nude. It is from Christian America that all of these movies come which show immorality and nudity.

We Christians are sophisticated enough to know that these things do not represent real Christianity and that no real follower of Jesus would do these things. However, our non-Christian neighbors don't understand these things as well. They look at us as if we were all Christians.

Therefore, one of the most important things we have to do is to rehabilitate the image of Christianity in our community. We must demonstrate to our non-Christian friends exactly who is a Christian is and what a Christian does.

What should be the correct image of our Christianity? Let me read you an important scripture that will start us thinking. Note this verse from 1 Peter 2:11-12: “*Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*” This passage deals with the perception of Christians from both ***an internal and external point of view***.

- From an internal point, we should view ourselves as aliens in this world.
- From an external view, others should be able to tell about us from our deeds.

We are urged to live good lives so others can see our good deeds and glorify God.

We Christians are grateful for the Protestant reformation which helped us all better understand that we are not justified by weighing our good deeds against our bad deeds. However, the people who are outside of Christianity—those who are viewing us from the outside do measure Christianity by that standard. Non-Christians look at our good deeds and our bad deeds and they make a judgment about the goodness or badness of the religion that we follow.

Whereas our good deeds do not determine our salvation, they may influence the salvation of others because whether or not a person comes to Christ is going to be determined by how attractive Christianity is to him. And the attractiveness of Christianity is directly proportionate to the way the Christian faith is viewed by outsiders.

This passage also deals with Christianity from *a positive and negative point of view*.

- From a negative point of view, we must avoid those things that bring reproach to Christianity—particularly the “*sinful desires which war against your soul.*”
- From a positive point of view, we must do those things that will cause the non-Christians to glorify God. We must “*live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*”

I am convinced that we as Christians need a much greater focus on the positive deeds in our lives so that our non-Christians neighbors will see our good deeds and glorify our father in heaven. That is the way Peter is calling on Christians to live.

- He is calling on us to avoid negative things in life and focus on the positive.
- He is calling on us to be concerned about the perception of our faith outside.

How do we do this?

- Find common ground.
- Go beyond dialogue.
- Show interest in those things that affect the other community.

We have worked very closely with our Muslim friends in creating a faith-based abstinence message to help fight the AIDS battle. This has been very successful especially here in the north. We are doing two things: We are fighting AIDS. We are also rebuilding a positive image of Christianity.

## **Conclusion**

Here is the summary statement for all that we have been talking about. *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*

- There is much evil in the world.
- There is evil in the government.
- There is evil in the educational system.
- There is evil in sports.
- There is evil in our communities.

## *Living at Peace*

However, God has told us how to overcome evil.

- We do not overcome evil by complaining.
- We do not overcome evil by threatening.
- We do not overcome evil by retaliation.
- We overcome evil by good.
- We overcome anger by calmness.
- We overcome violence with kindness.
- We overcome selfishness by selflessness.
- We overcome gossip by kind and gentle words.

I challenge all of you to be people of peace.

Presented to Chapel of Victory, ATBU, Bauchi on 22 June 2008 by Rev. Prof. Danny McCain