

**ROMANS – LIVING BY FAITH**  
**LOVING GOD AND LIVING GODLY – Chapters 12-14**

**LESSON 45 – HOW TO RESPOND TO YOUR ENEMIES – Romans 12:17-21**

Nothing feels more natural to us than to respond or retaliate when we get hurt. It just doesn't feel right to let wounds go unpunished but retaliation only creates more evil. The only way to break the cycle of evil is to overcome evil with good. To show love to our enemies isn't normal. It is the result of the power of the Holy Spirit giving a supernatural love that cannot be explained in natural terms. These verses from chapter 12 address enmity and hatred at a personal level. They teach us why we are not to seek vengeance and retaliation against those who've wronged us.

**Avoid Retaliation**

Paul begins with the most basic guideline, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil." Jesus redefined the Old Testament standard of "an eye for an eye" when He said to turn the other cheek to the one who harms you. This teaching by Jesus presents a standard for personal ethics that is contrary to the world's way of thinking.

Paul's instruction here in verse 17 come right after his challenge in verse 16 to not be proud or conceited. Proud people will always retaliate because they feel their rights have been violated by their attackers and are determined to seek their own vengeance. Proud people are easily wounded because they are focused on themselves and their own reputations. If you have given up yourself to God as a living sacrifice, there is no need to seek out vengeance.

**Always Respect What Is Right**

Paul is saying that we live out our Christian lives not only before God but before other people as well and we have a testimony to uphold before them. While Jesus is the perfect example for us, each Christian is to live their life as an example to others. This is a consistent theme for Paul. He wrote to the Corinthians and said he was, "taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man." While we can't control what others think about us, it is our responsibility to live our lives in such a way that others can "see our good works and glorify our Father who is in heaven."

We must live always being aware of how our actions will be perceived by others. We can't just walk around and live carelessly. In Romans 14, Paul will go into great detail on the subject of how our lives can affect others. If we are being attacked by another person, there is always someone watching to see how we are going to respond. Interestingly, it seems that non-Christians know what Christian standards of behavior are. The world knows that Christians are supposed to live by a higher standard than they do and we must do our best to live godly lives.

**Aim For Reconciliation**

In addition to avoiding retaliation and respecting what is right, we should aim for reconciliation with our enemies... "if it is possible."

**The Limitation of the Problem** – Paul puts limits on our responsibility by saying, "If it is possible." In other words, sometimes peace is simply not possible. Just because you want peace and reconciliation doesn't mean the other person is going to go along. Jesus said we would pay a high price for our faith in Him. You may be in a situation where you are being attacked because

you are a Christian. "If it is possible," you are to live peaceably with those around you. Our responsibility is to do what is possible.

**The Limitation of the Person** – Sometimes the situation presents limitations, and sometimes those limitations are personal. Paul tells us that we are to live peaceably "as far as it depends on us." We might not be able to achieve peace given our skills, knowledge or maturity but keep in mind that God will always hold us accountable for doing whatever we can.

### **Allow For God's Response**

We are told to love the evildoer, knowing that nothing can permanently hurt us because we belong to God. He will always care for His own. One of the things Paul means by, "leave room for God's wrath" is to allow the Lord to deal with a person in His own time and way...and He WILL deal with it. Sometimes we jump in ahead of God but Scripture reminds us that, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord." Don't try and do God's work for Him. We must grow in our faith and learn to trust Him.

### **Activate The Principle Of Replacement**

The Principle of Replacement is one of the most powerful principles in the New Testament. It says that it's not enough just to passively receive your enemy's actions, or even to receive them with a view toward God's intervention and justice. Instead, it says we are to do the opposite of what our enemy is doing to us. If they are acting negatively, we are to act positively. If they are hating, we must love. Feeding your enemy and giving them something to drink while they are actively hating you, goes completely beyond the norm of expected human behavior. We have to remember that these are the very words of God...otherwise, we would never even consider doing them.

God's plan for replacement is to replace your enemy's evil with good. Only by doing this will we keep the total amount of evil in the world from getting bigger and bigger...which is what happens when we repay evil with evil. The phrase "heap burning coals on his head" is a quote from Proverbs 25:22. The point of the illustration is that our love and good works toward our enemy is a painful reminder to them of the evil they've done. If we take vengeance into our own hands, we come the one who suffers. When we love our enemy, we become a reminder to them of what they've done.

### **Accept The Responsibility Of Recovery**

Paul's last challenge is a principle that sums up all he's been saying. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." If we pay back evil with evil, then in that moment, we have been overcome by the author of evil...satan himself. When we act like God and replay evil with good, we overcome satan. The only way we overcome evil is with good. This is the most far-reaching victory to be won in this world...to overcome the power of satan by the power of God. Only a Christian can do this through the power of the Holy Spirit.

The level of sin gets higher and higher when the cycle of retaliation begins. It becomes a game where each person has to say something more hurtful than what was said to them in order to maintain control. The only way for that to stop is for one person to pay back the evil with good. It may or may not be received, but at least it breaks the cycle.

There is always a price to pay for being a living sacrifice. Anyone who absorbs the wrong of another is going to pay a price. Jesus...of course...is the ultimate example of one who overcame evil with good. Another good choice of this principle is David. When David was anointed to become the new king of Israel, Saul made the decision to kill him. Saul was jealous of David and resentful that he had been anointed to be the new king.

Once David and his men were hiding in a cave and Saul entered not knowing they were there. David's men encouraged him to kill Saul but he refused to touch God's anointed king. David did slip out of his hiding place and cut off a piece of Saul's coat and later showed it to him. David wanted Saul to know that he had been close enough to kill him but had not done it. For a while there was reconciliation between the two. In that moment, David's good overcame Saul's evil. As much as it was possible, David tried to make peace with Saul.

Is there someone in your life that's attacked you and hurt you? Have you been retaliating instead of doing good? I encourage and challenge you to break the cycle and overcome their evil with God's good through the power of the Holy Spirit in your life.