

Romans 12:14-21

In this part of his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul shows us a couple of very **important** things. First of all, we need to remember that the way we live our lives as **Christians**, is a **response** to the **mercy** which God has shown to us. And **second**, in order to live as Christians, we need to have our thoughts and actions completely **transformed** by the Word of God. The concept of loving our **enemies** runs completely **opposite** from the way we normally think. That was true for the people in Paul's day too. They lived under the rule of the Roman Empire - an empire which was well known for its **aggression** and **violence**. So, when Paul wrote "*If your enemy is hungry, **feed** him; if he is thirsty, give him a **drink**,*" that seemed to be completely **backward** - and it seems that way to **us** as well. And that's because it **is** backward. The life of a **Christian** needs to be **completely opposite** from the ways of this world. While fighting back with **violence** might slow our enemies down, the only way the enemies of Christianity can be **permanently** changed is through **grace** - **undeserved love**. So, God encourages us to **Overcome Evil With Good**.

As always, Jesus gives us the **perfect** example. Jesus was **always** in character in **every** circumstance - fighting against **sin** and its **consequences**, and against **Satan** and his **followers**. Jesus treated Jews and Gentiles **alike** - **destroying** the powers of evil, and showing to **all** people the glory of God's **grace** and **mercy**. But He didn't destroy them with outward **force** or armies of **angels**. He did it as He willingly sacrificed His life on the **cross**, to **save** all people **regardless** of their **race**, **health**, or **social status**.

So, as His **followers** - brothers and sisters who have been **baptized** into Christ and His family - we will strive to **imitate** the character of Jesus in all of **our** circumstances as well. How can we **do** that? Certainly **not** by physically dying on a **cross**. But rather, we can **imitate Jesus** by showing love and kindness not only to those who are our **friends** and who **like** us - and not just on Sunday mornings. We need to be living as Christians and following the example of Jesus **everywhere** and at **all times** - even if we find ourselves in a **hostile** crowd, among those who **hate** us. In this way, we'll be offering our lives as **living sacrifices** - giving **thanks** to the LORD for His **mercy**.

Our text begins, “*Bless those who persecute you; bless, and do not curse. Rejoice with those who are rejoicing; weep with those who are weeping. Have the same respect for one another. Do not be arrogant, but associate with the humble. Do not think too highly of yourselves. Do not pay anyone back evil for evil. Focus on those things that everyone considers noble.*” It’s pretty **easy** for us to be **friendly** toward people who are **friendly** - to be **nice** to people who are **nice** - to repay **good** with **good**. But, it’s a little bit **different** when we have to deal with someone who is **arrogant**, or **hateful**, or who is downright **evil**, isn’t it? How do we **react** when someone has **gossiped** about us, or when someone has **cheated** us - or when a driver has **cut us off** in traffic? How do we **feel** when someone falsely accuses us - or calls us **cold-hearted** or **homophobic**, or **racist**? The natural **temptation** is to pay them **back** with **evil**. That’s how our sinful flesh operates. When you get **hit**, you need to hit **back**. But that’s **not** the choice **God** would have us make. Instead, He encourages us to do just the **opposite** - to **Overcome Evil With Good**.

We want the people of this world to see and hear **good things** from us, because as **Christians** we’re representing our **Savior**. We are to be **lights** in the **darkness** of this world - lights which allow the love of **Jesus** to shine forth into the world. How we **handle** ourselves when **evil** comes against us really does **matter**. That’s why we need to take to **heart** Paul’s words, “*Do not pay anyone back evil for evil ... If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, maintain peace with everyone.*” Again, look at the actions of **Jesus**. He **always** showed **mercy** and **love**, even for His **enemies**. When He was **arrested**, and Peter took out a sword and cut off the **ear** of the High Priest’s servant, Jesus mercifully **healed** his ear. And even while He was hanging on the **cross**, Jesus **prayed** for **forgiveness** for those who were **crucifying** Him. In the face of the most **severe** hostility, Jesus did what was **right**. He **fulfilled** the heavenly Father’s **plan**, and gave up His **life** to **rescue** all people - even His **enemies**.

By nature, you and I were **included** among God’s **enemies** - unable to do what is **right**, and only doing what is **evil** in His sight. The end result of our **sinfulness** would have been eternal **damnation** in **hell**. But, Jesus wouldn’t let that happen. God did **not** send His Son to **even the score** or to **pay us back** with **punishment**, but rather God sent His Son to be the **payment** which would **restore** us to God as His **forgiven** and **reconciled** children. A little bit earlier in this letter Paul had told the Romans, “*God*

*shows his own **love** for us in **this**: While we were still **sinners**, Christ **died** for us.”*

The result is that because Jesus has shown **grace** to **us**, we can respond to evil with **grace** as well. We respond not by demanding our **rights**, but by doing what **is** right. Our **goal** is to live in **peace** with everyone. Of course, it takes **two** to have peace; and even though **we** are striving to live in peace, the **other** side doesn't always **want** that to happen. In fact, they may even make things **worse** by continuing to **irritate** us, and **adding** to the conflict. Even our **Lord** had enemies who kept piling on the **hostility** all the way to His **death**. But Jesus stayed in character, and reached out to them in **love**. When He was **struck**, He didn't strike **back**.

So, as we strive to follow the example of our **Savior**, we'll make every effort to live in **peace** with **all** people. We'll try to sit down and peacefully **discuss** disagreements which arise - we'll even be willing to give up our **rights** for the sake of **peace**, as we let God's mercy **shine** in our lives. In His sermon on the mount Jesus said, *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.’ But **I** tell you, do not **resist** an evildoer. If someone strikes you on your **right** cheek, turn to him the **other** also. If anyone wants to sue you to take away your **shirt**, give him your **coat** too. Whoever compels you to go **one** mile, go with him **two**.”*

Our text continues: *“Do not take **revenge**, dear friends, but leave room for **God's** wrath. For it is written, ‘Vengeance is **mine**; **I** will repay,’ says the Lord.”* Getting **even** is the way of our sinful **flesh**; and it's the **cause** of all kinds of problems. But revenge **isn't** the way God wants us to **deal** with our problems. Two **wrongs** don't make a **right**. When **thieves** break in and **steal**, or when **injustice** runs rampant, it's not up to us as **individuals** to take matters into our own hands, in order to try to solve the problem. That's one of the reasons God has established the **government**. As **Christians**, we need to reflect the **love** and **grace** of our Lord. We have a God who loves us **dearly**. He watches **over** us, and **protects** us from all the **harm** which others would like to **cause** us. He holds all men **accountable** to **Him** for their hostility toward us. And, He has reserved a day of **wrath** when He will justly deal with those who have **not** repented of their sins. **Vengeance** belongs to the LORD, so leave **room** for Him to **take** His vengeance. Even **Jesus** didn't take matters into His own hands when He was wronged, but instead the Bible tells us, *“When he was **insulted**, he*

*did **not** insult in **return**. When he **suffered**, he made no **threats**. Instead, he entrusted himself to **him** who judges **justly**.”*

And finally, Jesus tells us, *“If your enemy is hungry, **feed** him; if he is thirsty, give him a **drink**. For by doing this, you will heap **burning coals** on his head.”* When we pour out **kindness** on our enemies - when we **befriend** them, and **help** them when they are in need - when we offer them **food** and **drink**, or **shelter** and **care** - our **kindness** serves **two** purposes. **First** of all, it reflects the **love** which Jesus has for **us**. And **second**, it causes our enemies to realize that there’s really **no reason** for them to be **angry** with us. As that realization **burns** into their hearts and minds, they may be moved to learn more about the **Savior** whom we represent.

Jesus has achieved a great victory for **all** people by removing the curse of **sin**. But it wasn’t with a **cost**. Jesus overcame evil by taking **our** sin on **Himself** - giving up His own **perfect life** to **pay** for the world’s sin. Three days later, He **rose** from the dead to claim His **victory** - a victory which He has given to **all** those who **believe** in Him. Jesus has overcome all the evil which **torments** us, and He has brought us from **death** to **life**. He has overcome our **sinful flesh** with all its evil desires, and has created a new heart in us - a heart filled with **holy** desires. That’s why we can honor God’s request, *“Do not be **overcome** by evil, but **Overcome Evil With Good**.”* That’s our **goal** - to overcome **evil** with **good**, and to let the **mercy** and **kindness** of our **Savior** shine through our life to **all people** - even to our enemies - so they may be won over to Jesus, and share in the saving **victory** of our Lord. The glory of Jesus **shines** - in His merciful **healing** of the people of His day - in His **sacrifice** for sinners on the **cross** - and even through **us**, His redeemed people, as we strive in the face of **evil**, to live in love, peace, and kindness, displaying the victory of **salvation** which Jesus has **won** for us. Amen.