

Eternity Daily Bible Study

Romans 9-16 The Implications of Salvation

PLEASE PRAY FOR THE MINISTRY OF THE AIBI

Number: 608

Verses: Romans 12:14-21

Topic: The Christian Response To Evil

Date: 17th January 2007

Romans 12:14-21 HCSB *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. (15) Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. (16) Be in agreement with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation. (17) Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Try to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes. (18) If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone. (19) Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for His wrath. For it is written: **Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay**, says the Lord. (20) **But If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.** (21) Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.*

In our incredibly militarized world of instant threats and massive retaliation the command "do not repay anyone evil for evil" seems quaint, out-of-touch and very unrealistic. Perhaps these commands were only meant for the Christian community, or for personal matters – not national self-defense. But if someone is about to kill your family what will you do? The Bible does not repudiate legitimate self-defense or even capital punishment, but it does create a spirit of grace that minimizes their use:

Luke 22:35-38 HCSB *He also said to them, "When I sent you out without money-bag, traveling bag, or sandals, did you lack anything?" "Not a thing," they said. (36) Then He said to them, "But now, whoever has a money-bag should take it, and also a traveling bag. And whoever doesn't have a sword should sell his robe and buy one. (37) For I tell you, what is written must be fulfilled in Me: **And He was counted among the outlaws.** Yes, what is written about Me is coming to its fulfillment." (38) "Lord," they said, "look, here are two swords." "Enough of that!" He told them.*

Jesus a) clearly tells the disciples to defend themselves from danger as a real priority and even allows them to use lethal weapons (swords) but b) is clearly unenthusiastic about any use of violence and wants all talk of it to be minimized. Similarly in Romans 13 Paul allows the state to exercise capital punishment but is not an enthusiastic advocate of it.

The main meaning of Romans 12:14-21 is personal conflict and personal evil. I see it applying generally to squabbles, arguments, envy, loss of prestige, neighborhood disputes, parking disputes, financial matters, broken courtships and the persecutions, betrayals and disappointments of life. When we deal with a big corporation and feel shoddily treated -how do we react? When someone puts us down publicly – what do we think of doing in return? If someone despises us for being a believer – how do we respond?

The first principle is that of "reacting in the opposite spirit" this sees evil and spiritual,

and trying to reproduce itself in people. So if someone is mean to you, and you become bitter and mean back then evil has conquered another human heart and multiplied itself. A second "mean spirit" has been generated. That is why Paul says: *Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.*

By blessing instead of cursing we are reacting in the opposite spirit and not allowing evil to dominate us, live within us, and reproduce its evil ways in the world. Rather we are attempting to "overcome evil with good". In the process we also become less reactive and more masterful and strong.

Acting in the opposite spirit also has an impact in the spiritual realm: *But if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.* The "fiery coals" may be the feeling of shame that comes to the perpetrator, or the judgment that comes from God. Either way, the one who acts in the opposite spirit comes out the winner spiritually.

The next principle is the "the emotional unity of the saints". We can best withstand persecution and evil if we are one united body, held together with strong bonds of love. Just as one twig is easily broken but a bundle of sticks is hard to break, so Christian unity gives us the power to resist evil. This unity was to be built through deep emotional congruence – a truly empathetic and understanding Christian community: *Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.* Christians were to enter into each others emotional worlds, in trust and empathy, rejoicing with those who rejoiced and weeping with those who wept. This sense of being heard, understood and loved kept everyone together.

The third reaction to persecution was to avoid the natural tendency to division that comes when people of different classes and abilities mix together - disagreement, pride, social snobbishness, and intellectual elitism. Such common causes of division were not to be present among God's people. Instead the rich were to hang out with the poor and all were to realize that God alone is the source of all wisdom. *Be in agreement with one another. Do not be proud; instead, associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own estimation.*

Fourthly Christians were to be noble, honorable, large-hearted and above petty disputes: *Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Try to do what is honorable in everyone's eyes.* The honorable person is not a mud-slinger. The recent rancorous dispute involving two media personalities with large egos is not a Christian way to behave! It has diminished everyone involved in it. She said X, so I'll say Y... is immaturity in action. The noble, mature Christian shows restraint and does not retaliate when provoked. We all have a "hot button" that can flip, and a tendency to want to return evil for evil as a matter of "justice". Spirit-filled Christians try to keep that "hot button" under control and to keep the feeling of power through anger to a minimum.

Fifthly Christians are to be pre-disposed towards peace rather than conflict. (18) *If possible, on your part, live at peace with everyone.* Sometimes peace is not possible because the other person is either irreconcilable, hostile and implacable, or in some cases is even dangerous to deal with (e.g. a violent abuser). But where peace is possible, we should seek it.

Let me quickly add that seeking peace does not mean that you give up a valid right to protect yourself from harm, nor does it mean that you should stay in a violent and abusive situation. The most peaceful thing to do may be to move to a safe location while the problem is being resolved.

Finally the Spirit-filled Christian is to show restraint so that God will have room to act: (19) *Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for His wrath. For it is written: **Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay**, says the Lord. (20) But **If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For in so doing you will be heaping fiery coals on his head.** (21) *Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil with good.**

God will repay, in this way or that, and when the time is most fitting. Dictators eventually fall, the proud get humbled, the liar gets found out, and so on. It is not up to us to decide to take revenge. Christianity has stumbled most and done its worst when a group of Christians has decided to take revenge against another group of Christians. These public internal wars between preachers denominations, theologies and so forth have done more to hurt the faith than almost anything else. Go to prayer before you go to war with a brother! Calm down, back off, and let God be the judge! Protect your heart from violent anger, hatred, bitterness and revenge. Do not be conquered by evil, keep a pure and good heart – and overcome evil with good!

There are some times when evil cannot be ignored – for instance we cannot let a child molester work his way through a church youth group! There is indeed a time for strict church discipline and even a time to call the police. Some evils have to be restrained through appropriate legal means. However we should not rush into such things with an angry and violent spirit. We should do so calmly and wisely, seeing them as the best available option at the time.

Blessings,

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