

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS

Message #45

Romans 12:17-21

There is perhaps no more difficult place to test our spirituality than when we are looking into the face of an enemy. When someone has done real evil against us, that is when we will really see where we are at in our walk with God.

The Roman believers to whom Paul was writing were living in a self-centered, self-seeking, hostile, and hateful world. For their faith in Christ they faced ridicule, persecution, and even death. Paul knew one of the best ways to demonstrate the Christian faith is to look enemies in the eyes and refuse to take revenge.

WE DEMONSTRATE THE REAL RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD WHEN WE REFUSE TO TAKE EVIL REVENGE AGAINST OUR ENEMIES AND DO GOOD THINGS FOR OUR ENEMIES.

One of the great testimonies for God is when we, as God's people, do good things for bad people. The implication of Romans 12:1-2 is if you meet this, evil will be done against you.

RIGHTEOUS REVENGE POINT #1 – Refuse to take revenge. **12:17a**

This is a major contrast to the Old Testament law, because according to the law, that was precisely what one was supposed to do (Exodus 21:23-27). **God expects us to continually demonstrate a Christianity which is totally contrary to the Old Testament law.** Having God's Spirit in us demands a greater level of godliness from us.

This principle is not only demanded by Paul, but also by Jesus (Matt. 5:38-41) and by Peter (I Peter 3:9). Refusing to take revenge is a denial of natural instincts and a demonstration of supernatural power.

RIGHTEOUS REVENGE POINT #2 – Always demonstrate right respect. **12:17b**

The word "respect" is one that means to think beforehand, and the word "right" is one that refers to that which is good. I understand Paul to be saying that we have the responsibility to think what is good and right in the sight of all men. It is our responsibility to respectfully and carefully think through the right thing in the sight of "all men."

The mark of righteousness is not emotional retaliation; it is volitional contemplation, doing what is respectful and right in the sight of all men.

RIGHTEOUS REVENGE POINT #3 – Strive for harmony. **12:18**

Notice carefully Paul's statement, "so far as it depends on you." What this means is that we must do our best to promote peaceful harmony. If hostility or fighting comes, let it begin with the other side, not us. From our perspective, we desire to stay out of fights, not get in them.

There will never be total harmony between a believer and an unbeliever. This is a theological impossibility. In fact, Jesus said, “Think not that I am come to send peace on earth; I came not to send peace but a sword” (Matt. 10:34).

RIGHTEOUS REVENGE POINT #4 – Leave the revenge to God. **12:19**

It is not wrong to want revenge; it is wrong to take revenge. God has promised that He will pay back and take revenge on those who have wronged us. God asks us to believe in Him and not in retaliatory revenge.

Moses said concerning God, “To Me belongeth vengeance and recompense; their foot shall slide in due time” (Deut. 32:35).

Donald Grey Barnhouse was so convinced of this reality that he said we are even to sit back and watch man’s wrath work against us. God will take note and pay that one back.

The “I” is very emphatic in Greek, meaning God, Himself, will repay the wrong done to us.

RIGHTEOUS REVENGE POINT #5 – Minister to your enemies. **12:20**

However, the principle is, when one of our enemies has a need and we become aware of that need or are asked for help with that need, then the spiritual person will do what he can to help meet it, even if that one has wronged him. Most of the time an enemy is not about to ask for help. However, if we discover that they need help, we must respond to the need.

What does it mean to heap coals on someone’s head?

- 1) It may mean that by our phenomenal demonstration of Christ-likeness toward an enemy, it will eventually be used by God to intensify the judgment against the enemy.
- 2) It may mean that by ministering to our enemies, we can diffuse the hostility.
- 3) It may mean that by ministering to our enemies, we will actually be used by God to bring that person under conviction and ultimately to repentance.

RIGHTEOUS REVENGE POINT #6 – Overcome evil by doing good. **12:21**

The present imperative is a continual command. The word “overcome” is a Greek word which means conquered. The command is this - we are not to be conquered by our enemies by trying to get revenge; rather we are to continually overcome this evil vengeful spirit with good.

When we are attacked by enemies and refuse to take revenge, we are the one winning the real warfare, the eternal warfare.