

**Romans 12:17-21 Answers**  
**Marks of a True Christian, Part C**

**Context:** The last section of Romans is generally about Service (Ro 12-16). In Romans 12-13, Paul detailed our service in relation to God (12:1-2), other believers (12:3-16), our enemies (12:17-21) and the government (13:1-14). Romans 1-11 is the “what”. Romans 12-16 is the “so what”. If you really believe Romans 1 – 11, then *this* (Ro 12-16) will be true in your life. Romans 1-11 is the foundation and Romans 12-16 the superstructure.

**Key Text:** The driving text for this whole section is **Romans 12:1-2**. We are studying what it looks like to present our bodies as living sacrifices that are transformed through renewed minds. Romans 12:9-21 list the marks of a true Christian.

**Introduction:** The marks of a true Christian focused on in today’s passage concerns how we relate to our enemies. Do you have any enemies? Is there someone who has done you wrong? Who is out to hurt you? Who slanders and misrepresents you? Anyhow who just does not like you? Is there a boss or co-worker who is against you? A professor who has persecuted you for your faith? An employee who stole from you? An ex-spouse who seems to be Satan’s scion?

Today we will study how we should respond to such people. That which is required of us is easy to say and hard to do. It is a tall order. We must have a pre-programmed response to our enemies.

The Southern part of the US has a culture of honor. It is unique in the US for its sense of honor and the need to respond to insult or defend one’s honor. Well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was nearly impossible to convict a killer of murder if the victim had first insulted the killer (University of Michigan study, “Insult Aggression And The Southern Culture”).

-----  
**\*\*\*\*In general, based on this paragraph, how should we respond when we are mistreated (12:14-21)?** Key words describing our response to evil include bless (12:14), curse not (12:14), live in harmony (12:16), do what is honorable (12:18), live peaceably (12:18), never avenge yourselves (12:19), overcome evil with good (12:20).

We’ve already studied 12:14-16, so today we’ll start in with 12:17.

**No Evil for Evil, v17a**

**\*\*\*\*1. How should we respond to evil (12:17)?** We are not to get even. When you get “even” that is exactly what you do. Paul started this paragraph with a similar thought:

**ESV Romans 12:14** Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Other Scriptures say the same thing:

ESV **1 Thessalonians 5:15** See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

ESV **1 Peter 3:9** Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling . . .

**True Faith:** Responding the right way requires true faith, believing that God is working in the situation to carry out His will not only in our lives but also in the lives of those who hurt us (Wiersbe, p. 143).

ESV **Romans 8:28** And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

ESV **Genesis 50:20** . . . you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

### What second mark of a Christian listed in 12:17?

**Word Study:** “Give thought” (12:17) is from *pronoō* (4306); *pro* means before and *noō* means to think. Thus it means to take thought in advance. You can’t just do what comes naturally.

**Application:** Our response to evil must be premeditated. We are to plan ahead for it so when it happens it won’t take us by surprise.

**2. How are we to interpret the words “in the sight of all” (12:17)? Does this mean we are to let all men determine what is honorable? Or does it mean we are to do what we already know is honorable, but in such a way that all men see it?** In light of the following texts, my take on it is that we should give thought on doing what is honorable so that other men will see our response and God can use it in their lives (Cranfield, p. 646).

ESV **Matthew 5:16** . . . let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven. [Yes, we are to give in secret, but other things are to be public].

ESV **Proverbs 3:1-4** My son, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments . . . So you will find favor and good success in the sight of God and man.

ESV **1 Peter 2:12** Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evil doers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

ESV **1 Peter 2:15** . . . this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

ESV **1 Peter 3:15-16** . . . make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

The government has a department of public works. We as Christians are to have our own department of public works!

**3. How might the two ideas in 12:17 connected?** We are first told not to repay evil; the second command tells us to be careful to do what is honorable our response to evil because others are watching us. Our actions will speak as loudly as our words.

ESV **Matthew 5:39-41** . . . Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

### **Live Peaceably, v18**

\*\*\*\***So are as it depends on you, what should you do (12:18)?** We should live in peace with all men.

**Application:** In our everyday relationships (work, school, neighborhood) we should be peacemakers, not troublemakers.

ESV **Matthew 5:9** Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

**4. Why did Paul add “so far as it depends on you” (12:18)?** The goal is not peace at any price. We cannot yield on principle simply to have peace. It is unavoidable that some people will hate us because of Christ. Thus Jesus said:

NAS **Matthew 10:36** . . . a man's enemies will be the members of his household. [Because of Jesus]

Further, despite our best efforts, there are some people with whom we will not be at peace. You cannot control what the other fellow does. You can only control yourself. Let it go; do not burn up on the inside.

### **No Revenge, v19-20**

\*\*\*\***What should we absolutely never do, no matter what (12:19-20)?** We should “never” take personal revenge on someone who has done us wrong. This idea of not taking revenge is not new to the new covenant as illustrated in the fact that Paul here quotes from Deuteronomy 32:35. Also, Proverbs counsels:

ESV **Proverbs 20:22** Do not say, "I will repay evil"; wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.

**5. What alternative to revenge are we given in 12:19?** We are to leave revenge to God's wrath. He will do a much better job of sorting things out that we ever could. This is a case where we are not to do God's work for Him. We simply must not play God.

**John Calvin:** Rather than take revenge, Calvin wrote that we should “wait patiently for the proper time of our deliverance, praying in the meantime that those who now trouble us may repent and become our friends” (Cranfield, p. 648).

**6. Verse 20 begins with, “To the contrary”. Contrary to taking revenge, how should we treat our enemies (12:20)?** In short, we are to pay back good for evil. We should help our enemies if they need it.

**Insight:** To pay back evil for good is satanic. To pay back evil for evil is human. To pay back good for evil is divine.

**ESV Matthew 5:44-45** Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.

**Example:** A Chinese house church leader was regularly persecuted, threatened and harassed by the local communist authorities. Later, during an economic crunch, that same local government ran critically low on funding. The Chinese church leader took up an offering from a network of house churches and gave the money to the communists to help ease their financial problems

**Example:** A Sri Lankan church planter took the Gospel to a new village where it was received with joy by some. Others however reacted negatively. One man, especially hostile to the Gospel, led a group of men who attacked and beat the evangelist. Such mob action is illegal in Sri Lanka, so the police got involved and asked the evangelist if he wanted to press charges. He told the man he would not press charges if he agreed to not persecute the church anymore, to which he agreed. The enemy was thankful that charges were not pressed and apologized. The evangelist later even helped the man find employment. He did not become a Christian but he did become a friend.

**Perspective:** Bitterness is like drinking poison and waiting for the other person to die

**7. What does it mean to heap burning coals on an enemy’s head (12:20)?** (Paul’s quote is from Proverbs 25:21-22). Some take this as a literal example of kindness. The thought is that in the days before matches, if your fire went out you might go to a neighbor’s house, get some burning coals, and take them home in a jar carried on your head (Wuest). However, most take it figuratively, meaning your enemy will feel shame, remorse, contrition or conviction as a result of your kindness in response to his evil.

**Augustine:** “. . . God converts those whom He does convert by showing them goodness. It is only in this way that we can convert a person, namely, by showing him kindness and love . . . if anyone is converted by love, then the whole person burns against himself . . . for he detests himself with the greatest vehemence . . . Therefore, benefactions, shown to an enemy are ‘coals of fire’” (Luther, p. 178).

### Overcome Evil With Good, v21

**\*\*\*\*How did Paul sum up his teaching on revenge (12:21)?**

**Steve Green Children's Song:** "Overcome Evil With Good". (D Bm Em A D, G D G Em A D)

**8. In context, what does it look like to be overcome by evil (12:21)?** To be overcome by evil is to curse our persecutors and seek revenge on them. When we retaliate we have been overcome by evil.

**9. What does it look like to overcome evil with good (12:21)?** It is to respond to those who persecute us by blessing them. It is to do good to those who did evil to us.

**Word Study:** "Overcome" (12:21) is from *nikao* and means victory. Nike was the Greek goddess of victory. We see this Greek word in the name of Nike shoes (they'll help will you win the race!). It is also seen in early Cold War era Nike anti-aircraft missiles

We are not to be victims; we are to be victors.

### Reality Check:

ESV **Acts 14:22** . . . through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.

ESV **2 Timothy 3:12** . . . all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted . . .

ESV **John 16:33** In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

### So What?

**Why are we instructed not to avenge ourselves?**

**How are we to overcome evil?**

**10. What three reasons did Paul give in 12:19-21 for not taking our own revenge?**

- 1) Vengeance is God's job, not ours.
- 2) To treat an enemy with kindness may move his heart.
- 3) To stoop to vengeance is to be overcome by evil.

ESV **John 14:15** If you love me, you will keep my commandments.

**11. How does 12:19-21 square with reporting a crime?** Reporting a crime is not a violation of this verse. What we are not to do is take personal revenge. We are not to be vigilantes. However, as we shall see in Romans 13, one way God punishes evil-doers with through the government, God's minister for our good.

ESV **Romans 13:4** [the government] is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.

## **12. How do Romans 12:19-21 and Exodus 21:24 (“eye for eye, tooth for tooth”) go together?**

In Exodus, God laid down principles of justice for the nation of Israel. It was public law. Nations today would do well to adopt the same standards. However, Paul was laying down principles of conduct for individual believers. Exodus 21:24 has nothing to do with personal revenge, but rather with just penalties for crime or injury.

In Romans 12:1-2 we are to present our bodies as a living sacrifice, which is our spiritual service of worship. Romans 12:9-21 explains what it means to be a living sacrifice whose mind is renewed and transformed.

### **How is self-defense different than revenge?**

\*\*\*\* = ask this question before reading the text aloud. Doing so will cause focus.

- These lessons are designed for a 45 minute session and are based on the text of the ESV.
- You can hear this lesson being taught at [www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF](http://www.SermonAudio.Com/NTRF).

Stephen E. Atkerson  
[www.NTRF.org](http://www.NTRF.org) 02/01/15