

ROMANS 12:17-21 THE CHRISTIAN AND HIS ENEMIES

Down through the history of the church there has not always been peace. There have been battles that have divided Christians. From the very days of the early church there were much needed discussion and debates over major issues such as the deity of Christ, the two natures of Christ, and the Trinity. Augustine debated Pelagius over the nature of man. In 1054, the Eastern Orthodox Church divided from the Catholic Church over one term. That word was filioque, which meant, and the Son. It had to do whether it was right to say that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, or whether it was "from the Father." During the Reformation, the Reformers divided over communion about the presence of Jesus.

James Montgomery Boice noted that in a small town there were churches on three of four corners. One was United Presbyterian, another was Reformed Presbyterian, and the third one was for Presbyterians who were neither united nor reformed.

The church has had many divisions and many times has not been at peace. If it is hard for the church to be at peace, it must be extremely hard for Christians and enemies of Christians to be at peace. This is our issue in the text we deal with here.

1. DO WHAT IS RIGHT (V 17)

A. THE NEGATIVE VERSION OF THE GOLDEN RULE

Repay no one evil for evil.

1. What about the OT law ? Ex 21:24, Lev 24:20

This actually deals with the civil law in how the governing authorities were to deal with people who caused harm to others. It is not about personal vendettas against others.

2. New Testament Matthew 5:38-42, 1Thess 5:15, 1 Pet 3:18-19

These are passages that have to do with personal insults or offences that happen to Christians. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount takes what the people thought about how they are to treat personal offenses and takes it a step higher. He demands that we love our enemies.

B. ALWAYS RESPECT WHAT IS RIGHT

1. (Kalos)—intrinsically good, proper, honest, right

2 Cor 8:20-21, Philippians 4:8

Christians are to lead the way in what is good. We are to pursue the very best in all areas. We are to live on such a high plane that even unbelievers will recognize the fact.

2. Absolutes Vs. Relativism

If there is to be good there must be absolutes. There must be strong Moral absolutes for a society to hold together.

The problem today is that many believe there are no absolutes.

We need absolute values to have ethics.

3. Knowing what is right

We need to know what the right thing is so we might do it.

In a culture that is relative it is impossible to know what the right thing is.

4. Having the will to do what is right

It is still one thing to know what is right and then having the will to do it.

In our own human hearts we cannot do that, as in Rom 7:15 but 7:25 gives us the answer, and that is Jesus Christ, our Lord.

2. LIVE AT PEACE WITH EVERYONE (VV 18-20)

A. REALISM-----2 DIFFICULTIES WITH THIS

We would like to have peace always but with some people, it may not be possible.

1. The behavior of other people may negate peace
2. Truth cannot be compromised. We cannot trade away truth.

James 3:17

A commitment to purity, truth, honesty, makes peace possible.

3. WAYS TO CONTRIBUTE TO PEACE

1. Love covers all wrongs---Prov 10:12
2. Overlook insults-----Prov 12:16
3. Goodwill----Prov 14:9
4. Gentle answer---Prov 15:1
5. Cover offenses---Prov 17:9
6. Drop a quarrel---Prov 17:14
7. Don't be angry---Prov 29:22

B. FORBEARANCE WHEN YOU WOULD LIKE TO AVENGE

Do not avenge yourselves. That means never. Fighting back is not characteristic of Christians.

1. But what about my rights ?

Surely I have to stand up for my rights? Do you? Stand up for someone else's rights. Don't fight for yourself.

2. Give place to wrath

Often we want to take the place of God. We want to take it in our own hands. But we are to know that God is the judge and we are to leave the execution of vengeance to Him.

This is very difficult, especially when they are attacking us. This is quite a test of faith. We are not to think the way the world thinks.

We are to trust God and see beyond the present time.

A. T. Robertson: God's anger (thumos) is his vehement fury or boiling rage. His wrath (orge) is his settled indignation or his settled anger. In other words, in God's anger the emphasis falls on the emotional, boiling intensity of it. And in God's wrath the emphasis falls on the controlled, settled, considered direction and focus of its application. But we dare not draw a hard line between them. God's anger is never out of the control of his wisdom and righteousness, and his wrath is never cool or indifferent, but is always a wisely directed fury. The wrath

Do you see both mercy and justice here? You who are mistreated do not take justice into your hands. Do

not seek vengeance. Does that mean there will be no justice? Does it mean there is no vengeance? No. Verse 19 says, "Leave it to the wrath of God."

Don't miss how profound this is—that vengeance belongs to God. It means that woven into the fabric of reality—the fabric of the universe and this world—is God's absolute commitment that justice be done. That every dishonor done to his glory by our sin will be punished in order that the infinite worth of God's glory might be upheld and displayed as the ultimate good and the ultimate value—the ultimate worth and excellence and treasure—in the universe.---- John Piper

Deut 32:35, Hebrews 10:30

2 Sam 22:48, Col 3:6

Proverbs 24:17-18 warns against that. It says, "Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the Lord see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him."

C. PUTTING GOODNESS INTO ACTION

We are to good and not only do good but do it to our enemies.

Prov 25:21-22

Heap burning coals?

burning coals on their head," there are two realities in this context, not just one. One is mercy and blessing if they repent. And the other is justice and wrath if they don't. I am saying that "you will heap burning coals on his head" refers more naturally to the justice reality, not the mercy reality. John Piper This is the way God's love works for his enemies, and it is the way our love works for our enemies. Our desire is that they would repent and come to a knowledge of the truth. But if they don't, the very love that we are showing increases the weight of wrath on their head. The more of God's mercy that people reject, the more wrath they heap up upon themselves.

And so it is with you and the enemies you love: the more mercy they reject, the more coals of fire will be heaped on their head. This not our desire or our aim. Our aim is in verse 14: Bless and do not curse. Pray for your enemies.

1 Pet 2:23-25

D. HOW DO WE DO IT ?

Peace with God and the Peace of God

3. OVERCOME EVIL (V 21)

Paul keeps repeating this theme as he established a progression. It is such a high standard. Starting in v 14, he used the word, speak. In v 17 it is actions that are presented.

A. OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD

1 Sam 24:8-13,16-21, 1 Sam 26:18-21

If you let a person's sin govern your emotions so that your sinful anger or your misery or your depression is owing to their evil, then you are being overcome by evil. John Piper

Graham Staines

God has given us some amazing portraits of Romans 12 historically and in our own day. For example, most of you remember that in January, 1999 Graham Staines and his two sons, Phillip (10) and Timothy (6) were mobbed by radical Hindus, trapped inside their vehicle in Monoharpur, Orissa, India, and burned alive. The three charred bodies were recovered clinging to each other. Graham Staines had spent 34 years serving the people of India in the name of Jesus. He was the director of the LeProsy Mission in Baripada, Orissa.

He left behind his widow Gladys and daughter Esther. And you may remember that her response was in every paper in India to the glory of Christ. She said, a few days after the martyrdom of her husband and sons, "I have only one message for the people of India. I'm not bitter. Neither am I angry. But I have one great desire: that each citizen of this country should establish a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who gave his life for their sins . . . let us burn hatred and spread the flame of Christ's love." Everyone thought she would move back to Australia. No. She said God had called them to India, and she would not leave. She said, "My husband and our children have sacrificed their lives for this nation; India is my home. I hope to be here and continue to serve the needy." Then, perhaps most remarkable of all—listen to this all you who are teenagers—her daughter Esther was asked how she felt about the murder of her dad, and the thirteen year old, said, "I praise the Lord that He found my father worthy to die for Him."

B. WHO CAN DO IT?

Who is sufficient for this? This is a very high calling.

1. How God treated us Mt 18:21-35

If we have been saved by grace, we will be gracious. If we are not, we have never known the grace of God.

We must forgive because we have been forgiven.

2. Christ's example 1 Pet 2:21-25

Charles Bridges, p. 478): "We are the disciples of him, who died for his enemies."

3. Drawing closer to Christ Phil 4:13

We have to marvel at the wisdom, scope, and power of the gospel that can do that. It takes sinners who only lived for themselves and turns them into people who overcome the world's evil. We are to exalt God's name and word by living out the truth in our daily lives.