

Last week we began a two part series on how to **Let Jesus Shine through You**. We looked at Romans 12:9-16 where Paul is telling us what true, *Agape* love looks like. Such love not only blesses us and makes our own lives more fulfilling, but it also shows people around what Christ is like and what He can do for them. People form their opinions about Christianity and about Christ based on what they see in Christians around them. We want them to see a clear picture of Jesus' love shining through us.

Now today we are going to continue in Romans 12 with verses 17-21. Here Paul shows us the greatest extent of *Agape* love. Even though he doesn't use the word love in these verses, he is still explaining what it means to love without hypocrisy (vs. 9). In these verses he shows how *Agape* love responds when someone becomes our enemy.

Listen as God teaches you how to

Let Jesus' Love Shine through You.

"17 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18 If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Dear Fellow Redeemed,

What is the Best Way to Conquer Your Enemy?

Our human nature tells us that we need to learn to fight back. We're not going to let anyone get away with hurting us or anyone we love. You have to fight fire with fire. But human experience shows that such plans don't work. They only make your enemy hate you all the more and escalate the situation, making things even worse.

God shows us a completely different way to conquer our enemies. The Book of Revelation describes Jesus as riding on a white horse going out to conquer the nations. But He doesn't do it with swords or guns and armies, He does it with His Gospel. It is the message of God's love and salvation that conquers His enemies and brings them into His Kingdom.

He teaches us to:

Conquer Your Enemies with Love!

First of all He teaches us to

-I- Always be a Friend

Paul begins, "Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men." When Paul says, "Have regard for good things in the sight of all men," He is saying let people get to know you as someone who is always kind and good to others. Don't do anything to hurt anyone, physically or emotionally. Always be kind, caring, and helpful. There are so many passages urging us to do this. Gal. 6:10 says, "As we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith." Eph. 4:31-32 "Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away

from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.”

Jesus is our best example: As Peter told Cornelius, “God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and with power, who went about doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him.” Acts 10:38 Jesus always helped everyone who came to Him. He never turned anyone away. Even when Jesus and His disciples were exhausted and just wanted to get away from the crowds for a little time to rest, so they got in a boat and went to the other side of the sea of Galilee, but the people saw where he was going and went around the lake and met Him on the other side. When Jesus saw the multitudes, He didn't get angry and say, “Can't you just leave us alone for once?” No, He had compassion on them and taught them and healed them and at the end of the day He even fed them. Letting Jesus' love shine through us means that we don't put our own needs and desires ahead of helping others.

If you are always kind and good you would think you won't ever have any enemies to deal with. But that is not always the case. It doesn't matter how good and kind you are, sometimes someone will still hate you and try to make your life miserable. That's why Paul says, “If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.” Make sure you never give anyone a reason to hate you. Live peaceably with all people. But there is no guarantee that people still won't turn against you. Jesus was the nicest person ever, yet He had enemies who opposed Him throughout His entire ministry. They were constantly trying to trap Him, to find something to accuse Him of and condemn Him. Ultimately in hatred they killed Him.

Jesus tells us to expect the same. He said, “A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you.” John 15:20 When you live an openly Christian life, some people will hate you because of it. A person might be your friend until you stand up for your faith. If that goes against their belief about themselves, it may spark some feeling of guilt or challenge what they believe. You may be shocked how quickly they turn against you.

So then what? What do you do when someone turns against you for no fault of your own? Paul gives us two instructions. First he tells us what NOT to do and then he tells us what we SHOULD do. First of all what we should NOT do. “Repay no one evil for evil.”

-II- Don't Get Even

This is where things begin to get difficult. Our human nature wants to strike back; to get revenge. But not only does that make things worse, it doesn't give glory to Christ. As Christians we bear Christ's name, and everything you do reflects upon Him and on the Gospel. Striking back doesn't show His love but suggests that Christians are no different from anyone else. Christ has called us to be different and dealing with an enemy is the best opportunity to show it. Everyone wants to strike back and get even when someone wrongs them. Jesus shows you a better way.

He says in verse 19, “Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.” “Do not avenge yourselves.” The desire for revenge is very strong, but Paul shows us how we can let go of that desire. Instead of seeking revenge he says to “give place to wrath.” What

does that mean? He is not talking about the wrath of the person who may have harmed you as if you are supposed to let him do whatever he wants. The Greek has a direct article with wrath, it is “THE wrath,” namely God’s wrath. Paul is saying give God room to work. God says, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay.” Just step back and let God take care of it. You don’t need to worry about it.

It takes such a burden off our back if we simply leave it up to God to deal with the evil doer. The desire for revenge is fueled by anger and hatred and that destroys your own life. When we harbor that anger then in effect you are letting the perpetrator continue to torment you. When you seek revenge then you are being overcome by evil. But if you leave it to God to take care of, you are freed from that anger and can get on with your life. The evil will not overcome you.

Once again Jesus gives us the perfect example of leaving justice up to God. The Apostle Peter tells us “This is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: “Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth”; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.” 1 Peter 2:19-24 Jesus never even spoke evil of his enemies; not when they were trying to trap Him; not when they were falsely accusing Him and condemning Him; not even when they were nailing Him to the cross and hurling insults and blasphemies at Him.

Instead of wanting to get even, Jesus wanted to save them, as Peter continues in the very next verse. “Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.” 2:24 Jesus repaid their evil with good, the greatest good. He took their sin and bore their punishment on the cross. He also prayed for them. He died for them so that God could forgive them. God exacted justice for all the crimes in the world by having Jesus suffer the just punishment instead of us!

To let Jesus’ Love shine through us, we also need to.

-III- Repay Evil with Good

Paul continues, “Therefore, if your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” This is really a commentary on Jesus’ words in His sermon on the Mt. when He says, “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” Matt. 5:44

Who can do that? If someone slanders you by telling inflammatory lies about you, are you going to speak kindly about them? If someone cheats you or steals from you, are you going to give them the shirt off your back? If someone physically beats you up, are you going to take them out to dinner? That seems preposterous. Who would do that?

Jesus would! No, Jesus did! Did you notice how Peter spoke of Jesus’ sacrifice? After saying Jesus didn’t revile those who reviled Him, and “when He suffered, He did

not threaten,” Peter went on to say, “Who Himself bore OUR sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes YOU were healed.” 2:24 Wait a minute, you and I didn’t revile Jesus or cause His suffering! — Didn’t we? Jesus “bore OUR sins in His own body on the tree.” He repaid our evil with good and died to save us. Jesus died for you when you were His enemy. He didn’t seek revenge against you but sought to save you.

When you think it is impossible to be kind to someone who is mean to you, think about Jesus and what He did every time you have wronged Him. Doesn’t that make you appreciate the love of Christ all the more? What you think is impossible is what Jesus does for us every day. When you remember what Jesus has done for us, then it is not so preposterous to show kindness to your enemy either. We are able to show the love that Jesus has shown us. As Paul said, “be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” Eph. 4:32

God loves everyone and wants everyone to be saved. He would much rather exact justice by bringing someone to repentance and giving them the justice earned by Jesus. If they never do come to repentance and receive Jesus’ forgiveness, they will have to suffer God’s wrath themselves in eternity but we don’t wish that on our worst enemy. So let us join God in trying to save them.

That is the way to overcome evil with good. Paul quotes Proverbs which says, “In so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” That almost sounds like a round about way to get even with your enemy. If you are supposed to love him why do you want to heap coals of fire on his head? Burning coals on the head is an illustration. Let me ask you, when you are ashamed or embarrassed about something, where do you feel it? Doesn’t your head get hot and your face turn red as if someone poured hot coals on your head? So when you show acts of kindness to one who has been mean to you at the very least they will be ashamed and leave you alone, since they get no satisfaction from tormenting you. At best, you may win them over as a friend and best of all, through you they might come to know Christ and receive His forgiveness and salvation.

That is how to “overcome evil with good,” rather than being overcome by evil. And it is not just your enemies that will benefit from such love. Others may see and marvel at how you acted and that could lead to other opportunities to tell them about how Jesus showed His love to us all.

So every time we follow our natural inclination and strike back with biting words or actions, stop and think about what you are doing to Jesus. That is the equivalent of slapping Jesus in the face and and slandering His name. May we repent to God with sorrow in our hearts that we have not honored His name. Then see how He forgives you and loves you. He overcomes your evil with His goodness and love. When you remember that, then you will have the strength to actually do what Jesus tells you to do. “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you.” Matt. 5:44 God help us,

Amen.