

HOW SHOULD A CHRISTIAN RESPOND TO HIS ENEMY?

(Romans 12:17-21)

...You cannot live and move in this world of ours without having enemies. It is a fact. Some of your enemies use their tongues like swords against you, while others would physically harm you if they could.

...So, what are we to do with those who hate us? Do we hate them back? Do we seek revenge? Do we gather others with us to stand against them? How are we to please the Lord in this difficult area of life?

...Paul has been telling us of the work of the Gospel in our lives. He closes this section dealing with this important matter. He tells us how we are to respond to the evil that has been done to us.

THREE DIRECTIVES INSTRUCTING US TO THE GODLY RESPONSE WHEN WRONGED BY OUR ENEMIES.

...If we do this, it will not only reflect Christ, but also may bring them to salvation.

- I. **We Must Never Return Evil For Evil. (v.17)** You will be tempted to do evil.
 - A. Paul begins by restating verse 14, "bless those who persecute you." We are to be "blessers."
 - B. He extends his teaching to say, we are not only to bless those and not curse them, but more, we are never to move beyond to the point of revenge.
 - C. The Old Testament taught, "An eye for an eye." (Exodus 21:24)
 1. This only pertained to Israel's civil justice, not personal revenge.
 2. In Romans 13:4, Paul tells that the civil government is a "minister of God...who does not bear the sword in vain..." This is the authority God gave to government, but is forbidden for personal purposes.
 - D. Never is one more like the Lord Jesus than when He takes an affront without rising to defend himself. Self defense is a basic human response. Jesus never sought to avenge Himself. We are to be like Him. (Matthew 5:38-41) Never avenge yourself. No exceptions!
 - E. Rather, we are to strive to do what is right and good before all. Evil does not fit...our gracious response should commend us to our enemies and to those who witness our actions. (Titus 2:10) ...David illustrates this truth by not killing Saul. (1 Samuel 24:10ff)
- II. **We Are To Strive To Live In Peace With Everyone. (vv.18-19)**
 - A. The fulfillment of this is conditional. Peace is a two-way street. Peace partly depends on the attitudes and responses of our enemies. "If possible." For we live in a wicked world...
 1. Our response: make sure that our side of the relationship is right, and that our inner desire is to be at peace with all men. (even with the meanest and most undeserving)
 2. We are to do this short of compromising God's truth and His standards. If a compromise is needed for peace, then it is impossible for us to have peace.
 - B. In this, Paul tells us to leave room for "wrath." (v.19)
 1. Some think this refers to God's wrath. Paul goes on to tell of God's wrath and that He will sooner or later deal with injustice. (See how God dealt with King Ahab, 1 Kings 20) ...Jonathan Edwards tells, "God holds evil men like little spiders over the fire. He will let them kick and thrash until He is tired of using them for His purposes, then He drops them in to the flames."
 2. It is better to see this as your enemies' wrath..."yield to wrath" We are to patiently endure the wrath of man who does us wrong. If evil rushes toward us, we are to love the evildoer and stand aside while he strikes out in blind selfishness. ...This is Jesus' teaching of "turning the other cheek," (Matthew 5:38-42) ...We can do this, for we know that vengeance does not belong to us, it belongs to God.
- III. **We Are To Overcome Evil With Good. (v.20-21)**
 - A. To withhold our vengeance is one thing, it is by far harder to actually return good for evil. ...If he "hungers, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink." To do this is to love our enemies.
 - B. By showing him kindness, it is "burning coals..." This is the way to move his heart. Perhaps this is the last thing that will bring him to repentance and faith? "The only real way to destroy an enemy is to make a friend out of him." Our kind response may do this?
 - C. Remember, for us to stoop to vengeance is to be ourselves conquered by evil. Remember Jesus.

LESSONS FOR OUR LIVES: