

## Render to No Man Evil for Evil

Romans 12:17-21

### I. INTRODUCTION: I

I. **2** It hurts when people wrong us.

A. That is especially true when one whom we least expect injures and wrongs us.

B. Jesus experienced this sort of unfair treatment time and time again.

(1) The religious leaders of the Jews, who should have rejoiced in His coming, condemned Him to death.

(2) One of His apostles betrayed Him, another denied knowing Him, and all of them scattered from Him when He was arrested (Matt. 26:31).

(3) Truly, Jesus was “a Man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief,”; but “when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten” (Isa. 53:3; 1 Pet. 2:23).

(4) What restraint! What love! What goodness!

2. Jesus is our example for how to respond to personal insults:

**1 Pet. 2:21-23:** “For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 ‘Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth’; 23 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;”

A. No doubt Jesus was hurt when people mistreated Him.

(1) David prophetically said:

**Psa. 55:12-13:** “For it is not an enemy who reproaches me; Then I could bear it. Nor is it one who hates me who has exalted himself against me; Then I could hide from him. 13 But it was you, a man my equal, My companion and my acquaintance.”

**Psa. 41:9:** “Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted, Who ate my bread, Has lifted up his heel against me.”

(2) So, Jesus was well-acquainted with suffering many wrongs at the hands of both friends and enemies.

B. In my estimation at least, Jesus response to these wrongs may be the most outstanding aspect of His perfect character.

C. Thus, how He reacted to these wrongs is our pattern to follow.

(1) It will take all the faith we have to follow in His footsteps at such times.

(2) And yet, Jesus has not given us an impossible task.

D. This business of turning the other cheek is the essence of loving our enemies; and is the embodiment of the golden rule: “And just as you want men to do to you, you also do to them likewise” (Lk. 6:31).

(1) Christians must not wrong the wrongdoer; we must not “fight fire with fire,” so to speak.

(2) We must not render evil for evil, even when we are tempted to feel justified in doing so (**Rom. 12:17:** “Repay no one evil for evil.”).

(3) Such conduct is from the devil, not from God.

3. **3** I want to make a couple of comments on two of the primary texts we'll consider in this lesson: Matthew 5:38-48 and Luke 6:27-36; first, let's consider:

**Matt. 5:38-39:** *"You have heard that it was said, 'An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.' 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also."*

A. Jesus' teaching in these passages are not universally applicable to all situations of life; but concern the concepts of personal retaliation and revenge.

B. I believe Jesus' teaching in these passages is often misunderstood and abused. For example:

- (1) Very importantly, Jesus is not saying that we just let evil people do as they wish and perpetrate evil acts against us with no resistance or consequences.
- (2) God's has always given His people the right to self-defense. For example:
  - (a) Abraham rescued Lot and his family when they were kidnapped by enemies (Gen. 14).
  - (b) Jesus told his disciples who had no sword to *"buy one"* for protection (Lk. 22:36).
  - (c) God ordained civil government to punish evil doers (Rom. 13:1-7; **v. 4:** *"...he does not bear the sword in vain; for he is God's minister, an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil."*).
  - (d) Furthermore, civil government gives you and me the right of self-protection for our person and property.
  - (e) Protecting ourselves and others from a murderer or thief is not personal retaliation or revenge.
    - (i) For example, Paul used his Roman citizenship to prevent being murdered by the Jews (Acts 22-25).
    - (ii) More than 40 Jews were so determined to murder Paul they vowed *"they would neither eat or drink till they had killed Paul"* (Acts 23:12).
    - (iii) Paul appealed to *"Caesar's judgment seat"* to protect himself (Acts 25:10-11).
  - (f) When it comes to the punishment of murderers and thieves it is the role of God-ordained civil government to exercise God's *"vengeance"* not me (Rom. 12:19; 13:4).
- (3) No Christian in his right mind would allow a pedophile to molest a child, or not raise a hand to save someone in danger of being murdered.
- (4) Again to take action in such cases is not retaliation or revenge; it is for the preservation of life and is the resistance to evil in a different sense than Jesus is discussing in Matthew 5 and Luke 6 (1 Pet. 5:8-9; in this sense we are commanded to resist evil!).

C. **4** In Matthew 5:38-39 Jesus is correcting an abuse of the Law of Moses.

- (1) The Jews had perverted the principle of *"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"* by applying it to personal retaliation and revenge; i.e., taking the law into our own hands.
- (2) The principle of *"An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"* was certainly from God (e.g., Ex. 21:24); **BUT**, it was not a principle guiding personal retaliation.
- (3) The concept was a principle guiding their legal system! **Deut. 16:18:** *"You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the Lord your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with just judgment."* (*lex talionis*: let the punishment fit the crime).
- (4) **5** The key then to understanding Matt. 5:38-39 is:

(a) The matters being considered are matters of personal insults, not criminal acts perpetrated against us.

(b) In such cases Jesus says we are not to retaliate or respond “in kind.”

D. **6** I also want to make a brief comment on **Luke 6:34-35**:

*“And if you lend to those from whom you hope to receive back, what credit is that to you? For even sinners lend to sinners to receive as much back. 35 But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.”*

(1) This does not mean that as a Christian I must walk around with my wallet open allowing anyone who so desires to take my money.

(2) If that was what Jesus was teaching we would end up very quickly with a bunch of desperately poor Christians unable to provide for their own!

**I Tim. 5:8:** *“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”*

(3) Jesus is simply telling me that as a Christian I should be as willing to provide aid to a “needy” enemy as I would for a “needy” friend.

(4) By refusing to help the “needy” enemy I would be retaliating for the fact that I consider him an enemy and I would **not** be modeling my behavior after our Heavenly Father.

4. The behavior Jesus is requiring of His people is not easy!

(1) What is your first inclination if someone slaps you in the face? **BAM...take that!**

(2) What is your first thought if someone who had wronged you in the past and was now down and out financially and needed assistance? **Ha, ha, you deserve it!**

5. But such responses are not godly responses!

**Matt. 5:44-48:** *“But I say to you, 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, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”*

6. When we are victims of such insults how can we avoid our first inclination to retaliate in kind?

A. How can we possibly return good for evil?

B. **7** Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5:38-48 and Luke 6:27-36 how to *Render to No Man Evil for Evil*.

II. **DISCUSSION:** I’m going to suggest five things we need to consider so we render no man evil for evil.

I. **8** Unselfishness: Matt. 5:38-42

**Matt. 5:38-42:** *“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I tell you not to resist an evil person. But whoever slaps you on your right cheek, turn the other to him also. 40 If anyone wants to sue you and take away your tunic, let him have your cloak also. 41 And whoever compels you to go one mile, go with him two. 42 Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away.*

A. Unselfishness is an essential quality of turning the other cheek.

B. We must devalue ourselves in our own estimation in order to ever be able to value the evildoer... especially when he carries out his evil against us!

- C. There are more important things than our feelings; that takes a major dose of humility; Jesus did it!

**Phil 2:5-8:** “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.”

**Matt. 26:53:** “Or do you think that I cannot now pray to My Father, and He will provide Me with more than twelve legions of angels?”

2. **9 Love;** Matt. 5:43-48

**Matt. 5:43-48:** “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ 44 But I say to you, 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, 45 that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”

- A. Loving our enemies may be one of the most difficult things we are called upon to do.
- B. Yet, to do so is to be “sons of (our) Father who is in heaven.”
- C. The word for “love” here is *agapao*: **Strong:** “to love (in a social or moral sense)”; **Thayer:** “to love to be full of good-will and exhibit the same.”
- (1) It doesn’t mean that the person loved is attractive, either in terms of physical beauty, moral character, charm of personality, etc.; Agape love loves the unlovable.
  - (2) Agape love always has the best interests of the one loved in mind.
  - (3) It is the sacrificial love God has toward us (Jn. 3:16; Rom. 5:8).
  - (4) It’s not a type of love people of the world would express toward their enemies (v. 46).
  - (5) That’s why Jesus said what is said in v. 48.
- D. Remember what Paul said about love? **1 Cor. 13:5:** “It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.” (NIV)
- (1) Love doesn’t keep a scorecard of wrongs committed against it (“I don’t get mad, I get even.”).
  - (2) Love, “keeps no accounts of evil” (footnote, NKJV).
- E. If God can show this type of love to me in the ultimate way (Rom. 5:8); then I must show it to my fellow man even though he may not be “lovable”; in doing so I can “be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.” (v. 48)

3. **10 Pray:** Lk. 6:28: “bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you.”

- A. It’s a tough pill to swallow when Jesus said to “pray for those who spitefully use you.”
- B. Those who treat us abusively need our prayers.
- (1) We need to realize their pitiful condition (**Lk. 19:10:** “...the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost.”).
  - (2) And, remember the value of our soul and that their soul is just as valuable! Matt. 16:26
- C. We are following Christ’s example when we pray for our enemies.

- (1) Remember Jesus' short prayer on the cross? *"Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they do"* (Lk. 23:34).
  - (2) That prayer is applicable to all of us (Rom. 3:23).
  - (3) Hence, just like us, the sinner needs prayers on their behalf rather than our animosity and contempt.
  - (4) How could we ever expect to save anyone with animosity and contempt?!
4. **11 Do good: Lk. 6:27:** *"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you,"*
- A. It is good to pray for the person who has wronged us and it is good not to keep a record so that we can "get even."
  - B. But for love to be love we must show it! We need to take the initiative and respond with kind, positive actions.
    - (1) Recall how Peter once described Jesus: Acts 10:38: *"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."*
    - (2) The Father's sunshine and rain blesses the evil and the good (Matt. 5:45).
    - (3) Likewise, we are to be doers of good to those who hate us.
    - (4) What a challenge it is to be like Christ! "If it was easy, everyone would be doing it!"  
**Matt. 5:48:** *"Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect."*
    - (5) I don't mean to pat myself on the back, but I've done this a few times in my life and it almost always is very "disarming" to the "enemy." I know it works!
5. **12 Be merciful: Lk. 6:36:** *"Therefore be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful."*
- A. We all need the mercy of God because we are all sinners (Rom. 3:23).
  - B. But, when someone sins against us and causes us pain, it is easy for that fact to be obscured; mercy is usually the last thing on our mind when we're hurting!
    - (1) Our first tendency in such situations is to lash out, instead of extending mercy (**Lk. 23:34:** *"...Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do."*).
    - (2) If Jesus was able to do that when He was going through the very worst suffering imaginable; then can't I do the same?
      - (a) My "hurts" and "slights" will never rise to the level Jesus suffered!
      - (b) If I withhold forgiveness for others, God will withhold His forgiveness of me (**Matt. 6:14-15:** *"For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."*).
      - (c) Paul also exhibited this Christ-like characteristic: **2 Tim. 4:16:** *"At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them."*
  - C. Even though we have the wonderful examples of Paul and Jesus in these cases; it's still very easy to lose our cool and instantly retaliate.
    - (1) In these situations we need to slow down and not just "react"! **Jas. 1:19-20:** *"So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; 20 for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God."*

- (2) At least a half dozen times Solomon gave the same advice in Proverbs:

**Prov. 14:17:** *“A quick-tempered man acts foolishly, And a man of wicked intentions is hated.”*

**Prov. 14:29:** *“He who is slow to wrath has great understanding, But he who is impulsive exalts folly.”*

**Prov. 16:32:** *“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city.”*

- (3) So when we are confronted with these situations the first thing to do is not react; but to stop and think!

D. We must never forget that we, too, will only reach heaven by the mercy of God.

E. Therefore, we must give other sinners what we too cannot do without (**Matt. 5:7:** *“Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy.”*).

### III. CONCLUSION: 13

- I. The next time we are wronged, instead of rendering evil for evil, we need to take Jesus' approach.

A. And, when we do, we shouldn't act as if we've just had to swallow a worm!

B. Because, whenever we imitate Jesus there is great reward!

**Lk. 6:35:** *“But love your enemies, do good, and lend, hoping for nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High. For He is kind to the unthankful and evil.”*

**Matt. 5:48:** *“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”*

C. Jesus' way is best, whether the sinner appreciates it or whether he continues to take advantage of us.

2. As we bring the lesson to a close, let us remember:

**Rom. 12:17-21:** *“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.”*

3. Invitation

Adapted from an article by Joe R. Price.