***Overcome Evil with Good  
RO163-02***

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Please open your Bibles once more to Romans 12:9-21. Our subject is Christian conduct, and this is segment number 14.

**Salvation**

Christianity and the Lord Jesus Christ are often dismissed by people of the world as claiming more than they can deliver. People sometimes say that Christianity just doesn't work, and what Jesus Christ and the Bible offer just doesn't click with reality. We must indeed point out that the Bible claims salvation, as a grace gift from God through faith in Jesus Christ, and that it really does bring a person personal regeneration. You really can secure spiritual life, and you really can secure eternal life through the gospel plan of grace salvation. As a matter of fact, that's the only way you can secure it. The Bible makes it very clear that without trusting in Christ for eternal life on the basis of His payment for your sin, there is no way that you could end up in heaven. And for that reason, the Lord Jesus Christ has pointed out that most of the human race will reject Him, and most of the human race will spend eternity in the lake of fire. This is not a human opinion. This is a divine viewpoint opinion declared by the living God Himself.

**The Old Sin Nature**

Being born again spiritually, however, does not do one thing that we always have to remind ourselves of, and that is that it does not remove the inherent inclination to sinning which is in all mankind. This is something we inherited from our father, Adam, and therefore, the inclination to sin comes right into the Christian life with us. This is the element that brings confusion and discrediting upon Christianity and the Lord Jesus, and the claims of what regeneration really will do for a human being.

**The Christian has Control over the Old Sin Nature**

The control of the sin nature is no longer, however, absolute over a Christian. Therefore, the believer is in a position, in contrast to an unbeliever, to resist the lust patterns of the sin nature. He is able to resist the evil appeals. And resisting the appeals of the sin nature, and living in godliness, however, is dependent upon the Christian's positive volition to the guidance of the Holy Spirit through doctrine. You have to simply decide that you're going to do right. You have to decide to act upon the information that you have from Scripture. You have to simply be willing to be yielded to the guidance of the Spirit of God. He does His work. He makes things very clear to us. We understand the ins and outs of rights and wrongs. Our problem is our resistance to what we know.

So, it's not a discredit to Christianity that Christians do not live up to the ideals and potentials that they have. It is only a recognition of the fact that the sin nature is still within us, and we can be victimized by it if we permit that to happen.

**The Carnal Christian**

So, the offer of Jesus Christ to save the believer from the lake of fire is a bonafide genuine offer. It really does work. The believing sinner is forever a child of God destined for heaven. Salvation by grace, through faith is the only way. The believer, however, may choose to yield to the sin nature, and so to live as if he were indeed no different than some unbeliever who is enslaved to his sin nature, and who cannot help himself. This is true, of course, of the carnal Christian as well. The carnal Christian, the Bible indicates, is just like an unbeliever at that point in time. Yes, he's going to heaven, but he lives for the devil. Consequently, he is a bad testimony for the cause of Christ.

The failure of the Christian to live up to the potential of the regenerated lifestyle, however, is no reflection on the Lord Jesus Christ, or on the Christian faith. Non-Christians, we must remember, are equally evil, and usually worse, by God's standard, and they all go into the lake of fire. At least we may say, for the Christian who is not rising to the ideals of biblical Christianity, that he is still going to end up in heaven. Therefore, he is moving in the right direction. And his failure in time is regrettable, but it is not inevitable. The failure is in the willingness of the Christian to yield to the appeals of his sin nature, even though he can choose to just say "no."

**Proper Christian Conduct vs. Psychology**

In Romans 12, then, the apostle Paul is led by God the Holy Spirit to set forth specific conduct that is appropriate for a regenerated child of God. These guidelines set forth in this chapter are by implication, or by clear statement, not optional, but obligatory. The Greek grammar makes it clear that these are commands from God. Obedience to these principles of conduct enables a person to live effectively in Satan's evil world. And that's why we have them listed here for us. They produce mental and emotional stability in the person who obeys them, no matter what the circumstances in life may be. This section of the Word of God here in this book of Romans is, in fact, part of the only true and workable psychology that exists anywhere in the world. Mental and emotional stability is reached when people obey the kinds of guidelines that are set forth in this chapter. And there is no other way for it to happen. The world comes in, and it imitate some of these very basic concepts, but they muddle through them without any capacity of executing, as indeed can be true in the life of a believer with the power of the Spirit of God behind these concepts. Here you have the only true psychology that exists in the world today. If it works (really works) on a long-term basis, it has to come from this kind of guidance as we have in this chapter.

The section of Romans 12:17-21, to which we have come, deals with the godly responses to personal abuse from other people. And of course, this is a very valuable section. It would drive a lot of counselors out of business overnight if people obeyed verses 17-21, if they responded to these concepts. Personal conflicts would very quickly evaporate and be resolved, and you wouldn't have to go to someone to consult about the matter.

We Christians pursue a course of peace. We are called upon here in this section to do that. We pursue a course of peace with all men to the degree that it is in our power to do so. Peace with others cannot be maintained, however, at the expense of what is true, no matter who our antagonists may be. We are often tempted to compromise the truth when our antagonist happens to be somebody very close to us in some relationship. So, we tend to slough off the fact that the person is wrong. If the person is guilty of violating a basic eternal truth built into the universe by God, it's there, and you can't pretend that it's not there.

**Leave Vengeance to God**

So, when someone close to steps out of line, you have to remember that, while you seek to be a person of peace, your peace with that individual cannot be at the expense of confronting him with the reality of the truth that he is violating. Personal integrity by biblical standards is maintained, furthermore, by the believer. And vengeance on the abusers has to be left with God. This passage tells us that we are not to return evil for evil done to us, but to return with good. So, in other words, Paul is saying, in short, "Life is short, and God's truth always wins out." So, pity the resister to the Bible point of view because of the eternity that he's going to face, whether that person is a Christian or not. Resistance to doctrine is bad news.

**Do not Avenge Yourselves**

Now we start at verse 19. The apostle Paul says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves." The words dearly beloved look like this in the Greek language. It's the Greek word "agapetos." You see our word "agape" here, which is love in terms of a mental attitude, not in terms of an emotion. It's the Greek word indicating an attitude of goodwill, lacking any spirit of bitterness. It is opposite to the word "enemy." The apostle Paul, instead of calling the Romans "brethren," as he might normally do, suddenly interjects this rather tender word. This is a word that is clearly saying, "Now, look. I've got no hard feelings toward you people, and I have no spirit of bitterness. I don't know all of you, and I don't have an emotional attachment to all of you, but I do have a spirit of goodwill toward all of you." And I think that suddenly he interjects this word "beloved" instead of "brethren" because he is now going to teach a trait that is required of the godly Christian, which really goes against the human grain. This is one thing that people really do not come by naturally, and that is concerning avenging themselves.

The word in the Greek Bible looks like this: "ekdikeo." "Ekdikeo" means "to get even," in the sense of administering justice to the guilty party, to give him what he deserves. That's what "ekdikeo" means: giving the person what he deserves. It connotes exacting justice by imposing a penalty on the guilty person. The Greek Bible says, "Don't do this." It is in the present tense, which tells us that at no time should a Christian be taking his own vengeance on somebody else. It is active voice, which tells us that you personally are not to go out there to give a person what he deserves. It is a participle which tells us that this is a spiritual principle. And here again, in the Greek language, I can tell you that this is stated as a divine command. Therefore, we are not dealing with something optional here when the Word of God says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves" – this is God thundering from heaven: "Don't do this, at any time, under any condition."

Furthermore, because this is in the present tense in the Greek Bible, that tells us that this is something that the Roman Christians were already doing. So, in effect, the apostle Paul was telling them: "Stop avenging yourselves. Stop taking your own vengeance on people who mistreat you."

I remember several years ago, while watching television one night, in an interview with the former Teamster president, Jimmy Hoffa, he stated his philosophy of life. He said that he always sought to do to others the evils that they planned for him before they could do it to him. And he said, "That's just how I live. I do it to them before they can do it to me." That stuck in my mind, especially when a few years later, he suddenly disappeared from sight, and everyone has since realized that his mafia friends took him and murdered him, and so eliminated him that not a trace of him has ever been found again. So, Jimmy Hoffa slipped up one time in failing to murder those first who had planned his murder. So, now he is dead. He is in eternity. And who knows what state he is in? That is not a very good philosophy to live by. I'm going to do to the other person what he plans to do to me before he can do it to me. That is hardly the golden rule concept. And Hoffa's philosophy is exactly what God's Word forbids to a Christian.

God the Holy Spirit says, "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but." Then he throws in this little Greek word "alla." This is a conjunction, and it's a strong negative (the opposite). He says, "But here's a difference. Rather do something else." And that is: "Give place unto wrath." The word "give" looks like this in the Greek Bible. It's the Greek word "didomi." The word means "to deliver up," or really "to yield." Here, again, the grammar gives us some information. This is the Greek aorist tense. It means at any point in time that you are confronted with somebody who's abusing you, this should be your response. This is active voice. This should be your personal conduct.

Now, suddenly, there's a change. In the Greek Bible, these commands have been coming in what are called "participles," but in such a way that we have seen indicated that God is commanding us. Now God gets really firm, and He uses the outright imperative mood in the Greek Bible. And it almost shocks you as you read the Greek text to see easier language of the participle, and now, suddenly, being transformed into the very definitive, clear statement: "Don't do this under any conditions." It is a divine command. God is, in effect, forcefully saying to the Christian: "Step aside child. I'll take it from here." That's a tough lesson to learn, and it is not a natural reaction on our part – to step aside, and let God take it from there.

He says, "Give place." The word "place" is "topos." This is a noun for indicating "space." And what it means here when he says, "Give place," is to back off from your assailant to actually leave room for the dispensing of justice by God to the individual. What this is telling us is: "Don't eagerly charge in against your abuser to reap your own vengeance upon him, because you might get yourself between God and his whip that He's applying to that abuser. This is good sense. This is good judgment. He has previously told us that we are to be people of peace. Now here's an application of how you do that. The person who is abusing you, in words or in deeds, is mistreating you. He is a person that you deal with in a peaceful way. And while the scoundrel deserves a comeuppance, you do not choose to do that. You leave it with God to exercise the vengeance. This is a very important principle. And actually what you do is back off from the confrontation. You back off from the conflict so that God can move into that space (into that "topos"), and start beating the fool out of that character, and bring him to his senses.

**The Wrath of God**

There's nothing so sobering as the wrath of God. The word "wrath" that is used here is this Greek word "orge." This word means a continuing state of indignation, waiting for satisfaction. This is not the hot-headed temper outburst that people have sometimes. It's interesting that the Bible has a different word for that. That is "thumos." This is the word we would translate as "wrath." Here he is talking about "orge," which is a settled indignation. God doesn't forget. God is remembering. God is taking it all into account. And while you're bearing the brunt of the abuse, you may think that He's not paying attention, but the Scripture is telling us you are wrong. He is paying attention. He's putting all this in the computer of His divine intelligence, and He does not forget. And He is going to act upon His characteristic that justice must be executed. Never forget that one of the attributes of God is His justice. He always squares things away. He always makes things fair. So, what the Word of God is telling us is: "Be careful how you react. Let God's wrath (this settled indignation) take its course."

You might be interested in observing, in Revelation 16:19, that these two kinds of words are used in one verse, where we read: "And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell. And great Babylon came in remembrance before God to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness." And here we have the word "thumos." The fierceness is the outrage of God – the outburst of His anger: "And of His wrath." And there you have the "orge." God's burning wrath, like a low-burning coal, is sitting there, taking time, waiting for the opportunity, and then God explodes in judgment. And here you have, under the seventh bowl of judgment against the antichrist world, the indignation and the glowing, burning, seething wrath of God waits for the moment when His wrath is exploded, and is expressed in judgment against the evil. So, this is a forceful indication to us that our God remembers. His wrath is not the explosive kind here. It's the remembering kind. These same two words are used in Revelation 19:15. You might be interested in looking at those.

What he is talking about here is the kind of wrath that we read of in Romans 2:5: "But after your hardness and impenitent heart, treasures unto yourself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Every evil, including human good, which is a loathsome evil with God, as well as your sins, is chalked up with God and remembered until the day when He begins exercising fairness and justice against your evil. Then you get the outbursts of His "thumos." But in the meantime, His "orge" (His wrath) is there: on a low-burner; building up; and, waiting for the appropriate time. You find this in Romans 5:9. You find this in Romans 9:22. You may look those up on your own – the Word of God using this same word "orge" for the wrath of God.

The point is that God never permit any doer to go scot-free – Christian or unsaved? Some of that judgment is received here in this life. A great deal of it is received in eternity. Divine justice is always going to be satisfied.

**Get out of the Way of God's Wrath**

So, this is God's wrath that he's talking about. He's not talking about your wrath or the abuser's wrath when he says, "Give place unto wrath." He's not saying, "Substitute for your wrath." He's not saying, "Back off from the wrath of some other person." When he says, "Give place unto wrath," he's talking about God's wrath: "Get out of the way, and let God exercise the whip of His judgment."

**The Christian's Response to Injustice**

The Christian's natural response to personal injustice is to get even. We are understandably incensed over unfair and undeserved abuse, but self-vengeance violates the principle of being at peace with all men. So, we have a divine viewpoint plan of action as abused believers. The abused Christians does not retaliate to evil with another act of evil. He maintains an attitude of peace toward his abuser, and he seeks not to enter into conflict with that person with words and actions. Furthermore, he does not seek his own revenge on his assailant.

Some of you will probably need to learn this lesson in a big way, because some of you tend to be short on temper. You tend to walk near the line. If somebody says something, you get very touchy and ticked off very easily. The Word of God says, "Don't do that." And if you really have somebody that has insulted you; somebody who has mistreated you; or, somebody has abused you, then deliver it to the Lord, and get out of the way, and let Him exercise the judgment – if you're right. It is the most pronounced trait of the sin nature that we want to have our own way.

Isaiah 53:6 makes it very clear that the whole human race is in sin because they have all gone their own way. And those who are denied their own way are going to be seeking revenge. This is what caused Cain to murder Abel – because Cain couldn't have his way of being accepted with God on His terms. And this is what caused the Jews to murder Jesus Christ – because they couldn't have their way for Him to be the kind of conqueror of Rome that they wanted.

**Faith Rest**

Personal spiritual regeneration causes God's way to take precedence over our own. So, we are to learn to faith rest things, and to stop pushing our own vengeance. Christians must mature so that they can distinguish between what their preferences are, or what they would like to do, and what should be their priorities, or what they should be doing. That's an essential factor in all Christian service. All of us every day are confronted with the fact" "I'd like to do this. This is what I prefer to do, but I can't. God's work requires this priority. So, therefore I do this." And those of you have learned that lesson well are those who are carrying the Berean ministries. The people who have not been able to distinguish between their preferences and their priorities are free-loading and riding, while others are carrying the ball of God's work in the ministries here, because they put aside their preferences, and they pursue the priorities that God has. In terms of vengeance, our preference may be to get even, but our priority must be the will and the plan that God has to handle it Himself.

This is indicated in the latter part of verse 19, where we read, "For it is written." The word "for" introduces a reason for no self-revenge. "It is written" is the word "grapho." This word means "to write." It is used in the Bible as a technical term to refer to Scripture. This is a perfect tense in the Greek Bible. The perfect tense tells us that here in the past, God did something, and then the results have continued to where we are now, and where we are now, and where we are now. And it just keeps going on forever. It's a very beautiful tense in the Greek language. And when you find it, it tells you a great deal.

**God's Written Revelation**

God is telling us that, at some point in time, He produced a written revelation of what He thinks. And that written revelation is the authority in the human race today. Obviously, it could not be an authority if there were mistakes in that revelation. It has to be an inerrant revelation, or we cannot confidently say that this is what God thinks, and this is what God has said. This technical term "grapho" – when you find that in the Scriptures ("it is written") always refers to the Bible as the inerrant revelation from God. It is passive voice, which means that the Bible did not produce itself, but that God used men that He selected and then guided. They produced it. And it's a statement of fact about the source of information about God that we can trust.

He then quotes here from Deuteronomy 32:35, and this is further re-quoted then in Hebrews 10:30. What he is quoting (what that passage in Deuteronomy says) is: "'Vengeance is Mine. I will repay,' said the Lord." So, he's dealing here with a very authoritative Bible doctrine principle – one that is so major that it requires a lot of spiritual maturity on the part of a Christian to be able to do it. You do not seek vengeance. Here is the word in the Greek Bible.

Instead, God says, "This business of vengeance is Mine. The word "vengeance" is "ekdikesis." "Ekdikesis" refers to exacting justice for some action. Actually, specifically, this word "vengeance" here refers to the penalty that you will exact. Somebody does something, and they deserve treatment back. What they get back is the penalty. God says, "Penalty-giving is up to Me. I will repay." And in the Bible, generally, the word "I" is not separate in the text unless God really wants to emphasize Himself. Here in this place, you have the word "I" separate, indicating that God is saying, "I want you to understand that I am talking about Myself – I myself." We say that in English when we want to emphasize that we are going to do it.

**God Will Repay**

What's he going to do? He's going to repay. And along comes one of those extra strong Greek words. In the Greek Bible, you can string words together in order to emphasize something you want to say. This one is "antapodidomi" – two prepositions and a verb stuck together. This word means "to give in return" or "to recompense." The word "apo" means "from." It's a prefix for "didomi," so he means "to give back" or "to repay." And then to make it even stronger, he adds another preposition "anti," which means "instead of." So, he means "to give back in full stead," which is: "I'm going to give you everything you've got coming." So, God says, "I'm possibly going to return. And furthermore, I want to make it clear that I'm going to return everything you've got coming."

**God's Justice**

So, God's justice is something that is really bad to contemplate. If you're a smart person, you will not want to come up against God's justice. You will not want to come up against promoting something that His Word condemns, because you are going to get the justice of God. Someplace along the line, you're going to pay a price: some here; and, some in eternity. You cannot get away with violating the justice of God. And that's when he is saying when he says, "Vengeance is Mine: I'm going to fully pay back."

So, God's justice will be perfectly executed in giving the abuser the punishment he deserves. This is in the future tense – at some point in the future. It's active voice. God says that He'll handle it. It's a statement of fact. Furthermore, we are told that the one who is saying this identifies Himself as "the Lord." This is the Greek word "kurios," which stands for deity. So, he is making it clear that this is an act of deity.

So, verse 19 gives us some very critical information that is not generally welcome in the human race, and is not natural to us. Christians are told that they are not to carry out revenge for the wrongs which have been done to them. Leave vengeance to God because He knows all the pertinent facts. So, He's able to act with perfect justice.

Haven't you had the time when you have done something that you thought somebody deserved, and then you discovered that they didn't do it, and you come through with vengeance. Sometimes we've done this to our children. We think that they have done something, but we have the story a little misunderstood, and we proceed to punish them, and then discover that they were innocent . . . after all. It crushes you. It makes you feel horrible. You punish this little kid, and he wasn't even guilty. I can remember occasions like that that still stick in my mind, where you missed the beat and got the information wrong, or you mis-evaluate it. And there you were interpreting conduct in one way, when it wasn't that way at all. Therefore, you acted with injustice. And that's how we are humanly. We cannot keep the things straight. We cannot exercise justice in the right way.

I remember one time my number three son came home from the academy and he took something from the house. I can't remember what it was. And he walked by me, and he hid it. So, right away I knew that something was up. So, I said, "What are you going to do with that?" And he wouldn't tell me. So, I spanked him a little. I said, "What are you going to do?" He said, "I can't stand to tell you." And now he was in tears. I paddled him a couple more times, and I said, "What are you doing? You're sneaking out with this?" He said, "Well, I can't tell you." And finally, he just broke down and said, "Well, we need it in class because we're preparing a surprise for you." Talk about being crushed, talk about sensing vengeance exercised with injustice. And that's what it is on the human level. You do not have omniscience to know it all. And only God can apply the justice perfectly. It makes good sense to leave it with him.

Human vengeance, unfortunately, is often the product of wounded pride rather than noble and godly convictions. The hot-tempered response in words and actions – the little snippy toss of your head, and the storming out is not because you're godly. It's not because you're such a noble person. It's just that your little pride has been wounded, and you have not had the capacity and the bigness as a believer to rise above that and say, "Well, Lord, if I have really been treated unjustly, I hope, and I know, You will take care of it, and I leave it with You." Only God can be completely fair in dealing out what every rascal deserves. That requires right timing, and the right kind of punishment – both.

Christians who execute their own vengeance are also likely to go too far, and then they will be disciplined themselves. In the Old Testament, the pagan nations were, on many occasions, used by God to punish Israel. The problem was that when the pagans found themselves in a position of dominance over the people of God, they went too far. They used excessive abuse. And the result was that when God finished His discipline upon Israel, He then disciplined the nation that he had used (and would have used without any ill effects upon them), because they went too far. They took over. Then they themselves found themselves in the hands of God's justice. The scales of justice always has to be balanced exactly. And only God can do that.

It is interesting that even the God-man, Jesus Christ, in His humanity, left vengeance with His Father. 1 Peter 2:23 says, "Who (referring to Christ) when He was reviled, did not revile again; when He suffered, he did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously." There you have the whole thing. The Lord Jesus, when He was abused, and when He was reviled, He didn't return it in kind. He took it in suffering, and He gave Himself over to His Father in heaven to exercise justice upon His abusers. Evil should be punished. That's true. But God has to do it, so as not to create more evil by acting unjustly.

So, what a relief it is to be free of any such awesome responsibility as Christians that we have to exercise our judgment. It is the height of old sin nature arrogance and presumption for a Christian to dispense his own judgment on people for their evil ways. The essence of Christian piety is trusting God to decide how to deal with our abusers, as it is the essence of godliness to try to take God's place in dispensing justice.

I would suggest that you jot down to read Psalm 37 as a beautiful example of the absolute certainty of God exercising vengeance, and doing it in perfect righteousness.

**Saul and David**

Let's look at one classic example to illustrate this from the Bible. A classic example of not taking personal vengeance is Davis's refusal to kill King Saul on two occasions where the opportunity fell into his hands. You remember that King Saul, as he realized that God had abandoned him; had rejected him; had turned from him; that He had selected the young boy David to be the king of Israel after him; that Saul's son Jonathan would never be on the throne of Israel; that the dynasty had been removed from his family; and, now David would be king, Saul hated David with a vengeance. And he proceeded to abuse this young man in every way he could, and sought to take his life.

Turn to 1 Samuel 24. Here is the first time that Saul fell into the hands of David, and he could have killed him on the spot without any problem. It happened in a very beautiful spot. It was a place called Engedi. Engedi is one of those little places nestled into a forest area. And there's a waterfall that comes down. There's a place in Yosemite like that. I forget – it's Fairy Falls, or some name like that. It's amazing that you walk into the place (into the forest area), and suddenly you come upon this waterfall with a big pool. And we had a young man with us on one of our trip camps years ago, when we walked into this place in Yosemite. And he had been to Israel to Engedi. When we came around the bend and saw this place, he said, "Boy, this looks just like Engedi. Most of the kids didn't know what he was talking about, but he was referring to this incident here where David is hiding out at this little oasis spot. And what should happen, but along comes Saul and his entourage.

"And it came to pass, when Saul was returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, 'Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi.' And then took 3,000 chosen men out of all Israel, and went to seek David and his men upon the rocks of the wild goats." What Saul decides to do here is to mount an expedition against David.

"And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet; and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave." Saul goes into the cave by himself to take care of personal needs. And his men are outside the cave. Well, what he doesn't know is that the cave is already filled with somebody. Way in the dark recesses, back in the cave, sits David and some of his men: "And the men of David said unto him, 'Behold, the day of which the Lord said unto you, 'Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it shall seem good unto you.'' Then David arose and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe stealthily." David's men said, "Here it is, David. This is what God has promised. He told you that your enemy would be put in your hand. He's done it. Kill him."

Instead, David quietly sneaks up, and he cuts off a chunk of souls robe: "And it came to pass afterward that David's heart smote him because he had cut off Saul's skirt. And he said unto his men, 'The Lord forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the Lord's anointed; to stretch forth my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the Lord.' So, David restrained his servants with these words, and did not permit them to rise against Saul, but Saul rose up out of the cave and went on his way." David said, "This is God's man. Yes, this man has abused us. Yes, this man does deserve punishment. Justice demands that something be done to Saul for what he's done to us, but he is God's king. God put him in that position. We relieve vengeance as the Word of God tells us. Get God to execute it. We'll do it wrong. "So, David refused to let his people injure Saul. Saul, in the meantime, gets up and leaves.

Verse 8: "David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried unto Saul, saying, 'My Lord, the King.' And then Saul looked behind him. And David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down. And David said to Saul, 'Why do you hear men's words, saying, 'Behold, David seeks your harm?''"

In verse 9, David says to Saul, "Why are you listening to the scuttlebutt; that I have evil intentions; and, that I want to do you injury? Why do you listen to that? You know that's not true. Behold, this day your eyes have seen how the Lord has delivered you into my hand in the cave, and some bade me kill you. But my eye spared you. And I said, 'I will not put forth my hand against my Lord, for he is the Lord's anointed. Moreover, my father see, yea see the skirt of your robe in my hand, for in that I cut off the skirt of your robe, and did not kill you. Know and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my soul to take it. The Lord judge between me and you, and the Lord avenge me of you. But my hand shall not be upon you. As says the proverb of the ancients, 'Wickedness proceeds from the wicked, but my hand shall not be upon you.' After whom has the king of Israel come out? After whom do you pursue? After a dead dog? After a flea? The Lord therefore be judge, and judge between me and you, and see, and plead my cause, and deliver me out of your hand.'"

Here, David very properly pleads his case. And he makes a point as to why the abuser is wrong in abusing him. And that's OK to do that. But he did not go so far as to take the vengeance in his own hand.

Well, as proverb says, "A soft answer turns away wrath.' And that certainly worked with Saul on this occasion. Notice what happens: "And it came to pass, when David had ceased speaking these words unto Saul, that Saul said, 'Is this your voice, my son David?' And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. And he said to David, 'You are more righteous than I, for you have rewarded me good, whereas I have rewarded you evil. And you have showed this day how you have dealt well with me. For as much as when the Lord has delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me. For if a man find his enemy, will he let him go well away? Wherefore, the Lord reward you with good for what you have done unto me this day. And now behold, I know well that you shall surely be King, and that the Kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. Therefore, now swear unto me by the Lord, that you will not cut off my seed after me, and that you will not destroy my name out of my father's house.' And David swore unto Saul, and Saul went home, but David and his men went up onto the stronghold."

So, Saul was very properly convicted. He was humiliated by this response. God brought conviction upon his heart. And he said, "David, you're a better man than I am, Gunga Din. And indeed, I should not have been treated in this way at your hands. And God is going to make you king. And I'm going to ask you now to be kind to my family when you are in authority." That is because, ordinarily, what Kings of the time did was wreak vengeance upon the previous king's family by killing them all off for what they had done to him.

There was another time, and you may read this on your own, in 1 Samuel 26:1-25. This is a very interesting second opportunity when Saul fell into David's hand. David could have killed him. Saul mounts an expedition to capture David, and David, by night, takes one of his young men with him, and they actually infiltrate the camp ground of Saul, and then they infiltrate the very tent in which Saul is sleeping. And here again, David's man says, "Kill him. We've got him. We're in. Nobody knows we're here. We'll finish him off and we'll leave. And that'll end Saul's abuse. Saul forgot his words here. And he went back to hunting and pursuing David again. But David again refused to do that, and then later reveals to Saul how he had refused to take vengeance. And again, in that passage, in 1 Samuel 26, Saul is shamed and convicted because of the love of David.

Now, having said all that, I must remind you that Romans 12:19, about not taking vengeance, does not deal with the divine institution of government, because government has a direct command from God to exercise vengeance; to dispense justice; and, to impose punishment on evildoers. When we get to Romans 13, we'll be getting more into governmental matters and the role of government as a divine institution in human society. But I do want to point out now that individual citizens are not authorized to impose their own justice on evildoers. That's a vigilante action. But human government was set up specifically by God in order to keep the playing field fair. It is the responsibility of human government to exercise justice on evildoers, so everyone has an equal chance to exercise his of equal abilities.

So, we come to Romans 12:20: inspiring shame and remorse in your enemy. Verse 20 says, "Therefore." Here is a conclusion now being introduced. This is a second contrast here in verse 20 on executing the admonition of verse 19. The first illustration of not taking vengeance, that verse 19 speaks about says, "Turn it over to the Lord and let Him do it." A second way of exercising vengeance on your abuser is in verse 20 now. And this is a legitimate way that you can exercise vengeance on those who abuse you: "Therefore, if." This is the Greek word "ean." This "ean" indicates to us that this is a third-class condition (a third-class "if"). A third-class "if" in the Greek Bible indicates that maybe the person will do this, or maybe he won't. This is like in 1 John 1:9. That's a third-class condition: "If you confess your sins," certain things will result for you, and if you don't, they won't. So, it says, "Maybe you will; and, maybe you won't." This is one of the beauties of the Greek language. Here it's: "Maybe this will; and, maybe it won't." Your enemy may or may not do this, but if he does, here's what you should do.

**If your Enemy is Hungry, Feed Him**

"If your enemy" is the Greek word "echthros." "Echthros" is a personal antagonist. It's not just some impersonal enemy like someone that you are in combat with in time of war. This is a personal enemy. This is someone such that you really feel particularly injured that they are abusing you: "If your close enemy has a problem." What. He's hungry. The Greek word is "peinao." This is the word that indicates the need for food to sustain the nutrition of the body. Here is a potential condition. Your enemy is hungry. He is losing his strength. And what should you do? This guy has been knocking around. He's been giving you all kinds of misery. And now you have a chance to let him suffer what he has brought onto himself, perhaps his negligence and indolence. He hasn't been working whatever. The Word of God says that what you do is you feed: "psomizo." This comes from the Greek word which means "a morsel."

So, literally what this is saying is: "Give somebody a morsel of food." Put a bit of food into your enemy's mouth to sustain his physical nourishment. You are to do this on all occasions as a Christian. It is active voice. You are to do it yourself. And here again, God comes in with that imperative mood. He's commanding it.

**If your Enemy is Thirsty, Give him Water**

Then he says, "If." Again, this is the third-class condition. He may have another problem. Your enemy may be dying of thirst: "If he is in need of water. You know, you can go a long time without food. Some of you don't think that's possible. Some of you can't get through a service without munching on something to sustain yourself to the end. But you can go many days without food. But you can only go for a very few days without water. So, this is even a more pressing demanding need.

So, aha: "This guy has nothing to drink." You've caught him out here in the middle of the desert. You have the water; and, he has nothing. You can get up here on the high spot and watch him slowly dehydrate and wither away. The sucker should have that. That's what he deserves. Let him shrivel up before your very eyes.

However, God says, "No, he's dying. He is your enemy. You "psomizo" him. You give him something to drink. You give him the supply of water to sustain his physical life. And again, this is in the form of a divine command. The expressions "Feed him" and "give him to drink" imply a humanitarian response that you would extend to any human being.

Then he explains why you do this. And he puts in this word "for" ("gar"), which indicates the reason. He says, "In so doing (by accomplishing this – this kind of response), you will heap something upon him. The word is "soreuo." "Soreuo" means "to pile on" – at any future time you find your enemy in these needs. The need of having to have food or water is a metaphor for any kind of desperate human need that your enemy may have.

So, here you find him in this need. What do you do to him? You pile something on him. In 2 Timothy 3:6, you find this same words use relative to what people do with sins. They love to sin so much that they just pile it on themselves. So, here you pile something on your enemy. And what you do is you pile up coals of fire. You take burning coals, and you dump them on his "kephale," which is "his head." That's a part of the human anatomy. Coals of fire here refers to "keen anguish of the soul."

This expression comes from Proverbs 25:21-22, where God's wisdom advises us to do that – to act in such a way through kindness that what we do to those who are our enemies is that they are subdued by that kindness. They are convicted by it, and it burns on their head like coals of fire in their souls. They are just internally convicted. The enemy will experience the pain of shame and remorse in his mind, as if his head were covered with burning coals.

So, the Christian's basic response to an unfriendly person is a Holy Spirit-generated "agape" response. It's "agape" love. It's a call to treat our Christian enemies as our friends in Christ, and our unsaved enemies as our potential friends in Christ. It enables us to feed and to water them as they may need. This is surely an example of the Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12, which says that we should treat others as we would like them to treat us. Repaying hostility with non-retaliation, so that the attacker is humiliated, is the only kind of vengeance that is open for us as Christians to use. We can kill you with kindness, and you might enjoy doing that.

1 Peter 2:15 says, in this respect: "For so is the will of God – that with well-doing, you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men." Vengeance and retaliation, though it may be deserved by the abuser, only foment more bitterness and aggression. It is counterproductive.

Check Proverbs 15:1: "The soft answer turns away wrath."

We should also remember that we ought to pity our abuser (our attacker), because of the enormous internal emotional disruption that he is suffering from. He is distraught within. He is emotionally tearing himself up. And we have learned enough about the physical body to know that when you are emotionally disrupted, it has an effect on the physical body. Doctors cannot explain many things – why people have some physical ailments. They are finding that they can trace the person's emotional disruption. Anybody who is an abuser (an attacker) and is exercising vengeance is emotionally upset, and you should pity them on that account alone.

Furthermore, how our attacker reacts to our non-retaliatory response to abuse is irrelevant. You have to leave that with God. The thing is: "Don't become part of his problem."

So, we Christians are to take no pleasure in seeing the enemies of right get what they deserve from God. But we know that, indeed, that's what's going to happen to them. It is not pleasing to us, and we hope they will come to repentance. We hope that those who abuse us will return to the principles of the Word of God rather than bring judgment on themselves. Proverbs 24:17 expresses the attitude of the Christian: "Rejoice not when your enemy falls, and let your heart be glad when he stumbles."

**Overcome Evil with Good**

We close this with verse 21. Verse 21 summarizes everything that has been said to us in verses 17-20: "Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." The word "overcome" looks like this in the Greek Bible. It's the Greek word "nikao," and that's the word for "to conquer." So, what he is saying is: "Do not be conquered by evil." Do not be overcome by this thing called evil, which is the Greek word "kakos." This is a word that refers to what is inherently evil – something that's just evil in itself, not necessarily in its effects. This evil indicates definite acts, because in the Greek Bible it says, "Don't be conquered by *the* evil." So, it's referring to those specific abuses that people may exercise toward you. To be conquered by evil means to retaliate with evil. It's warning against your being provoked to a point of revenge. It's responding with guidance from the old sin nature to retaliate instead of responding with guidance from the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

"Don't be overcome (don't be conquered) by evil. But (this is a strong contrast again) overcome that evil with good." This is the Greek word "agathos," which is the word for something that is, again, inherently good or beneficial. And, in the Greek Bible, it is "*the* good." These are the specific acts that you choose to exercise – divine good instead of evil.

So, the way to deal with the evil that you receive is a magnanimous response of loving kindness. Subdue your enemy with kindness rather than with injury. The evil of verse 21 is related to the statement "Avenge not" in verse 19. That's the evil he's talking about. The good of verse 21 is related to the feeding and watering of your enemy in verse 20.

People naturally will expect retaliation when they do abuse you, but they are softened, and they are trained when they receive a kind response. Matthew 5:44 tells us the way we should handle it all: "Do good, and pray for those who mistrust us."

So, God's way is to overcome evil with good. This means that we are to respond to abuse with divine viewpoint wisdom of the Word of God. Going out of your way to show kindness by word and deed to your antagonists is the way to respond.

The unsaved, of course, cannot do this very well. They do not have the power of the indwelling spirit to override that bitterness that is naturally in the sin nature.

We have several biblical examples that I'll mention to you, and you may want to read this on your own. They are excellent examples of using kindness to make bitter enemies ashamed of themselves.

We have an example of that in Joseph's response to his brothers in Genesis 45:1-15 and Genesis 50:15-21.

We had this in the case of Elisha in 2 Kings 6:8-23.

We had this in the case of Steven in Acts 7:59-60.

We may summarize this all now today by the illustration of the death of God's Son, Jesus Christ, for the sins of the world. His act is a classic example of divine consistency with the principle of overcoming evil with good. The cross of Jesus Christ represents the highest manifestation of the sinner’s hatred for God. That same cross of Jesus Christ represents the finest expression of God's love in return for evil. The spear in the Savior side, thrust in with maximum human hatred, only drew forth the saving blood of Christ that washes the sin of the world in maximum expression of divine love. It got to the centurion standing beneath the cross, for indeed, he made a proper conclusion: "Surely this must be the Son of God."

Dr. John E. Danish, 1988

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