

# Romans 12:18-21 Commentary

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ROMANS ROAD to RIGHTEOUSNESS				
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Modified from Irving L. Jensen's excellent work [Jensen's Survey of the NT](#)

**Greek:** [ei dunaton, to](#) ex [humon meta panton anthropon eireneuontes](#): (PAPMPN)

**Amplified:** If possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

**NLT:** Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** As far as your responsibility goes, live at peace with everyone. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** If it is possible so far as it depends upon you, with all men be living at peace.

**Young's Literal:** If possible -- so far as in you -- with all men being in peace;

#### IF POSSIBLE SO FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU: ei dunaton to ex humon:

- Ro 14:17,19; 2 Samuel 20:19; Psalms 34:14; 120:5, 6, 7; Proverbs 12:20; Matthew 5:5,9; Mark 9:50; 1 Corinthians 7:15; 2 Corinthians 13:11; Galatians 5:22; Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 3:14,15; 1 Thessalonians 5:13; 2 Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 12:14; James 3:16, 17, 18; 1 Peter 3:11

**If possible - it may not always be possible!** We all want a word that always works, an easy solution, a quick fix. But some things in this broken world can't be fixed no matter what we do. And then there are some situations clearly when you may be forced to defend yourself in an abusive situation.

**Spurgeon** - Some people will quarrel, and it is barely possible to keep upon good terms with them. In their case we must do our best, and if after all, we cannot live peaceably with them, it will be fortunate for us if we can move off and live without them.

**Possible (1415) (dunatos [word study]** from **dunamai** = referring to power one has by virtue of inherent ability and resources; see study of **dunamis [word study]**) means powerful, able, strong. **Able** describes that which has sufficient or necessary power, means, skill, or resources to accomplish an objective.

**Dunatos** - 32x in 32v - NAS = able(6), could(1), impossible\*(1), influential men(1), man of power(1), mighty(3), mighty one(1), possible(12), power(1), powerful(1), strong(3), strong enough(1).

Matt. 19:26; 24:24; 26:39; Mk. 9:23; 10:27; 13:22; 14:35f; Lk. 1:49; 14:31; 18:27; 24:19; Acts 2:24; 7:22; 11:17; 18:24; 20:16; 25:5; Rom. 4:21; 9:22; 11:23; 12:18; 15:1; 1Co. 1:26; 2Co. 10:4; 12:10; 13:9; Gal. 4:15; 2Tim. 1:12; Titus 1:9; Heb. 11:19; James. 3:2.

Someone has said that "I could live this Christian life with no problem if it weren't for people!"

Someone else has said,

The more I get to know the human race, the more I love my dog.

Dogs are loyal, dependable, eager to please, and quick to forgive and forget. Don't you wish people were more like that? But sometimes no matter how hard we try to have a good relationship with someone, it doesn't work.

Note the qualifying phrase "**as much as depends on you.**" Some people problems may never be resolved, for just as it takes two to quarrel, it also takes two to reconcile. If we do our part and the "irreconcilable difference" remains, there is still a plan to follow. For the surrendered (Spirit filled and enabled) believer it is important not to hold on to resentment and not to try to retaliate with the "weapon of silence" (I call it "pouting" or passive aggressive behavior, the "silent treatment" - you know exactly what I mean don't you! As a non-born again husband, I mastered this exercise to a fine art form!).

Believers have a new power supply, the indwelling Holy Spirit and a new, regenerate nature [2Cor 5:17note] (cp Ezek 36:27, Note that his is our responsibility = Php 2:12-note, but it is only possible because of God's motivation and enablement = Php 2:13-note). Our responsibility is to make a conscious effort (a choice of our wills, this choice enabled by God's Spirit) to seek to overcome evil with good, and let the **Sovereign, Omnipotent** God work out the problem. Believers need to continually follow the "steps" given in the following verses in this chapter (Ro 12:9-21) until our people problems are resolved. But regardless of whether they resolve, we must still continue the practices Paul lays out for surrendered believers.

## See related topic: Forgiveness

- List of links related to forgiveness/unforgiveness
- Multiple illustrations and quotes related to forgiveness/unforgiveness
- Exposition of "Forgiveness" in Ephesians 4:32
- Exposition of "Forgiveness" in Colossians 3:13
- Exposition of "Forgiveness" in Matthew 6:12 and Matthew 6:14-15

Paul gives us some excellent advice in Romans 12 on how to handle "people problems"

Be affectionate (Ro 12:10-note)

Be prayerfully patient (Ro 12:12-note)

Bless your persecutors (Ro 12:14-note)

Be humble (Ro 12:16-note)

Don't take revenge (Ro 12:19-note)

Defeat evil with good (Ro 12:21-note)

As **Solomon** wisely advised when we encounter a **hard** situation, try a **soft** answer "A **gentle** (soft, tender, not harsh or negative) **answer** turns away wrath, But a **harsh word** (lit = "words of toil" = critical, cruel & meant to cause mental anguish) stirs up anger (Proverbs 15:1-[William Arnot's Comment](#), [Bridge's Comment](#))

If you answer a man with a harsh, negative, critical word, it stirs up the hearer's fleshly nature (including the old flesh nature latent and present in believers), and soon you have a quarrel on your hands.

**Matthew Poole** - The duty to which he exhorts in this verse, is a peaceable and quiet behaviour towards all men, as well infidels as Christians; those who are bad, as well as those who are good. The like exhortations we have, Heb 12:14-note. And to the discharge of this duty he annexeth a double limitation; first: If it be possible; secondly: As much as lieth in you: q. d. It may so fall out, that some men are of such froward and unpeaceable tempers, that it is impossible to live peaceably with them, or by them: or such conditions of peace may be offered as are not lawful for you to accept; it will not stand with the truth and glory of God, and with a good conscience, to agree with them. But, however, do your part, let there be no default in you why you should not live in peace with all men whatsoever. ([Romans 12 Commentary](#))

**Ray Stedman** - True love seeks to live at peace with everyone: "If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." There are people who just will not allow you to be at peace with them, but don't let it start with you. Remember the old song, *It Takes Two To Tango?* I think that last word ought to be tangle. It takes two to tangle. If you refuse to tangle, at least the conflict does not depend on you and is not traceable to your actions and your attitudes. That is what love really does. ([Romans 12 - Ray C. Stedman](#))

**William Newell** - It is not always possible for a Christian to be at peace with all men, but he can be a peace-lover; a peace-liver; and often a peace-maker, among men. As James says, "The fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by them that make peace." Perhaps the most fruitful cause of trouble for a Christian is his claiming "his rights," forgetting Paul's description of us Christians throughout this dispensation: "For Thy sake we are killed all the day long; We were accounted as sheep for the slaughter." (Ro 8:36, Ps 44:22) [One who had visited the Chicago stock yards on a slaughter-day said to me, "Our guide took us to where the swine were being slaughtered. Here there was squealing and grunting everywhere, and the moment the men laid hold of one for slaughter, it gave a wild shriek, and the uproar was terrible. By and by we approached another building and heard no sounds; and we found that here the sheep were being slaughtered, without complaining--in silence!"] ([Romans 12 - Newell's Commentary on Romans](#))

**Denney** - Over others' conduct we have no control; but the initiative in disturbing the peace is never to lie with the Christian. ([Romans 12 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Murray** -This must be as inclusive in its scope as the preceding clause; there is no restrictive use of the expression "all men". It is obvious, however, that a reservation is made in this instance respecting the obligation to be at peace. "If it be possible" indicates that it may not always be possible. We may not suppose that the implied impossibility has in view any inability arising from our weakness as, for example, inability to restrain our own impulses of anger or resentment. The impossibility is that of another character; it is "a case of the objective impossibility... chiefly where truth, right, and duty command resistance". It would violate the witness of Jesus to demand peace at the expense of these priorities (cf. Matt. 10:34, 35, 36, 36; Luke 12:51, 52, 53, 53). "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable" (James 3:17) and we are to follow peace and holiness (cf. Heb 12:14-note). As Philippi again observes, "by the side of speaking the truth in love must ever stand loving in truth". "As much as in you lieth." If the preceding clause alludes to

the impossibility proceeding from considerations objective to ourselves, this bears upon the exercise of every means within our power to maintain peace with our fellowmen. The responsibility for discord must to no extent be traceable to failure on our part to do all that is compatible with holiness, truth, and right. This exhortation as a whole underlines the evil of indulging discord for its own sake or when necessity does not demand it. Peaceableness of disposition and behaviour is a virtue to be cultivated in our relations with all men; there is no circumstance in which our efforts to preserve and promote peace may be suspended. This is the force of "as much as in you lieth". On the other hand, we may never be at peace with sin and error. If peace means complicity with sin or error or if it encourages these, then peace must be sacrificed. We are to love our neighbour as ourselves and we may not refrain from the rebuke and dissent which may evoke his displeasure but which his highest interest requires. ([The Epistle to the Romans](#))

**Hodge** explains that "The retaliation of injuries necessarily leads to contention and strife, while peace is the natural result of a forgiving disposition. The command in this verse, therefore, is naturally connected with that contained in Ro 12:17. So far from resenting every offense, we should do all we can to live at peace with all men. As the preservation of peace is not always within our control, Paul limits his command by saying, if it be possible, so far as lieth in you, as to what is of you. The cause of conflict must not arise from you. Your duty is to preserve peace. From the wickedness of others, this is often impossible; and Paul's own example shows that he was far from thinking that either truth or principle was to be sacrificed for the preservation of peace. His whole life was an active and ardent contention against error and sin. The precept, however, is plain, and the duty important. As far as it can be done consistently with higher obligations and more important interests, we must endeavor to promote peace, and for this end avoid giving offense and avenging injuries. ([Romans 12 - Hodge's Commentary on Romans](#))

**William Barclay** - We are to live at peace with all men. But Paul adds two qualifications. (a) He says, "if it be possible". There may come a time when the claims of courtesy have to submit to the claims of principle. Christianity is not an easy-going tolerance which will accept anything and shut its eyes to everything. There may come a time when some battle has to be fought, and when it does, the Christian will not shirk it. (b) He says, as far as you can. Paul knew very well that it is easier for some to live at peace than for others. He knew that one man can be compelled to control as much temper in an hour as another man in a lifetime. We would do well to remember that goodness is a great deal easier for some than for others; that will keep us alike from criticism and from discouragement. ([Romans 12 - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible](#))

**Spurgeon** gives the following illustration: I once lived where my neighbor's garden was divided from me only by a very imperfect hedge. He kept a dog, and his dog was a shockingly bad gardener, and did not improve my plants. So, one evening, while I walked alone, I saw this dog doing mischief and being a long way off, I threw a stick at him, with some earnest advice as to his going home. This dog, instead of going home, picked up my stick, and came to me with it in his mouth, wagging his tail. He dropped the stick at my feet and looked up to me most kindly. What could I do but pat him and call him a good dog, and regret that I had ever spoken roughly to him? (**Ed:** Would it be so that humans responded more like dogs to harsh words!)

While it's true that a humble response to wrath will normally cause it to subside, it's equally true that some people will never be pacified. Because of long-term bitterness and resentment, the tide of their wrath runs too high. Calm, quiet words may not always turn away another's wrath. You may be grieved because they go unheeded, but you can never go wrong with a soft answer.

**Illustration** from Our Daily Bread: My neighbor seemed upset with me. Apparently I had done something that bothered her. When I asked if I had offended her, she responded with a curt "No!" I told her, "I don't want any bad feelings between us. If I've done something to offend you, I apologize." Since then the climate has remained cool. Someone has said, "The more I get to know the human race, the more I love my dog." Dogs are loyal, dependable, eager to please, and quick to forgive and forget. Don't you wish people were more like that? But sometimes no matter how hard we try to have a good relationship with someone, it doesn't work. The apostle Paul addressed that situation in Ro 12:18. Notice the phrase "as much as depends on you." He knew that some people problems may never be resolved. It takes two to quarrel; it takes two to reconcile. If you do your part and the problem remains, there is still a plan to follow. Don't harbor resentment or retaliate with the weapon of silence. Work at overcoming evil with good (Ro 12:21), and let God work out the problem. We need to keep following the steps given in Romans 12:9-21 until our people problems are resolved--but especially if they're not. --D J De Haan ([Our Daily Bread, Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved](#))

**The best way to conquer an enemy is with the weapon of love.**

**BE AT PEACE WITH ALL MEN: meta panton anthropon eireneuontes ( PAMPN ):**

- 2 Cor 13:11; 1 Thes 5:13

**John MacArthur** - Short of compromising God's truth and standards, we should be willing to go to great lengths to build peaceful bridges to those who hate us and harm us. We must forsake any grudge or settled bitterness and fully forgive from the heart all who

harm us. Having done that, we can seek reconciliation honestly. ([MacArthur, J: Romans 9-16. Chicago: Moody Press](#))

**Be at peace** (1514) (**eireneuo**) is the verb form of the Greek word for **peace**, **eirene** (word study), which in turn is derived from the verb **eiro** which means to join or bind together that which has been separated. This word therefore literally depicts the binding or joining together again of that which had been separated or divided. It pictures a setting at one again, a meaning conveyed by the common expression "having it all together". It follows that peace is the opposite of division or dissension. Peace as a state of concord and harmony is the opposite of war. Peace was used as a greeting or farewell corresponding to the Hebrew word shalom - "peace to you".

**Peace** is a condition of freedom from disturbance, whether outwardly, as of a nation from war or enemies or inwardly, as in the current context, within the soul. **Peace** implies health, well-being, and prosperity.

**Eireneuo** - 4x in 4v - Mk 9:50; Ro 12:18; 2Co 13:11; 1Th 5:13

There are 10 uses of **eireneuo** in the non-apocryphal **Septuagint**- 1Ki. 22:44; 2Chr. 14:5, 6; 20:30 (Quiet = peace -- note the Source of rest which led to peace! He is the same source for us beloved); Job 3:26; 5:23, 24; 15:21; 16:12; Da 4:4

**Be at peace** sounds like a command but in the Greek is not in the form of a command. Nevertheless it is still an exhortation which should be obeyed by the Spirit controlled believer (and in truth, this instruction **CAN ONLY** be obeyed as we depend on the Spirit to enable us!). The **present tense** calls for this attitude to be our continual mindset or lifestyle. Try to do this in your own natural, Adamic (**flesh**) strength! What's the secret? (see Gal 5:16-note; Gal 5:17-note; Gal 5:25-note; Ep 5:18-note; cp Col 3:16-note)

**Steven Cole** - DOING WHAT IS RIGHT MAY OR MAY NOT RESULT IN PEACE, BUT PEACE SHOULD BE YOUR AIM. Romans 12:18: "If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men." Sometimes in spite of all that we do, the other person does not want to make peace. He's mad at God and you represent God to him. But Paul's point is, don't provoke a quarrel by your obnoxious behavior and then claim that you're being persecuted for righteousness' sake. Bend over backwards to make peace. Let the difficult person know that you want to be on friendly terms. If he rejects it, at least it's not your fault. I should add that seeking peace does not include compromising key biblical truth for the sake of peace. Paul would not make peace with the Judaizers, who insisted on circumcision in addition to faith for salvation. He confronted Peter over his hypocrisy in trying to stay on their good side. Sometimes it is sin to make peace. We need wisdom and discernment to know when to stand firm. ([Doing Right When You're Wronged](#))

Christians should not be needlessly provocative or contentious. The righteousness of God is not worked out by belligerence and wrath (James 1:19-note; James 1:20-note). In fact...

**We should love peace,  
make peace, and  
be at peace.**

When we have offended others, or when someone has offended us, we should work tirelessly for a peaceful resolution of the matter.

Don't be like the dad who when ask by his son "How do wars begin?" replied "Well, World War I began because Germany invaded Belgium." At this point his wife interrupted, "Tell him the truth. It began because somebody was murdered." To which the husband quickly retorted "Are you answering his question or am I?" At which the wife stormed out of the room, slamming the door as hard as she could. When the room stopped vibrating, an uneasy silence was broken by the son's comment "Daddy, you don't need to tell me how wars begin. Now I know!"

Are you quick to retaliate?  
(Or are you quick to forgive?)

Have you laid it "ALL" on the altar  
so that now you are cultivating a peaceable spirit?  
(When you sing "I Surrender All" do you mean it?)  
(Or are you a singing hypocrite?)

(Why do we sing songs that we don't intend to obey in the power of the Spirit?)

Remember that Jesus prayed for His enemies - Do you? (Do I?)  
(This selfless act can only be carried out as we are filled with and walk by the Spirit!)

**And remember that getting even**

**takes you down to the level of your offender.**

When anger lingers in our heart,  
It poisons all we think & do.  
But faith seeks ways to show God's love  
An keeps our spirit strong & true.

**-D J De Haan**

**Romans 12:19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. ([NASB: Lockman](#))**

**Greek:** [me heautous ekdikountes](#), (PAPMPN) [agapetoi](#), [alla dote \(2PAAM\)](#) [topon te orge](#), [gegraptai \(3SRPI\)](#) [gar, hemoi ekdikesis](#), [ego antapodoso](#), (1SFAI) [legei \(1SPAI\)](#) [kurios](#).

**Amplified:** Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave the way open for [God's] wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is Mine, I will repay (requite), says the Lord. [[Deut. 32:35](#)] ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

**NLT:** Do your part to live in peace with everyone, as much as possible. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Never take vengeance into your own hands, my dear friends: stand back and let God punish if he will. For it is written: 'Vengeance is mine. I will repay'. ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Do not be avenging yourselves, beloved ones, but give place at once to the wrath, for it stands written, To me belongs punishment, I will repay, says the Lord

**Young's Literal:** not avenging yourselves, beloved, but give place to the wrath, for it hath been written, 'Vengeance is Mine,

**NEVER TAKE YOUR OWN REVENGE BELOVED : [me heautous ekdikountes \( PAPMPN\)](#) , [agaphetoi](#):**

- Ro 14,17; Leviticus 19:18; 1 Samuel 25:26,33; Proverbs 24:17, 18, 19,29; Ezekiel 25:12

**Never** - The English definition of **never** is not ever; not at any time; at no time. It refers to the past or the future. This gives a clear picture of the behavior Paul is calling for in a believer and emphasizes the need for us to have made a presentation of our whole self to God as a wholly holy sacrifice (Ro 12:1-note) continually refusing the world's advice to "get even" and instead continually being transformed by the renewing of our mind to God's way and will (Ro 12:2-note) holding back instead of paying back!

**Denney** - Even when the Christian has been wronged, he is not to take the law into his own hand, and right or vindicate himself. ([Romans 12 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Beloved (27)** ([agapetos](#) from [agapao](#) = love; [agape](#)) means beloved, dear, very much loved. **Agapetos** is love called out of one's heart by preciousness of the object loved. In Scripture **agapetos** is used only of Christians as united with God or with each other in love. God the Father uses this same word describing Jesus declaring that "This is My **beloved** Son, in whom I am well-pleased." (Mt 3:17)

*So even as we are now His sons and daughters, may He be well-pleased with our loving obedience, albeit never as perfect as the Son's obedience.*

In fact the first 9 uses in the NT are of God the Father speaking of Christ, His beloved Son. This gives you some idea of the preciousness of the word **beloved**! (see all of Paul's uses of **agapetos** - Ro 1:7; 11:28; 12:19; 16:5, 8,9, 12; 1Co 4:14, 17; 10:14; 15:58; 2Co 7:1; 12:19; Eph. 5:1; 6:21; Phil 2:12; 4:1; Col 1:7; 4:7, 9, 14; 1Th 2:8; 1Ti 6:2; 2Ti 1:2; Philemon 1:1, 1:16) In short, by addressing the saints at Rome as **beloved**, Paul is conveying the deep feeling he has in his heart towards them.

**Godet** - there is in the heart of man an ineffaceable feeling of justice which the apostle respects. He only desires to give this sentiment its true direction. Evil ought to be punished, that is certain. If you would not yourself become unjust, don't think you should make yourself the instrument of carrying out the justice, but instead peacefully resign this concern to God, the only Just Judge. The

apostle knows that he is here requiring a difficult sacrifice. Hence the style of address: dearly **beloved**, by which he reminds his readers of the tender love which dictates this recommendation, a love which is only an emanation of that which God Himself bears to them. ([Romans 12:3-21 The Believer as a Member of the Church](#))

**Alexander Maclaren** - THE natural instinct is to answer enmity with enmity, and kindness with kindness. There are many people of whom we think well and like, for no other reason than because we believe that they think well of and like us. Such a love is really selfishness. In the same fashion, dislike, and alienation on the part of another naturally reproduce themselves in our own minds. A dog will stretch its neck to be patted, and snap at a stick raised to strike it. It requires a strong effort to master this instinctive tendency, and that effort the plainest principles of Christian morality require from us all. The precepts in our text are in twofold form, negative and positive; and they are closed with a general principle, which includes both these forms, and much more besides. There are two pillars, and a great lintel coping them, like the trilithons of Stonehenge. Do not take the law into your own hands, but leave God's way of retribution to work itself out. By avenging, the Apostle means a passionate redress of private wrongs at the bidding of personal resentment. We must note how deep this precept goes. It prohibits not merely external acts which, in civilised times are restrained by law, but, as with Christian morality, it deals with thoughts and feelings, and not only with deeds. It forbids such natural and common thoughts as 'I owe him an in turn for that'; 'I should like to pay him off.' A great deal of what is popularly called 'a proper spirit' becomes extremely improper if tested by this precept. There is an eloquent word in German which we can only clumsily reproduce, which christens the ugly pleasure at seeing misfortune and calls it 'joy in others' disasters.' We have not the word; would that we had not the thing? ([Still Another Triplet - Romans 12:19-21](#))

**Ray Stedman** - love does not try to get even. Listen to these words again. "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written, 'It is mine to avenge, I will repay,' says the Lord." Revenge is one of the most natural of human responses to hurt or injury or bad attitudes. We always feel that, if we treat others according to the way they have treated us, we are only giving them justice. We can justify this so easily. "I'm only teaching them a lesson. I'm only showing them how I feel. I'm only giving back what they've given me." But any time you argue that way you have forgotten the many times you have injured others without getting caught yourself. But God hasn't forgotten. This always puts us in the place of those Pharisees who, when the woman was taken in adultery, were ready to cast stones and stone her to death. Jesus came by and said to them, "He that is without sin among you, let him cast the first stone," (John 8:7). That stopped them all dead in their tracks, because there wasn't a one of them who wasn't equally as guilty as she. They needed to be judged too. We must never carry out revenge, because we are not in the position of a judge. We, too, are guilty. We need to be judged. Therefore, Paul's admonition is, "Don't try to avenge yourself." You will only make a mess of it. The inevitable result of trying to get even with people is that you escalate the conflict. It is inescapable. When I was in school in Montana, I used to watch the cows in the corral. They would be standing there peacefully, and then one cow would kick another cow. Of course, that cow had to kick back. Then the first cow kicked harder and missed the second cow and hit a third. That cow kicked back. I watched that happen many times. One single cow, starting to kick another, soon had the whole corral kicking and milling and mooing at one another, mad as could be. This happens in congregations too. (Romans 12 - Ray C. Stedman)

**Take revenge** ([1556](#)) (**ekdikeo** from **ek** = out or from + **dike** = right, justice; see cognates = **ekdikesis** and **ekdikos**) is literally that which proceeds from justice. The idea is to vindicate one's right or to do one justice.

**Revenge** (Webster's) = to avenge (as oneself) usually by retaliating in kind or degree; to inflict injury in return for (revenge an insult); To inflict pain or injury in return for an injury received.

**Vengeance** (Webster's) = from Latin vindicare to lay claim to, avenge — punishment inflicted in retaliation for an injury or offense; retribution - the dispensing or receiving of reward or punishment especially in the hereafter

**BDAG** summarized - **1.** to procure justice for someone, grant justice (Lk 18:5); taking justice into one's own hands (Ro 12:19); **2.** to inflict appropriate penalty for wrong done (of special significance in an honor/shame-oriented society) punish, take vengeance for (2Cor 10:6, Lxx - Dt 32:43); prayers for vengeance w. the person on whom vengeance is taken, or who is punished, designated by ek (Nu 31:2; 1Ki 24:13 Rev 6:10) **3.** to carry out one's obligations in a worthy manner, do justice to = do justice to one's official position.

**TDNT** - By assimilation to ekdikazo, this acquires the sense "to avenge," "to punish." We find it in the LXX for a. (passive) "to be punished," b. "to avenge" with accusative of cause, c. "to avenge" with accusative of person (or dative), d. "to punish" with accusative of person (or dative), e. "to punish" with ex, epi, or more rarely en or para of person, and f. "to avenge" with genitive of person or cause. In the OT the usage develops under the influence of the strong sense of the sanctity of blood, whereas a more legal concept affects the usage of the papyri, thus yielding the senses "to decide a case," "to contest a case," "to bring to judgment," and "to help to justice."

**Thayer** (summary) - to vindicate one's right, do one justice; to protect, defend, one person from another (Lk 18:3); to avenge a thing (i. e. to punish a person for a thing) (2Cor 10:6); to demand in punishment the blood of one from another, i. e. to exact of the murderer the penalty of his crime (A. V. avenge one's blood on or at the hand of) (Rev 6:10, 19:2).

**Liddell-Scott** on **ekdikeo** - to avenge, punish a crime, NT.: also to exact vengeance for a crime, II. to avenge a person

**International Standard Bible Encyclopedia** - Ekdikeō, which means to avenge, is twice used of God (Rev 6:10; 19:2); and ekdikēsis, "vengeance," 6 t (LK 18:7ff; Rom 12:19; 2Th 1:8; He 10:30). In the first two Instances it is used by Jesus concerning the Divine action; ekdikos, "avenger," occurs once in application to God (1Th 4:6); dikē, "judgment" or "vengeance" is twice used of God (2Th 1:9; Jude ver 7). The use of these terms shows that the punishment inflicted on sinful men is strictly punishment of the vindictory sort, the vindication of outraged justice, the infliction of deserved penalty. Very significant is the passage in 2Th 1:6, "It is a righteous thing with God to recompense affliction to them that afflict you." There is no question of bettering the offender.

**Ekdikēsis** - means the return of injury for injury, or the infliction of pain on another in consequence of an injury received from him further than the just ends of reparation or punishment require. Revenge differs materially from resentment, which rises in the mind immediately on being injured; but revenge is a cool and deliberate wickedness, and is often executed years after the offence is given. By some it is considered as a perversion of anger. Anger, it is said, is a passion given to man for wise and proper purposes, but revenge is the corruption of anger, is unnatural, and therefore ought to be suppressed. It is observable that the proper object of anger is vice; but the object, in general, of revenge, is man. It transfers the hatred due to the vice to the man, to whom it is not due. It is forbidden by the Scriptures, and is unbecoming the character and spirit of a peaceful follower of Jesus Christ. ([Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological and Ecclesiastical Literature](#))

**Revenge** - Means the return of injury for injury, or the infliction of pain on another in consequence of an injury received from him, farther than the just ends of reparation or punishment require. Revenge differs materially from resentment, which rises in the mind immediately on being injured; but revenge is a cool and deliberate wickedness, and is often executed years after the offence is given. By some it is considered as a perversion of anger. Anger, it is said, is a passion given to man for wise and proper purposes, but revenge is the corruption of anger; is unnatural, and therefore ought to be suppressed. It is observable that the proper object of anger is vice; but the object in general of revenge is man. It transfers the hatred due to the vice to the man, to whom it is not due. It is forbidden by the Scriptures, and is unbecoming the character and spirit of a peaceful follower of Jesus Christ. ([Revenge - Charles Buck Theological Dictionary](#))

There are 6 uses of **ekdikeo** in the NT -- Usage: avenged(1), avenging(1), give... legal protection(2), legal protection(2), punish(1), take... revenge(1).

Luke 18:3 "There was a widow in that city, and she kept coming to him, saying, **Give me legal protection** from my opponent.'

**Comment:** Here the sense of **ekdikeo** is to help another secure justice or bring about justice, grant a fair verdict. **Ralph Earle** adds - "The verb **ekdikeo** does sometimes mean "avenge." But here the verb is followed in the Greek by apo, "from." So the idea is, "Give me legal protection from my opponent" (NASB) or "Grant me justice against my adversary" (NIV; cf. AG, p. 238; TDNT, 2:444). Plummer says that the meaning is "preserve me against his attacks" (p. 412)." (Word Meanings in the New Testament)

**A T Robertson:** Avenge me of (ekdikēson me apo). A late verb for doing justice, protecting one from another (note both ek and apo, here). Deissmann (Light from the Ancient East, pp. 420ff.) quotes a stēlē (stele = stone or wooden slab used for commemorating important people and events) of the second century B.C. with a prayer for vengeance for a Jewish girl that had been murdered which has this very verb **ekdikeō**.

Luke 18:5 yet because this widow bothers me, I will **give** her **legal protection**, otherwise by continually coming she will wear me out."

Romans 12:19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord.

2 Corinthians 10:6 and we are ready to **punish** all disobedience, whenever your obedience is complete.

**Comment:** Here **ekdikeo** refers to bringing someone to judgment for something.

Revelation 6:10-[note](#) and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?"

Revelation 19:2-[note](#) BECAUSE HIS JUDGMENTS ARE TRUE AND RIGHTEOUS; for He has judged the great harlot who was corrupting the earth with her immorality, and HE HAS AVENGED THE BLOOD OF HIS BOND-SERVANTS ON HER."

**Ekdikeo** - 91 verses in the non-apocryphal Septuagint (LXX) -

Ge 4:15, 24; Ex 21:20, 21; Lev 26:25; Nu 31:2; Dt 18:19; 32:43; Jdg 15:7; 1Sa 3:13; 14:24; 15:2; 18:25; 24:12;



2Ki 9:7; 2Chr 22:8; Ps 99:8; Is 57:16; Je 5:9, 29; 9:9; 15:3; 23:2, 34; 25:12; 46:10, 25; 50:15, 18, 21; 51:36, 44, 52; Ezek 7:3, 27; 16:38; 19:12; 20:4; 23:24, 45; 24:8; 25:12; Ho 1:4; 2:13; 4:9; 8:13; 9:9; 12:2; Joel 3:21; Amos 3:2, 14; Obad 1:21; Nah 1:2, 9; Zeph. 1:8, 9, 12; 3:7; Zech 5:3.

**Ekdikeo** in the Septuagint [LEH] - Ge 4:15, 24; Ex 7:4; 21:20-21 = to avenge; Lev 26:25; Jer 51:52; to avenge, to punish; to exact vengeance for = 2Ki 9:7; he shall pay penalties, he shall suffer vengeance = Ge 4:15

For example the prophet Nahum declares...

**Nahum 1:2** A jealous and avenging God is the LORD; The LORD is **avenging** and wrathful. The LORD takes vengeance on His adversaries, And He reserves wrath for His enemies.

**Comment:** Note that God can take revenge for He is sinless and judges perfectly righteously, so that His revenge is meted out to absolute perfection, something we could never do! So let us leave revenge to God, for He alone can do it justly! Note that this does not mean judicial courts should not execute justice, for they should (and hopefully it will be just, but that is becoming less and less common in our morally decaying society!). This note refers to personal "getting even" type of avenging.

Using a term from the "wild wild west" we might say don't be a vigilante - a member of a volunteer committee organized to suppress and punish crime summarily as when the processes of law **appear** inadequate and in this present verse a self-appointed doer of justice.

The Christian must be free from the desire to "get even." Instead choose to view personal insults and injuries as momentary light afflictions producing an eternal weight of glory, and thus (supernaturally) viewing these negative experiences from an eternal perspective rather than from a temporal perspective. (2Co 4:17,18)

## NAVE'S TOPIC - REVENGE

**Forbidden** Leviticus 19:18; Proverbs 24:29; Romans 12:17,19; 1 Thessalonians 5:15; 1 Peter 3:9

- Jesus an example of forbearing 1 Peter 2:23
- Rebuked by Jesus Luke 9:54,55
- Inconsistent with the will of Christ Luke 9:55
- Proceeds from a spiteful heart Ezekiel 25:15
- Punishment for Ezekiel 25:15-17; Amos 1:11,12

## EXEMPLIFIED

- By Simeon and Levi Genesis 34:25
- By Samson Judges 15:7,8; 16:28-30
- By Joab 2 Samuel 3:27
- By Absalom 2 Samuel 13:23-29
- By Jezebel 1 Kings 19:2
- By Ahab 1 Kings 22:27
- By Haman Esther 3:8-15
- By the Edomites Ezekiel 25:12
- By the Philistines Ezekiel 25:15
- By Herodias Mark 6:19-24
- By James and John Luke 9:54
- By the chief priests Acts 7:54-59; 23:12

## Related Resources:

- [Revenge - Torrey's Topical Textbook](#)
- [What does the Bible say about revenge?](#)

**BUT LEAVE ROOM FOR THE WRATH OF GOD: alla dote ( [2PAAM](#)) topon te orge:**

- Mt 5:39; Lk 6:27, 28, 29; 9:55,56

**Literally** - but give place to the wrath.

**But** - Here Paul presents the Spirit enabled, supernatural **contrast**.

**Godet** - To give place unto wrath, is to refrain from avenging oneself, in order to give free course to the justice which God Himself will exercise when and how He thinks good. To seek to anticipate His judgment is to bar the way against it. Comp. what is said of Jesus Himself, 1Pet. 2:23. It is needless to refute explanations such as the following: "Let your wrath have time to calm down," or: "Let the wrath of the enemy pass." The passage quoted is Deut 32:35. ([Romans 12:3-21 The Believer as a Member of the Church](#))

**Leave room** - Literally give place. Give some territory or space! It is a command in the **aoist imperative** which conveys the sense of "Do this now. Do it effectively. Don't delay!" The aoist imperative is like a sharp command from the general to his troops engaged in battle (cp spiritual battle!) and can even convey a sense of urgency. Do it with expediency and resolution. Do it without hesitation.

Literally it could be read "**give** ([didomi](#)) **place** ([topos](#))" or "**grant** territory".

Paul's use of the **aoist imperative** further suggests that there is a moment in most confrontations in which we have to make the critical decision to "give it over" to God (recall that the verb here is actually [didomi](#) meaning "to give"! ) and "back off" as we would say in today's language.

The **active voice** of [didomi](#) signifies that this action is not one that God will force us to take but it is a choice of our will & if we have indeed presented our bodies to Him in Romans 12:1 ([note](#)) than we will choose not to be conformed to the world (the world wants to "get even" and do it now!) but as we make the choice not to retaliate (by the power of His Spirit, in the grace in which we stand, possessing the "mind of Christ"), we will be transformed by the renewing of our mind. The one who trusts in God will not think it necessary to avenge themselves; they will leave the issue of vengeance to God. They will be giving no place to their own wrath, and a wide place to God's wrath.

Paul's point is that God's timing is perfect and His wrath will come (Col 3:6-note) so that sooner or later He will right all unjust wrongs that have been committed against us.

**Denney** adds - The idea is not that instead of executing vengeance ourselves we are to abandon the offender to the more tremendous vengeance of God; but this—that God, not injured men or those who believe themselves such, is the maintainer of moral order in the world, and that the righting of wrong is to be committed to Him. Cf. especially 1Peter 2:23. Dt 32:35 ([Romans 12 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Wrath** ([3709](#)) (**orge** [**word study**] from **orgaō** = to teem, to swell) conveys the picture of a swelling which eventually bursts, and thus describes an anger that proceeds from one's settled nature. **Orge** does not refer to uncontrollable anger to which men are so prone but to God's settled indignation and controlled passionate hostile feeling toward sin in all its various manifestations. Settled indignation means that God's holiness cannot and will not coexist with sin in any form whatsoever. Orge is not the momentary, emotional, and often uncontrolled anger (**thumos** - [2372](#)) to which human beings are prone. **Orge** is used primarily of God's holy, righteous wrath but occasionally refers to the wrath of men (see Ephesians 4:31-note)

#### **Related Resources:**

- [Wrath of God - Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology](#)
- [Wrath, Wrath of God - Holman Bible Dictionary](#)
- [Anger \(thumos, orge, parorgismos\) - Trench's Synonyms of the New Testament](#)

**Wuest** - "Wrath" is preceded by the article (Greek = "te" ~ English = "the"), and points to a special wrath, God's **wrath**. "To give place to God's **wrath** means to leave room for it, not to take God's proper work out of His hands ... The idea is not that instead of executing vengeance ourselves, we are to abandon the offender to the more tremendous vengeance of God; but this—that God, not injured men or those who believe themselves such, is the maintainer of moral order in the world, and that the righting of wrong is to be committed to Him." (Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament)

**Orge** refers to to an inner, deep resentment that seethes and smolders. Orge as used of God refers to His constant and controlled indignation toward sin, while **thumos** (which originally referred to violent movements of air, water, etc., and consequently came to mean "well up" or "boil up") refers more to a passionate outburst of rage. **Thumos** type anger represents an agitated, vehement anger that rushes along relentlessly. The root meaning has to do with moving rapidly and was used of a man's breathing violently while pursuing an enemy in great rage!

**Orge** is God's settled opposition to and displeasure with sin

God's wrath is his holy hatred of all that is unholy. It is His righteous indignation at everything that is unrighteous. It is the temper of God towards sin. It is not God's uncontrollable rage, vindictive bitterness or a losing of His temper, but the wrath of righteous reason and holy law.

**Warren Wiersbe** tells the following story - "A friend of mine once heard a preacher criticize him over the radio and tell things that were not only unkind, but also untrue. My friend became very angry and was planning to fight back, when a godly preacher said, "Don't do it. If you defend yourself, then the Lord can't defend you. Leave it in His hands." My friend followed that wise counsel, and the Lord vindicated him. ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

**Ray Stedman** - Paul gives two reasons why you should not avenge yourself: One is because God is already doing it. **'Leave room for God's wrath.'** God knows you have been insulted or hurt or injured. He knows it and he is already doing something about it. Second, God alone claims the right to vengeance because he alone can work it without injury to all concerned. He will do it in a way that will be redemptive. He won't injure the other person, but will bring him out of it. We never give God a chance; we take the matter into our own hands. And Paul says that is wrong. It is wrong because we don't want that person to be redeemed; we want them to be hurt. We are like Jonah when Ninevah repented. When God spared it, Jonah got mad at God. "Why didn't you wipe them out like you said you would?" We get angry because God hasn't taken vengeance in the way that we would like. Paul reminds us that God is already avenging, so we should leave him room, and God claims the right to vengeance because he alone can work it without injury to all concerned. (Romans 12 - Ray C. Stedman)

#### FOR IT IS WRITTEN: gegraphtai ( 3SRPI) gar:

- Deut 32:35 Pr 25:21,22 cp Mt 5:43, 44, 45, 46, 47

**For (gar)** is a **term of explanation** = always pause, ponder and query "for" when it is used as a term of explanation, relying on your Teacher, the Spirit, to give you illumination to the meaning of the text and context.

**It is written** - 76 times in the NAS -

Joshua 8:31; 2Sa 1:18; 2Ki 23:21; 2Chr 23:18; 25:4; 31:3; 35:12; Ezra 3:2, 4; 6:18; Neh 8:15; 10:34, 36; Ps 40:7; Is 65:6; Dan. 9:13; Mt 4:4, 6, 7, 10; 11:10; 21:13; 26:24, 31; Mk 1:2; 7:6; 9:13; 14:21, 27; Lk. 2:23; 3:4; 4:4, 8, 10; 7:27; 19:46; 24:46; Jn 6:31, 45; 12:14; Acts 1:20; 7:42; 15:15; 23:5; Ro 1:17; 2:24; 3:4, 10; 4:17; 8:36; 9:13, 33; 10:15; 11:8, 26; 12:19; 14:11; 15:3, 9, 21; 1Co. 1:19, 31; 2:9; 3:19; 9:9; 10:7; 14:21; 15:45; 2Co 8:15; 9:9; Ga 3:10, 13; 4:22, 27; Heb. 10:7; 1Pe 1:16

Where is it **written**? **Paul** quoting **Moses**...

Deuteronomy 32:35 **'Vengeance is Mine**, and retribution (LXX = I will recompense) In due time their foot will slip (used by Jonathan Edwards in his famous sermon = [Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God - delivered July 8, 1741](#)); for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them.'

**Comment:** In the OT context this verse assures even rebellious Israel that those Gentile nations which God used/allowed to discipline/chasten His consistently erring Chosen People, will themselves receive divine/just punishment for their evil actions! The wicked acts of Israel's enemies were known to God and are stored up in His storehouse (Dt 32:34). At the proper time, God will avenge. Only a **Sovereign** God can mete out the correct "amount" of justice at just the right time.

When we were children and our parents told us to do something and we questioned "Why?", the answer was usually "Because I said so!". Why are we commanded to be holy? Because God said so! A popular (actually it may not be that "popular"! ) saying is

God said it, I **believe** it,  
that settles it.

That sounds good but in truth it is not completely accurate because God's Word is true, irregardless of whether we **believe** it or not. A more accurate "saying" would be

God said it, that settles it,  
whether I **believe** it or not!

**It is written** should put a stop to every complaint or excuse. Paul is saying don't judge but remember you will appear before Me to give an account (as the next verse clarifies). This sobering thought should motivate us to obey this injunction.

**Written** (1125)(**grapho** [word study] from root **graph-** = primarily means to scratch on or engrave as on an ornament, reports, letters, etc; **English** = graph, graphic, etc) means to engrave or inscribe with a pen or stylus characters or letters on a surface which can be wood, wax, metal, leather, stone, parchment, dirt (John ), paper, etc.

**Written** is in the **perfect tense** (gegraphtai) which emphasizes the lasting and binding authority of that which was written. It has been written at some point in time in the past (cf Lv 11:44, 19:2, 20:7 were originally inscribed with a stylus by Moses probably on clay tablets under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit circa 1500BC) and it "stands" written. It remains on record as the eternal, unchanging Word of God. In short, the use of the **perfect tense** signifies the permanence of the written word of God. Therefore it is not surprising that the phrase **it is written** (in perfect tense) is a regular "*formula*" in the New Testament (e.g., Mt 4:4, 4:6, 4:7, 4:10, 11:10, etc - for all uses see **word study on grapho**) and always refers directly or indirectly to an **Old Testament quotation** and thus it carries great authority for the believer. The idea is that this divine revelation was written down at a specific time in the past and stands written and effective.

**Jesus** declared...

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words shall not pass away. (Mt 24:35)

The original sense of the Greek verb **grapho** was to carve or to engrave as deduced from uses in the Septuagint (where **grapho** occurs some 300 times usually for the Hebrew [kathab 03789](#)) such as the following...

**Write** (LXX = grapho) on them (LXX = lithos = stones) all the words of this law (Deut 27:3)

Then he (Solomon) carved (LXX = egkolapto = cut or carve) all the walls of the house round about with **carved** (Lxx = grapho) engravings of cherubim... (1Kings 6:29)

... You who **carve** (LXX = grapho) a resting place for yourself in the rock? (Isaiah 22:16)

**NIDNTT** has a historical note writing that "**grapho** is found in its original sense in Homer, Il. 17, 599. In Herodotus, 4, 36 the word is used meaning to draw, of lines on maps; and scholars of the 3rd cent. B.C. used it of drawing of mathematical figures. In Homer grapho is already used in the sense of scratching signs on a tablet as a kind of letter (Il. 6, 169). From the time of Herodotus. it is used generally in the normal sense of to write, and from the time of Pindar in the derived sense of to prescribe, to order. From the practice of handing in a written accusation, grapho came in judicial language to mean to accuse (Plato, Euthyphro 2b). ([Brown, Colin, Editor. New International Dictionary of NT Theology. 1986. Zondervan](#))

**Warren Wiersbe** commenting on the significance of the phrase **it is written** reminds us that "Our Lord used the Word of God to defeat Satan, and so may we (Mt 4:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11; see Ep 6:17-note). But the Word of God is not only a sword for battle; it is also a light to guide us in this dark world (Ps 119:105 - [Spurgeon's note](#); see 2Pe 1:19-note), food that strengthens us (Mt 4:4; see 1Pe 2:2 - note), and water that washes us (Ep 5:25; 26; 27-notes). The Word of God has a sanctifying ministry in the lives of dedicated believers (Jn 17:17). Those who delight in God's Word, meditate on it, and seek to obey it will experience God's direction and blessing in their lives (Ps 1:1, 2, 3 see notes Ps 1:1; 1:2; 1:3)([Spurgeon's note](#)). The Word reveals God's **mind**, so we should **learn** it; God's **heart**, so we should **love** it; God's **will**, so we should **live** it. Our whole being—mind, will, and heart—should be controlled by the Word of God... Does this mean that the Old Testament Law is authoritative today for New Testament Christians? Keep in mind that the early Christians did not even have the New Testament. The only Word of God they possessed was the Old Testament, and God used that Word to direct and nurture them. Believers today are not under the ceremonial laws given to Israel; however, even in these laws we see moral and spiritual principles revealed. Nine of the Ten Commandments are repeated in the Epistles, so we must obey them. (The Sabbath commandment was given especially to Israel and does not apply to us today. See Romans 14:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 - see notes) As we read and study the Old Testament, we will learn much about God's character and working, and we will see truths pictured in types and symbols. first step toward keeping clean in a filthy world is to ask, "What does the Bible say?" In the Scriptures, we will find precepts, principles, promises, and persons to guide us in today's decisions. If we are really willing to obey God, He will show us His truth (Jn 7:17). While God's methods of working may change from age to age, His character remains the same and His spiritual principles never vary. We do not study the Bible just to get to know the Bible. We study the Bible that we might get to know God better. Too many earnest Bible students are content with outlines and explanations, and do not really get to know God. It is good to know the Word of God, but this should help us better know the God of the Word." ([Wiersbe, W: Bible Exposition Commentary. 1989. Victor](#))

**VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY, SAYS THE LORD : emoi ekdikesis, ego antapodoso (1SFAI) legei (1SPA) kurios:**

- Ro 13:4; Deuteronomy 32:35,43; Ps 94:1-3; Nahum 1:2,3; Hebrews 10:30

Deut 32:35 'Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, In due time their foot will slip; For the day of their calamity is near, And the impending things are hastening upon them.'

Deut 32:43 "Rejoice, O nations, [with] His people; For He will avenge the blood of His servants, And will render vengeance on His adversaries, And will atone for His land [and] His people."

**Vengeance** (1557) (**ekdikesis** [word study] from **ekdikeo** = that which proceeds from justice; vindicate from **ek** = from + **dike** = justice) means to give justice to someone who has been wronged. It means to repay harm with harm on assumption that initial harm was unjustified and that retribution is therefore called for.

**Ekdikesis** - 9x in 9v in the NT - Lk. 18:7, 8; 21:22; Acts 7:24; Ro 12:19; 2Co 7:11; 2Th 1:8; Heb 10:30note; 1Pe 2:14-note

There are 48 uses of **ekdikesis** in the **Septuagint (LXX)**--

Ex 7:4; 12:12; Num. 31:2, 3; 33:4; Deut. 32:35; Jdg. 11:36; 14:4; 2Sa 4:8; 22:48; Ps. 18:47, 48, 58:10; 79:10; 94:1; 149:7; Is 59:17; 66:15; Jer. 11:20; 20:10, 12; 46:10, 21; 50:15, 27, 26, 31; 51:6, 11, 36; Lam 3:60; Ezek 5:15; 9:1; 14:21; 16:38, 41; 20:4; 23:10, 45; 24:8; 25:11, 12, 14, 15, 17; 30:14; Hos. 9:7; Mic. 5:15; 7:4.

Paul's point is that God said it and we must be content to rest in God's perfect justice, irregardless of "when" He determines repayment shall be meted out (in this life or the judgment in the life to come). God is faithful (see His attribute **Faithfulness**) and just so you can be assured that there will be a just recompense in His perfect time. He will faithfully fulfill the promise inherent in the passage in Galatians...

**Do not be deceived**, (present imperative + negative ~ stop being deceived, implying some already were being deceived - remember too that when we are deceived, by definition we don't even know it! That's frightening isn't it!) God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. 8 For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. (Galatians 6:7, 8-note)

In **Hosea** the prophet warned "For they sow the wind, And they reap the whirlwind." (Hosea 8:7)

**Wuest** - "**Vengeance**" is again **ekdikēsis** "a revenging, punishment," the latter word more applicable in this context as connected with God. God cannot be said to have vengeance in the sense that a person has vengeance, namely, a retaliatory feeling which prompts a vindictive requital. (Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament)

**Revenge** is excessive retribution. It is not only "getting even", but it is giving the other person something else besides and that is not God's way! He is the only One Who can recompense perfectly. So let Him take care of all vengeance!

God says in essence that the believer is never do this. We who call Christ our Lord and Master are never (not just most of the time but never!) to try to get even - never, ever attempt to exact your own vengeance because that "job description" belongs to one person only -- God the **Just** and **Righteous** Judge. When we attempt "pay back", we usurp God's job and we do so at some "risk" for we lack God's **omniscience**, **omnipotence** and **wisdom** and the result will most likely be that we make things worse. Think for a moment those times you disobeyed this clear command and how many times your pay back actually made things better! This alone should motivate us to diligently seek to obey this section of Scripture. Notice that there is not just one verse dealing with revenge, but several, a fact that I personally take as a clue to our resistance to this truth and our great need to obey it. But I could be wrong.

**William Barclay** - We are to keep ourselves from all thought of taking revenge. Paul gives three reasons for that. (a) Vengeance does not belong to us but to God. In the last analysis no human being has a right to judge any other; only God can do that. (b) To treat a man with kindness rather than vengeance is the way to move him. Vengeance may break his spirit; but kindness will break his heart. "If we are kind to our enemies," says Paul, "it will heap coals of fire on their heads." That means, not that it will store up further punishment for them, but that it will move them to burning shame. (c) To stoop to vengeance is to be ourselves conquered by evil. Evil can never be conquered by evil. If hatred is met with more hatred it is only increased; but if it is met with love, an antidote for the poison is found. As Booker Washington said: "I will not allow any man to make me lower myself by hating him." The only real way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend. ([Romans 12 - William Barclay's Daily Study Bible](#))

**Spurgeon** writes that "It is recorded of a Chinese emperor that, on being informed that his enemies had raised an insurrection in one of his distant provinces, he said to his officers, "Come, follow me; and we will quickly destroy them." He marched forward, and the rebels submitted upon his approach. All now thought that he would take the most signal revenge, but were surprised to see the captives treated with mildness and humanity. "How!" cried the first minister, "is this the manner in which you fulfil your promise? Your royal word was given that your enemies should be destroyed; and behold! you. have pardoned them all, and even caressed some of them." "I promised," replied the emperor, with a generous air, "to destroy my enemies. I have fulfilled my word; for see, they are enemies no longer: I have made friends of them" This is a fit example for the Christian.

Forget not thou hast often sinned,  
And sinful yet must be:  
Deal gently with the erring one,  
As God has dealt with thee.

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**Better Than Revenge** - For centuries, Albanian clans were known for their bloody family feuds. They considered it cowardly not to avenge the death of one of their own. Sometimes retaliation would set off a chain reaction that left 25 to 30 people dead before it ended. This bloody tradition continued until 1990, when a group of Albanian peacemakers settled a large number of those clan conflicts. The change came about because the people found something they desired more than revenge. They wanted to become a part of the wider European community, and also to unite in defending themselves against a common enemy.

So too, church fights and family feuds will end when Christians find something they want more than the bitter excitement of a grudge match. Holding a grudge loses its appeal when the combatants realize they are cutting themselves off from the support and enjoyment they need, which Christian fellowship provides. Getting even doesn't look so appealing when they see how their angry words and belittling comments play into the hands of the devil, who is trying to destroy them. Why pay the high price of getting even? We have so much more to gain by dropping our grudges and extending forgiveness. That's so much better than revenge! —M R De Haan II ([Our Daily Bread](#), Copyright RBC Ministries, Grand Rapids, MI. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved)

If you find yourself looking for ways to get even, why not look for ways you might turn an enemy into a friend?

Believers at war with their brothers and sisters Can't be at peace with their Father!

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The story is told of a rich man in Springfield, Illinois, who insisted that a certain poor man owed him \$2.50. When the claim was denied, the rich man decided to sue him. He contacted a young lawyer named Lincoln, who at first hesitated to take the case. On second thought he agreed—if he'd be paid a fee of \$10 cash in advance. The client readily produced the money, whereupon Lincoln went to **the** poor man and offered him \$5 if he would immediately settle the alleged debt. Thus Lincoln received \$5 for himself, the poor man got \$2.50, and the claim was satisfied. The rich man foolishly paid three times the original debt, just to gain his rights. ([Our Daily Bread](#))

**Romans 12:20** "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [alla ean peina \(3SPA\)](#) [o echthros sou](#), [psomize \(2PPAM\)](#) [auton](#); [ean dipsa \(3SPA\)](#) [potize \(2PPAM\)](#) [auton](#); [touto gar poion \(PAPMPN\)](#) [anthrakas puros soreuseis \(2SFA\)](#) [epi ten kephalen autou](#).

**Amplified:** But if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head. [Pr 25:21, 22.] ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

**NLT:** Instead, do what the Scriptures say: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink, and they will be ashamed of what they have done to you." ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** ... these are God's words: 'Therefore if your enemy hungers, feed him; if he thirsts, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head' ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** But, if your enemy is hungry, be feeding him. If he thirsts, be giving him to drink, for doing this, you will heap burning coals of fire upon his head.

**Young's Literal:** I will recompense again, saith the Lord; if, then, thine enemy doth hunger, feed him; if he doth thirst, give him drink; for this doing, coals of fire thou shalt heap upon his head;

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**BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK:** [alla ean peina \(3SPAS\)](#) [o echthros sou](#), [psomize \(2SPAM\)](#) [auton](#); [ean dipsa \(3SPAS\)](#) [potize \(2SPAM\)](#) [auton](#):

- Ex 23:4-5; 1Sa 24:16-19; 26:21; Pr 24:17, 25:21,22; Mt 5:44

Pr 24:17 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles

1Sa 24:16 Now it came about when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, "Is this your voice, my son David?" Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. 17 And he said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. 18 "And you have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and [yet] you did not kill me. 19 "For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day.

**But (235) (alla)** -- Withholding personal vengeance is hard enough, but now now Paul calls on us instead of doing nothing, to now return good for evil! Thus Paul presents the radical, supernatural **contrast** which is possible for believers who have presented themselves to God (not just their physical bodies but their mind, soul, spirit) as living sacrifices, who are not being conformed to the world (it says "get 'em before they get you!") and who are continually having their minds renewed by the Word of Truth and the Spirit of Truth to know the will of God (in this case clearly stated!)

**Godet** - It is not enough to refrain from meeting evil with evil; the ambition of love must go the length of wishing to transform evil into good. **But if...** would signify: "But, far from avenging thyself, if the opportunity of doing good to thine enemy present itself, seize it" ([Romans 12:3-21 The Believer as a Member of the Church](#))

**If your enemy is hungry** -- This implies that you have to be in contact with them otherwise how could you know about their need.

**Hungry (3983) (peinao from peina = hunger)** literally means to be in a state of hunger as used in this passage but occasionally used in a figurative sense meaning to long for or desire something strongly (Mt 5:6-note).

Here are the 23 uses of **peinao** in the NT - Mt 4:2; 5:6-note; Mt 12:1, 3; 21:18; 25:35, 37, 42, 44; Mk. 2:25; 11:12; Lk 1:53; 4:2; 6:3, 21, 25; Jn 6:35; Ro 12:20; 1Co 4:11; 11:21, 34; Php 4:12-note; Rev. 7:16-note

**Feed (5595) (ptomizo from psomos = a morsel)** means literally to feed someone morsels (morsel = a small piece of food or small quantity of food). Paul uses the **present imperative** which calls for this to be our habitual practice. Once again this command challenges every thinking believer to acknowledge that such an action is totally impossible in our own strength. We must deny self and humble ourselves allowing His Spirit (cp (see Gal 5:16-note; Gal 5:17-note; Gal 5:25-note; Ep 5:18-note; cp Col 3:16-note) and His amazing grace (2Co 12:9, 10, James 4:6) to "flow" through us, feeding our enemies for the glory of the Lord (cp Mt 5:16-Matthew 5:16).

The only other NT use of **ptomizo** is in 1Co 13:3.

**Thirsty (1372) (dipsao)** means literally to have a desire or need to drink (a sensation of dryness in the mouth and throat associated with a desire for liquids) or figuratively to have a strong or ardent desire for something (Mt 5:6-note, Jn 4:13, 14; 6:35; 7:37)

**Give a drink (4222) (potizo from potos = a drinking bout)** means to give to drink or to make to drink in the literal sense (Mt 10:42, 25:35, 37, 42 -- latter speaks of "ministering" to those who belong to Christ and thus doing so virtually to Him) and figuratively with reference to teaching of an rudimentary level (1Co 3:2, "I gave you milk to drink"), of spiritual watering by teaching the Word of God, (1Co 3:6 - "Apollos watered"), of being provided with the power and blessing of the Holy Spirit (1Co 12:13) and of the effect upon the nations of "partaking" of the passion of immorality that will characterize Babylon in the last days (Re 14:8 - [note](#)).

Here are the 15 uses of **potizo** in the NT -

Mt 10:42; 25:35, 37, 42; 27:48; Mk 9:41; 15:36; Lk 13:15; Ro 12:20; 1Co 3:2, 6, 7, 8; 12:13; Re 14:8 - [note](#)

**Paul** quotes from Proverbs 25:21, 22

If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you. (**Ryrie** commenting on this proverb says "*Kindness shown to an enemy will bring shame to him and blessing to the benefactor. Burning coals will kindle shame in the enemy and perhaps lead him to repentance. In an Egyptian ritual a guilty person carried a pan of burning coals on his head to indicate his repentance.*")

**Enemy (2190) (echthros from échthos = hatred, enmity; noun = echthra = enmity, hostility)** is an adjective which pertains to manifesting hostility or being at enmity with another, where enmity is a deep seated animosity or hatred which may be open or concealed or a "deep-rooted hatred."

In the active sense **echthros** means to be hateful, hostile toward, at enmity with or adversary of someone. In the passive sense

**echthros** pertains to being subjected to hostility, to be hated or to be regarded as an enemy.

**Echthros** is one who has the extreme negative attitude that is the opposite of love and friendship. An enemy is one that is antagonistic to another; especially seeking to injure, overthrow, or confound the opponent. Scripture often uses **echthros** as a noun describing "the adversary", Satan! Like father like son!

This is how you overcome evil with good! Which is another way of saying what Jesus said "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor, and hate your enemy.' but I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you. (see **notes** Matthew 5:43; 5:44).

**William MacDonald** reminds us that "Christianity goes beyond non-resistance to active benevolence. It does not destroy its enemies by violence but converts them by love." ([MacDonald, W & Farstad, A. Believer's Bible Commentary: Thomas Nelson](#))

**Steven Cole** - DOING WHAT IS RIGHT INCLUDES KIND, LOVING DEEDS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF YOUR ENEMY. Romans 12:20: "But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink ...." Feeding your enemy or giving him a drink represents all kind deeds that you can do to meet your enemy's needs. Deeds often speak louder than words. During a time of terrible atrocities in Armenia, a Turkish soldier pursued a young woman and her brother down a street. He cornered them and then mercilessly shot the brother and let the sister go free, but only after she saw her brother's brutal murder. Later, the woman was working as a nurse in a military hospital when the Turkish soldier who had shot her brother was brought into her ward. He was critically wounded and if she had left him alone, he would have died. At first, she wrestled with the desire for vengeance. But she realized that the Lord wanted her to treat this man with kindness, so she gently nursed him back to health. One day the Turk, who recognized her, said, "Why didn't you let me die?" She replied, "I am a follower of Jesus and He said, 'Love your enemies.'" The man was silent for a long time, but finally said, "I never knew that anyone could have such a faith. If that's what it does, tell me more about it. I want it." ("Our Daily Bread," 11/81) So the wrong response to being wronged is to pay it back with wrong. The right response when you are wronged is to do what is right toward your enemy. ([Doing Right When You're Wronged](#))

**FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD : touto gar poion ( PAPMSN) anthrakas puros soreuseis (2SFAI) epi ten kephalen autou:**

- Ps 120:4; 140:10; Song 8:6,7

**Heap burning coals** - Obviously this is **not literal** but **figurative language** (See terms of comparison -- metaphor) Is the heaping coals of fire on his head something good in the eyes of our enemy or is it something bad? Clearly in context it is something that is not calculated to aggravate to appease.

**Heap** ([4987](#)) (**soreuo** from **soros** = a heap) means to heap up, pile on or amass by setting one thing atop another (used only here and Lxx of Pr 25:22). The idea in part appears to be that of overcoming hostility against oneself by showing kindness to the hostile party. In short, this **metaphor** could refer to a "burning conviction" which kindness places on our enemy.

**Burning** ([4442](#)) (**pur** - Thayer thinks it is from Sanskrit **pu** = to purify) is used literally of an earthly phenomenon (Mt 17.15) and figuratively in prophecy of the divine judgment and place of punishment (Mt 3.10). Pur is used of a destructive force (Jas 3.5) Figuratively pur speaks of trials as a purifying force (1Pe 1.7). Finally, pur is used as a sign of God's presence (Acts 7.30; Rev 1.14)

**Pur** - 71x in 69v -

Matt 3:10ff; 5:22; 7:19; 13:40, 42, 50; 17:15; 18:8f; 25:41; Mark 9:22, 43, 48f; Luke 3:9, 16f; 9:54; 12:49; 17:29; 22:55; John 15:6; Acts 2:3, 19; 7:30; 28:5; Rom 12:20; 1 Cor 3:13, 15; 2 Thess 1:8; Heb 1:7; 10:27; 11:34; 12:18, 29; Jas 3:5f; 5:3; 1 Pet 1:7; 2 Pet 3:7; Jude 1:7, 23; Rev 1:14; 2:18; 3:18; 4:5; 8:5, 7f; 9:17f; 10:1; 11:5; 13:13; 14:10, 18; 15:2; 16:8; 17:16; 18:8; 19:12, 20; 20:9f, 14f; 21:8

**Coals** ([440](#)) (**anthrax**) refers to charcoal or a burning ember.

**Thayer** has this note associated with his definition of anthrax noting that heaping burning coals signifies...

to call up, by the favors you confer on your enemy, the memory in him of the wrong he has done you (which shall pain him as if live coals were heaped on his head), that he may the more readily repent. The Arabians call things that cause very acute mental pain burning coals of the heart and fire in the liver; cf. Gesenius in Rosenmüller's Biblical-exeg. Repert. i., p. 140f (or in his Thesaurus i. 280; cf. also BB. DD. under the word Coal).

Other commentators feel **heaping burning coals** refers to the practice of lending coals from a fire (this was the best that one has to



give another person because the fire from coals was very valuable in the ancient world and necessary for warmth and cooking) to help a neighbor start their own. Such an act of kindness that would be appreciated. It reminds one of the phrase "Killing them with kindness." However as the world uses this aphorism, it is selfishly, fleshly motivated. Such is not to be the case with believers who can only carry this action out in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit.

The following story to some degree illustrates the principle...

An old Christian Indian was seen taking many gifts to his enemy's teepee.

"What are you doing?" asked the missionary.

"I am burning him to the ground," replied the chief, "by heaping coals of fire on his head"

**William MacDonald** - If the live coal treatment seems cruel, it is because this idiomatic expression is not properly understood. To heap live coals on a person's head means to make him ashamed of his hostility by surprising him with unconventional kindness. ([Believer's Bible Commentary](#))

**Wuest** - As to heaping coals of fire on the head of the one who has injured one, that is equivalent to satisfying his hunger and quenching his thirst. The latter two actions meet a desperate need of that individual, and are an outstanding kindness shown him. Heaping coals of fire on his head also meets a desperate need. The author cannot put his hand on the source from where he procured the following, but he gives it for what it may be worth as an explanation of a difficult passage. In Bible times an oriental needed to keep his hearth fire going all the time in order to insure fire for cooking and warmth. If it went out, he had to go to a neighbor for some live coals of fire. These he would carry on his head in a container, oriental fashion, back to his home. The person who would give him some live coals would be meeting his desperate need and showing him an outstanding kindness. If he would heap the container with coals, the man would be sure of getting some home still burning. The one injured would be returning kindness for injury, the only thing a Christian is allowed to give back to the one who has injured him. This act of kindness God could use to soften the heart of the person and lead him on to repentance and the offering of a recompense for the injury sustained. In this way the Christian would overcome evil with good. In fairness to the reader, the author gives the other interpretations found in his sources.

**Denney** says; "The meaning of 'heaping burning coals on his head' is hardly open to doubt. It must refer to the burning pain of shame and remorse which the man feels whose hostility is repaid by love. This is the only kind of vengeance the Christian is at liberty to contemplate." ([Romans 12 - The Expositor's Greek Testament](#))

**Alford** explains; "I understand the words, For in this doing, you will be taking the most effectual vengeance; as effectual as if you heaped coals of fire on his head." ([Romans 12 - Greek Testament Critical Exegetical Commentary](#))

**Robertson** says, "It is a metaphor for keen anguish. The Arabs have a proverb, 'coals in the heart, fire in the liver.' [Romans 12 - Robertson's Word Pictures of the New Testament](#) "

**Vincent** does not come to any definite conclusion, but says after giving the explanation of some, "Perhaps it is better to take it that kindness is as effectual as coals of fire." ([Romans 12 - Vincent's Word Studies](#))

**Godet** - "Thou wouldst avenge thyself? Be it; and here is the way in which God permits thee to do so: Heap benefits on thine enemy; for thereby thou shalt cause him the salutary pain of shame and regret for all the evil he has done thee; and thou shalt light up in his heart the fire of gratitude instead of that of hatred." The figure coals of fire is common among the Arabs and Hebrews to denote a vehement pain; but, as Meyer observes, it contains no allusion whatever to the idea of melting or softening the object. ([Romans 12:3-21 The Believer as a Member of the Church](#))

**Steven Cole** - What does Paul mean, though, when he cites Proverbs 25:21-22 about your good deeds heaping burning coals on your enemy's head? Most commentators say that the burning coals are burning pangs of shame that may bring the wrongdoer to repentance. In light of the context, which urges us to overcome evil with good, they argue that it could not mean that our good deeds will result in greater judgment for our enemy. But John Piper ("[Christ Overcame Evil with Good—Do the Same - Desiring God](#)") and Thomas Schreiner (Romans [Baker], pp. 674-676) argue that all of the Old Testament references to burning coals refer to God's judgment on His enemies, not to bringing the shame of guilt or repentance on them. For example, in Psalm 140:10, David cries out with regard to his enemies, "May burning coals fall upon them ...." So the meaning of Romans 12:20 would be that if you do good toward your enemy and he doesn't repent, you can rest assured that God will one day redress your wrong by bringing severe judgment on your enemy. Your motive in doing the good deeds is not to increase your enemy's judgment, but prayerfully to bring him to repentance. But if he doesn't repent, you can know that God will ultimately bring him to justice. In that sense, the righteous will rejoice when God brings judgment on the wicked (Deut. 32:43; Ps. 58:10-11; Rev. 6:10; 18:20). But our job is to bear witness to Christ by doing good towards our enemies and leaving all vengeance with God. **Conclusion** = So the hard question that this

Scripture leaves us with is, have I paid back evil with evil to anyone? Is this my pattern with my spouse? Is this the way I deal with my kids? How are my relationships with my extended family? Is this how I deal with difficult people at work or in my neighborhood? If so, first ask God's forgiveness. Then figure out a way to ask forgiveness of those you have wronged. Even if they don't repent, think about ways that you can bless them with kindness. That's how to do right when you've been wronged. **Application Questions** = (1) How can we determine when it is right to fight for our rights and when we should just accept being wronged? (2) Why does reporting an abusive spouse or parent to civil authorities not violate the commands of our text? (3) Does Scripture require us to try to carry on a relationship with a difficult person? Can we keep our distance? (4) Is there a situation where you need to apply the principles of our text? How will you go about doing it? ([Doing Right When You're Wronged](#))

**Ray Stedman** - You say, "What do you expect me to do? Somebody hits me -- do you expect me just to sit there and do nothing? Oh, no. There is something you can do. Look what it is: "On the contrary: 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Two things will happen if you refuse to avenge yourself and let God do it: First, you will be enabled to act positively instead of negatively. That will result in what Paul, quoting Proverbs (Pr 25:21-22), calls "heaping burning coals on his head." This doesn't mean that you are going to get even by another process -- burning his head. No, this refers to the ancient way of lighting fires. They didn't have matches in those days, so if you wanted to light a fire in your home, you couldn't go and borrow a match. But you could go and borrow some coals from your neighbor. Of course, you took along an earthen jar that would not burn. Then you would ask your neighbor if you could borrow some coals to light your own fire. Now, if he was a good neighbor, he would fill the jar and you would carry the padded jar home on top of your head. This became a picture of an ample, generous response to a neighbor's need. Because of that, it became a metaphor for responding so generously to your neighbor that it made him ashamed of himself for his attitude toward you. That is what Paul is suggesting here. The second result of leaving vengeance to God is that you win the battle. If there is a conflict going on, you will win it if you respond with doing good instead of evil. (Romans 12 - Ray C. Stedman)

**William Newell** has a lengthy note on this verse...

Here are specific directions for active love toward an enemy,—praying for him meanwhile, as Christ commanded: "Bless them that persecute you, pray for them that spitefully use you." (Ro 12:14-note) There is no more terrible danger than that of cherished revenge; and nothing marks out so blazingly a Christian path as love toward a foe. The Indians who inhabited America when the white man came, hated one another, tribe against tribe. The war paint, the warpath, the tomahawk, the scalp lock,—and pride in it all! was the hell-mark wherewith Satan branded these poor heathen,—and where are they today? No less devilish are the ghastly family "feuds" in certain parts of America. No less significant is the kind of man admired in some regions: "He won't take a word from anybody"; "He'll fight at the drop of the hat," and the like.

Now the promise is most striking indeed, that in a deed of kindness to an enemy we shall "heap coals of fire upon his head." Of course, as always, when the literal statements of God's judgment are made, we are apt to shrink in timidity and unbelief, and seek to evade the actualities. But remember exactly what we are dealing with: we are asked to step aside from self-avenging, and "give place" to God's coming vengeance and recompense. Of course, we continue loving our enemies and praying for them, hoping they may repent. Thus we are sharing the feeling of God Himself, who "takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, and would have all men to be saved." Nevertheless, we know in our hearts that many will refuse Divine mercy, and go on to that day of vengeance. And what do we read in the Scriptures about "coals of fire" at that time?

Let burning coals fall upon them;

Let them be cast into the fire,

Into deep pits, whence they shall not rise (Ps 140:10).

Upon the wicked He will rain snares;

Fire and brimstone and burning wind shall be the portion of their cup (Ps 11:6).

It is a trifling exposition that would make the "coals of fire" of Romans 12:20, quoted from Proverbs 25:21, 22, a mere figure—and meaning, really, nothing!

The knowledge and constant remembrance by the saints of the coming literal doom of the wicked, is both a deep incentive to a holy walk, and a strong motive for loving and praying for them. But let us not forget that the more we are "a sweet savor of Christ unto God" as we preach the gospel, the more we become "a savor from death unto death in them that are perishing" (2Co 2:14, 15, 16). Paul significantly, just here, adds the words: "And who is sufficient for these things? For we are not as the many, corrupting the Word of God" (2Co 2:17). Our Lord Himself said, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no excuse for their sin." It is a fearful thought that in our kindness to enemies—enemies of our Lord and of ourselves for the gospel's sake, we may be increasing their doom: but the responsibility is theirs; the obedient kindness, ours!

**Unexpected Kindness** - A missionary was teaching a class of young girls about kindness. She told them about Jesus, who said that a person who gives a cup of water in His name "will by no means lose his reward" (Mark 9:41).

The next day the missionary watched as a group of weary men walked into the village square, removed their heavy backpacks, and sat down to rest. A few minutes later, several little girls shyly approached the surprised men and gave them all a drink. Then they ran to the missionary. "Teacher!" they shouted. "We gave those men a drink in Jesus' name."

Although Mark 9:41 applies primarily to showing kindness to believers in Christ, we know that we are to "do good to all" (Galatians 6:10) and even give our enemy a drink (Ro 12:20).

In today's Bible reading, David had the chance for revenge against King Saul (1 Samuel 26:9, 1Sa 26:1-26). But because David revered God, he showed kindness to the king.

Showing unexpected kindness to strangers or enemies will not always change their hearts. But sooner or later someone will wonder why we were kind, and we will have an opportunity to tell about our Lord, who was kind even to His enemies (Ro 5:10-note).—Herbert Vander Lugt

Do a deed of simple kindness,  
Though its end you may not see;  
It may reach, like widening ripples,  
Down a long eternity. —Norris

**One act of kindness  
may teach more about the love of God than many sermons.**

**Romans 12:21** **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** ([NASB: Lockman](#))

**Greek:** [me niko \(2SPPM\)](#) [hupo tou kakou](#), [alla nika \(2PPAM\)](#) [en to agatho to kakon](#).

**Amplified:** Do not let yourself be overcome by evil, but overcome (master) evil with good. ([Amplified Bible - Lockman](#))

**KJV:** Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

**NLT:** Don't let evil get the best of you, but conquer evil by doing good. ([NLT - Tyndale House](#))

**Phillips:** Don't allow yourself to be overpowered with evil. Take the offensive - overpower evil by good! ([Phillips: Touchstone](#))

**Wuest:** Stop being overcome by the evil, but be overcoming the evil by means of the good.

**Young's Literal:** Be not overcome by the evil, but overcome, in the good, the evil.

**DO NOT BE OVERCOME BY EVIL : me niko ( 2SPPM) hupo tou kakou:**

- Pr 16:32; Luke 6:27-30; 1Pe 3:9

**Wuest** - Stop being overcome by the evil, but be overcoming the evil by means of the good.

**Godet** - To render evil for evil, is to let evil have the victory; to confine oneself to not rendering evil is, if it may be so said, neither to be conqueror nor conquered, though in reality this also is to be conquered. The true victory over evil consists in transforming a hostile relation into one of love by the magnanimity of the benefits bestowed. Thereby it is that good has the last word, that evil itself serves it as an instrument: such is the masterpiece of love. ([Romans 12:3-21 The Believer as a Member of the Church](#))

**Overcome** ([3528](#)) ([nikao](#)) means to conquer, to be victorious or to prevail in the face of obstacles. **Romans 3:4** (note) speaks of God prevailing as in a legal accusation against Him!

**Overcome** describes the quality of a true saint who may stumble and fall but who God always picks up and he continues onward and upward in the power and motivation of the victory Christ has won for us on the Cross.

In **Webster's American Dictionary** (1828) **overcome** means to conquer; to vanquish; to subdue; as, to overcome enemies in battle. To surmount; to get the better of; as, to overcome difficulties or obstacles. To gain the superiority; to be victorious.

**Hodge** - Do not therefore allow yourself to be overcome of evil, (i.e., to be provoked to the indulgence of a spirit of retaliation,) but overcome evil with good; subdue your enemies by kindness, not by injuries.' (**Hodge summarizes the principles in this section**) Abstaining from evil is but one half of duty. It is not enough to avoid imprecating evil upon our enemies; we must sincerely desire and pray for their welfare. Nor is it sufficient not to recompense evil for evil; we must return good for evil, Romans 12:17-21. 8. The prerogatives of judgment and vengeance belong to God, we have no right, therefore, to arrogate them to ourselves, except in those cases in which, for his glory and the good of society, he has given us authority. All condemnation of others for self-gratification, and all private revenge is inconsistent with the gospel, Romans 12:11-21. ([Romans 12 - Hodge's Commentary on Romans](#))

As **Jesus** alerted His soon to be vigorously persecuted disciples "These things (Ed: Always ask "What things?" - forces you to read the preceding context - See Jn 14:1ff, esp Jn 14:23) I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have **overcome** the world." (Jn 16:33) (**Comment:** John uses the **perfect tense** pictures the permanence of our Lord's victory over this evil world system and its evil ruler! Glory!)

**John** describes **overcomes**...

**1John 2:13, 14** I am writing to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have **overcome** (**perfect tense** pictures permanence of the victory) the evil one. I have written to you, children, because you know the Father. **14** I have written to you, fathers, because you know Him who has been from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have **overcome** (**perfect tense**) the evil one.

**Spurgeon comments:** (from his sermon below) May we be happily ignorant of what it is to be vanquished by the powers of evil, and remain like the British drummer boy who did not know how to beat a retreat, for he had never had any use for such a thing. May we not know the dishonor and misery of being overcome of evil, because divine grace continually giveth us the victory. When we are overcome of evil, even for a moment, it discovers the sad weakness of our spiritual life. We must be babes in grace and sadly carnal still, if sin is allowed to master us. If we were stronger in the Lord and in the power of his might we should overcome the world itself by faith: did not John write unto young men

**John** teaches us that as believers in the Overcoming Christ, we too have **overcome** the "evil one"...

**1John 4:4** You are from God, little children, and have overcome them; because greater is He who is in you than he who is in the world. (**Comment:** John uses the **perfect tense** for **overcome** which pictures the permanence of this victory! Hallelujah! Victory in Jesus! When He died on Calvary and rose from the dead three days later, he achieved and assured effective, eternal victory over the evil one! Hallelujah again!)

**John** explains that all believers are overcomers...

**1Jn 5:4** For whatever is born of God **overcomes** (present tense = continually) the world; and this is the victory that has **overcome** (aorist tense - speaks of completed action at a point in time -- surely an allusion to the Cross [Jn 16:33] and our faith in the finished work of the Cross) the world -- our faith. **5:5** And who is the one who **overcomes** (present tense = continually) the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? (**Comment:** Rhetorical question -- the point is that believers = overcomers -- see their "rewards" in the uses of **Nikao** in the Revelation -- see verses below and click note for commentary).

There are 28 uses on **nikao** in the NT (4 verses use **nikao** twice) - The NAS renders **nikao** as -- come off victorious(1), conquer(1), conquering(1), overcame(2), overcome(11), overcomes(10), overpowers(1), prevail(1).

Lk 11:22; Jn 16:33; Ro 3:4-note; Ro 12:21; 1Jn 2:13; 4:4; 5:4, 5; Re 2:7-note, Re 2:11-note, Re 2:17-note, Re 2:26-note; Re 3:5-note, Re 3:12-note, Re 3:21-note; Re 5:5-note; Re 6:2-note; Re 11:7-note; Re 12:11-note; Re 13:7-note; Re 15:2-note; Re 17:14-note; Re 21:7-note

There are 3 uses of **nikao** in the **Septuagint** - Ps 51:4; Pr 6:25 (Septuagint translation - "Let not the desire of beauty overcome thee"); Hab 3:19

**Do not be overcome** - This is not a "suggestion" but a command (**present imperative**) to be carried out at all times (present tense). In Greek the present imperative with a negative calls for the stoppage of something already being carried out. The idea then is **Stop being overcome by evil**, implying that some were allowing this to happen.

"Stop being conquered by this harmful, wicked thing or person."

**How can one stop?** For one thing you know that God will repay and that satisfies the righteous indignation). We must not allow the evil done to us by other people to overcome and overwhelm us. And we must not allow ourselves to be overcome by our own evil responses (emanating from our **fallen flesh**, which remains present and totally unredeemed or unimproved in all believers until we are glorified! The indwelling Spirit now enables us to overcome our **flesh**).

Believers need to remember that our own evil is more detrimental to us than is the evil done to us by others. We must choose to surrender our "rights" and yield fully to the filling of the Holy Spirit, thus "tapping into" His omnipotent enabling power that we might accomplish supernaturally that which is impossible to accomplish naturally! We don't just need a "little help" for "help" implies we have some intrinsic ability to not be overcome by evil. Beloved, we do not have a "little strength" in our fallen flesh. Our great need is not so much for the Spirit's help but His 100% enabling power to flow through our heart and mind and soul and spirit to the glory of the Father.

**Darby** explains the first part of this verse "If my bad temper puts you in a bad temper, you have been overcome of evil." (Interesting thought!)

**Evil** (2556) (**kakos**; related word = **kakia**) is a word which basically denotes a lack of something so that it is "bad" or "not as it ought to be. **Kakos** means not meeting accepted standards of behavior, and thus worthless, bad or inferior. **Kakos** then speaks of lack of goodness, of a bad nature. (Note there is some repetition in this discussion, but hopefully this repetition will give you a good sense of the different nuances of this word).

One of the more frightening uses of **kakos** (personal opinion) is in the phrase "inventors of evil" (Ro 1:30).

**Vine** - stands for "whatever is evil in character, base," in distinction (wherever the distinction is observable) from **poneros**, which indicates "what is evil in influence and effect, malignant." (**See No. 2** = **poneros** = akin to **ponos**, "labor, toil," denotes "evil that causes labor, pain, sorrow, malignant evil") **Kakos** is the wider term and often covers the meaning of **poneros**. **Kakos** is antithetic to **kalos**, "fair, advisable, good in character," and to **agathos**, "beneficial, useful, good in act;" hence **kakos** denotes what is useless, incapable, bad; **poneros** is essentially antithetic to **chrestos**, "kind, gracious, serviceable;" hence it denotes what is destructive, injurious, evil. As evidence that **poneros** and **kakos** have much in common, though still not interchangeable, each is used of thoughts, cp. Mt 15:19 with Mk 7:21 ; of speech, Mt 5:11 with 1Pe 3:10 ; of actions, 2Ti 4:18 with 1Th 5:15 ; of man, Mt 18:32 with Mt 24:48 .The use of **kakos** may be broadly divided as follows: (a) of what is morally or ethically "evil," whether of persons, e.g., Matthew 21:41 ; 24:48 ; Philippians 3:2 ; Revelation 2:2 , or qualities, emotions, passions, deeds, e.g., Mark 7:21 ; John 18:23,30 ; Romans 1:30 ; 3:8 ; 7:19,21 ; 13:4 ; 14:20 ; 16:19 ; 1 Corinthians 13:5 ; 2 Corinthians 13:7 ; 1 Thessalonians 5:15 ; 1 Timothy 6:10 ; 2 Timothy 4:14 ; 1 Peter 3:9,12 ; (b) of what is injurious, destructive, baneful, pernicious, e.g., Luke 16:25 ; Acts 16:28 ; 28:5 ; Titus 1:12 ; James 3:8 ; Revelation 16:2 , where **kakos** and **poneros** come in that order, "noisome and grievous." (Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words)

**See Bible Dictionary discussion of evil - [Evil](#)**

**Evil** in a moral sense -

Mt 27:23; Mk 15:14; Lk 16:25; Jn 18:23; Acts 9:13; Ro 1:30; 9:11; 12:17ff.; 13:3 ff.; 1Co. 10: 6; Col. 3: 5; 1Th. 5:15; 1Ti. 6:10; Heb. 5:14; Jas 1:13; 1Pe. 3: 9ff.

**Kakos** means "harm" in the sense of "physical injury" in Acts 28:5.

**Kakos** defines one who is evil in himself, wicked, vicious, bad in heart, conduct, and character and, as such, gets others in trouble. **Kakos** is found from Homer on in a large variety of associations and means bad in the sense of lacking something, always in contrast to **agathos** which is good.

**Kakos** is the opposite of **kalos** ( good with emphasis (as discussed below) on that which is beautiful, handsome, excellent) and **agathos** (intrinsically good, inherently good in quality but with the idea of good which is also profitable).

Note that in the **KJV** (Textus Receptus) **kakos** is used in 2Cor 5:10-note for "bad" but the **Nestle-Aland** has **phaulos** which means not intrinsically bad but simply that which is of no value, that which is worthless.

**Kakos** can describe that which is morally reprehensible. For example **kakos** refers to wicked people = Mt 24:48 (servant), Php 3:2, Titus 1:12, Rev 2:2; **Kakos** refers to actions, emotions, thoughts = Mk 7:21).

**Kakos** is that which is contrary to custom or the law (it is wrong).

**Kakos** in some contexts speaks of that which is harmful or injurious and thus is dangerous or pernicious (Titus 1:12)

Of things = Mk 7:21, evil thoughts; Ro 13:3 = evil works; 1Co 15:33 = evil conversations; Col 3:5 = evil desire; Pr 6:18 = evil plans

Maximus Tyr uses **kakos** writing "the soul falls victim to [the] kakon, contrary to its own efforts and in spite of its struggles." Another ancient writer says "vengefulness composed of so many evils."

**Evil** (Webster's English definition) - Morally reprehensible. Having bad qualities of a natural kind; mischievous; having qualities which tend to injury, or to produce mischief. Having bad qualities of a moral kind; wicked; corrupt; perverse; wrong; as evil thoughts; evil deeds; evil speaking; an evil generation. Unfortunate; unhappy; producing sorrow, distress, injury or calamity; as evil tidings; evil arrows; evil days.

**Bad** (Webster's English definition) - evil; opposed to good; a word of general use, denoting physical defects and moral faults, in men and things; as a bad man, a bad heart, a bad design, bad air, bad water, bad books. Failing to reach an acceptable standard; morally objectionable. . Vicious; corrupt; depraved, in a moral sense; as a bad life; a bad action. Unwholesome; as bad provisions. Unfortunate; unprosperous; as a bad state of affairs.

**Harm** (Webster's English definition) - Injury; hurt; damage; detriment. physical or mental damage. Moral wrong; evil; mischief; wickedness.

**Friberg on kakos:** (1) morally, of persons characterized by godlessness = evil, bad (Mt 24.48); substantively = evildoer (Rev 2.2); (2) as moral conduct, attitudes, plans of godless people = evil, base, wicked (Mk 7.21); (3) neuter as a substantive *to kakon* ("the evil") = evil as being present in the world (Ro 13.3); plural *kaka* = evil deeds (Ro 1.30); (4) of circumstances and conditions that come on a person = harmful, evil, injurious (Rev 16.2); substantively *ta kaka* = ruin, harm, misfortunes, evils (Lk 16.25); (5) as characterized by reprehensible lack of accuracy = wrong, incorrect (Jn 18.23)

**Thayer** (summary) - 1. universally, of a bad nature; not such as it ought to be. 2. (morally, i. e.) of a mode of thinking, feeling, acting; base, wrong, wicked: of persons, evil i.e. what is contrary to law, either divine or human, wrong, crime: plural (evil things): 3. troublesome, injurious, pernicious, destructive, baneful: neuter *kakon*, an evil, that which injures, with the suggestion of wildness and ferocity (cf Titus 1:12). *ta kaka* = evil things, the discomforts which plague one, Lk 16:25 (opposed to *ta agatha* = the good things, from which pleasure is derived).

**Louw-Nida** (summary) - (1) pertaining to being bad, with the implication of harmful and damaging (Mt 21:41); (2) pertaining to being harsh and difficult—'bad, harsh, difficult.' (Lk 16:25). (3) pertaining to having experienced harm (Acts 28:5) (4) pertaining to being incorrect or inaccurate, with the possible implication of also being reprehensible (Jn 18:23)

**Kakos** was descriptive of a soldier who was cowardly. It is seen in several English words, such as "cacophony" (a discordant, bad sound), "cacography" (illegible writing), and "cacodemon" (an evil demon—as if there were "good" demons). The very sound of the word *kakos* suggests the idea in the word "reprehensible."

**Kakos** - 50x in 45v - Usage: bad(1), bad things(1), evil(32), evil men(1), evil things(1), evildoer(1), harm(4), loathsome(1), wretches(1), wrong(5).

Matthew 21:41 They said to Him, "He will bring those **wretches** to a wretched end, and will rent out the vineyard to other vine-growers who will pay him the proceeds at the proper seasons."

Matthew 24:48 "But if that **evil** slave says in his heart, 'My master is not coming for a long time,'

Matthew 27:23 And he said, "Why, what **evil** has He done?" But they kept shouting all the more, saying, "Crucify Him!"

Mark 7:21 "For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the **evil** thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries,

Mark 15:14 But Pilate said to them, "Why, what **evil** has He done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify Him!"

Luke 16:25 "But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus **bad** things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony.

Luke 23:22 And he said to them the third time, "Why, what evil has this man done? I have found in Him no guilt demanding death; therefore I will punish Him and release Him."

John 18:23 Jesus answered him, "If I have spoken wrongly, testify of the **wrong**; but if rightly, why do you strike Me?"

30 They answered and said to him, "If this Man were not an **evildoer**, we would not have delivered Him to you."

Acts 9:13 But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much **harm** he did to Your saints at Jerusalem;

Acts 16:28 But Paul cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Do no **harm** yourself, for we are all here!"

Acts 23:9 And there occurred a great uproar; and some of the scribes of the Pharisaic party stood up and began to argue heatedly, saying, "We find nothing **wrong** with this man; suppose a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?"

Acts 28:5 However he shook the creature off into the fire and suffered no **harm**.

Romans 1:30-note slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of **evil**, disobedient to parents,

Romans 2:9-note There will be tribulation and distress for every soul of man who does **evil**, of the Jew first and also of the Greek,

**Comment:** Doers of **evil** would equate with sin in this context. (cf similar nuance in Ro 7:19 and in Ro 7:21 **kakos** is virtually a description of our fallen flesh, our sinful nature.)

Romans 3:8-note And why not say (as we are slanderously reported and as some claim that we say), "Let us do **evil** that good may come"? (cp Ro 6:1) Their condemnation is just.

Romans 7:19-note For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very **evil** that I do not want.

21 I find then the principle that **evil** is present in me, the one who wants to do good.

Romans 12:17-note Never pay back **evil** for **evil** to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

Romans 12:21-note Do not be overcome by **evil**, but overcome **evil** with good.

Romans 13:3-note For rulers are not a cause of fear for good behavior, but **forevil**. Do you want to have no fear of authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same; 4 for it is a minister of God to you for good. But if you do what is **evil**, be afraid; for it does not bear the sword for nothing; for it is a minister of God, an avenger who brings wrath on the one who practices evil.

Romans 13:10-note Love does no **wrong** to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.

Romans 14:20-note Do not tear down the work of God for the sake of food. All things indeed are clean, but they are **evil** for the man who eats and gives offense.

Romans 16:19-note For the report of your obedience has reached to all; therefore I am rejoicing over you, but I want you to be wise in what is good and innocent in what is **evil**.

1 Corinthians 10:6 Now these things happened as examples for us, so that we would not crave **evil** things as they also craved.

1 Corinthians 13:5-note does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a **wrong** suffered,

1 Corinthians 15:33 Do not be deceived: "**Bad** company corrupts good morals."

2 Corinthians 13:7 Now we pray to God that you do no **wrong**; not that we ourselves may appear approved, but that you may do what is right, even though we may appear unapproved.

Philippians 3:2-note Beware of the dogs, beware of the **evil** workers, beware of the false circumcision;

Colossians 3:5-note Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, **evil** desire (The opposite is "good desire"), and greed, which amounts to idolatry.

1 Thessalonians 5:15-note See that no one repays another with **evil** for **evil**, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.

1 Timothy 6:10 For the love of money is a root of **all sorts of evil**, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

2 Timothy 4:14-note Alexander the coppersmith did me much **harm**; the Lord will repay him according to his

deeds.

Titus 1:12-note One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, **evil** beasts, lazy gluttons."

Hebrews 5:14-note But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and **evil**.

James 1:13-note Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by **evil**, and He Himself does not tempt anyone.

**Comment:** Here James (in a sense) personifies **evil** as the tempter of our fallen flesh.

James 3:8 But no one can tame the tongue; it is a restless **evil** and full of deadly poison (cp similar thought in Mk 7:21).

## **MOST CONCENTRATED USE OF KAKOS IN SCRIPTURE A PASSAGE WORTH MEDITATION UPON!**

1 Peter 3:9-note not returning **evil** for **evil** or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing. 10 For, "THE ONE WHO DESIRES LIFE, TO LOVE AND SEE GOOD DAYS, MUST KEEP HIS TONGUE FROM **EVIL** AND HIS LIPS FROM SPEAKING DECEIT. 11 "HE MUST TURN AWAY FROM **EVIL** AND DO GOOD; HE MUST SEEK PEACE AND PURSUE IT. 12 "FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD ARE TOWARD THE RIGHTEOUS, AND HIS EARS ATTEND TO THEIR PRAYER, BUT THE FACE OF THE LORD IS AGAINST THOSE WHO DO **EVIL**."

3 John 1:11 Beloved, **do not imitate** (present imperative with a negative = stop doing this. The implication is you can, because you possess a "holy power" within -- if you cannot stop, then it may signify you lack the indwelling Spirit!) what is **evil**, but what is good. The one who does good is of God; the one who does evil (kakopoieo - in the present tense = doing evil is what this person lives for) has not seen God (this is a way of saying this habitually evil practitioner is not a genuine believer!).

**Comment:** Dear reader, please do not miss John's clear, even urgent warning which is made even clearer by presenting it as a dramatic contrast of lifestyles and ultimately of eternal destinies! John is not stuttering, but is clearly saying that if you are a continual doer of evil, than you lack a regenerate heart, because a genuine believer cannot continually do evil. They may backslide, but they will always get up out of the "pig pen" of evil! There are some commentators who interpret this passage to say that John is not referring to salvation. (e.g., even the otherwise excellent and generally conservative Bible Knowledge Commentary = "John was not questioning Diotrephes' salvation... " -- I strongly, vehemently disagree with that comment as does John MacArthur who says "John's statement indicates that Diotrephes' actions proved that he was never a Christian." Someone has to be wrong in their interpretation and there are eternal implications at stake!) That is not what the literal, simple, normative reading of the text says. Listen to your Teacher, the Holy Spirit, and not to human teachers! See also Hebrews 5:14.

Revelation 2:2-note 'I know your deeds and your toil and perseverance, and that you cannot tolerate **evil** men, and you put to the test those who call themselves apostles, and they are not, and you found them to be false;

Revelation 16:2-note So the first angel went and poured out his bowl on the earth; and it became a **loathsome** and malignant sore on the people who had the mark of the beast and who worshiped his image.

**Kakos** - 279 verses in the non-apocryphal Septuagint - Ge 19:19 (lest I be overtaken by the evil/calamity);

Ge 24:50; 26:29; 44:34; 48:16; 50:15; Ex 5:19; Num 14:23; 32:11, 23; Deut 1:39; 29:21; 30:15; 31:17, 29; 32:23; Judg 2:15; 6:13; 1 Sam 10:19; 17:43; 20:13; 24:17; 25:26, 39; 2 Sam 12:11, 18; 17:14; 18:32; 19:7, 35; 1 Kgs 3:9; 21:21; 22:8, 18, 23; 2 Kgs 8:12; 21:12; 22:16, 20; 1 Chr 7:23; 2 Chr 18:7, 17, 22; 20:9; 34:24, 28; Neh 13:18; Esth 1:1; 3:13; 7:7; 9:25; 10:3; Job 1:5; 2:3, 10f; 4:12; 5:5, 19, 21; 13:4, 26; 16:2; 28:28; 30:26; Ps 7:4; 10:6; 15:3; 21:11; 23:4; 27:5; 28:3; 34:13f, 16; 35:4, 26; 37:27; 38:12, 20; 40:12, 14; 41:5, 7; 54:5; 56:5; 70:2; 71:13, 20, 24; 88:3; 90:15; 91:10; 107:26, 39; 109:5; 121:7; 140:11; Prov 1:18, 28, 33; 2:12, 14, 17; 3:7, 29ff; 4:27; 5:14; 6:3, 11, 14, 18; 8:13; 9:7f, 12; 10:23, 29; 11:27; 12:12, 20f, 26; 13:10, 17, 21; 14:6, 16, 19, 22, 24f; 15:2f, 14f, 23, 27f; 16:2, 4, 12, 17, 22, 27f, 30; 17:4, 11f, 16, 20; 18:3, 6; 19:6, 27; 20:30; 21:12, 26; 22:8, 14; 24:1, 10, 16; 25:19; 27:12, 21; 28:5, 10, 14, 20; 30:11ff; Eccl 5:1; 9:2, 12; Isa 7:16; 13:11; 26:15; 28:9; 31:2; 45:7; 46:7; 57:12; Jer 1:14; 2:3, 27; 4:6; 5:12; 6:1, 19; 7:6, 24; 9:3, 14; 11:11f, 17, 23; 13:23; 14:8, 16; 15:11; 16:10, 19; 18:8, 11, 20; 19:3, 15; 21:10; 23:12, 17; 25:32; 26:3, 13, 19; 29:11; 32:23, 42; 35:17; 36:3,



31; 39:16; 40:2; 41:11; 42:6, 10, 17; 44:2, 5, 7, 9, 17, 23; 45:5; 48:2; 49:37; 51:60, 64; Lam 1:21; 3:38; Ezek 14:22; 20:44; Dan 7:24; 9:12ff; Joel 3:13; Amos 6:3; 9:4, 10; Jonah 4:6; Mic 1:12; 2:1, 3; 3:11; 4:9; 7:3; Hab 2:9; Zeph 3:15; Zech 1:15; Mal 1:8

**Genesis 48:16** (Jacob/Israel) The Angel (**Angel of the LORD**) who has redeemed me from all (how much?) **evil** (Lxx = kakos), Bless the lads; And may my name live on in them, And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

**Psalm 23:4** Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no **evil**, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

**Psalm 34:14** Depart from **evil** and do good; Seek peace and pursue it.

**Malachi 1:8** “But when you present the blind for sacrifice, is it not **evil**? And when you present the lame and sick, is it not **evil**? Why not offer it to your governor? Would he be pleased with you? Or would he receive you kindly?” says the LORD of hosts.

**BUT OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD: alla nika (2SPAM) en to agatho to kakon:**

- 1Pe 2:12-note

## OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOD!

The **only way** to **overcome evil with good** is to do it in reliance of God, motivated and enabled by His indwelling, empowering Spirit!

**Wiersbe** - As children of God, we must live on the highest level—returning good for evil. Anyone can return good for good and evil for evil. The only way to overcome evil is with good. If we return evil for evil, we only add fuel to the fire. And even if our enemy is not converted, we have still experienced the love of God in our own hearts and have grown in grace. (Bible Exposition Commentary - Be Right - Romans).

**Stedman** - I was reading one day a story about a boy who was in the army. He was a Christian and had formed the habit of praying beside his bed before he went to sleep. He kept up this practice in the army, but he became an object of mockery and ridicule to the entire barracks. One night he knelt to pray after a long, weary march. As he was praying, one of his tormentors took off his muddy boots and threw them at the boy, one at a time, hitting him on each side of his head. The Christian said nothing about it, and just took the boots and put them beside the bed and continued to pray. But the next morning, when the other man woke up, he found his boots sitting beside his bed, all shined and polished. It so broke his heart that he came to that boy and asked him for forgiveness. That led, after a time, to that man becoming a Christian. This is what Paul means when he says you overcome evil with good. As Abraham Lincoln once said, "The best way to overcome an enemy is to make him your friend." Three times in this passage the apostle has stressed the fact that you are not to return evil for evil. In Ro 12:14, 17, 21 he states it. So, throughout this passage it is underscored that the major way we express love in the world is by not reacting in vengeance when we are mistreated by the world. Can you imagine what would happen on this Peninsula Bible Church if the Christians would begin to act this way? How many times we turn people away from Christianity by assuming the same attitude the world around us has. Surely this is a practical way Paul has of reminding us that we are not to be conformed to this age. We are not to think like they do. It is recorded of the Lord Jesus that when he was reviled, "he reviled not again, but committed himself to him who judges all things righteously," (1Peter 2:23 KJV). That was given for our admonition, that we might behave as Jesus did in the midst of the world. What a testimony of grace that would be! (Romans 12 - Ray C. Stedman's Expository Studies of the Bible)

**But** - So now Paul calls for a radical, supernatural, Spirit empowered **contrast**.

**Overcome** (3528) (**nikao** from **nike** = victory) means to get the victory, overcome, conquer or subdue. The verb is in the **present imperative**) and thus is a command to keep on overcoming, implying that believers will continually be confronted with evil! Don't be surprised. Be aware! Be "empowered" by His Spirit to stand firm against the onslaught of evil, even being supernaturally enabled

**Good** (18) (**agathos [word study]**) means profitable, benefiting others, whereas the related word **kalos** means constitutionally good, but not necessarily benefiting others The idea is to overcome evil with what is useful, beneficial or profitable to others.

Any one can return **good** for **good** and **evil** for **evil**. But Paul is teaching that the only way to truly overcome evil is with good. If we return evil for evil, we only add fuel to the fire of the evil doer.

The great black scientist, **George Washington Carver**, once said, "I will never let another man ruin my life by making me hate him." As a believer Carver empowered by the Spirit would not allow evil to conquer him. Instead he choose to overcome evil with good.

Sound (healthy, soul health giving) doctrine does not just deliver a negative prohibition but goes on to a positive exhortation.

**Edwin M Stanton** (1814-1869) treated **Abraham Lincoln** with venomous hatred, declaring on one occasion that it was foolish to go to Africa in search of a gorilla when "the original gorilla" could be found in Springfield, Illinois! Lincoln took this "gorilla warfare" all in stride and later Lincoln appointed Stanton as his secretary of war, because he felt that Stanton was the most qualified for the office. After Lincoln was assassinated, Stanton called him the greatest leader of men. Lincoln's restraint in returning the vitriolic verbal diatribe prove too great a weapon for Stanton who was overcome by Lincoln's selfless restraint!

## OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD

NO. 1317

### A SERMON DELIVERED ON LORD'S-DAY MORNING, OCTOBER 8TH, 1876

**"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." — Romans 12:21.**

This is a very pithy verse, and the form of it greatly assists the memory. It is worthy to be called a Christian proverb. I would recommend every Christian man to learn it by heart, and have it ready for use (see Memorizing His Word); for there are a great many proverbs, which convey a very different sense, and these are often quoted to give the weight of authority to unchristian principles. Here is an inspired proverb; carry it with you, and use it as a weapon with which to parry the thrusts of the world's wisdom. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

### A Choice Between Two Things

Observe that the text appears to give us a choice between two things, and bids us choose the better one. You must either be overcome of evil, or you must yourself overcome evil: one of the two. You cannot let evil alone and evil will not let you alone. You must fight, and in the battle you must either conquer or be conquered.

The words before us remind me of the saying of the Scotch officer to the Highland regiment when he brought them up in front of the enemy and said,

"Lads, there they are: if ye dinna kill them they'll kill you."

So does Paul marshal us in front of evil, and like a wise general he puts us on our mettle by saying,

**"Overcome, or be overcome."**

There is no avoiding the conflict, no making truce or holding parley, no suspension of hostilities after a brief skirmish, but the battle must be fought through to the end, and can only close with a decided victory to one or the other side. Soldier of Christ, do you long debate which of the two to choose, victory or defeat?

**To be utterly overcome of evil would be a very dreadful thing.** I shall say but little about it, because I trust we shall, by divine grace, be upheld so as never to know by experience what it is to be overcome of evil! May we be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us." (Ro 8:37-note) May we be happily ignorant of what it is to be vanquished by the powers of evil, and remain like the British drummer boy who did not know how to beat a retreat, for he had never had any use for such a thing. May we not know the dishonor and misery of being overcome of evil, because divine grace continually giveth us the victory. When we are overcome of evil, even for a moment, it discovers the sad weakness of our spiritual life. We must be babes in grace and sadly carnal still, if sin is allowed to master us. If we were stronger in the Lord and in the power of his might we should overcome the world itself by faith: did not John write unto young men and say, "Ye are strong, and have overcome the wicked one." If we are overcome of evil, even for a moment, it will cause us great sorrow if we are in our right mind. A tender conscience will be greatly vexed as soon as defeat is sustained, and in looking back upon our fall, if fall we do, it will be a daily grief to us that we suffered ourselves to be overcome by evil at all. To be overcome of evil is dishonoring to our Lord, and opens the mouths of adversaries. Those who watch for our halting will be sure to make much of it. "Report it, report it," say they, and they do report it through the length and breadth of the land, that a servant of Christ has been overcome of evil. And if to be overcome of evil were not occasional but were continuous, if it could be said of our whole life that we were overcome of evil, it would prove that we were none of Christ's; for he that is born of God overcometh the world. Our Lord Jesus said, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world," and he makes all his true disciples partakers of this victory. Only to conquerors are the great promises of the book of Revelation given —

“To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna.”

“Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the house of my God.”

“To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

To be defeated in the battle of life would prove that we did not belong to that conquering seed which, if its heel be bruised, shall nevertheless break the foeman's head. Fix it, then, in your minds that evil is to be overcome; it is a matter of necessity that we wage this war and succeed in it. We must needs triumph over the powers of darkness.

Few are the words, but weighty is the meaning of our text. In one sententious sentence the conflict is set before us, and the sword of the battle is put into our hands.

“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Good is the only weapon which in this dread conflict we are permitted to use, and we may rest assured it will be sufficient and effectual. To use any other weapon is not only unlawful but altogether impossible, for he who wields the sword of evil is no longer Christ's soldier at all.

The reference in the text is to personal injuries, and therefore we shall confine ourselves to that one point, though the principle is capable of very great extension. In fighting with sin and error our weapons must be holiness and truth, and these alone: it is a wide subject, and I will not venture upon it. That personal injury is referred to in my text is clear from the preceding verses,

“Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give piece unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine: I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him, if he thirst, give him drink: for is so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.”

With regard to the evil of personal injury, the common method is to overcome evil with evil: let us talk about it. Secondly, the divine method is to overcome evil with good: let us speak of that; and this will no doubt exhaust our time. As this is a very practical subject let us entreat the Holy Spirit to teach us the will of Christ, and then to enable us to obey it in all things. I shall be much disappointed if the subject does not humble as well as instruct us, and if it does this it will be well for us to fly at once to the blood of the atonement, that we may be purged from former faults and cleansed for future holiness.

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## **I. The Common Method Of Overcoming Injuries Is Overcoming Evil With Evil.**

“Give him a Roland for his Oliver.”

“Give him as good as he sends.”

“Sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.”

“Be six to his half dozen.”

I might go on with a score of proverbs, all inculcating the sentiment of revenge, or at least of meeting evil with evil.

I have to observe that the overcoming of evil with evil is in the first place a most natural procedure. It suggests itself to my fool to overcome evil with evil; a lunatic or idiot would do that. You need not train your children to it, it will be suggested in their infancy, and they will strike the floor upon which they fall, and beat the post against which they stumble, to punish it for their hurt; it is natural, very sadly natural. A sort of instinct suggests it, the instinct of the worm which turns if it be trodden on. This instinct says,

“Surely we are not to suffer evil without resenting it, and what can we do better than to treat others as they treat us? “

It must be admitted, also, that there is a show of justice about such a method of combating evil. Why should not a man be made to suffer who makes me suffer? And if he does me wrong why should I not defend myself and make him smart for making me smart? I freely admit that this is exceedingly natural, and has a show of justice about it? But to which part of us is it natural? Think for a minute. Is it natural to the new created spirit which dwells in believers, or is it natural to us because there is a part of us which is animal? Is it the new man in us which suggests revenge? Or is it the flesh, the mere animal in us which strikes out to avenge itself? A moment's reflection will let you see that the returning of evil for evil is natural to the animal nature, but that it is not, and never can be, natural to the new-created spirit whose nature is like the God from which it came, namely love, and gentleness, and kindness.

“Good for evil is Godlike; good for good is man-like; evil for good is devil-like; evil for evil,”

— what is that? I quote it to prove my point. It is beast-like; it is like the beast which kicks because it is kicked, gores because it is gored, and bites because it is bitten. Surely we cannot allow the lower part of our triple nature to dictate to our heaven-born Spirit. We cannot let the servant be the master. We will be natural, but the nature which we will follow shall be that which we received in our regeneration, when we were made partakers of the divine nature, and enabled to escape the corruptions of the world. That returning evil for evil looks like rough and ready justice I have confessed, but then is any man prepared to follow out for himself, and in his own case this rule of justice? Is he prepared to stand before God and receive evil for his evil?

“He shall have justice without mercy that showeth no mercy.”

Is he willing to stand before God on the same terms as he would have the offending one stand before himself? Nay, our best, and indeed our only hope must lie in the mercy of God who freely forgives offenses. We must look up to infinite love, and entreat the Lord to have mercy upon us according to the multitude of his lovingkindnesses; and therefore we must render mercy to others. To recompense evil for evil is natural, but may God deliver us from the nature which makes it natural? It is just, no doubt, after a fashion, but from that sort of justice may our Redeemer rescue us!

Again, it is admitted that the art of returning evil for evil is very, very easy. If, my dear friend, you make it a rule that nobody shall ever insult you without having to pay for it, nor treat you with disrespect without meeting his match, you need not pray God in the morning to help you to carry out your resolve. There will be no need to wrestle in prayer that you may be graciously enabled to take vengeance on your adversaries, and stand up for your rights: you can do that decidedly better by trusting to yourself than by looking to God; indeed you dare not look to God about it. The devil will help you, and between your own passion and the evil one the thing may be very easily managed. There will be no reason for watchfulness, you need not be on your guard, or keep your spirit in check; on the contrary, you may give to the very worst part of your nature the greatest possible license, and go a-head according to the rage of your passionate spirit. Prayer and humility of mind will of course be quite out of the question. Nor will there be any need for faith; you will not commit your case unto God and leave it there, you will fight your own battles, wipe off old scores as you go on, and place your dependence on fierce speeches, on your mighty fists, or on the law and the policeman. Christian graces will be too much in your way for you to think of them. Gentleness, meekness, forbearance, forgiveness — you will bid good-bye to these and cultivate the virtues of a savage or of a bull-dog. All this is wonderful easy, though it may be that ere long it will turn out to be hard.

Now, I put it to Christians, whether that which is so very easy to the very worst of men can ever be the right procedure for those who ought to be the best of men. If the divine plan of love be difficult and requires great grace to enable you to follow it, and I freely admit that it does, if it be very difficult to maintain it, and will require much prayer, much watchfulness, and much conquest of yourself, is it not, therefore, the more sure to be right? As for that which is so easy, let that be left to publicans and sinners, but as for you who have received more mercy of God than other men, should you not render more? You believe yourselves to be twice born, you have received a new and heavenly life; what do ye more than others? Ought ye not to show that there is more in you than in others, by letting more come out of you than comes out of others? Much more is expected of us than of the unregenerate, naturally and rightly expectation runs high in reference to men who make such high professions; and if the professed Christian be no better in his daily conversation than the ungodly, depend upon it he is no Christian man at all. We possess a higher life, and we are lifted to a nobler platform than the common sons of men, and therefore we must lead a nobler life and be guided by sublimer principles. Let the children of darkness meet evil with evil, and carry on their wars and fightings, their strifes and their envyings, their malice and their revenge: but as for you, O believers, ye are the children of the God of love, and love must be your life. You have been renewed in the spirit of your minds, and you must not be conformed to this world, but be transformed into the likeness of Christ your Master. Evil for evil should be a principle detested by you, and such should be your loving spirit that it ought to be no longer easy to recompense evil with evil, but hard, yea impossible, to bring you to do anything of the kind. Revenge and fury should be as alien to the spirit of a child of God as they would be to an angel before the throne.

By many to return evil for evil has been judged to be the more manly course. Years ago if a gentleman imagined himself to be insulted, it was necessary according to the code of honor then in vogue for him either to shed the blood of the offending person, or at least to expose himself to the like peril of his life. Thank God, that murderous custom is now almost entirely gone from the face of the earth. The spirit of Christianity has by degrees overcome this evil, but there still abides in the world the idea that to stand up for yourself, just to let people know what you are, never to knuckle down to anybody, but to defend your own cause and vindicate your honor, has something extremely manly about it; but to yield, to submit, to be patient, to be meek, to be gentle, is considered to be unworthy of a man of Spirit. They call it showing the white feather and being cowardly, though to my mind, he is the bravest man who can bear the most. Now, Christian men, who is your model of a man? You do not hesitate for a second, I am sure. There is but one model of a Christian man, and that is the man Christ Jesus. Will you then remember that whatever is Christly is manly, and whatsoever you think to be manly which is not Christlike, is really unmanly, as judged by the highest style of man. The Lord Jesus draws near to a Samaritan village, but they will not receive him, though he was always kind to Samaritans. Good John, gentle John, becomes highly indignant, and cries,

“Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?”

Jesus meekly answers,

“Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of: for the Son of man is not come to destroy men’s lives, but to save them.”

See him on another occasion: your Master has risen from his knees, with the bloody sweat still on his face; and Judas comes and betrays him, and they begin to handle him very roughly, and therefore, being highly provoked, brave Peter draws out his sword; and just to flesh it a little he cuts off the ear of Malchus. Hear how gently Jesus says,

“Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword;”

and so he heals that ear at once. Was that manly, do you think? Was it manly to refuse to call fire from heaven, and to touch and heal the wounded ear? To me it seems superlatively manly, and may such be my manliness and yours. Look at our Lord again before the high priest, when an officer of the court, incensed by his gentle answers, smites him on the cheek; what does Jesus say? Observe the difference between Christ and Paul. Paul says, “God shall smite thee, thou whited wall.” Bravo, Paul, that is speaking up for yourself! We cannot blame thee, for who are we to censure an apostle? But look at Paul’s Master and hear his words,

“If I have spoken evil bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?”

Is not the example of Jesus the more noble, the more Godlike? No man for a moment can put the two side by side without feeling that the Lord’s conduct is by far the more sublime. It is not for us to imitate the servant of Christ when Christ himself excels him. Herein is victory when a man so overcomes himself that he replies to evil language with good and wise answers, but not with fierce and reviling words. O Christians, look ye at Christ, your Lord, who all his life long endured such contradiction of sinners against himself; who when he was reviled reviled not again, but submitted himself to him that judgeth righteously; and who even on the cruel tree, when he was mocked by those around him, had nothing to say but this —

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.”

O Man of men, be thou the criterion henceforth of all the manliness at which we aim, and if others count the opposite to be manly let them count it so that will, — we are not of their mind.

Dear friends, we are now bold to affirm concerning the old, easy, natural method of returning evil for evil is that it does not succeed. Nobody ever did overcome evil by confronting it with evil yet. Such a course increases the evil. When the great fire was blazing at London Bridge it would have been a strange way of putting it out or keeping it under if our firemen had lit another fire close to it, or had pumped petroleum upon it; yet have I known some try to overcome the evil of a passionate temper in a man by becoming passionate themselves — rolling up another tar barrel to his fire, and so making it burn more furiously than ever. That is not conquering evil, nor is evil ever to be so conquered till water drowns the sea. A soft answer turneth away wrath, but anger excites more anger and more sin. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth, when it comes to be heaped up with fuel, and blown upon by furious winds.

What is worse, when we assail evil with evil we are already ourselves overcome: we have fallen into the very wrong which we complain of. As long as we can be calm and quiet we are victorious; but our breaking loose into an ill temper is our own defeat, and being overcome how can we overcome others? Brethren, the desire to return evil for evil does not succeed, because it injures us much more than it injures the person whom we seek to overcome. It has been said that the worst peace is better than the best war, and I believe almost anything is better than becoming angry. Scarcely any injury which we can ever sustain will so injure us as the injury which must arise to us from becoming angry and revengeful. Our enemies are not worth putting ourselves out about after all, and ten minutes of a palpitating heart, and of a disturbed circulation, causes us greater real damage in body than an enemy could inflict in seven years. Ten minutes of a fiery deluge overflowing the whole soul is a serious catastrophe, not to be often risked. Ten minutes in which you could not look Jesus in the face, ten minutes in which you would be ashamed to think of the Master’s being near, ten minutes of broken fellowship — why this is a very serious self-torture. Let us not suffer it to please our foes. Alas, I have known professors keep up this wrath for days and weeks. How it must hurt a man to have his soul broiling all that time! To have his heart roasting in the fire of wrath. I feel it to be too painful to bear, even for a brief season; it is bad for us in every sense, it hurts the mind permanently. Evil for evil is an edged tool which cuts the man who uses it: a kind of cannon which is most dangerous to those who fire it, both in its discharge and in its recoil. If you wished to destroy your enemy it would be wise to make him a present of this dangerous gun, and allow him to have the entire monopoly of it. I may truly say that when we oppose evil with evil, the evil which comes from us does us far more injury than any evil which we experience from others.

Again, the method of overcoming evil with evil does not bear inspection; it does not bear to be pondered and meditated on. Let any renewed man sit down for a minute after he has fallen into this practice, and ask himself as a Christian how he feels over it. He has usurped the place of God, for vengeance belongs only to the Judge of all the earth: how does he feel while acting as a usurper? Who am I that I should clamber to the throne of God and seize his sword and attempt to make myself judge and executioner among

mankind! Will this bear consideration? Can a child of God thus see himself guilty of high treason against his King? How does a man feel when he is on his knees and remember what he has done? How does he say "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us"? Do not his eyes fill with tears and is not his heart heavy with regret? How will your hard speeches and fierce actions appear when viewed from your dying bed? Will railing, and fighting, and law-suits be sweet memories there? Can such a thing as resenting evil with evil be the subject of our praise to God? Can we ever thank the God of love for enabling us to avenge ourselves? If we cannot pray about it, or praise about it, let us let it alone. Is there anything about it which we could whisper in the ear of Christ? Is there anything in it that will help us to nearer fellowship, with him? Is there anything in anger and wrath which will prepare: us for the business of earth or for the bliss of heaven?

It is bad, bad altogether. The best that I can say of it is that there may be rare occasions in which the provocation may be so great as to present others from condemning us, but then I must add that at such times we had better even then make no excuse for ourselves. The mind of Christ is that when smitten on one cheek we turn the other also, and that in no case we render unto any man evil for evil. Beloved brethren, I beseech you by the mercies of God that ye adjure for ever the method of seeking to overcome evil with evil, and that ye follow the example of your Lord, taking his yoke upon you and learning of him, for he is meek and lowly in mind.

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## **II. Let us now consider The Divine Method Of Overcoming Evil With Good.**

And here I freely admit, to commence with, that this is a very elevated mode of procedure. "Overcome evil with good! Ridiculous!" says one; "Utopian," cries another; "It might do for Plato's republic," says a third, "but it will never do for ordinary, every day life." Well, I shall not blush to own that this is a very high course of conduct, and one which the mere worldling cannot be expected to follow, but of Christians we expect higher things. Ye have a high calling of God in Christ Jesus, and ye are therefore called to a high style of character by your glorious leader, the Lord Jesus Christ. Brethren, if it be difficult I commend it to you because it is so; what is there which is good which is not also difficult? Soldiers of Christ love those virtues most which cost them most. If it be hard to obtain, the jewel is all the more precious. Since there is grace sufficient to enable us to become like our Lord, we will labor after this virtue also, and obtain the great grace which its cultivation requires.

Notice that this text inculcates not merely passive non-resistance, though that is going a good way, but it teaches us active benevolence to enemies. "Overcome evil with good," with direct and overt acts of kindness. That is, if any man has done you a wrong, do not only forgive it, but avenge it by doing him a favor. Dr. Cotton Mather was never content till he had bestowed a benefit on every man who had in any way done him an injury. If anybody has slandered you, or treated you unkindly in any way, go out of your way to serve him. "If thine enemy hunger, feed him."

You might say

"Well, I am sorry for him, but really he is such a vagabond, I could not think of relieving him."

Yet according to this Scripture, he is the very man you are bound to feed. If he thirst, do not say,

"I hope somebody will relieve him; I feel no animosity to the man, but I am not going out of my way to give him drink."

According to your Lord's command, he is the man to whom you must give drink. Go straightway to the well and fill your pitcher, and hasten to give him drink at once, and without stint. You have not merely to forgive and forget, but you are bidden to inflict upon the malicious mind the blessed sin-killing wound of your hearty and practical good-will. Give a blessing for a curse, a kiss for a blow, a favor for a wrong. "Oh," say you, "this is high, I cannot attain unto it." God is able to give you strength equal to this also. "It is hard," say you. Ah, but if you take Christ to be your Master, you must do what he tells you, and instead of shrinking because His command seems difficult to flesh and blood, you must cry, "Lord, increase my faith, and give me more of thy Spirit." To forgive to seventy times seven would not be hard to Christ, for he did it all His life long, and it will not be hard to you if the same mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus. It is to this that you are called. It is a sublime temper, and it is exceedingly difficult and needs Divine grace, needs watchfulness, needs living near to God, but for these reasons it is all the more worthy of a follower of Jesus, and therefore we should aim at it with our whole heart.

The benefit of the method of returning good for evil is that it preserves the man from evil. If evil assails you, and you only fight it with good, it cannot hurt you, you are invulnerable. If any man curse you, and you answer him with a blessing, it is clear that the curse has not hurt you. It has not made you full of curses, or else one would come out of you. If a man has slandered you, but you never return him a reproachful word, he has not hurt your real character; the dirt which he has thrown has missed you, for you have none to throw back upon him. If when much provoked your temper still remains calm and quiet, the provocation has not touched you, the arrow has passed harmlessly by. The very thing your enemy wants is to make you descend to his level of anger and malice, but, as

long as having much provocation you remain unprovoked, you vanquish him. Believe me you are provoking your adversary terribly if you are quite calm yourself, you are disappointing him, he cannot insert his poisoned darts for you are clad in armor of proof. He tries to injure you, but he cannot; he fails to make you sin, and so he misses his mark. Do you not see what a wonderful armor it is? If God preserve you, so that you have nothing but good wishes and goodwill towards the man who hates you and seeks your ruin, then you are a conqueror indeed.

While this conduct protects you, it is the very best weapon of offense against the opposer. William Ladd had a farm in one of the states of America, and his neighbor, Pulsifer, was a great trouble to him, for he kept a breed of gaunt, long-legged sheep, as active as spaniels, which would spring over almost any sort of fence. These sheep were very fond of a fine field of grain belonging to Mr. Ladd, and were in it continually; complaints were of no use, for Pulsifer evidently cared nothing for his neighbour's losses. One morning Ladd said to his men, "Set the dogs on those sheep, and if that won't keep them out, shoot them." After he had said that, he thought to himself,

"This will not do. I had better try the peace principle."

So he sent to his men and countermanded the order, and rode over to see his neighbor about those troublesome sheep. "Good morning," said he, but he received no answer: so he tried again, and got nothing but a sort of grunt. "Neighbor," said he, "I have come to see you about those sheep." "Yes," Pulsifer replied, "I know. You are a pretty neighbor to tell your men to kill my sheep! You a rich man, too, and going to shoot a poor man's sheep!" Then followed some very strong language, but Ladd replied,

"I was wrong, neighbor, and I am sorry for it. Think no more about it. But, neighbor, we may as well agree. It seems I have got to keep your sheep, and it won't do to let them eat all that grain, so I came over to say that I will take them into my homestead pasture and I will keep them all the season; and if any one is missing you shall have the pick of mine."

Pulsifer looked confounded, and then stammered out, "Now, Squire, are you in earnest?" When he found that Ladd really meant to stand to the offer, Pulsifer stood still a moment and then said, "The sheep shan't trouble you any more. When you talk about shooting I can shoot as well as you; but when you speak in that kind and neighbourly way I can be kind too." The sheep never trespassed into Ladd's lot any more. That is the way to kill a bad spirit: this is overcoming evil with good. If one had begun shooting, and the other had followed suit, they certainly would have been both losers, and both been overcome; but when the offended one made kindness his only return the battle was over. I remember years ago — though I only quote it, not for my own praise, but as an illustration — a certain person, a very good man too, did not admire a course of action that I felt bound to take. He was very angry, and called upon me to express his objections. At last he said, "If you do that I shall expose you in a pamphlet." I was in a gracious mood at that time, and was not to be ruffled in temper, nor yet turned from my course. I said to him quietly, "What do you think the pamphlet would cost?" "Oh," he said, "I don't know, but whatever it costs I shall do it." I answered, "Well, if you feel you ought to do it I should be sorry to see you go into debt, and therefore I will pay the printer's bill. I will trust you to give a truthful account of the matter, and I am not at all ashamed to have my course of action made as public as possible; indeed I had rather it should be." He said he should not like to take any money from me. "Well," I replied, "perhaps you think that there might be some profits upon the sale; you shall be quite welcome to them. Your own friends can print for you, I will find the money, and you shall have the profit." I never heard any more of that pamphlet, and he is an exceedingly good friend of mine at the present moment, and will I hope always remain so.

To remain quiet is generally the way to baffle an adversary; indeed there is no weapon with which he can wound you. If you will not yield so as to give railing for railing, what is to be done with you? It is much the same as when a certain duke proclaimed war against a peaceful neighbor, who was resolved not to fight. The troops came riding to the town, and found the gates open as on ordinary occasions. The children were playing in the streets, and the blacksmith was at his forge, and the shopkeepers at their counters, and so, pulling up their horses, the soldiers enquired, "Where is the enemy?" "We don't know. We are friends." What was to be done under the circumstances but to ride home? So it is in life, if you only meet evil with good the bad man's occupation is gone.

It has sometimes happened that evil men have been converted into good men, and conquered thus in the very best possible way by seeing the patient Christian return good for evil. Some years ago a wicked, reprobate sailor was engaged in tarring a vessel, and while he was at his work there came along an old man well known in the district as a Christian. One of the sailor's mates standing by said to him, "Jack, you could not provoke that man; he is such a gentle-spirited man you could not put him out of temper." Jack was quite sure he could, and it became the subject of a wager. The wicked fellow took his bucket of tar with which he was tarring the keel, and dared to throw it right over the good old man. It was a most shameful assault, and the fellow deserved the utmost penalty of the law. The old man turned round and calmly said to him, "The Lord Jesus Christ has said that he who offends one of his little ones will find that it were better for him that a millstone had been tied about his neck, and that he were cast into the sea: now, if I am one of Christ's little ones, it will be very bad for you." Jack slunk back dreadfully ashamed of himself. What was more, the old man's quiet face haunted him; night after night he woke up, and in his dreams he saw that old man; and those tremendous words, "that it

were better for him that a millstone were about his neck," broke him down before the mercy-seat of God. He asked and found pardon; he sought out the old man, confessed his fault, and received forgiveness. Who would not have a bucketful of tar thrown over him if it would save a soul? Now, suppose the old man had turned round on him, and uttered some fiery language, or struck at him, — who could have blamed him? But then there would have been no triumph of grace in the Christian, and no conversion in the sinner. God has often made use of a gentle, meek, quiet, forbearing spirit to be the power with which he subdues the lion-like rebel, and turns the course of ill-disposed and ungodly men. He makes them see how awful goodness is, how strong is gentleness, how omnipotent is love.

Returning good for evil, again reflects great honor upon Christ. I do not know of anything which makes the blind world see so much of the glory of Christ as this. When one of the martyrs was being tortured and tormented in a horrible way, the tyrant who had caused his sufferings said to him, "And what has your Christ ever done for you that you should bear this?" He replied, "He has done this for me, that in the midst of all my pain, I do nothing else but pray for you." Ah, Lord Jesus, thou hast taught us how to conquer, for thou hast conquered. There are many mighty names on the battle-roll of earth, but thy name is not there: there is another conflict sterner and nobler, and thou standest at the head of the heroes who are engaged in it. Read the name, my brethren, it is written in his own blood, "Jesus of Nazareth, the Crucified, the chief of those who overcome evil with good." Who among you will say, "Write down my name, Sir, beneath my Lord the Lamb, for in that battle I would have a share, and on those lines I would fight the foe"? Recollect you must do it or you cannot be like him, and if you are not like him, you have not his spirit, and "if any man hath not the spirit of Christ, he is none of his."

I will not explain how this principle can be carried into other things, for there is no time, but I will close by noticing that everything that is admirable may be said of this method of overcoming evil with good. It is so noble, it is so becoming to whom God has lifted up to be his child, that I commend it to every man of sanctified feeling. A Christian man is the noblest work of God, and one of the noblest features of a Christian man is his readiness to forgive; and the cheerfulness with which he seeks to recompense good for evil. The Emperor Adrian, before he reached the throne, had been grievously insulted. When he had attained the imperial purple he met the man who had used him ill. The guilty person was, of course, dreadfully afraid of his mighty foe. He knew that now it only needed a wish from the Emperor, and his life would be taken away. Adrian cried out, "Approach. You have nothing to fear; I am an Emperor!"

Did this heathen feel that his dignity lifted him above the meanness of revenge? Then, my brethren, let those whom Christ has made kings unto God scorn to render evil for evil. Say, "I am a Christian, and my resentments are over. What can I do to serve you? I could have fought you to the death aforesaid, but now I am dead myself and born again, and having commenced a new life, behold Christ hath made all things new. My animosities are buried in his tomb, my revenges are lost in the abyss into which he has cast my sins; and now as a new man in Christ Jesus, my life shall be love, for he hath said, "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you. That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise upon the evil and on the good."

Good for evil is nobly congruous with the spirit of the gospel. Were we not saved because the Lord rendered to us good for evil? The spirit of the law is "An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth," but the spirit of the gospel is, "freely I forgive you: your many iniquities and vast transgressions are all blotted out for Christ's name's sake, therefore be pitiful towards others." Forgiveness is one fruit of the gospel, and doing good in return for evil is another. Should not the spirit of every Christian man be one of unconquerable love? For by unconquerable love he is saved.

And, beloved, this spirit of forgiveness is the Spirit of God, and he that hath it becomes like to God. If thou wouldst rise to the highest style of being, rise thou to the condition of a being who can be injured, and yet forgive. To be just is something, scarcely for a righteous man would one die; but to be merciful and kind is much more, since for a good man some would even dare to die — such is the enthusiasm which a loving spirit will kindle. Rise above mere righteousness into the divine atmosphere of love. But whether men love you or not is a small matter; whether you conquer them or not is also a little matter, but that you should conquer evil, that you should be victorious over sin, that you should receive from your Lord at the last the "Well done, good and faithful servant," and that you should be like to God in your nature, this is of the utmost importance to you, for this is heaven. Heaven is to have self dethroned to be purged of all anger — to be delivered from all pride. Heaven is in fact to be God-like. May we be made so through Jesus Christ our Savior, by the work of his Holy Spirit. Amen.