



## “Doing Right When Wronged” (Romans 12:17-21)

### 🌀 Review

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The world cares very little about our Christian beliefs, but they cannot argue with a life beautifully lived. In Romans 12:17-21, the Apostle Paul shows us what a beautiful life looks like. He does so by giving us three instructions for when we’ve been personally wronged. First, we do not try to settle the score ourselves. Second, we find ways to be kind to our offenders. And third, we trust that God will make things right in the end. This is how Jesus responded to the wrongs done to him while he was on the cross. Indeed, **believers are never more like Christ than when we respond to personal offenses like Christ**. When we live like this, we live beautifully, and we give the gospel credibility in this generation.

### 🌀 Reflect

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1. In the sermon, Pastor Tim noted that this passage is one of those texts that is over-applied by some people, under-applied by other people, and misapplied by a lot of people. When do you think each of these faulty applications takes place? Keep in mind the three realms of response in the Old Testament for handling injustice in a fallen world:
  - In times of **international aggression** (e.g., sieges, invasions, captivities, atrocities, etc.), God’s people were to seek divine guidance through their national security council (prophets, priests, and kings).
  - In times of **criminal activity** (e.g., thefts, kidnappings, rapes, murders, etc.), God’s people were to seek justice through their established legal system (laws and judges).
  - In times of **personal offense** (e.g., slights, insults, disputes, insensitivities, etc.), God’s people were to seek relief through their own reconciliation efforts (beginning with personal forgiveness).
2. How might it help victims of heinous crimes or severe abuse to know that Romans 12:17-21 (and other similar passages) are meant to address personal offenses, not necessarily international aggression or even criminal activity (cf. Rom 13:4)—even though reconciliation is always God’s goal whenever people are at odds with one another?

3. Pastor Tim said, **“The problem with revenge is that it doesn’t feel like sin; it feels like justice.”** While revenge and justice are related, there are some key differences between them. Discuss these differences, keeping in mind the distinctions made in the sermon:
  - a. Revenge is primarily emotional; justice is primarily rational.
  - b. Revenge is personal and partial; justice is impersonal and impartial.
  - c. Revenge is an act of vindictiveness; justice is an act of vindication.
  - d. Revenge is about cycles; justice is about closure.
  - e. Revenge is about retaliation; justice is about restoring balance.
4. Most Christians probably don’t struggle with outright plotting revenge (v. 19a), they likely struggle more with **repaying evil for evil** (v. 17a), something that can be done in subtle ways. What are some common ways we repay evil for evil today—subtle or not? Why do you suppose God is opposed to *any* form of retaliation when it comes to personal offenses?
5. Discuss what Paul means by some of the more curious phrases in this passage:
  - a. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. (17b)
  - b. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. (18)
  - c. ...leave room for God’s wrath. (19b)
  - d. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head. (20b)
  - e. ...overcome evil with good. (21b)
6. How does the Old Testament law serve as a background to Paul’s message in this passage (cf. Lev 19:18; Exod 23:4-5; Deut 32:35; Prov 25:21)? Is Paul saying anything new here to the Roman Christians?
7. How did Jesus model the way Paul instructs believers to respond to personal offenses?

## Respond

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1. What kinds of personal offenses most upset you and provoke you to want to retaliate (slights, insults, disputes, insensitivities, etc.)? Why do you think *these* are the specific things that “push your buttons”? What idols might you have that get easily “hooked”?
2. When are you most tempted to “sit in God’s chair” and take his authority to judge others? How might this reveal your own self-centeredness or self-righteousness? Why does Scripture insist that you’re unqualified for the job?
3. What names and faces come to mind as you think about who might need some “burning coals” (= acts of kindness) heaped upon them? What are you going to do about it?



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