

Romans
The Heart of the Christian Life (Part 5)
Romans 12:9-21
May 10, 2020
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Well, it's our privilege now to turn to the Word of God together, and I invite you to take your Bibles, I hope you have them handy, and turn to Romans, chapter 12. Today, Lord willing, we finish this wonderful chapter; we finish what our Lord has taught us here through the Apostle Paul.

I don't know if you noted it or not, or heard of it or not, but a week ago Tuesday, an Ecuadorian tribesman died. The man's name was Mincaye. The world wrote this about him:

Mincaye, one of the Huaorani warriors who attacked and killed Jim Elliott, Nate Saint, and three other American missionaries in 1956, died on Tuesday in his home in the village of Ecuador. He was between 88 and 91 years old. The families of the slain missionaries, (This article goes on to say.), made peaceful contact with the tribe in 1958. Mincaye converted to Christianity and became known for preaching to other tribes in the region. Jim Elliott's wife, Elizabeth, memorialized the story in her book, Through Gates of Splendor.

Sheila and I and our family had the immense privilege of meeting Mincaye many years ago.

What did God use to save Mincaye? Of course, it was the gospel, the same as the rest of us; the gospel of Jesus Christ, the good news of Jesus's perfect life, substitutionary death, and resurrection.

But what was the platform that God used to open his heart to that gospel message? It was the love of the families of the very men whom he had murdered. In 1959, Nate Saint's sister, Rachel, and Elizabeth, Jim Elliott's widow, made contact with the tribe. Elizabeth then lived among those people who had murdered her husband for two years. Rachel Saint lived among them for the next thirty years. It was through the powerful testimony of those two families, loving those who had done them so much evil, that an entire tribe came to faith in Jesus Christ. It's a powerful illustration of overcoming evil with good.

I want you to think, for a moment, about those, throughout your life, who have done you evil, immense terrible evil. Perhaps it's happening right now.

Now, let me just say as a caveat to all that I will say today, and it's an important caveat, if a believer is responsible for evil against you, then you need to follow the process that our Lord outlined in Matthew 18. Also, I need to importantly add that if a professing believer or an unbeliever is committing evil against you that falls into the category of illegal, it is a breach of the law, things such as sexual or physical abuse, then you need to report those abuses to the authorities, to the police, and you need to seek help and support from the leadership of this church. So, it's important for you to understand those caveats to everything else that I will share today. But most of the evil that we face, whether it's from professing believers or unbelievers, is not illegal. Instead, it is an expression of sinful hearts, hearts that, according to Titus 3, are “hateful and hating one another.” So, how is it that we should respond to the evil that others perpetrate against us?

Well, that's what Paul teaches us today in the final paragraph of Romans, chapter 12. Let me read for us one last time, Romans, chapter 12, the paragraph that begins in verse 9, and concludes at the end of the chapter. You follow along as I read.

Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; (That's what I get for looking up while I'm trying to read.) not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. Never pay back evil for evil to anyone. Respect what is right in the sight of all men. If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 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. “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.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Now, as we have noted over several weeks, the theme of this paragraph is that the first and greatest priority of every Christian is to love God and to love others because that is really the heart of the Christian life. Paul begins this paragraph by underscoring the greatest priority of a Christian. The first half of verse 9, he says, “Let love be without hypocrisy.” That is, make sure that you love and that your love is real, that it’s genuine. That is really the heading for all that follows in the rest of this chapter; because in the rest of the chapter, Paul simply shows us how that love for God and for one another should express itself, or as we have described it, the practical expressions of love. That begins in the middle of verse 9 and runs down through verse 21.

Now so far, we have learned that love demonstrates itself in our response to God's Word. That's the second half of verse 9. It demonstrates itself in our response with some key attitudes, verses 10 and 11, our response to difficult circumstances, verses 12 to 13, and then last week, our response to people in verses 14 to 16.

Now this morning, we learn that love is even displayed in our response to evil; that's the message of verses 17 to 21. The theme of this final paragraph is still that our love should be real, that we should love, and that our love should be genuine. But he's dealing here with our love for a specific group of people. Notice how he identifies them, verse 17, “Never pay back evil for evil.” That means he's talking about when someone has committed evil against you. Verse 19, “Never take your own revenge.” Someone has done something to you that invites and even, at the human level, expects revenge. Verse 20, “YOUR ENEMY,” someone has become your enemy either by their declaration that it's so, their attitudes toward you, or their treatment of you. Verse 21, “Do not be overcome by evil.” Someone is treating you in such an evil way that it threatens to overwhelm you.

So, clearly then, this paragraph is about our response to evil; it includes persecution that we learned about in verse 14, but it's much broader than persecution. Evil comes at us in ways

other than persecution. If we love as God loves, then we will respond to those who do us evil in ways that demonstrates a genuine love for them; and in so doing, we will imitate our Father.

In fact, go back to Matthew, chapter 5; Matthew, chapter 5, and notice what our Lord says in verse 43; Matthew 5, verse 43. In the Sermon on the Mount, He says, “You have heard that it was said, ‘YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR.’” Now, that is from the Old Testament; that is a quote from Leviticus. And then you'll notice, “...and hate your enemy.” That is not in the Old Testament; that's what the rabbis surmised, that's what they concluded. If you're supposed to love your neighbor, then it's okay to hate your enemy. “But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, (Now watch verse 45.) so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven.’” And here's how our Father acts, “He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and (He) sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”

In other words, God is good even to the evil, those who do evil toward Him, that is, who rebel against Him, who uses His name in vain, who ignore Him, who even deny His existence; He still does them good. Verse 46, “For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”

Listen, the worst of sinners, love people that love them. “If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than other? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” No, you're to be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect; you are to love your enemies, you're to love those who do evil against you just as our Father does.

So, back in Romans, chapter 12, Paul is simply urging us here to do what God does, to respond to those who do evil against us in the same way that God responds to those who do evil against Him.

In verses 17 to 21, we learned five loving ways that we should respond to those who do us evil. I think he's primarily here talking about our response to unbelievers, but let's be honest, there are also times at which evil comes to us from those who are believers or who at least profess to be believers, and this is our response regardless of who it is that is the source of the evil that comes

against us. So, notice these ways, these responses that should characterize us.

The first response is this, never return evil. Verse 17, “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.” Now the Greek word for ‘evil’ here, it is a flexible word; it can refer to that which is morally reprehensible; it can also refer to that which is personally harmful or maliciously done, or it can be a combination of both, and I think that's the idea here. Here, it's a morally reprehensible action that harms you and is motivated by maliciousness, by a malicious intent to harm, to hurt.

When someone acts against you in that way, Paul says, verse 17, “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.” I love the way the Greek text, in its literalness, brings out the emphasis. Listen to how it literally translates from the original language. “Nobody evil in place of evil be paying back, nobody evil in place of evil be paying back.” The word ‘for’ here, “Never pay back evil for evil,” is not the usual Greek word that's translated ‘for’ throughout the New Testament. It's the word ‘anti’ here. We, in English, use the word ‘anti.’ It's a word that in Greek literally means, ‘in the place of,’ don't return evil in the place of evil, and don't do it, notice he says, to anyone. There are absolutely no exceptions! He doesn't say, “Don't do it, but here's a list of three or four exceptions where it's okay.” What he's saying here is, “No, believer, no follower of Jesus Christ is ever, under any circumstances, to pay back evil to anyone in the place of or in exchange for the evil that they have received.”

Now, that is a revolutionary concept when it comes to human beings. I'm afraid the comic strip, “Hagar the Horrible,” captures it pretty well when Hagar is talking to his son and he says, “Son, don't let the sun go down on your wrath; (Sounds pretty good so far, right? But then he finishes.) attack your enemy at once and waste him while what he did to you is still fresh in your mind.” That's the human vantage point, that's the typical human way of thinking about things.

You see this when you go back, and you look at the Greek philosophers. For example, in Homer's *Iliad*, “Revenge is sweeter far than flowing honey.” Euripides wrote, “This is sweet to see your foe perish and pay to justice all he owes.” Sophocles wrote, “God will not punish the man who makes return for an injury.” Aristotle said, “Men regard it as their right to return evil for evil, and if they cannot, feel they have lost their liberty.”

Even the Jewish rabbis justified the concept of revenge. You remember the Old Testament Law that said, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for tooth.” That was actually an incredibly humane law, the ‘*lex talionis*,’ as it’s called. It was, a humane law because it was intended by God to make sure that the punishment fit the crime, that the punishment didn’t vastly outweigh the extent of the crime unlike many of the surrounding nations around Israel. For example, in the Code of Hammurabi, the penalty for a thief for the crime of stealing was to chop the thief’s hand off. And God says, “No, if someone steals, he should make restitution, he should do so with interest.” So, an “eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth,” meant the punishment needs to fit the crime.

Sadly, this law of the ‘*lex talionis*’ that God instituted to protect His people from such harsh inappropriate punishments, the rabbis turned into an opportunity for personal revenge. Jesus addressed that in the Sermon on the Mount, you remember. It’s what human beings do; they want revenge, and they seek to justify it in whatever way they can. But Paul says in Romans 12, “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.” That’s our responsibility as believers.

Now, just let me draw out a couple of applications of that so that we think about this practically. In light of what verse 17 says, it means it is a sin to harbor desires, thoughts, or plans of getting even with someone. It’s not okay if you don’t carry them out, but you stew on them and enjoy them in your mind. Secondly, it’s a sin to verbally retaliate in anger against the evil that someone else has perpetrated against you. Thirdly, it’s a sin to treat someone with evil because you believe that’s how they deserve to be treated in light of how they have treated you. Fourthly, it is a sin to pay back evil in the place of evil in every human relationship in context. That’s true in your marriage, that’s true in your family, that’s true with your friends, that’s true with your coworkers, it’s true with your fellow students, it’s true with strangers, it’s true even with enemies. It’s never okay! No one in any circumstance, Paul says, “Never pay back evil for evil to anyone!” So, the first response of love to evil acts against us will be never return evil.

Secondly, do what’s right, do what’s right. Notice the second half of verse 17, “Respect what is right in the sight of all men.” ‘Right’ is used here in the sense of an outward expression of what

is morally and ethically right. Do what you ought to do because it's morally and ethically right. Now, by saying what is right in the sight of all men, Paul is not here urging us to allow sinful people to determine what is morally right or morally wrong. Paul has already made it clear in the letter to the Romans that unbelievers have a depraved mind. Chapter 1, verse 32, "They call good evil and evil good."

There also is a limitation that's built into this very word 'right' itself that doesn't allow us to let it just be whatever somebody decides it ought to be. That's not what Paul is saying. What he is saying here is that you should respond to evil perpetrated against you in such a way that even unbelievers will acknowledge that your response is a morally right, an appropriate response, that's what he's saying. It's like what he says in 2 Corinthians, chapter 8, verse 21, "...we have regard for what is honorable, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men." Let your response be such that others aren't telling you how to respond, but rather when they see your response, even unbelievers, they will say, "That is a morally right response."

Now notice he says, "Respect what is right in the sight of all men." The word 'respect,' I'm not confident is the best translation. This word is a common New Testament word; it's a Greek word that means, "to give careful thought to, to take consideration beforehand." So, what he says is, "Give careful thought before you respond to what is right in the sight of all men." It implies that doing what's right doesn't happen accidentally; it's something you have to plan; it's something you have to think about and not just desire.

But, don't miss the larger point that Paul is making in the second half of verse 17. He's saying that when you respond to the evil done against you, you must always think beyond yourself. It's hard to do when we've had evil against us. But you must realize that in that moment, there is far more at stake than the harm that's been done to you. Understand this, your response to that evil will affect the reputation of your Christian brothers and sisters; what you do will cause others to say, "Well, that's how Christians are." In addition, your response will affect the reputation of the church at large. It'll affect the reputation of the Christian faith. You know this, you've heard people talk this way. It'll affect the reputation of our Lord Himself, and ultimately of the glory of God.

“So, when you are sinned against, when someone commits evil against you, don't ever think solely of yourself. That's what Paul is saying; give careful thought before you respond so that even unbelievers can affirm that your response is morally right because the gospel and the advance of Christ's Kingdom is more important than the harm that has been done. If you have genuine love, here's how to respond to evil done against you. Number one, never return evil. Number two, do what's right.

Thirdly, verse 18 says, “Pursue peace,” pursue peace. Notice what Paul writes, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” Now, the focus of this command is, “be at peace.” This Greek word for peace doesn't describe a calm feeling in your heart; that's not what he's talking about here. Instead, it describes an objective state. In Greek terms, peace describes the absence or the cessation of war or hostilities. But it's not merely the absence of war; in other words, it's not just a temporary truce or a temporary cease-fire; instead, this word, the root word from which this word ‘peace’ comes from, means ‘to bind or join together that which is broken or divided. It describes wholeness, it describes a completely harmonious relationship. Ultimately, it comes from the Hebrew word for peace, ‘*shalom*.’ When it's used of relationships as it is here, it refers to a relationship that is in a state of health and well-being.

So then, the peace that Paul has in mind here when he says, “Be at peace,” is bring all conflict in your life to an end and establish an objective state of peace and relational well-being with others. And you are to pursue that kind of peace, believer, between you and every other person. This is a biblical priority.

In Matthew, chapter 5, verse 9, you remember in the Beatitudes that description of what a person who is in the kingdom looks like, He says, “Blessed are the peacemakers for they shall be called sons of God.” It's not a separate category of elite Christians; it's a basic description of all Christians. Christians, by nature, have experienced peace with God and, therefore, want to pursue peace with others. We are, by nature, peacemakers. Mark, chapter 9, verse 50, says, “...be at peace with one another.” Romans 14, verse 19, “We pursue the things which make for peace.” 2 Corinthians 13:11, “...brethren, live in peace; and the God of love and peace will be

with you.”

Now, here in Romans 12, I want you to notice several important qualifiers to this command to be at peace. First of all, notice he says, “...be at peace with all men.” This is another one of those comprehensive commands. There's nobody excluded. In fact, here in context, it's even with those who commit evil against you, be at peace with them.

Notice the next qualifier; the verse begins, “If possible...be at peace with all men.” The Greek word is a word which means, ‘if you can, if you are able, if it's within your power.’ I love that because you know the Apostle Paul is a realist; he's acknowledging here that in a fallen world with fallen people, peace in relationships is not always possible. Why not? Why would it not be possible for there to be peace between you and another person? Well, there are a couple of primary reasons. One is because the other person is simply unwilling; they don't want the conflict to end or they're not willing to do what's necessary for the conflict to end. Another reason would be because either the issue itself over which the conflict is happening or the conditions that the other person lays down for there to be reconciliation, either of those involve compromise of either biblical truth or of righteousness. You have to obey God and you have to embrace the truth more than you have to resolve conflicts, and sometimes it's just not possible.

He adds one more in verse 18, “If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.” Here's what he's saying, “You must never be the reason for ongoing conflict.” Let me say that again, “You must never be the reason for ongoing conflict, and you must take the initiative to restore peace regardless of who started it.”

Now, here's how I want you to think about this and how I'd like for you to apply it as I've had a look at my own heart and life. Can you think of any ongoing conflict between you and another person? And again, it doesn't matter who started it? Is there any ongoing conflict between you and another person? If there is conflict, even with someone who's done you wrong, here's the question to ask yourself, “Can I stand before Jesus Christ someday and honestly say to my Lord, ‘Lord, I did every right and reasonable step to pursue peace with that person. There was nothing else reasonably or morally right that I could've done to pursue peace with that person.’” If so,

then you have fulfilled this command even if the conflict continues. But if not, then you need to understand this is important to our Lord; this is His command to you, and you need to begin to initiate steps to pursue peace. Again, it may not be possible, but until you have exhausted every right and reasonable step, then you have not obeyed this command.

There's a fourth way love expresses itself toward our enemies; it's this in verses 19 and 20, never seek revenge, but do them good, never seek revenge, but do them good. Let's take this in several parts. First of all, "Never take your own revenge, never take your own revenge." That's how verse 19 begins, "Never take your own revenge, beloved."

Now, the word 'revenge' in the Greek text may surprise you. It's actually a legal word; it's a word that means 'to execute justice, to inflict an appropriate penalty for a wrong done.' It's used of God's justice. Our translators here, however, use the word the English word 'revenge' because Paul literally says at the beginning of verse 19, "Do not execute justice for yourselves;" that's what he says. And of course, that's exactly what revenge, our English word, is. In fact, our expressions 'getting even,' or 'evening the score,' imply this; they imply that something has happened which isn't fair, and we are only acting in revenge to accomplish justice, to restore fairness. But Scripture absolutely forbids our taking justice against another person in our own hands.

Leviticus, chapter 19, verse 18 says, "You shall not take vengeance." Proverbs 24:29, "Do not say, 'Thus I shall do to him as he has done to me. I will render to the man according to his work.'" You're essentially taking up God's work. In fact, our Lord says here in Romans 12, "Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God."

Now, you'll notice in our English text that the words "of God" are in italics. They're added by the translators for clarity. Literally, again, the Greek text says this, "Do not execute justice for yourselves, but rather give place to the wrath." That's what it says.

Now, because Paul doesn't say whose wrath he's talking about, there have been, through the years, several different views on what he means. Some say he means, "Give place to the

evildoer's wrath," just let his anger run its course and don't try to stop it. Another view is, "Give place to your own wrath;" that is let your own anger pass without getting into revenge. You're going to be angry, but let your anger pass and then move on. A third view is, "Give place to the government's wrath." That is, let the government execute punishment on the evildoer like chapter 13 is going to describe. And of course, the fourth view is, "Give place to God's wrath."

This is clearly what Paul means for two reasons; first of all, because he uses the definite article. In Greek he says, "Give place to the wrath," which is what he would do if he's talking about God's wrath. Also, the following quote is about God's wrath, so this has to be the wrath of God. He says, "Don't take justice into your own hands; instead, leave room for God's holy wrath in His time and in His way."

Verse 19, for, because, here's why you should "leave room for God's...wrath...for it is written, 'VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY,' says the Lord." Paul here quotes Deuteronomy 32:35, which says, "Vengeance is mine, and retribution." The word 'vengeance' means 'carrying out justice, inflicting the deserved penalty on those who do wrong.' God says that the sole right to execute justice and to inflict the deserved penalty on wrongdoers belongs solely to Him, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, it belongs to Me, it's My right and not yours."

Now, it's important to understand that God is, by nature, perfectly just. Psalm 97, verse 2, says, "...justice (is) the foundation of His throne." And that perfectly just God will someday execute that justice; He will eventually execute vengeance. In fact, go back to Romans, chapter 2; Romans, chapter 2, and notice verse 5, "...because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." There's a day of wrath and a day of righteous judgment coming and, on that day, verse 6, God "WILL RENDER TO EACH PERSON ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS."

Listen, nobody gets away with anything; every individual sin will get justice, either it'll be judged in that person forever, or if that person has accepted Jesus Christ, it will be judged in God's Son on the cross. But either way, every sin gets justice.

So, understand that; it's wrong, therefore, for you to take justice into your own hands; it's wrong because you wouldn't do justice nor would I. Instead, we would be biased, our understanding of the circumstances might be wrong, it might be flawed, and we would enact it as a personal vendetta. In addition to that, you and I are not the appointed judge; Jesus Christ is. John, chapter 5, verse 22, says that the Father has committed "all judgment to the Son."

So, instead of taking justice into our own hands, how should we respond? Well, let me give you one other point outside of this passage, but so important; entrust yourself to God's justice. Go to 1 Peter, this is the very point Peter makes in 1 Peter, chapter 2, verse 21; 1 Peter 2, verse 21, "You have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps." What's the example? Here it is, "(He) COMMITTED NO SIN, NOR WAS ANY DECEIT FOUND IN HIS MOUTH." Of course, we're not going to perfectly follow that, but that should be the pattern of our lives so that when we are reviled, it's not because we've done something wrong. "And (so) while being reviled, He did not revile in return." Here's the example we're to follow, "...while being reviled, He did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously."

In other words, the way Christ was able to endure unjust evil perpetrated against Him is He kept on as a pattern of life, entrusting Himself to God the righteous judge saying, "God, someday you're going to sort all this out." And, that's what you and I have to do as well. As Proverbs 20, verse 22, puts it, "Do not say, 'I will repay evil,' wait for the LORD," wait for the LORD.

Back in Romans, chapter 12, Paul adds, "Do good to your enemy." Verse 20, "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK." Paul here quotes from Proverbs 25, verses 21, and the first part of verse 22. What it means is, he's not saying, "This is the only thing, if he happens to be thirsty, give him something to drink, if he happens to be hungry, give him something to eat; but if he's not hungry and he's not thirsty, then you're off the hook." No, He's saying, "Give them any practical help they need and do so from a heart of love."

As one author puts it, “Our responsibility is to love and serve our enemy according to his needs and genuinely to seek his highest good.” Here's how Paul puts it in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5, verse 15, “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.” Listen to that again, “...always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people,” and that's talking about in response to evil.

Now, back in our text, Romans, chapter 12, you'll notice that the first half of verse 20 is clear; there's really no debate about that. The second half of verse 20, however, is not quite as clear. Notice what he says, “...FOR IN SO DOING (by doing good to your enemy) YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” Now that's not how we would normally speak; that's, of course, from the Proverb; it's a metaphor. The question is how are we to interpret this metaphor?

There are a couple of possible interpretations. There are, I'm sure more than these two. I encountered maybe three or four, but these are the primary two. First of all, it could be saying that when you do good to your enemy, you increase his guilt before the Lord which increases his punishment. There are a couple of times in the Psalms; Psalm 11, verse 6; Psalm 140, verse 10, where there is this idea of coals that imply judgment. So, some would say it's like you're adding God's judgment to him. However, that doesn't really fit the flow of the context. We're here being told to do good to them, to love them. In fact, verse 21 says, “...evil...(is)...overcome (by) good,” which I think argues against this interpretation.

I think a second interpretation is far more likely here in the context; and in this case, Paul is saying this, “When you do good to your enemy, you are causing him to burn with shame over his treatment of you and possibly even leading him to repent and turn to the Lord.” I think we all understand that kindness can blunt even the worst enemy and evil, and that's what I think our Lord is saying here through Paul. When you do good to your enemy, when you seek his good, you heap on his head shame for his conduct, and you run the possibility that that will bring him to repentance for what he's done against you at the very least, and possibly to turn to the Lord.

There's a fifth and final response love will cause us to take toward those who do us evil and it's this, overcome evil with good, overcome evil with good. Verse 21, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." You know the Greek word 'overcome,' you know it in English, but you also know it in Greek. The Greek word is '*nikao*,' from which the name brand Nike comes. '*Nikao*' means 'to be conquered, vanquished, or overcome.'

So, the question is, in what way do we risk being overcome by evil? I don't think he means that we have a feeling of being overwhelmed, or a feeling of being overcome. I think it's much more objective than that. He says, "When we allow the evil actions of others to cause us to display the very same attitudes and actions in response to them, then we have been conquered by evil." And he says, "Don't let that happen!" In other words, don't respond in kind; because if you respond in kind, you only add more evil, and you yourself now have been overcome by evil.

On the other hand, when we respond to evil in the ways that we have learned in this paragraph, with a mind that's been transformed by the Word of God, we are, the verb tense here's a present tense, we are constantly overcoming the evil that is done against us by doing good. Douglas Moo, in his commentary on Romans, writes this, "When we respond this way, not only have we not allowed it, that is the evil of others, to corrupt our own moral integrity, but we have displayed the character of Christ before a watching and a skeptical world."

Now, I want you to look again at those five responses, and I want you to notice that Paul is really urging us to imitate our Father; he's urging us to imitate our God, to meditate on Him and to let the Spirit use that meditation in our feeble attempts to imitate Him, to obey Him, and the Spirit uses all of that to change us into the same image.

I mean, think about our God for a moment in reference to these responses we've just learned. Think about this with me for just a moment. Our God never does what is evil in response to evil. We saw that in Matthew 5, right? We saw that He just keeps on being good to those who are evil toward Him. Luke, in Luke 6:35 says, "...He...is (good) to...evil and...ungrateful...men." Our God never does what is evil in response to evil! Imagine if He did!

Secondly, our God always is and does what is morally right. Psalm 116:5, makes it clear that righteousness is what God is in His very character. He is righteous, He exhibits righteousness in His responses to all things.

Thirdly, He relentlessly pursues reconciliation with His enemies at the greatest possible personal cost to Himself; He pursues peace in a way that we can't even begin to imagine. In fact, turn with me to 2 Corinthians, chapter 5. That's Paul's message here, 2 Corinthians, chapter 5, he says in verse 18:

Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave (to) us (who have been reconciled) the ministry of reconciliation, (That is, to go out and help others be reconciled to Him.) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the message about reconciliation.

God has done the amazing thing at the cross to pursue reconciliation with mankind. Verse 20, "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ (Notice this.) as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God." Notice God and Christ are both appealing; they're begging for their enemies to be reconciled to them.

How is that possible? How can you, if you've never been reconciled to God, if you have never come to put your faith in Jesus Christ, then you are God's enemy. How can you be reconciled to God? Verse 21, "(God) made (Christ) who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf." He's talking about what happened at the cross. On the cross, God treated Jesus as if he lived the life and committed the sins of every person who would ever believe in Him. Jesus paid the full and complete justice those sins deserved so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

If you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, I want you to realize that God is the ultimate peacemaker and that He made a way for there to be peace between you and Him. You can be reconciled to Him; you can have a relationship with God, your Creator, through His Son, and He is pleading with you to turn to Him in repentance and faith in His Son. I hope you will do that

even today.

There's a fourth way that we see God's character in this passage; He delays His just wrath and “is patient” and long-suffering because He is not willing “for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.” That's the message of 2 Peter 3:9.

And finally, God, our Father, is the ultimate example of doing good and being generous to His enemies. Romans 2, verse 4, says, “Listen, God's goodness, God is showering you with good in order to bring you to repentance.” And of course, Romans 5:8 says, “...God (demonstrated) His love (when)...Christ died for us.” Christ died for all of those who would believe in Him. This is how to respond to evil and it's exactly the way our Father does. May God give us the grace to do so.

Let's pray together. Our Father, we thank you for these amazing truths, and, Lord, we confess to you that we are not adequate for these things, that we, by nature, are far more prone to revenge, to getting even. Lord, I pray that you would forgive us, that you would give us genuine love for you and love for others, even for our enemies, for those who do us evil so that we would respond like this, so that we, oh, God, could be like you, our Father.

Lord, I pray, as well, for those who have not been reconciled to you; may they hear the simple message of reconciliation, that you were, in Christ, reconciling the world to yourself. And may today be that day for them, we pray in Jesus's name, Amen.