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Do not be Overcome by Evil

Romans, Part LVIII

Romans 12:14-21

Stuart W. Bryan

I. My father, shall I kill them? (cf. 2 Kgs 6:8ff)

Romans 12:14–21

¹⁴Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. ¹⁶Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion. ¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. ¹⁸If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. ¹⁹Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord. ²⁰Therefore "*If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.*" ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

II. Love your enemies

A. Introduction (cf. Mt 5:43-45)

⁴³"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, ⁴⁵that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. (Mt 5:43-45)

What is it to love our enemies? We learned that *love without hypocrisy* is *to treat another _____ from the heart*. So what is it to love my enemies? It is to treat him lawfully from the heart that he may reflect God's image more fully.

B. Bless your persecutors (14-18)

Paul commands us, like Jesus, to bless our persecutors - to work for their ultimate good by treating them lawfully from the heart. As Jesus says in Luke 6:27-29:

²⁷"But I say to you who hear: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸bless those who curse you, and pray for those who spitefully use you. ²⁹To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either.

John Calvin explains Paul's command to *bless and do not curse*:

"God by his word not only restrains our hands from doing evil [taking revenge], but also subdues the bitter feelings within; and not only so, but he would have us be solicitous for the wellbeing of those who unjustly trouble us and seek our destruction."

- 15 – *Cultivate a sympathetic spirit.*
- 16 – *Cultivate a humble spirit.*
- 17a – *Cultivate a gracious spirit.*
- 17b – *Cultivate a generous spirit.*
- 18 – *Cultivate a peaceable spirit.*

C. Respond in faith (19 cf. Dt 32:35)

God's _____ toward us motivates and empowers our love for our enemies. We ourselves were enemies of God. And what did God do? In His love, He sent Christ to die for us and to reconcile us to Himself.

⁶For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. ¹⁰For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. (Rom 5:6-10)

So how ought we respond to those who persecute us? We ought not to *avenge ourselves* but *give place to wrath* – let God sort out their evil in His time and in His way.

D. Overcome evil with good (20-21)

We are free to bless our neighbor knowing that God cares about the evil doing of evil men and will make sure that justice reigns. We needn't stand in the place of God nor (as we will see) the magistrate, God's *minister of wrath* (13:4). We must not be overcome by evil – that is, let another's evil tempt us to begin practicing _____ ourselves.

"To be consumed with vengeful thoughts, or to be led into putting such thoughts into practice, is to keep evil in circulation, whereas the way to overthrow evil, rather than perpetuating it, is to take its force and give back goodness instead" (Wright, 616).

III. Wisdom for Loving our Enemies

A. Remember that you too are a sinner in need of grace

We ought to be sure to incur enmity for the right reasons. As Peter wrote:

¹⁹For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. ²⁰For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. (1 Pet 2:19-23)

We ought also to pray for our enemy - that God would work to grant them repentance and to cause them to love righteousness and justice.

B. Remember that you are beloved by God

Even if our enemy intends his curses and evil doings for our destruction, God intends them for our good – and His purposes stand.

C. Remember that God is a just judge (cf. 1 Pet 3:8-12)

Remembering God's justice warns us lest we ourselves incur God's wrath by practicing evil ourselves. Solomon warns us:

¹⁷Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, And do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles; ¹⁸Lest the LORD see it, and it displease Him, And He turn away His wrath from him. (Prov 24:17-18)

IV. Conclusion