

Romans 12:17-21 NIV

“How to really fix your enemies”

“Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. (18) If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

(19) 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.

(20) 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.’ (21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

We most hurt enemies by acting nicely to them.



Nearly all of us find ourselves in some adversarial relationships.

Just about everyone has an enemy.

Many people opposed Jesus.

We all encounter difficult people.

A man walked along a California beach praying intensely. Suddenly from the sky, the Lord said, "**Because you have tried to be faithful to me in all ways, I will grant you one wish.**" The man said, "**Build a bridge to Hawaii so I can drive over anytime I want.**"

The Lord said, "**You make a materialistic request. Think of the enormous challenges**

that kind undertaking creates. The concrete and steel supports required to reach the bottom of the Pacific will nearly exhaust several natural resources. I can do it but your desire for worldly things is hard to justify. Take a bit more time and think of something that will honor and glorify me."

The man thought about it for a long time. Finally he said, "Lord, I wish that I could understand my wife. I want to know how she feels inside; what she's thinking when she gives me the silent treatment; why she cries; what she means when she says 'nothing's wrong,' and how I can make a woman truly happy."

The Lord replied, "You want two lanes or four on that bridge to Hawaii?"

On the radio, Norma and I heard about a certain married couple. For her birthday, the wife asked her husband to buy her a new racy sports car. She'd like a red Ferrari or BMW that would go from zero to 150 in ten seconds.

He bought her something that would go from zero to 400 in four seconds.

What was that?

A new set of bathroom scales.

Whether she sued him as a bulky woman in New Hampshire sued her doctor, I don't know.

The lady's physician told her she was obese.

She tried to have him removed from his practice.

We all have occasion to be upset over the way people treat us.

We wonder how we can pay them back for hurting us. “It’s payback time!”

I’ve taken my share of vengeance.

Years ago when I worked for an oil company, a number of us salesmen gathered at Marysville, CA, for a conference. The out-of-town guys all stayed in the same motel.

Most of us got into town about 4 PM. I had dinner with the guys, went back to my room, read my Bible a while, called Norma, watched TV some, and went to bed early.

The other guys partied at a local bar. Did you ever go to sleep in a strange place, later hear strange, loud noises, and become totally disoriented?

Awaking suddenly, you couldn’t remember where you were?

Panic excites you to climb the walls.



That’s what happened when the salesman from Stockton, CA, who roomed next to me, returned from the bar-- loudly and boisterously.

This fellow had a wife and about eight kids and probably shouldn’t have been partying anyhow.

I wanted vengeance.

My payback scheme came together for me the next day.

At breakfast my raucous Stockton friend, invited us all to his room to watch a televised heavyweight championship boxing match that evening.

He thought it would be fun if we watched the fight together.

That day, I borrowed a duck call from the local oil company distributor. While in my friend's room that evening to watch the boxing match, I stealthily opened one of the windows and then pulled the drapery so he wouldn't notice.

I set my alarm for about 5:30 the next morning. When the alarm rang, I got up, took the duck call, and without turning on any lights in my room, went outside and over to his open window. I blew the duck call several times, and then ran to my room. I peeked out my window to see if I had gotten any reaction.

When his room lights came on, I knew I succeeded. My vengeance was sweet.

But he didn't turn off his light and I began worrying whether he'd had a heart attack.

He didn't and lived to party lots more.

My friend's offense was rather slight.

Yet my retribution came quickly. Those facts caused my conscience to agonize about my retribution.

**How about major offenses against us?
Is someone offending you today?**

- **Have you thought about getting even?**
- **Have you worked a retribution plan?**
- **Does vengeance fill your mind?**

The Old Testament records King David's frequent plans for vengeance.

Numerous enemies plotted, stirred up trouble, and said stinging things about him.

Most leaders receive that type of opposition.

How did David react?

His Psalms give us strident samples:

“Arise, O LORD! Deliver me, O my God! Strike all my enemies on the jaw; break the teeth of the wicked.”¹

“Lord, give them hockey goalie choppers!”

David did not always wish his foes well.

(8) “Do not grant the wicked their desires, O LORD; do not let their plans succeed, or they will become proud. Selah”²

“Lord, if my enemies succeed they will walk proudly around, and I

couldn’t stand that. Make them fail, Lord.”

When our enemies act proudly and arrogantly, that’s often too much to take, isn’t it? “Look at the way she acts. She thinks she’s so cool.”

(9) “Let the heads of those who surround me be covered with the trouble their lips have caused.”

“Let them suffer the torment they’ve wanted for me.”

(10) Let burning coals fall upon them; may they be thrown into the fire, into miry pits, never to rise.

David often wished his enemies to rot in hell.

That’s one of today’s prominent expressions isn’t it, “Go to hell!”?

¹ Psalm 3:7 NIV

² Psalm 140:8-10 NIV

Let's clarify some important points.

First, today's text refers to Christian personal relationships.

Nothing in the gospels records Jesus' criticizing the Roman government.

- Rome taxed heavily.
- Rome approved of slavery.
- Rome warred constantly.
- It brutally executed criminals.

Jesus never commented on Roman government policies and practices.

Jesus called all people to repent telling them the requirements for following him.

The New Testament never suggests or hints that we criticize governments for their policies.

The NT urges us to pray for government leaders; never to carp or to protest them.

The Lord gave governments responsibility for regulating society.

He holds them accountable for doing that.

Judging them isn't our assignment.

We render to "Caesar to Caesar what is Caesar's."

Jesus commissioned us to preach the Gospel to the whole creation, not to judge others.

Jesus' last words before he left the earth: "Go teach all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."³

Few churches or individuals do a good job taking Jesus' Good News, baptizing and teaching his ways.

In fact many do everything else but preach the Gospel.

³ Matthew 28:19

They're too busy complaining and criticizing other people.

Here's a second point of clarification:

In Matthew 18, Jesus taught that churches shouldn't tolerate congregation members who slander others, promote hate, act immorally, or mistreat others.

Jesus gave specific, adequate instruction for dealing with misbehavior of Christians within congregations. If someone offends us, we go directly to that person and immediately resolve the matter.

If someone persists in acting unseemly, mature congregational leaders help resolve the problem.

Yet all this should be done in a spirit of love and harmony.

To summarize, Jesus gave no precedent for criticism or hostility to governments and governmental leaders.

Second, churches should follow Jesus' Matthew 18 instructions for dealing with offensive members.



So how do we deal with our personal enemies?

- **Imagine a neighbor whose dog regularly relieves itself on our well-manicured lawn.**
- **A young man or woman who drives through the neighborhood with the car stereo putting out about 90 decibels of irritating rap music.**

- **Someone who regularly insults us.**
How should you get even?

The 8-27-05 edition of the **Sioux City Journal** featured an article entitled: **“Try new things in your garden,”** by a **Woodbury County Extension Office agent.**

The author decided that Jalapeno peppers would look good in the area between the side walk and the curb at his residence.

“I moved mine further into my yard,” he wrote **“after I observed first hand that people do not walk a dog to exercise a dog.”**

How do you get even with inconsiderate dog owners?

It occurs to me that I might arrange a load of horse manure on their front steps.

How would you get even with that kid who drives his car with windows open with his stereo jolting your nerves?

You might try following him to lovers’ lane on Friday night and as soon as he parks with his girlfriend, drive up beside him with your windows down and your stereo at full blast playing, “Jesus saves!”

Would you really like to fix them?

That’s what today’s text tells us.

“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.”

“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.”

An *American Bible Society Record* account epitomizes Jesus' way.

Fifty years ago, five missionaries planned to take the gospel to the Auca Tribesmen in the Upper reaches of the Amazon Valley in South America.

The Aucas were headhunting tribesmen in the Amazon jungles.

Many people argue, "Why bother those people? They've lived that way for centuries. Why should we try to change their culture?"

The missionaries studied numerous tribes in the region.

They learned that the Aucas had the highest homicide rate of any people group in history. Not only were they hostile to other tribes, they killed off one another.

Their homicide rate was 60%, and the tribe was "on a road to extinction."

The missionaries knew all the risks well.

"The 'moment of truth' came on Jan. 8, 1956, when Jim Elliot, Pete Fleming, Ed McCully, Nate Saint and Roger Youderian set their light plane down on a sandbar in the river and were speared to death by the men with whom they meant to share the love of Jesus."

Would you want to annihilate those bloodthirsty, violent people?

According to the article:

"Their young bereaved wives courageously took up the work that their husbands had set out to do.

They returned to the jungle with their babies, and learned the language of the *Waodani*, "the people," reaching hearts with the grace of God's Word.

Years later, Mincaye, a *Waodani*, said, "We acted badly, badly, until they brought us God's carvings [Scripture]. Now we walk his trail."

Every major news outlet told this story in 1956, including *Life* magazine.

Later one of the widows, Elisabeth Elliot, wrote her personal account:
*Through the Gates of Splendor.*⁴

God bless those missionaries for the courage, wisdom, and faith to follow Jesus in responding to offenses.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Bob Blair
PO Box 176
Cleghorn, IA 51014

www.robertblairbooks.com

⁴ “American Bible Society Record,” summer 2005, p- 7