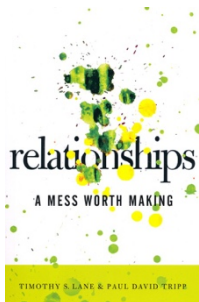


**WHEN YOU ARE HATED..., PT. 2**  
**ROMANS 12:17-21**

We all have expectations for relationships. We have desires for how they will work and what we will receive through those relationships. However, we live in a fallen world, so...

- ✓ Our relationships will never work completely according to our plan
- ✓ Our relationships will never live up to all our expectations
- ✓ Our relationships will always grapple with some kind of difficulty
- ✓ Our relationships will always need to improve



I have a number of books about relationships and most of them give at least a hint at the difficulties bring in the titles: *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, *War of Words*, *How to Deal with Powerful Personalities*, *Losing that Lovin' Feeling*, *Picking Up the Pieces: Recovering from Broken Relationships*, *Pursuing Peace: A Christian Guide to Handling Our Conflicts*, *Broken-Down House: Living Productively in a World Gone Bad*, *When a Mate Wants Out*, and *What Did You Expect? Redeeming the Realities of Marriage*.

We all have relationships and we want good relationships, but relationships are hard and they are often broken because others sin against us — and that's even among Christians. It is even more true that unbelievers will sin against you and defraud you and be unconcerned to reconcile and be hostile toward you when you attempt to put things right. What will you do?

Paul answers that question in **Romans 12:17-21** by saying,

**WHEN PEOPLE ARE PERSONALLY OPPOSED TO YOU, TRUST GOD TO DO WHAT IS RIGHT.**

Remember also that Paul is not talking here about our relationships with institutions (he will address that in chapter 13); he is talking about our interpersonal, private relationships. He has in mind relationships like parents, children, spouses, neighbors, co-workers...

In this passage Paul provides **four principles** for how to act when we are directly wronged by others (and I think he particularly is thinking of unbelievers).

1. Do Not Respond in **KIND** to Evil (v. 17)
2. Be a **PEACEMAKER** with Everyone (v. 18)
3. Never be **VENGEFUL** (v. 19).
4. Be Gracious by **BLESSING** Your Enemies (vv. 20-21)

**1. Do Not Respond in KIND to Evil (v. 17)** — instead, do what is good and right

- Paul makes a supposition in this verse that people will do evil to you. He doesn't say, "if," but he infers "when." Evil is coming. People will sin against you and they will do it with malice.
  - ✓ The word **evil** indicates something that is morally reprehensible. It is a word that is often used in contrast with what is useful, beneficial, and beautiful. People will do that to us.
  - ✓ When sinned against, the command is ***Never pay back evil with evil.***
  - ✓ There is never a time when it is appropriate to retaliate against evil with a similar evil. And there is never a person against whom evil retaliation is appropriate. Don't be evil to **anyone** — Jew or Gentile, male or female, friend or enemy, believer or unbeliever. No one receives our retribution.
  - ✓ The fact that Paul has to make this command suggests that we will be tempted to do evil to others. You will be tempted to put others in harm's way when you have been treated with hatred.
  - ✓ In fact, this kind of retribution was expected by the Pharisees (Mt. 5:38).
    - Jesus rejected this kind of retribution (Mt. 5:39).
    - Other NT writers rejected retribution (1 Thess. 5:15; 1 Cor. 13:5-6; 1 Pt. 3:9).
    - The OT rejected the possibility of retribution (Prov. 20:22; 24:29).
- As he does elsewhere in this passage (vv. 14, 16, 19, 20-21), Paul balances the negative command with a positive exhortation. Instead of paying back with evil, ***respect what is right...***
  - ✓ The sense of **respect** is "to think beforehand and be preoccupied with..." Think carefully and plan.
  - ✓ And what we should carefully think about is **right** — the good and beautiful things (contrast w. **evil**).
  - ✓ Notice that Paul says, ***in the sight of all men*** — he doesn't mean, "do what the masses think is right" (that will inevitably lead to wrong actions); he means, "do what is right so that even unbelievers will recognize you are doing right" (Mt. 5:16; 1 Pt. 2:12; 3:16; 2 Cor. 8:21).
  - ✓ Instead of extracting our pound (or two) of flesh and our own justice, we are concerned to do good things for everyone else — even our enemies. This also began in the OT (Ex. 23:4-5).
  - ✓ When we are tempted to act in ungodly ways, we need to stop. Think. Meditate. And plan. But don't plan evil. Make a plan of "retribution" that is gracious and good. "How can I bless those who persecute me?" "How can I act so it will be a testimony for Christ to everyone who sees me?"
    - *Wives* may need to make a blessing plan for their husbands.
    - *Employees* may need to make a blessing plan for their employers.
    - *Children* may need to make a blessing plan for their parents.
    - Instead of reacting angrily to sin, we need to strategize our godly responses. "Pre-decide..."
    - Whatever your challenging relationship, do what is right in the sight of God; do what all men recognize is right as a witness to them.

## 2. Be a **PEACEMAKER** with Everyone (v. 18)

- We don't live in a perfect world — and we are not perfect. Instead of demanding rights and justice, we are to examine our hearts and work to effect reconciliation with everyone. “Am I the problem?...”
- The command in this verse is to ***be at peace with all men***.
  - ✓ There is no limitation on the extent of this command. We are to be peaceable with *all* people. As in the previous verse, if you know and have interaction with anyone, be at peace with that person.
  - ✓ The fact that it is a present tense command means that we should always be working to be peaceable. And the present tense indicates the sin may be repeated and that repentance in the sinner might not come quickly. We will need repeated endurance.
  - ✓ If there is an impasse in a relationship, it should never be because of our refusal to humble ourselves and reconcile. This verse reminds us of Jesus' words — **Mt. 5:9** — “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” The fruit of salvation that has given peace to us with God is that we pursue peace with others (cf. Mk. 9:50; **Rom. 5:1, 10**).
  - ✓ We have been given peace; that peace leads us to be peacemakers—an overflow of sanctified life (v. 2).
- There are two limitations on pursuing peace with others (compromise and rebellion) —
  1. ***If possible*** — There are times when in order to be peaceable, righteousness will be sacrificed; we can't do that (e.g., we can't sacrifice sanctification for peace, Heb. 12:14; **Mt. 10:34-36**).
  2. ***So much as it depends on you*** — Not every sin will be reconciled; sometimes relationships stay broken/unreconciled. But it should never be because of our lack of effort.
    - Sometimes you will attempt to reconcile with others and they will lie about the sin or be unwilling to talk about the problem — “No there is nothing wrong...” You might pursue it two or three or more times, but they refuse to talk. If they are unwilling to reconcile, you won't...
    - Sometimes you will both recognize the sin and you will confess and they will not forgive (or they will say they forgive but the relationship isn't restored). Go again. And again. And if they refuse to reconcile, then they are accountable to the Lord and you are not.
- Being a peacemaker is hard work. But if we don't, who will? Has God brought about this impasse for the very purpose of bringing about reconciliation and salvation? And is my lack of activity a barrier?
  - ✓ The world says the closest relationships are an excuse to not worry about reconciliation: “Home is where people go when they are tired of being nice.” “I like relationships, it's just people I can't stand.”

You always hurt the one you love, The one you shouldn't hurt at all.  
You always take the sweetest rose And crush it till the petals fall.  
You always break the kindest heart With a hasty word you can't recall, so  
If I broke your heart last night It's because I love you most of all

- ✓ God says peace in *all* our relationships is *our* responsibility. We *must* be concerned w. reconciliation.

- In your relationships, are you the initiator of reconciliation? (Husbands? Parents? Offended believer?)
  - ✓ Think about your relationships. Is there anyone from whom you are estranged? What have you done to attempt to reconcile? Have you done anything? Have you done everything possible?
  - ✓ You may not be able to be reconciled, but lack of reconciliation should not be from lack of effort.
  - ✓ As believers, we should always be working for reconciliation.

“We enter relationships for personal pleasure, self-actualization, and fun. We want low personal cost and high self-defined returns. But God wants high personal cost and high God-defined returns. And, although we frequently disagree with God, his plan is better. Beneath all our conflict with others lies a deeper conflict between these two agendas: ours and God’s.” [Lane & Tripp, *Relationships: A Mess Worth Making*, 49.]

### 3. **Never be VENGEFUL (v. 19)** — *trust God* to take care of justice

- In case we have missed the point, Paul is exceedingly clear in this verse: ***Never take your own revenge.*** **Never take revenge for yourself.** There is never an appropriate time to “take the law into our own hands.” There is no place for personal retribution. To take revenge is a sin because we set ourselves up as both the Law and the Judge (contra **Is. 4:12**). When we take revenge we “baptize” our sin with “moral righteousness” when we don’t have that authority. *We are unqualified to take revenge.*
  - ✓ Notice again Paul’s emphasis — there is never a right time to take personal revenge (which doesn’t mean that we can’t appeal to the law to do what is right; cf. **Rom. 13:3-4**).
  - ✓ Paul also adds the word ***beloved*** to this exhortation: that is something he does often when writing hard realities (**1 Cor 15:58**; Phil 2:12). It’s also a reminder that they are not only beloved by Paul, but loved by God, though they were His enemies (Rom. 5).
    - Because they have received undeserved love from God they can give undeserved love to others.
    - Because God loves them they can trust Him to do what is right.
- Paul again balances the negative prohibition with a positive command — ***leave room for the wrath of God.*** To make room for God’s wrath means we **always let God enact His justice in His time.**
  - ✓ We need a reminder of God’s wrath —
    - It’s been a while since we have talked of God’s wrath — cf. **1:18**, 24, 26, 28; **2:5-6**.
    - “God’s wrath...[is] his active, retributive response to sin, a judicial penalty, imposed in accordance with his personal, righteous hostility to everything that is evil.” [Ovey, *Pierced...*]  
*... God’s wrath is in accordance with His justice.* It is never wrong (sinful). God is angry only when a violation of His holiness has been committed (cf. vv. 19-32). “God must be angry with sin because of the destructive character of sin. His love will not allow Him to be tolerant toward the devastating effects of sin.”

... *God's wrath is an expression of His holiness.* God's anger is against sin. It is His "holy revulsion...against that which is the contradiction of his holiness." [Murray] Every act of sin is an act of rebellion against God and His commands and reminiscent of Satan's initial rebellion. That is why God is just in being angry against it (cf. 1:32 – 2:2).

- Our temptation to revenge is incapable of meeting the standard of God's wrath.
- Further, when we act vengefully, we are saying, "God's infinite wrath isn't enough...but my temporal wrath is adequate to exact justice." We are elevating ourselves to the place of infinite God.
- When we act vengefully, we are also removing the opportunity for grace. God's wrath has a place for grace in that sometimes the wrath of God is poured out eternally on sinners, and sometimes God's wrath is poured out infinitely on Christ for the sake of sinners (5:8-9).
- We need to remember that we deserve the full wrath of God ourselves but have been spared that wrath because of God's grace, so we will wait for God's grace to be given to others as well.
- ✓ So leaving room for God's wrath means that we are willing to trust that God will do what is best towards that individual — either grace or wrath — at the right time. We can believe and trust that God will repay those who are ungodly and unrighteous, which is the point in Dt. 32:25.
- ✓ If true sin has been committed against us, the greatest part of the sin is that it is against God, not us. Only His justice will be adequate and right. Leave it to Him to carry out whatever retribution needs to be meted out.

#### 4. Be Gracious by BLESSING Your Enemies (vv. 20-21)

- Not only are we not to do evil against our enemies, but these verses re-affirm that we are to do good to our enemies — we are to bless them and we are to give good things to them (cf. v. 14).
- Verse 20 is a quotation from Prov. 25:21-22.
  - ✓ To give food to the enemy goes beyond the requirement of the Law (Ex. 23:4f). The law only required one to give back what belonged to the enemy; this principle teaches to give what is mine to my enemy so that he gets benefit at a cost to me.
  - ✓ This statement is profound. It means meeting his most basic and pressing need. It means that our emotion towards our enemies is compassion and not anger. It involves sacrifice. And it implies that there is fellowship between us. And it is connected to v. 19 — trusting the Lord for justice.
  - ✓ It's also significant that Paul is quoting from Proverbs 25, which repeatedly affirms humility (25:6-7) and speaking and acting with caution to benefit others (25:20, 25-26).
  - ✓ Commentator Charles Bridges got it exactly right: "Unless we are ready with the practical exercise of sympathy — feeding him when he is hungry and giving him to drink when thirsty — we are only the victims of our own self-delusion."

- What happens when we act graciously? We ***will heap burning coals on his head***. The exact meaning is uncertain. There are several options but the best seems to be that when we humbly care for those who are our enemies, it produces shame in them and they are convicted of their sin and brought to repentance.
  - ✓ In that way, our good deeds become a tool of God to open the door of evangelism. We are turning sin against us into gospel opportunities.
  - ✓ There was a man who was cold toward the gospel and the church for many years and it was this very action that brought him to clear confession of Christ. When his son died, whom most of you did not know, a large number of ladies showed up to serve a meal after the funeral. “Why would they do that? They don’t even know me!” That kindness led to his salvation.
  - ✓ Let us also acknowledge that this is hard. Some of you are in very challenging situations.
    - This does not mean you cannot pursue legal means of protection (as in physical abuse, ch. 13).
    - We will only be able to do this by the power of the Spirit (8:4, 7-8; Jn. 15:5).
- In our relationships with unbelievers, when they sin against us, there is something more important than justice and equity. Their salvation is more important than our vindication. And evil will be ***overcome*** (the word is the one for victory) when we do ***good*** to those who are evil and do evil against us (v. 21). “Drown the evil in the good.” [Robertson]
  - ✓ Do they deserve that? Of course not! But is there not a better demonstration of God’s grace than to give them good when they give us evil? Isn’t that exactly what God has done for us? Doing good to those who are unrighteous will take growing humility on our part. And it is one of the means God has designed to soften their hardened hearts against the gospel.
  - ✓ When we do good to those who are evil it is also a victory in that we have not become like them.
    - Many times I have exhorted others (and myself) when suffering unjustly — “don’t become bitter like they are...” “Don’t let your heart be corrupted...” That’s a loss, not a victory.
    - Matthew Henry wrote in his journal after he was robbed, “Let me be thankful. First, because I was never robbed before. Second, because although they took my wallet, they did not take my life. Third, because although they took it all, it was not much. Fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.” He was not overcome by evil...
  - ✓ And recognize this: if the evil of unbelievers against us becomes an opportunity to do good to them, then “the perverseness of our enemies will thus become a great advantage to us. We shall be indebted to them for some measure of conformity to our Divine Master.” [Charles Bridges]
  - ✓ Be gracious and giving when sinned against by unbelievers. Then trust God.
  - ✓ It is for their advantage and yours.

**BENEDICTION:** Romans 8:35-39