

Transformative Love

Romans 12:14-21

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Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear 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.

Romans 12:1-2: *Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.*

Main Idea: Overcome evil with good.

1. Love produces empathy.

Empathy – "The ability to understand and share the feelings of another."

"Differences are not intended to separate, to alienate. We are different precisely in order to realize our need of one another."

- Desmond Tutu

2. Love restrains. (The negative commands)

"The key is to know that love is a habit, not merely a choice... Learning to love God is like learning to play Bach: it requires daily immersion in habits and practices that train the 'muscles' of my heart to desire, and thus do, what it ought."

- James K.A. Smith

"If we do an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth, we will be a blind and toothless nation."

- Martin Luther King Jr.

"We should note that this does not mean 'going soft on evil'. Saying you shouldn't take revenge isn't a way of saying evil isn't real, or that it didn't hurt after all, or that it doesn't matter. Evil is real; it often does hurt, sometimes very badly indeed and with lasting effects, and it does matter. This is, perhaps, one of the fundamental differences between Christianity and, say, Buddhism. Because we believe in a creator God who made a good and lovely world, we believe that everything which

defaces and distorts, damages or spoils part of that creation is not just another variety of goodness but is actually its opposite, evil. The question is, what are we going to do about it?"

- N.T. Wright

"A stark alternative is set before us; no neutrality, no middle way is envisaged. If we curse (14), repay evil for evil (17) or take revenge (19), then, because all these are evil responses to evil, we have given in to evil, been sucked into its sphere of influence, and been defeated, overcome, even 'overpowered' by it."

- John Stott

3. Love empowers. (The positive commands)

Romans 5:1-5: *Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.*

"For in fact this was the crucial work of the Only Begotten: to bring together things divided and to reconcile the alienated."

- Chrysostom

"For Paul, the question [of what we are to do] begins with the question, what has God done about it? Quite a bit of the letter, earlier on, has been devoted to answering this question, and it boils down to what he says in 5.6-11: while we were still sinners, the Messiah died for us. There are many other things to be said about God's moral governance of the world, but at the centre of the Christian story stands this claim, that when human evil reached its height God came and took its full weight upon himself, thereby exhausting it and opening the way for the creation of a new world altogether. Revenge keeps evil in circulation. Whether in a family or a town, or in an entire community like the Middle East or Northern Ireland, the culture of revenge, unless broken, is never-ending. Both sides will always be able to 'justify' further atrocities by reference to those they themselves have suffered."

- N.T. Wright

"Treat your enemy kindly, for that may make him ashamed and lead to his repentance. In other words, the best way to get rid of an enemy is to turn him into a friend, and so overcome evil with good."

- F.F. Bruce