



09/01/2019  
Romans 12:14-21

## BIG IDEA

Biblical hospitality overcomes evil with good.

## LOOKING BACK

*As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.*

*Invite members to share any questions or points that came up in their family discussions regarding last week's study. Invite them to share ways God continued to speak to them as they sought to apply those truths throughout the week.*

- From the following groups of people in your life, who is the easiest for you to show hospitality to and who is it hardest for you to show hospitality to—family, friends, coworkers, employees, church family, strangers, or another? Why do you think that is?

Consistency is something we expect to see in life. Spiritually speaking, this is more than an expectation; it is a command. Gospel consistency is synonymous with faithfulness; when we do not live consistently with the gospel, people take great notice.

This obligation of gospel consistency extends even to how we relate to people who treat us badly, as difficult as that can be. We believe in a God who promises to enact justice in the end, but this same God went about accomplishing justice in His world by becoming a man and suffering injustice Himself. Indeed, Jesus did not judge us according to our sin as He had every right to do; instead, He took the penalty for our sin by going to the cross. As the Master goes, so go the disciples.

## LOOKING IN

*Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.*

| **Ask a volunteer to read Romans 12:14-18.**

- What command is hardest for you in these verses? Why?
- How do these verses relate to the topic of hospitality?
- No one would expect us to extend hospitality to someone who treated us badly. Why is it doing what is right" for believers to show hospitality in a hostile world?

Paul captured the spirit of Jesus' teaching not to resist the evildoer, but instead to look for ways to bless the evildoer. This shows that Paul was following the same teachings of Jesus that we find in the Gospels, such as Matthew's presentation of the Sermon on the Mount. Paul appealed to the correctness of a standard of good and evil known to everyone in a general sense. In most cases, people are able to recognize whether something is good or evil, and answering one evil act with another is not something that is "honorable in everyone's eyes."

The phrase, "as far as it depends on you" acknowledges that we are not responsible for others who resist living at peace with us. The biblical themes of peace (shalom) and the peace that we receive with God by virtue of being reconciled to Him through Christ (see Rom. 5:1-2, 9-11) provide the foundation for our living at peace with others. Because we are at peace with God, we should desire to live at peace with others.

*Ask a volunteer to read 1 Peter 4:10-11.*

- From verses 20-21, what does it mean, practically, for us to "leave room for God's wrath"?
- When you are kind to someone who has been unkind to you, are you more likely motivated by the hope to "heap burning coals on his head" (v. 20) or to "overcome evil with good" (v. 21)? How are the two things related?
- What was Paul's ultimate purpose in instructing us this way? What are some ways we can keep spiritual need and the purpose of the gospel in front of us when we relate to people who are difficult to like?

Verse 21 summarizes what has been said in the previous verses: "Do not be conquered by evil." Repaying evil for evil and sorting out vengeance for ourselves are ways of allowing evil to conquer us. This is stated in the affirmative here as well: "Conquer evil with good," which also succinctly represents what Paul instructed in verses 17-20. We not only avoid being conquered by evil, but we also actively conquer evil through Christ.

Turning away from evil is synonymous with repentance. As those who have repented of their sin and placed their faith in Christ, it would be hypocritical to employ evil methods to achieve "good." Selfless acts of love and kindness are a fitting application of the gospel because it was in Christ's selfless act on the cross that good ultimately conquered evil (Col. 2:13-15; 1 Pet. 3:18, 21). Jesus willingly laid down His life in order to conquer the enemies of sin, death, and Satan (see Matt. 26:53; John 10:17-18). By experiencing the brunt of injustice firsthand, Jesus entrusted Himself to the Father and secured a way for those who were once God's enemies to become His adopted sons (Rom. 5:6-11; Eph. 2:1-10).

- When have you seen God use an act of hospitality extended to someone who didn't deserve it "to overcome evil with good"?

## LOOKING FORWARD

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

- Of the following phrases from this week's message, which do you most need to remember to help you extend hospitality in a hostile world this week? Why? — Bless...don't curse. Rejoice...weep. Live in harmony. Do not return evil for evil but do what is right. So far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Don't seek revenge, but instead trust God's justice and instead meet the needs of your enemy. Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.
- In what relationships do you need to be more consistent to carry out God's call to biblical hospitality? How can this group pray for you specifically in that?

## FAMILIES

Use the following questions and truths to disciple your children throughout the week.

- Share an example of someone who has treated you badly and your own struggle with showing that person kindness (generally, and without names). If previous, explain what God taught you through that relationship. If current, ask your children to help you remember to show biblical hospitality to that person so that he or she might know Christ.
- Who are some people you have a hard time showing kindness to? Why?
- What does God want you to do about that? Why?

## PRAY

Thank God for His justice that came at the cross, and for His justice to come on the Day of the Lord. Praise God for sparing us of His judgment through Christ. Acknowledge the struggles identified by group members and ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with love, understanding, and wisdom in dealing with those who seek your harm. Ask Him to give you the courage you need to be consistent by extending hospitality to them so that they might come to a saving faith in Jesus.

## COMMENTARY

### | Romans 12:14-21

12:14 Now comes the hard evidence that believers in the church were being persecuted, and with it the need for evidence that these believers were responding as living sacrifices. Paul paraphrases Jesus' words to "love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you," and "bless those who curse you" (Matt. 5:44; Luke 6:27-28). Jesus Himself was the chief example of blessing the enemy when He prayed for those who were torturing and crucifying Him: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34).

12:15 Identifying with others in their joys and sorrows is evidence of love flowing from one who is a living sacrifice. These are admonitions that Paul had made in his lengthy writing on body dynamics in 1 Corinthians 12 (cf. v. 26). He also touches the subject in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 and Galatians 6:2.

12:16 This verse provides evidence of possible internal conflicts within the church in Rome—class and racial distinctions that caused some to look down on others in contempt. There were no doubt slaves in the church, as well as people of means (cf. Paul's personal greetings to members of the church in Rom. 16). Also, there was the possibility that Jews in the church were maintaining a position of superiority over the Gentile believers (see Rom. 2:17-24). Paul's teaching in places such as 1 Corinthians 12:13; Galatians 3:28; and Ephesians 2:15-16 confirm the principles underlying all of Romans 12: all have been leveled by sin, and any who have been redeemed have been so by God's mercy. Therefore, anyone who would look upon

another believer with contempt or conceit because of status or position in life has not grasped the enormous implications of having been redeemed solely by grace.

12:17-21 Finally, Paul concludes the chapter with the most lengthy, and perhaps the most difficult to manifest, evidence of being a living sacrifice: loving when wronged. The clear command is, Do not repay anyone evil for evil— whether a fellow believer or an unbeliever outside the church. There are at least two reasons for not taking revenge into one's own hand. First, it puts an individual, a part of the creation, in the place of judge over another part of creation. God has made it abundantly clear in Scripture, as Paul attests with his quote of Deuteronomy 32:35, that it is his prerogative and responsibility to avenge sin— and that he will do it: "For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil" (Eccl. 12:14, NASB).

The second reason not to seek revenge is that it could bring disrepute and harm to the cause of the gospel. When Paul told Timothy to lead the church in Ephesus in prayers for "kings and all those in authority," it was so that those same subjects of prayer would not bring trouble to the church; so that believers could live "peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness" (1 Tim. 2:2). Since "God. . . wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim. 2:3-4), any disruption of a quiet and peaceful society would hinder the spread of the gospel.

To that same end, Paul tells the Roman believers, If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. That would include peace with believers and nonbelievers, those in the church and outside the church. Since it takes two to fight, if the believers do not seek revenge, there will be no long-lasting disruption of peace. Doing what is right in the eyes of everybody includes not only "the eyes of the Lord but also. . . the eyes of men" (2 Cor. 8:21; cf. also 1 Thess. 5:15).

What should they do when persecuted? In essence, the same thing that Paul has already said in verse 14: "Be a blessing." The lengthy quotation from Proverbs 25:21-22 may represent an Egyptian ritual in which hot coals carried in a basin on the head would cause the guilty to repent. If that is the basis of the Proverbs quote, then the application would be that love—food and drink—will bring about shame and thus repentance in the enemy. But the admonition can be carried out simply as a gesture of kindness, as Elisha requested in the case of the Aramean army which, though trapped and primed for destruction, was given a feast and then sent home (2 Kgs. 6:21-23; cf. 2 Chr. 28:15). Even the law code in Israel commanded that an Israelite return to an enemy an ox or donkey that had wandered off, or give assistance to an enemy's beast of burden (Exod. 23:4-5).

The point of this last section is to do toward others what God has done toward us: forgive as we have been forgiven (Eph. 4:32). God loved us when we were enemies (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). Though Israel is an enemy of the gospel still (Rom. 11:28), God loves her. And we are to love those who are our enemies. We are not to be overcome by evil but to overcome evil with good.