

## ALTARED STATE

### "THE ODDITY OF GETTING EVEN"

#### ROMANS 12:17-21

Ignoring your enemies is difficult, resisting the temptation to get even is harder still, and loving them is nearly impossible; however, that's what Jesus commands us to do. In the Sermon on the Mount he says: "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5:43-48).

And in the Sermon on the Plain, Luke's version of Jesus' message, he says: "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good

***You have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil.***

– Saul to David 1Sa 24:17 (ESV)

to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful" (Lk 6:27-36). By "love your enemies" (Mt 5:43; Lk 6:27), Jesus clearly means do good to your enemies and not evil (cf., Ro 12:14, 17, 20; 1Pe 3:9).

### **This Week's Core Competency**

**Love** – I unconditionally and sacrificially love and forgive others.

You might say that in Romans 9:17-21 Paul tells us how to do what Jesus commanded his disciples to do, namely, really love their enemies. In verse 17, he says, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil" and "do what is right in the eyes of everyone." In verse 18, he says, "As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." In verse 19, he says, "Do not take revenge." And in verse 20, he says, "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink." David, the son of Jesse and the LORD's anointed, provides us with a practically perfect example of how to really love someone.

In the early days, David enters Saul's service. He pleases the king and whenever Saul is depressed, David takes up his lyre and plays, bringing the king relief. However, following David's defeat of Goliath, Saul becomes jealous. What king wouldn't? On the way home from slaying the

cont. pg. 2

the Philistine giant, women come out to greet the king, singing and dancing. "Saul has slain his thousands," they serenade, "and David his tens of thousands" (1Sa 18:7). The refrain displeases the king, and the next day while David is playing his lyre, Saul has a spear in his hand and he hurls it, saying to himself, "I'll pin David to the wall." But David eludes him (vv. 8-11). Anyone in his right mind would agree that the king overreacted—and not for the last time. History repeats itself some time later, despite Jonathan's intercession on David's behalf (19:1-5). Saul takes this oath, "As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death" (v. 6), but after David is again victorious over the Philistines, while he is again playing the lyre, Saul tries to pin him to the wall a second time, but David eludes him as Saul drives the spear into the wall (v. 10).

Saul tries to kill David twice. It's only fitting that David spares Saul's life twice. Saul sets out with three thousand men to find David "near the crags of Wild Goats" (24:2). There he enters a cave "to relieve himself" not knowing that one he's dogging is far back in the cave with his men. David creeps up on unsuspecting Saul and cuts off the corner of the king's robe. From outside the cave, he calls to the king: "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'? This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you . . . I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you" (vv.9-10). Later, he comes across Saul in pursuit of him a second time—this time encamped with his men (26:5). David slips into the camp under cover of darkness and makes off with Saul's spear and water jug while the king is sleeping. From the hilltop on the other side of the camp, he chides Abner for failing to guard the king. Saul hears David's voice and asks, "Is that your voice, David my son?" And after hearing David's defense, declares, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have been terribly wrong" (v. 21). The reflection of Paul's injunctions (Ro 12:17-21) in David's behavior and its outcome is impossible to miss.

## day 1 ENCOUNTER – read God's word to put yourself in touch with him.

### Romans 12:17-21

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 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. 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.

### Cf., another translation

17 If someone has done you wrong, do not repay him with a wrong. Try to do what everyone considers to be good. 18 Do everything possible on your part to live in peace with everybody. 19 Never take revenge, my friends, but instead let God's anger do it. For the scripture says, "I will take revenge, I will pay back," says the Lord." 20 Instead, as the scripture says: "If your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them a drink; for by doing this you will make them burn with shame." 21 Do not let evil defeat you; instead, conquer evil with good. (GNT)

## EXAMINE – what the passage says before you decide what it means.

- \* Bracket "evil for evil" in v. 17.
- \* Underline v. 17a and v. 21.
- \* Circle "be careful" in v. 17.
- \* Bracket "if it is possible, as far as it depends on you" in v. 18.
- \* Box "but" indicating *contrast* in vv. 19, 21.
- \* Highlight the OT quotations in vv. 19, 20.
- \* Box "on the contrary" indicating *contrast* in v. 20.
- \* Bracket "heap burning coals on his head" in v. 20.

---

day 2

**EXPLORE** – the answer to these questions to better understand what the passage means.

Consult the explanation of the message and the notes to follow if you need help.

1. What makes you think verses 17-21 pertain to how *Christians* should behave toward *non-Christians*?
2. Paul echoes the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). How so?
3. The verb translated "be careful" means literally "think beforehand." What do you infer from that?
4. Who determines "what is right" in verse 17? Explain.
5. Verse 18 suggests: "It takes two to tango." How so?
6. What's the difference between *retaliation* (v. 17a) and *revenge* (v. 19)?
7. Define "enemy" (cf., v. 20).
8. Is heaping burning coals on someone's head a *good* thing or a *bad* thing? Explain.
9. Explain the *contrast* in verse 21.
10. **Discussion:** Talk about a situation like one presumed in verse 18 in which one of the warring parties rationalized his or her "refusal to dance."

---

## day 3

## EXAMINE – an explanation of the message to better understand the meaning of the passage.

"Love must be sincere" serves as a heading for Romans 12:9-21, in that it summarizes the content of the following verses to the end of the chapter. In fact, verses 9-21 provide a definition of genuine love, not a dictionary definition but a definition nonetheless. These verses provide a definition of *agape* by identifying some of its defining traits or features. For example, it does good and not evil (v. 9), puts others first (v. 10), serves the Lord (v. 11), and practices hospitality (v. 13), blesses persecutors (v. 14), and promotes harmony (v. 16). It associates with the lowly (v. 16), does not retaliate (v. 17), figures out how to do what is right (v. 17), promotes peace (v. 18), and rather than seek revenge (v. 19), overcomes evil with good (v. 21). It's just what *agape* does.

Paul concludes chapter 12 with a delineation of important manifestations of genuine love toward non-Christians (vv. 17-21). According to one commentator: "He would be aware of the fact that the little churches in Rome were an endangered species, vulnerable to further imperial ruling against Jews and societies. His first concern therefore is to urge a policy of avoiding trouble by refusing retaliation to provocations and by responding with positive good to all hostile acts directed against them . . . The fact that he takes for granted that persecution and acts of malice would be directed against the small house gatherings is significant enough. It speaks eloquently of the atmosphere of threat and intimidation within which these Christians had to live out their discipleship. All the more striking it is therefore that he advocates such a positive outgoing goodness in response (not merely passive resistant). It was no doubt a policy of prudence: a reputation for kindness might well help ensure the support of the citizenry at large in any confrontation with the authorities. But even more important, it was a policy which Jesus had advocated by word and deed and was a characteristic expression of that same love which should characterize relationships within the congregation of faith (vv 9-10, 13)" (James D. G. Dunn, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 38b, *Romans 9-16*, 755).

The echoes of Jesus' Sermon found in these verses suggest how seriously the apostle takes his

Lord's last words, "teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Mt 28:19). Paul's reteaching of what Jesus previously taught hardly needs explanation. His opening and closing words, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (v. 17) and "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (v. 21), not only reiterate Jesus' words, "Do not resist an evil person" and "Love your enemies" (Mt 5:39, 44), but also bracket specific descriptive commands supported by Old Testament quotations. In a nutshell, Paul tells his readers don't retaliate; in other words, resist the impulse to *hit back*. And don't seek revenge; in other words, resist the impulse to *get even*. Both of which we commonly try to justify on the basis of what the offending party did *first* and what the offending party truly *deserves*. Instead, we are to do the right thing, namely, what everyone, believers and unbelievers alike, will agree is right. One commentator explains: "Believers are constantly under the scrutiny of unsaved persons as well as of fellow Christians, and they must be careful that their conduct does not betray the high standards of the gospel" (Everett F. Harrison, "Romans," in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 10:134). And we are to make room for "wrath," namely, God's wrath. The same commentator writes: "We are not to take vengeance. This would be to trespass on the province of God, the great Judge of all. 'Leave room for God's wrath' (v.19). Trust him to take care of the situation. He will not bungle. He will not be too lenient or too severe" (134-35).

But wait; there's more. Paul expects more than a *passive* response from us; he expects an *active* one, too. He expects us to do more than leave the matter to God. We are to overcome evil with good, more specifically, feed our enemy if he's hungry and give him a drink if he's thirsty. Who knows? Perhaps surprising him by doing him good rather than evil will shame him into repenting of his evil intentions and changing his evil ways.

---

day **4** **EMBRACE** – how God spoke to you in his word.

*The Message of the Passage*

*Rather than retaliate or seek revenge when others do you wrong,  
do them good, hoping it will bring about their repentance,  
thereby overcoming evil with good.*

Our desire is to not be merely hearers of the word, but doers of the word as James teaches in James 1:22.

Do you struggle to obey Paul's commands or are you by nature peacemaker?

When it comes to living at peace, it takes two to tango. If the other person simply won't dance, can you do no more than agree to disagree?

You can do good to your enemies in the wrong spirit. Explain.

---

# notes STUDY – the commentaries to answer the questions.

v. 17 **evil for evil** See Mt 5:38-42. "The prohibition of retaliation in v. 17a expands on Paul's warning that we are not to curse our persecutors in v. 14b. Here again, Paul's dependence on Jesus' teaching is clear. For not only did Jesus exhort us to love and pray for our enemies; in the same context he also warns us not to exact 'eye for eye, and tooth for tooth' (Matt. 5:38)" (Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, NICNT, 784).

v. 17 **be careful** Cf., "give thought to do" (ESV); see also, "For we are taking pains to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also in the eyes of man" (2Co 8:21). "The verb 'be careful' (*proneo*) is literally 'to think beforehand,' which suggests that the conduct of believers ought not to be regulated by habit, but rather that each situation that holds prospect for a witness to the world be weighed so that the action taken will not bring unfavorable reflection on the gospel" (Harrison, 10:134). "Doing good to all is something to be planned and not just willed (Asmussen; Spicq, *Agape*, II, 206). Intention alone does not suffice. It must be considered how the aim can be effectively achieved and with proper tact. Just as v. 17a can be understood as a heading, v. 18 makes it specific" (Ernst Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, 348). "Both here and 2 Cor 8:21 the thought seems to be more of the need for sensitivity to the views of others than of active material provision, as in 1 Tim 5:8" (Dunn, 748).

v. 18 **if it is possible . . .** "Jesus himself commended 'peacemakers' (Matt 5:9) and urged his followers to 'be at peace with one another' (Mark 9:50, where 'one another' probably refers to people generally rather than to the disciples only. Although much less clear than the allusions in vv. 14, 17, and 21, this may, then be another allusion to the teaching of Jesus" (Moo, 785). "Christians are called (vv. 18-19) to strive to be at peace, so far as possible, with all persons, not seeking to vindicate themselves. This seems to allude to Matt. 5:9" (Ben Witherington III, *Paul's Letter to the Romans*, 296). "There is no Christian virtue in provoking strife, whether inside or outside the Church; limits may, however, be imposed on peaceable relations by the attitude of others. But even when peace is broken by another, the Christian is not to seek revenge" (C. K. Barrett, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, HNTC, 242). "'If it be possible' suggests that there are instances in human relations when the strongest desire for concord will not avail. This, in turn, is explained by the statement 'as far as it depends on you.' In other words, if disharmony and conflict should come, let not the responsibility be laid at your feet. The believer may not be able to persuade the other part, but he can at least refuse to be the instigator of trouble. He can be a peacemaker (Matt 5:9) only if he is recognized as one who aims to live at peace with his fellows" (Harrison, 134).

v. 19 **"It is mine to avenge"** From Dt 32:35. "There are occasions when God's wrath is rightly put into effect by human agency (xiii. 4), but this is always by special divine appointment (xiii. 1); *no private person is at liberty to assume that his own vengeful feelings will carry out the divine sentence*" (Barrett, 242 italics added).

v. 20 **on the contrary** Cf., "but" (NASB); "instead" (NLT); "rather" (NET). On the possible connotation of the *contrast*, whether 1) negative or 2) positive: 1) "Paul may view our giving of food and water to the enemy to be means by which—if such actions do not lead to repentance—the enemy's guilt before the Lord will be increased, leading in turn to an increase in the severity of his or her judgment" (Moo, 788); 2) "To read the contrast as 'Leave your enemy to God, but try to increase his guilt by your acts of kindness' strikes a jarring note. And it hardly fits comfortably either with the positive thrust of v 20a-b (cf. 2 Kgs 6:22) or with the final call to 'overcome evil by good' (Furnish, *Love Command*, 108). As already noted, therefore, the *alla* [but] is best taken as calling for a positive response to hostility (by meeting it with acts of kindness) and not simply as a passive response (leave it to God) (Dunn, 751). "Paul is giving us a positive motivation for acts of kindness toward our enemies. He does not want the prohibition of vengeance (v. 19) to produce in us a 'do-nothing' attitude toward our persecutors" (Moo, 789).

v. 20 **"If your enemy is thirsty . . ."** From Pr 25:21-22.

v. 20 **heap burning coals . . .** "'Burning coals' are best understood as 'the burning pangs of shame and contrition' (Cranfield, in loc.). There is no definite promise at this point that that the offender will be converted, but at least he will not be a threat in the future" (Harrison, 135). "Heaping burning coals on the enemy's head probably refers to some sort of shaming convention meant to drive a person to remorse and better behavior" (Witherington, 297). "The statement seems to point to an Egyptian penitential ritual involving a forced change of mind (Morenz, 'Kohlen,' 187ff.). This supports the opinion that the saying is not related to a divine penalty (Michel; Spicq, *Agape*, II, 207f.) but to the remorse and humiliation of the adversary (the majority view), although it is best not to speak of the remarkable optimism of the apostle in this regard (Kuhl, Julicher)" (Kasemann, 349).

### Family Talk

Encouragement from one parent's heart to another

Nothing breaks your heart and whips up a tornado of crazy faster than seeing your child hurt by others. Oh, how painful! Let's be honest - your gut reaction is to unleash the fury on that person and anyone else who falls into the path of destruction. There was a time another mom spoke unkindly to one of my kids. In a mama bear moment, I let her know exactly what I thought about the situation. The Holy Spirit quickly convicted me to apologize. Thankfully, both of us were embarrassed and ashamed at what had transpired and were eager to get to a place of peace with each other. Romans 12:17-21 speaks of one of the hardest core virtues - love. It's easy to love and live at peace with those we like and get along with, but for with those who have wronged us, it's impossible without the help of the Holy Spirit. We live in a fallen world filled with bullies, bad bosses, and rude people. But then, Jesus. Merciful, loving, compassionate Jesus. He loved us when we were His enemy. His greatest desire is for a relationship with us, even when we turn our back on Him. Have you been in a difficult situation at work, with family, or even church? Did you handle it well? Prayerfully, God will help you model grace and love as you strive to live at peace with others. I'm praying for your family to be peacemakers this week!

#### What Does The Bible Say

Weekly Verse: Read Romans 12:17-21

1. What does it mean to live at peace with everyone?
2. Whose job is it to administer justice?
3. How do these verses tell us to treat our enemy?

#### What Do You Think

Do you think praying for your "enemy" might change how you feel about them?

#### What R U Going To Do

Living at peace sometimes mean giving up your right to be right. This week challenge yourself to put others above yourself even when you don't want to.

#### Core Comp

Love – I love and forgive others no matter what.

#### Memory Verse

Romans 12:2a – *Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.*

### KIDPIX COUPON

I memorized my verse \_\_\_\_\_, completed *Scrolls* \_\_\_\_\_, brought Bible \_\_\_\_\_, brought a friend \_\_\_\_\_.

Series Discipleship Challenge located in KidPix Store.

Child's name \_\_\_\_\_ Grade \_\_\_\_ Parent's signature \_\_\_\_\_

Earn 1 token by completing the PantegoKids Bible study and another token by reciting the memory verse.

Questions: Kids@pantego.org

# 30 CORE COMPETENCIES

## 10 CORE BELIEFS

### **Trinity** *2 Corinthians 13:14*

I believe the God of the Bible is the only true God - Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

### **Salvation By Grace** *Ephesians 2:8-9*

I believe a person comes into a right relationship with God by His grace, through faith in Jesus Christ.

### **Authority of the Bible** *2 Timothy 3:16-17*

I believe the Bible is the Word of God and has the right to command my belief and action.

### **Personal God** *Psalms 121:1-2*

I believe God is involved in and cares about my daily life.

### **Identity in Christ** *John 1:12*

I believe I am significant because of my position as a child of God.

### **Church** *Ephesians 4:15-16*

I believe the church is God's primary way to accomplish His purposes on earth today.

### **Humanity** *John 3:16*

I believe all people are loved by God and need Jesus Christ as their Savior.

### **Compassion** *Psalms 82:3-4*

I believe God calls all Christians to show compassion to those in need.

### **Eternity** *John 14:1-4*

I believe there is a heaven and a hell and that Jesus Christ is returning to judge the earth and to establish His eternal kingdom.

### **Stewardship** *1 Timothy 6:17-19*

I believe that everything I am or own belongs to God.

## 10 CORE PRACTICES

### **Worship** *Psalms 95:1-7*

I worship God for who He is and what He has done for me.

### **Prayer** *Psalms 66:16-20*

I pray to God to know Him, to lay my request before Him and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Bible Study** *Hebrews 4:12*

I read the Bible to know God, the truth, and to find direction for my daily life.

### **Single-mindedness** *Matthew 6:33*

I focus on God and His priorities for my life.

### **Spiritual Gifts** *Romans 12:4-6*

I know and use my spiritual gifts to accomplish God's purposes.

### **Biblical Community** *Acts 2:44-47*

I fellowship with other Christians to accomplish God's purposes in my life, others' lives, and in the world.

### **Giving Away My Time** *Colossians 3:17*

I give away my time to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Money**

*2 Corinthians 8:7*

I give away my money to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Faith** *Ephesians*

*6:19-20*

I give away my faith to fulfill God's purposes.

### **Giving Away My Life** *Romans 12:1*

I give away my life to fulfill God's purposes.

## 10 CORE VIRTUES

### **Joy** *John 15:11*

I have inner contentment and purpose in spite of my circumstances.

### **Peace** *Philippians 4:6-7*

I am free from anxiety because things are right between God, myself, and others.

### **Faithfulness** *Proverbs 3:3-4*

I have established a good name with God and with others based on my long-term loyalty to those relationships.

### **Self-Control** *Titus 2:11-13*

I have the power, through Christ, to control myself.

### **Humility** *Philippians 2:3, 4*

I choose to esteem others above myself.

### **Love** *1 John 4:10-12*

I sacrificially and unconditionally love and forgive others.

### **Patience** *Proverbs 14:29*

I take a long time to overheat and endure patiently under the unavoidable pressures of life.

### **Kindness/Goodness** *1 Thess. 5:15*

I choose to do the right things in my relationships with others.

### **Gentleness** *Philippians 4:5*

I am thoughtful, considerate and calm in dealing with others.

### **Hope** *Hebrews 6:19-20*

I can cope with the hardships of life and with death because of the hope I have in Jesus Christ.

## About the Authors

**Tom Bulick** (M.A. in Educational Leadership, Eastern Michigan University, Th.M. in Old Testament, and Ph.D. in Bible Exposition, Dallas Theological Seminary). For more than forty years, Tom has served as pastor, faculty member, and administrator. Tom was Vice President for Student Life and Associate Professor of Religious Studies at Trinity Western University (Vancouver, B.C.) for twelve years before accepting the position of Spiritual Formation Pastor at Pantego Bible Church in 1998. He and his wife Ruth have one son, Zach.

**Stephanie Thomas** (B.B.A. University of Texas at Arlington). Stephanie is married to James, and they have four children: Elijah, Levi, Ella, and Simon. She and James are Shepherds of the Bailey Community Group. She has attended Pantego Bible Church for more than twenty years and has been on staff for more than five years.



8001 Anderson Blvd.  
Ft. Worth, TX 76120  
1-866-PANTEGO  
Fax 817-275-6403  
[www.pantego.org](http://www.pantego.org)

The mission of THE SCROLLS is to help you Belong, Become, and go Beyond as follower of Jesus Christ through your own active reading of the Bible. Send any questions or comments you may have about this lesson to Tom Bulick. His e-mail address is [tbulick@pantego.org](mailto:tbulick@pantego.org).