

“Let God be God When Others Disappoint You”

Romans 12:17-21

Do you remember the story of Joseph? There is no greater illustration of forgiveness, other than Christ. As a boy, Joseph was ridiculed by his brothers. He was hated. Life was hard enough as a son of Jacob. His brothers made it unbearable. In a fit of rage, they abandoned him, leaving him for dead.

This betrayal was just the beginning of a lifetime of events that would take Joseph away from his father and mother, his homeland and everything that he knew. Joseph was sold into slavery. He was falsely accused of molesting Potiphar's wife. He was jailed. What did Joseph do while he was a prisoner? Others might have stewed and steamed. Joseph trusted God and maintained his godly behavior. While in jail serving God, he was abandoned by the chief cup bearer. He was forgotten by his people, separated from his parents for most of his natural life.

When God brought his brothers from Canaan to Egypt, Joseph could have treated them the way they had treated him. He could have retaliated. Instead, he weeps over them. He reveals himself to them and forgives them.

His words of forgiveness are often quoted. (Genesis 50:20) *"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives."*

I often use this verse as an example for us to follow, reminding us that God is at work even when it seems that others are taking advantage of us. But note carefully the verse that precedes the more familiar Genesis 50:20.

(Genesis 50:19) *"But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God?"*

What allowed Joseph to forgive his brothers? It was his recognition that God alone is the judge. This is the theme of the closing verses of Romans 12.

Romans 12 begins with a personal exhortation to surrender ourselves to God as living sacrifices. But verses 3-21 (and the rest of Romans) focus upon the person to person aspect of living out the Christian life. In Romans 12:17-21, we are told that to live out Christian ethics with one another, we must LET GOD be GOD.

There is no more important place to LET GOD BE GOD than in the area of the hurts committed against us.

These verses contain 9 ethical commands directing our personal relationships, representing nearly 1/3 of the 29 ethical commands from Romans 12:9-21. This passage reminds us to allow God to take control of every situation where you are mistreated.

I. **Let God be God When Someone Sins Against You.** Rom 12:17

- A. When someone **acts wickedly** against you, to not return them the way they treat you.
- B. JESUS acted this way. Matthew 5:38-42
- C. The word Repay is from the Greek word apodidomi
 - 1. Apo -from
 - 2. Didomi - to give
 - 3. It is used of paying taxes, paying wages
 - 4. (1 Peter 3:9) *"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult, but with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."*
- D. Someone once said, "Before seeking revenge, first dig two graves."
(Chinese proverb quoted in sermoncentral.com)

II. **Let God be God by Giving up your Rights to Promote God's Righteousness.**
17b-18

- A. Here, there are two commands
 - 1. The first is "Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody"
 - a. The word Be careful means "take thought beforehand" (A.T. **Robertson**)
 - b. We might ask if this command is telling us to be a "**people pleaser.**" Scripture makes it clear that we are to act for God's approval and not the approval of others. This is emphasized in (**Ephesians 6:5-6**) *"Slaves, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in the sincerity of your heart, as to Christ; **not by way of eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.**"*
 - c. (Ephesians 6:7) *"Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were **servng the Lord, not men,**"*
 - d. The proper idea is similar to what Paul meant when he wrote that he tried to be "**All things to all men**" **1 Cor 9:19-21**
 - (1) In this passage, Paul expresses that he had the RIGHT to expect financial support from the Corinthians (1 Cor 9:12)
 - (2) He surrendered this RIGHT for their benefit.

- e. In essence, Paul surrendered his rights so that the Corinthians did not have a **leg to stand on!** Their accusations against him would be invalidated. Paul refused to give them ammunition that would be used against him. The reason for this was that he was more concerned with the advancement of the gospel, than he was his own rights and privileges.
- f. (2 Corinthians 11:12) *"And I will keep on doing what I am doing in order to cut the ground from under those who want an opportunity to be considered equal with us in the things they boast about."*
- g. The same idea is expressed by Peter. (1 Peter 2:12) *"Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us."*
- h. (1 Peter 2:15) *"For it is God's will that by doing good you should silence the ignorant talk of foolish men."*
- i. (1 Peter 3:16) *"keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander."*
- j. In a sermon on this same passage, Ray Pritchard writes, "Live in such a way that no one can make an honest accusation against you. Live so that if they are going to accuse you, they have to tell a lie to do it." (Ray Pritchard, "Loving Those You'd Rather Hate" sermon on www.keepbelieving.com)

- B. The second command in this section tells us to "Live at peace with everyone"
 - 1. We are to live at peace with rulers. 1 Tim 2:2 "quiet and peaceable lives"
 - 2. With enemies
 - 3. With the family of God. (Hebrews 12:14) *"Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord."*

Let's move on in our development

III. **Let God be God by Leaving Judgment to Him. Rom 12:19-20**

- A. Do not take revenge
 - 1. quotation from (Deuteronomy 32:35) *"It is mine to avenge; I will repay. In due time their foot will slip; their day of disaster is near and their doom rushes upon them."*
 - 2. (Hebrews 10:30) *"For we know him who said, "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," and again, "The Lord will judge his people."*

- B. Reasons we must leave judgment to God
1. Nothing will escape God's justice.
 - a. (Matthew 10:26) *"There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known."*
 - b. We do not have to take justice into our own hands!
 2. The God of Justice is also the God of Mercy. (Brian Bill, "Loving Those You'd Rather Hate," www.pontiacbible.org)
 3. God is Just.
 - a. "If the hand of justice is paralyzed, will not evil and injustice engulf mankind? Here is Paul's answer. A juster hand than yours and mine rules and will, indeed, in most perfect justice mete out full due to every [sinner]." (Lenski, Romans, 778)
 - b. (Job 34:12) *"It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice."*
 4. We are biased.
 - a. "Even human judges are not allowed to try their own cases" (Lenski, 779)
 - b. We overlook our own guilt and focus on the guilt of others.
 - c. (James 2:12-13) *"Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!"*

The NATURAL reaction: REVENGE

When he was an **attorney**, **Abraham Lincoln** was once approached by a man who **insisted on bringing a suit for \$2.50** against **poor debtor who couldn't pay**. Lincoln tried talk him out of it, but this man wanted his revenge. Finally, **Lincoln took the case and charged the man legal fee of \$10**. Lincoln then **gave half the money to the poor debtor, who in turn paid the \$2.50!** Believe it or not, the vengeful man was satisfied. (Daily Walk, May 22, 1992)

A soldier fighting over in Iraq received a letter from his girl friend that said she was breaking up with him. She also asked him to send the picture she had given him when he left because she needed it for her bridal announcement. The soldier was heart broken and told his friends of his terrible situation. So his whole platoon got together and brought all their pictures of their girlfriends, and put them in a box and gave them to him. So he put her picture in the box with the rest along with a note that said, "I'm sending back your picture to you please remove it and send back the rest. For the life of me I can't remember which one you are." (From a sermon by **David Owens**, "Better Than Revenge" 2/16/2009Sermoncentral.com)

- C. The Alternative to Revenge = Mercy. Rom 12:20
1. Quotation is from (Proverbs 25:21-22) *"If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you."*
 2. The term "Coals of fire"
 - a. "Make him feel a burning sense of shame" (Moffat)
 - b. "The pain of contrition for the enemies past meanness" (Lenski)
 - c. Kindness returned for evil brings a reproof of shame.

IV. Let God be God by Conquering Evil with Good. Rom 12:21

- A. Overcome = Greek **νικάω** (Nike, greek god of victory)
- B. *"be victor, prevail, conquer"* (BAGD)
- C. To CAIN. (Genesis 4:7) *"If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it."*

V. Application

- A. When you are hurt, do not retaliate
- B. God is in control
- C. Let God be God!
- D. He does not need your assistance in restoring order to the world
- E. He does not need you to investigate the shortcomings of others
- F. Sin will be discovered. *The sins of our children always were discovered.* (Numbers 32:23) *"But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the Lord; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out."*
- G. Place others first by leaving their judgment in God's hands