

## "WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU'VE BEEN DONE WRONG"

(Romans 12:17-21)

(Chuck Swindoll)

If anyone understood the pain of personal offense, it was Paul. In addition to the perils of nature, he survived numerous and brutal assaults while crisscrossing the empire between Jerusalem and Rome. He endured multiple lashings and even stonings by men who wanted to silence the gospel. He withstood withering verbal attacks from religious rivals, including pagans, Jews, and even fellow Christians. No leader in the first-century church suffered more at the hands of other people than Paul. So his command in 12:17, "Never pay back evil for evil to anyone," came at great personal sacrifice.

The apostle's teaching on personal attacks can be reduced to three principles, each suggesting a godly response:

1. *Evil stirs up more evil; refuse to obey your natural reaction.* All of us have natural instincts that reside deep within. Every cell of our bodies is programmed for survival. When something comes too close to our face, we flinch. When we're about to fall, we throw out our hands. When we're in the car and another car starts backing up quickly, we honk, honk, honk! Those are natural, instinctive responses. When someone causes us harm, our natural instinct is to seek justice by getting even.

*Paul calls us to respond supernaturally, which means we must arrest our natural response.*

2. *Our desire for justice is corrupt; refuse to seek your own.* Justice honors God. That's why the Lord gave us governments, which He empowers for the common good. As bearers of our Creator's image, we desire justice when wronged by another; however, unlike our Creator, our desire for justice is fueled by pride, fear, hatred, and selfishness. Therefore, we are unqualified.

*Paul calls us to surrender our desire for justice and to seek blessing for the offender instead.*

3. *Our vengeance leaves no room for grace; surrender the matter to God.* Each person has an unavoidable appointment with death, at which point each one will stand before his or her Maker to be judged. If punishment is due, then—and not a moment sooner—God will mete out vengeance according to his or her deeds. In the meantime, the Lord extends the offer of grace to all who do wrong. Even the justice dispensed by governments is an instrument of chastening in His hand, which He uses to bring non-believers to repentance. Dare we interfere?



*Paul calls us to allow God to be the judge of souls, to dispense justice or bestow mercy according to His infinite wisdom.*

After suffering because of the sinful deed of another, we need healing; and vengeance whispers a tantalizing promise doesn't it? "Getting even will heal that emotional wound and make you feel warm all over." But it's a lie. Vengeance can't heal wounds. Only grace can do that. Grace in the form of heartfelt repentance and a sincere apology will go a long way, but offenders almost never risk that kind of humility. Fortunately, God's grace is available in abundant supply, just for the asking. So, instead of seeking retribution, ask for grace. Then stifle the persistent lies of vengeance by taking another step toward healing: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good" (12:14, 21).