

# ROMANS (12:17-18)

## *Paying 'em Back*

PART 71 - MAY 21, 2006

### NOW WE'RE EVEN

The other night, Shaz and I were watching TV and hitting each other's legs. You ever bump or hit someone and they *have* to hit you back in order to "get even" ... so, you *have* to hit *them* back? I can't remember what started it. But it went on for quite a while. Hit. "Now we're even." Hit. "Now we're even." Hit. ... Hit.

My wife doesn't like it when we do this ... when company's over (which they were). She doesn't think it "looks good" for the pastor to be *slugging* his daughter! I know; the woman is crazy.

But just so you all know, I ended it by saying, "I'll let *you* have the *last* hit." You see I'm *very* mature ... plus, *the company!*

Q: Why do we reflexively strike back when we're mistreated?

- Aim your high-beams at me, will ya?! *Flash! ... Ok then.*
- Cut me off, will ya?! *Honk! Tailgate! Hit! Skid! Crash! ... Ok then.*

We just wanna teach 'em a little Bible: Give and it shall be given! This reflex offers strong evidence that we are created spirit-beings with intense innate desires for *justice* ... mixed with *sin*. By the way, my wife does not accept this as an excuse for my behavior!

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. - *Romans 12:17-18 NIV*

Understanding our reflex to strike back, and wanting us to counteract this compelling natural instinct, Paul says:

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil"

- We must renounce the urge to retaliate.
- We must choose to be the better person.

Q: So, if we can't repay 'em with evil, what can we repay 'em with?

## MERCY AND JUSTICE

Paul says: "Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody"

There are two types of repayment that are: "right in the eyes".

1. We can repay 'em with mercy.

In this way we choose to: Treat them *better than* they deserve.

[Jesus said] Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. - *Luke 6:27-31 NIV*

I remember reading about a church that was picketed by a large angry group of pro-choice demonstrators. The pastor wasn't sure how to respond. He prayed. He got an answer. He went out in front of the church, set up a table, placed some items on the table, sat behind the table, and held up his own sign: Free coffee and donuts. Over several days he got to know his protestors by name. And their hate dissipated. And they left ... and wished him well.

When we treat those who "pay us evil" better than they deserve we not only reveal to them the merciful nature of God, we remind *ourselves* that He is our all-satisfying security, and that we don't need to treat others out of insecurity.

By loving our enemies in this way, we demonstrate that God is both merciful *and* all-satisfying. In other words, we *glorify* Him.

Q: But now, what about those offenses that can't be overlooked, because they'll cause damage if not dealt with?

He is not only a God of mercy; He is a God of righteousness.

2. [Therefore] We can repay 'em with justice.

In this way we choose to: Treat them *as* they deserve.

A church gossip named Myrtle accused a kind deacon named George of being a drunk; his truck had been parked in front of a bar one night, and was still there in the morning. She informed *everyone* that common sense dictated what was going on! But ol' George didn't lose his temper - didn't try to defend himself. He just quietly left and calmly drove his truck to Myrtles house ... and parked it there for the night!

Q: The question is: Is this God-ordained justice?

A: Sadly, no. And do you know why not?

The Lord only shares His obligation to punish wrong doers through God-ordained institutions, not self-willed individuals. There are at least five institutions that have His blessing and Biblical backing (but I'll need to condense the material):



A. The institution of: **Family**

Parents are called to discipline their children so they'll develop a clear comprehension of right from wrong.



B. The institution of: **Church**

Elders are called to correct and restore those members who persistently, intentionally, and unremorsefully commit sin.



C. The institution of: **Education**

Teachers are called to assign good grades to good work, and poor grades to poor work, thereby attesting to truth.



D. The institution of: **Employment**

Employers are called to reward honest efforts, and punish laziness. Taking wages without working is called stealing.



E. The institution of: **Government**

Police are called to arrest lawbreakers; and Judges are called to imprison them. This curtails free-will evil.

It would be unfair, unjust, and unbiblical for a cop to "turn the other cheek" when catching a criminal committing a crime!

The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted ... -  
*Romans 13:1-2 NIV*

- We show mercy as individuals, justice as institutions.

But whether mercy *or* justice, our heart must be free from spite, fear, or malice, and deeply secure and content in the Lord. Otherwise you can bet we'll react, retreat, or retaliate.

And if our spirit is vindictive, even if we turn to a God-ordained institution of justice, we'll be repaying with evil.

Paul then adds something both refreshing and challenging.

## IF IT'S POSSIBLE

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone

Even when we're willing to be merciful, and treat others better than they deserve, peace will not always be possible. That's the refreshing part – I'm glad that's in there!

But, then there's that emphasis on: "as far as it depends on YOU". **You** are to go the extra mile. **You** are to offer the apology. **You** are to try and reconcile.

And scripture gives us the steps to follow: Go to the individual, and be politely truthful. If they reject you, go back with a mutual, unbiased friend. If they reject you both, turn to an institution.

And even when a relationship has been damaged or destroyed because of clear-cut sinful actions committed against us, peace may not be possible, but forgiveness is.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that we forget what happened; it simply means that we surrender the desire to get even. Forgiveness doesn't mean that we dismiss or condone what happened; it simply means we're offering an undeserved gift.

Q: How do you *know* if you've gone: "as far as it depends on you"; with people who remain impossible to: "live at peace with"?

Here are four ways to tell when peace isn't possible.

1. The offender is **unreachable**. If they're deceased or departed (and can't be located) there's nothing further you can do. Don't beat yourself up for something you can't pursue.
2. The offender is **unsafe**. If the offender poses a clear and present danger (to you or those under your care) you should keep your distance.
3. The offender is **unwilling**. If the offender won't acknowledge their role and responsibility, and demonstrate remorse, there's nothing further you can do.
4. The offender is **unlawful**. If making peace would require you to violate your faith, deny the truth, or do what's wrong, peace is not an option.

Remember, forgiveness is *essential* but peace is not.

However, if someone (who paid you evil in the past) *is* reachable and harmless and potentially willing, you owe it to yourself, to them, and to the glory of God to find out if peace is possible.