

Romans (12:20-21)

Coals of Conviction

Part 73 – June 18, 2006

CHILDREN and CHAINSAWS

Last week's message was titled: Wroom for Wrath. One of the big truths we learned was that: we don't hold a grudge, the grudge holds us.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. - *Romans 12:19 NIV*

This is both a gift and a guarantee that allows and enables us to release our bitterness and our resentment and our hostility. Because our biggest fear of letting go of a grudge is that those who've hurt us won't be properly judged for what they've done.

- Let's say it together: If I hold a grudge, I doubt the Judge.



The battle against a grudge is a battle against unbelief. It's about trusting the Lord to perfectly repay according to *His* plan. My goal is retaliation, but God's goal is redemption. Letting us take our own revenge would be like giving a chainsaw to a child. We know just enough about how to handle it to be a danger to ourselves and others.

So, in the past two messages: Paul has warned us *not* to repay evil for evil; and he has explained *why* we must not take revenge.

Now, he tells us what we *are* to do and what the result will be:

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." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. - *Romans 12:20-21 NIV*

CONFOUND THE ENEMY

Practical kindness will confound your enemy.

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink"

Enemies have answers for arguments ... but not for love. Don't just give your enemies more ammunition to fire back at you. Offer them something they can't contend with.



I used to collect Laurel & Hardy films. I loved this revenge shtick they did where a simple misunderstanding would escalate until everything was destroyed.

- There was one where a neighboring store owner cuts off Ollie's tie and tucks it neatly into Ollie's front pocket ... while Ollie just watches.
- Ollie goes, "Hmph!" and then follows the man back to his ice-cream shop where Ollie scoops ice-cream and toppings into the patient man's trousers.
- The man returns, hands Ollie's hat to Stanley (who politely holds it), and breaks light bulbs one-by-one over a cooperative Ollie's head.

It's hilarious because we see *ourselves* in their exaggeration. It wouldn't be nearly as funny if the man comes in and cuts Ollie's tie, and Ollie says: "Hey, I've obviously done something to upset you; I'm so sorry. Let's talk." And the guy goes, "Well, maybe I overreacted."

- We control the ammunition that keeps the evil escalating.

Paul is calling us to imitate the One who confounded His enemies with love in the face of persecution, injustice, and *death!* We model Jesus by trusting God's justice, by enduring what appears to be injustice, and by extending forgiveness.

[Jesus said] Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. - *Matthew 5:44-45 NIV*

"That you may *be* sons"; not: "that you may *become* sons": but "that you may *act like* what you already are!" The reality of Christ is most evident when I speak and act in love toward those who reject, betray, disappoint, and offend me.

HOT-HEADS

"In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head"

Okay, now we're getting' somewhere! Burning coals. On the head! Big blisters. On the head! Heap 'em high. On the head! And I missed Paul's point completely!

The original meaning of this metaphor is debated, but the gist is clear that it's a *positive* action, not a *negative* one.

SIDEBAR: There is an interesting Egyptian ritual where a man would carry a pan of burning coals (coincidentally enough) on his head, in public, as a sign of repentance.

The coals we heap are coals of conviction. The “heat” is meant to melt those hard hearts. But, just because we do the right thing, doesn’t mean we’ll get the right result.

Jesus died for those who betrayed and rejected and persecuted him; but they sure didn’t all respond the way He wanted them to:

- A. One thief on the cross repented, the other cursed. *(Luke 23:39-42)*
- B. The centurion acknowledged; the Pharisees scoffed. *(Mat 27:41; 54)*
- C. Peter repented; Judas went out and hanged himself. *(Mk 14:72; Mat 27:5)*

If the love of Christ doesn’t always produce repentance in people, we shouldn’t expect our love to do any better!



There are three possible responses from three types of hot heads:

1. The **Sensitive** – They say: “Get ‘em off! Get ‘em off!”

These are the hotheads who see a demonstration of love and immediately repent because of the guilt and shame they feel.

2. The **Stubborn** – They say: “I can take the heat!”

They may justify their actions, and doubt your sincerity, but each consecutive kindness will add to the weight of conviction. Love is the one-and-only offensive weapon we have, against which our enemies have *no* defense.

3. The **Seared** – They say: “Coals? What Coals?”

These coals ain’t comin’ off, so you better adjust to it. They *want* you to strike back; they *need* you to strike back. When you respond with love, they have nothing to work with. These hotheads will not only endure all the coals you can heap, they’ll probably hate you more for not “playing by the rules”.

OVERCOMING EVIL

But, it’s ultimately not about our enemy’s response, it’s about ours.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good”

Don’t let your enemy’s hostility produce hostility in you. Let your love triumph over his hostility. We must not let another person’s evil make us evil.

If I allow someone’s sin to govern my emotions so that my bitterness, my misery, or my depression is owing to *their* evil, then I am being overcome by evil.

It's a victim mentality: let someone else's evil provoke us to think evil thoughts, speak evil words, or act in evil ways, and then blame *their* evil for it!

- To repay evil with evil is to be overcome by evil.

Paul says, "Don't give 'em that kind of power!" When someone does evil to us, we need a quick huddle with the Holy Spirit:

- A. "They don't govern my thoughts, words, and actions."
- B. "They're not my Lord; Jesus is my Lord and my king."



When we encounter evil, we're at a spiritual fork in the road:

- We can react to evil, or respond to Christ.

We must choose which will be the dominant reality in our life.

Paul began chapter twelve by urging us to offer ourselves as living sacrifices, to reject this world's pattern, and to be transformed by the renewing of our minds.

This verse is a culmination and conclusion, not only to chapter twelve, but especially to chapter twelve's final seven verses.

"Do not curse" (vs. 14)

"Do not repay anyone evil for evil" (vs. 17)

"Do not take revenge" (vs. 19)

If we "curse", "repay evil for evil", or "take revenge", we have been sucked into and: "overcome by evil" (vs. 21)

If however, we:

"Bless our persecutors" (vs. 14 paraphrased)

"Do what's right in the eyes of [others]" (vs. 17)

"Attempt to live at peace with everyone" (vs. 18)

"Leave all wrath and judgment up to God" (vs. 19 paraphrased)

"Serve the needs of those who've hurt us" (vs. 20 paraphrased)

We will have: "overcome evil with good". (vs. 21)

And then, no matter how your hot-head happens to respond (be they sensitive, stubborn, or seared) ... it is *you* who will conquer, through Christ!