



## Marks of the Christian 5: Seeking Peace (Part 2)

Romans 12:17-21

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Now, if you have your Bibles with you, I would invite you to turn to the book of Romans, chapter 12. We've been in chapter 12 for some time now, and this week marks our last week in this section. We have been looking at the marks of a Christian. Often, as we come to a section of Scripture like this where we are receiving commands from God about how to live and the way in which we should live the Christian life, a question may come to us. It may have come to your mind.

Where do we find the Lord Jesus Christ in our text? It seems to be a word from God telling us what to do. The answer to that is Jesus is found in the entirety of chapter 12, because everything we are told to do marks who Jesus is. Jesus is love. Jesus is one who holds fast to what is good. Jesus outdoes everyone in showing honor to others. Jesus is fervent in the Spirit. He rejoices in hope. He was patient in tribulation. He blessed those who persecuted him. Everything we are called to do is to make us more like Jesus. Let's now turn to our text this morning (Romans, chapter 12, verses 17 through 21). Hear now the very Word of God:

*“Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, 'Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.' To the contrary, 'if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*

Thus far the reading of God's Holy Word. Let's pray for his blessing upon it. Dear Lord, we ask that you would use your Word mightily in our lives, that you would remind us that we are yours, and that you would remind us that you have changed us through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ and the application of that work by your Holy Spirit. Lord, help us to hear your commands. Help us to do them that we truly might be more and more like our Savior Jesus. This we ask in Christ's precious name, amen.

This week we come to the end of chapter 12, the end of a section in which we have been looking at in very slow fashion. That is, the marks of a Christian. Last week, we looked at the general principles of the believer who seeks peace in a world filled with persecution. In that, Paul told us persecution in this world is real. Therefore, we must be ready to respond to it.

He told us the way for us to face the reality of this persecution is not through our natural reaction but with a supernatural...that is, a spiritual...reaction. We are not to call down God's curses upon our enemies, but, instead, we are to call upon the Lord to bless them. You recall that we could only do this by remembering the facts of the gospel. That is, first we remember that we were once enemies of God, and we have been forgiven, and those who mistreat us are enslaved to sin. Further, those who mistreat us are in need of salvation.

Now, this morning, we look at what this looks like in practice. Paul tells us that there are two essential elements here to seeking peace. First, *repaying evil with good*. Secondly, *trusting the Lord*. We have to repay evil with good, and we must trust the Lord. There is no way we can respond properly to persecution and difficulties unless we trust the Lord and unless we lay it at his feet. We'll look at these two particular aspects of seeking peace. Let's begin with Paul's injunction to us to...

## **Repay Evil with Good**

*Repay evil with good*. Paul starts again in his typical pattern. You should know it well by now from verse 9 and following that Paul has a pattern. He tells us, first, what not to do. Then, he tells us what to do. He always gives us both of these aspects. He tells us to abhor what is evil but then also to hold fast to what is good. He tells us not to be slothful in zeal, but as its counterpoint, we are to be zealous or fervent in the Spirit. He tells us we are to rejoice in hope and to be patient in tribulation and that we are not to curse those who persecute us, but, rather, we are to bless them.

Paul gives us this pattern of the negative and the positive (what we are not to do and what we are to do). After he gives us the negative, he gives us the positive. This order is important and helpful for us to see. The Bible always meets us where we are. The Bible doesn't come to us expecting that we have improved ourselves to a point where the Bible is useful to us. No. The Bible knows that we come to the Scripture as sinners. The Bible knows this because it is the Lord himself who declares his worth, and he knows that we are sinners. He knows we struggle with sin. He knows that we are a work in progress by his grace.

He starts, then, with the negative (what we are not to do or what we are to stop doing). He then moves to the positive (what we are to actively undertake to do). It's not enough to simply avoid sin. That's just the beginning. We move on from avoiding sin to living a life of godliness. That's exactly what Paul does here in the first half of verse 17. He begins by telling us what not to do. He tells us, "Repay no one evil for evil..."

Paul is being very straightforward here. This is directly in our faces. The reason it is so direct is because we need to understand that our instinctive response (the natural response we have when people hurt us or wrong us) is not what we are called to as Christians. You might think about it this way. If someone punches you in the nose, what is your reaction? You probably don't even have to think about it, but you have made a clenched fist, and you're ready to hit them back.

What if somebody insults you? Your mind is already turning trying to find a comeback that is even more insulting than they have laid upon you. What if someone steals from you? You think or dwell upon ways you can get back at them and not only get back what you have lost but steal something from them so they can know what it feels like to be wronged. This is our instinctive response.

Paul tells us we are not to respond in kind. That's actually what the word *repay* means. It literally means to give back or to return something to someone or to exchange something or to give someone a reward. In a very brief, completely non-nuanced phrase, Paul directly tells you that you cannot do this. It's not hard to understand. It's not filled with all kinds of qualifiers. "Do not repay evil with evil. Do not respond in kind."

You'll also notice there is no exception built into Paul's command. The word for no one here is absolute. It is as wide as possible. It encompasses Jew and Gentile, believer and unbeliever. What Paul is saying is, "It doesn't matter who has wronged you. You are not to repay in kind." In our minds, we might say this command would apply if a Christian wrongs us. Then, I owe it not to repay them, but if a non-Christian wrongs me, all bets are off. That's not what Paul says. Paul is very clear here. It's very direct.

Now, we must also understand, though, what Paul is *not* saying here. Paul is not referring to all justice in the world. The reason why it's so important for us to not take the text further than it goes is because, often, what we do with the Scripture is we take it beyond the meaning of the text to a point that is ridiculous. Then, we say, "This is ridiculous! We can't do this! There's no way this could be true. There's no way anyone can do this."

One thing Paul is *not* saying is that there should be no authority in the world, that there should be no justice, that there should be no government, that there should be no entity that repays evil with the punishment it deserves, because if we took this text to mean that there would be chaos. How could society function if wrongdoers knew there would be no consequences to their actions? Why would you even have an authority if it couldn't be exercised?

Of course, that's not what Paul is saying, because in the very next breath in chapter 13, Paul is going to tell us about the governing authorities' responsibility to give out judgment. He tells us they do not bear the sword in vain. He's painting a picture for us that the authorities don't have a sword so they can mount it up as a display on a wall. No. They take it to execute justice on wrongdoers. That is the authority given to government.

What Paul is referring to here is our personal relationships. He's telling you that in your personal life the way of kindness, the way of goodness, the way of mercy and non-revenge is the way of the Christian, and that will have a great effect on others. We are not to take upon ourselves the execution of justice. We are not to indulge in retaliation, but that does not deny that justice exists or that legitimate authorities can't take justice. Paul is speaking specifically to us in our personal lives.

Now, another thing Paul is *not* describing for us here is he's not talking about a kind of weak, sentimental spirit that passively allows others to hurt you just to take and keep the peace. Sometimes that's what people think. They think our Lord was being weak when he told us to turn the other cheek. They think it was weakness Jesus was displaying before Pilate and before the Sanhedrin when he was acting out this principle of turning the other cheek, but what Paul is talking about here is not a peace-at-any-cost position. It is not passive.

We'll see in a minute that Paul calls us to be active actually and to take positive action. We are not to just sit there and take it. We are to live lives empowered by the Holy Spirit to overcome evil. Now, it is also important to understand this is not something we can ignore. Often, when we come to a hard passage of Scripture, and by that what we often mean is not hard for us to understand but hard for us to obey... When we come to that kind of passage, we try to find an exception for us.

The famous late comedian, W.C. Fields, was known as a man who caroused and drank and gambled. One day shortly before his death, he was out in his garden, and his friend came to see him, and he was very

uncharacteristically flipping through and leafing through his Bible. His friend said to him, "What are you doing?" As he turned the pages, he said, "Looking for loopholes. Looking for loopholes."

That's not how we should come to the sacred text. We don't come trying to find a way to not have this command apply to us. It comes directly to us. It's a command that is throughout the Bible. I've already referred to Jesus' saying in Matthew 6 about turning the other cheek. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5, "See that no one repays anyone evil for evil, but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone."

Peter writes in 1 Peter 3, "Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing." This is the teaching of the whole of Scripture, that we are to do away with our natural response. That is the place where you must begin. You start by doing away with your natural response.

Of course, Paul doesn't stop there. The place to begin is always with keeping away from sin. That is not to be taken lightly. It is no small thing to keep from sin. When you are able to defeat sin in your life, you should rejoice, but you should rejoice not rest. You have not completed your Lord's command for you. God has given you a victory in keeping from sin, but you do not end there. You move on to the positive.

Not only are you not to strike back at someone who wrongs you, but you are to do the opposite. That's what Paul says in the second half of verse 17 on through verse 18. He says, "...but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all." Paul tells you that you are to be deliberate in doing good to those who do evil to you.

This verse has been difficult to understand because some translations are harder to understand. The verb Paul uses here at the end of verse 17 is unusual. For example, the King James Version translates it as *provide things honest*. The New American Standard says *respect what is right*. Now, both of these translations give the impression that you are to sit back and think about the things that other people think are good, but that's not what Paul is saying here.

I think the ESV is very helpful here. It translates it as *give thought to do*. There are actually two elements involved in what Paul is commanding. We are to give thought in advance as to what we are to do. Then, we are to do it. Two elements... This verb, for example, is used in two other places in the Scriptures. In 2 Corinthians, chapter 8, Paul is talking about the relief offering he has taken up from the churches in Europe in Greece for the relief of the church in Jerusalem. He says it has been placed in the hands of Titus, and he is doing all of this openly and transparently. Why?

Why is it so important for Paul to tell us how he's handling the relief fund? He answers that by telling us, "Because we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord's sight but in the sight of man." The word *aim at* is the same word we see here in verse 17. What it means is Paul took forethought even before the offering was taken up as to how it would be handled.

He thought about it in advance so he could act on it so that it would be honest, transparent, and honorable not just before God who knows our hearts and sees all things but before all men. Do you see the distinction here? I think oftentimes we are apt to say, "Well, God knows my heart and my motive. He knows I wasn't trying to make

difficulty. He knows I wasn't attacking." What Paul would say is, "That's fine, but do people know that? Are you doing what is honorable in the sight of all people?"

The other place where this verb is used is in 1 Timothy, chapter 5, where Paul writes that we are to provide for our relatives. Again, the same word (*provide*), and what Paul means there is we are to give forethought for how we are to care for our families. How many of you are giving forethought for what you will have to do when your parents are retired or in need of help? You don't want to wake up one day and have that on your doorstep. You want to give forethought so you can act in the right way. That's what Paul is telling us here.

What we are to do is give thought to doing what is honorable in the sight of all. What does Paul mean by honorable? Well, the word he uses is actually one of two Greek words that mean good. The first word for good in Greek means and has the connotation of moral goodness, inherent goodness, goodness per se. The second word, the word he uses here, has the idea of goodness that is to be seen, goodness that is external.

Now, I don't mean by that a superficial goodness. I mean a goodness that puts itself on display. Another way to translate this word...it will not surprise you...is the word *beautiful* (something that is good and shapely and proportioned and can be seen that way so it is beautiful). What Paul is saying here is that you are to do what is good and by that what is good and seen to be good by everyone around you. You're not to do something that is good that just a few would notice. It should be common to all. Let me give you an illustration of this.

We all have heard stories about a Christian couple that goes out to enjoy a nice meal. The meal was not cheap. It cost some good amount of money. The waitress is with them attending to them, refilling their drinks, and making sure their bread is there and hot and if they need any help or assistance. After the meal is over and they enjoyed it very much, they get the bill, and on the portion of the bill where it says tip, they write, "You should read your Bible," and hand it back to her.

Now, I think we can all say it is good and proper to tell people to read their Bibles. That is something that is good, but that certainly would not be seen as good by the waitress or by anyone else. It would be seen as being rude, cheap, out of the common sense. If you're ever in that situation, your pastor tells you that you can write on a receipt, "You should read your Bible," after you have given a 25 percent tip.

You see, you want to do what everyone around will say, "That's good!" We understand this. It's not a hidden good. It's not a secret good. It's not something you and three other people think is good. It's obvious to all. As a matter of fact, that's the very thing Paul says at the end of this thought. He says, "We are to do this in the sight of all." We might even say, "Before the faces of everyone," or "In the presence of everyone." We are to give thought to do what everyone around us will believe and say is good.

Now, Paul goes on in verse 18 to tell you that you are to live in peace with others. This is another positive command. It is a very strong thought. "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all." Now, this verb (*live peaceably*) is quite simply the verb form of the noun *peace*. You are to be peaceful. Live in peace. Live in such a way that peace surrounds you. That's what Paul is saying. He is telling you to be actively at peace with others, to live in a state of harmony with them, and to be reconciled to them.

Now, there are two important qualifiers to what Paul says. The first is he says, "If possible..." Now, when we hear that, we might think that refers to our ability. If I am able, I'm going to try to live at peace with others. That is, if I can do it. I know it's pretty hard. Then, we start to think about things like, "I'm Italian, and a temper is part of our natural resource, so I'm not sure I can live at peace with everyone because that may not be possible for me," but the truth is that's not what Paul is saying. That's a subjective way of thinking.

If that were true, this command would come differently to all of us in different ways based on our ages, based on our circumstances, based on our temperaments, and there would be thousands of qualifications here. That's not what Paul means. He's not being subjective. He's rather being objective. It doesn't depend on you whether it's possible for you. It's whether it's possible for others. Do you see the distinction? That is objective. The possibility is not on you; it's on others. You are to live at peace with others unless they make it impossible to do so.

Now, I think we all have seen, read, or heard about someone who just makes it impossible to have peace with. They're always picking a quarrel. You can say something like, "The sky is blue," and they'll find a way to pull an argument out of it and to engage you with it. You can't make any statement without it leading to a fight. That may make it not possible for you to be at peace with that person. They won't let you. You make every effort, but they won't let you. There will be no peace because they won't let there be peace.

The second qualifier is that Paul says, "...so far as it depends on you..." That means you are not to be the cause or the initiation of struggle or strife. You are not to resort first to quarreling and violence. You are not to be the initiator. Now, again, this does not mean we are to seek peace at any price compromising all of the time, telling people they're always right whether they are or not, compromising the truth just to keep the peace.

I think the best illustration we all can remember of that from history is Neville Chamberlain returning from Munich holding a piece of paper saying, "I have found peace in our time." Of course, in a span of just a few years, the worst war that had ever been seen on the face of the earth erupted. He hadn't gotten peace. He had simply compromised the truth and let wickedness flourish.

How do we know that's what Paul means here, that he doesn't mean for us to always give in and to always be the ones who compromise? Well, we take this text in the context of James, chapter 3, verse 17. James tells us, "But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable..." The wisdom that comes from God is not peaceable first. It is first pure. We might even say it can't be peaceable unless it is pure and unless it is in accordance with the truth.

Lying does not produce peace. You may have had situations like this in your family. Have you ever had the instance where you just felt like you couldn't tell someone the truth because you thought it would hurt them? You strung them along over and over and over again and you had to keep up an ever growing and elaborate lie not to let them find out the truth. You weren't living peaceably. All you were doing was deceptive. Eventually, the truth comes home, because the truth will come out.

You see, what Paul is telling us here is that we are not to be the ones who initiate conflict. We are not to be the ones who seek conflict, but we don't have to compromise the truth in order to have peace. To be frank, you can't

do that. It's not your truth. It's God's truth, but at the same time, our desire for peace should affect the way in which we deliver the truth.

We should be patient. We should be as helpful as we can possibly be. It should drive us to speak the truth in love and so to promote peace, and it should keep us from making an item of truth a point of our personal interest, a personal matter, a matter of our own reputation, because, again, that is not the truth. That is us seeking to win a conflict with someone else.

## **Trusting the Lord**

We repay evil with good, Paul says. Now, the next thing Paul tells us we are to do is we are to trust the Lord. He starts this in verse 19 by advising us, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God..." Now, it is one thing to say that. It is quite another to do it. Isn't it? How can you possibly live that way? How can you turn the other cheek when you are wronged and you know someone has wronged you? How can you let your own rights go by the wayside and not insist on being justified?

Does that seem impossible to you? Well, that's because it is. It is impossible in your own strength. I can't think of anything harder to do than this. I would rather give up all that I have and go travel to the most remote places of earth to be a missionary than to live out this command. Anything else I could do would be easier than this. It's the hardest thing that comes before us (to bear with evildoers and to be at peace with those who attack us), but the good news of the gospel is that Paul is not talking to you in your own strength.

He makes that clear as he goes on in the next few verses starting with verse 19. Now, I have been emphasizing over and over again that all of these commands come in the context of chapter 12, verses 1 and 2. You may be tired of me telling you this by now, but all of the commands that come are with the knowledge that you are a new creation in Christ, that you are redeemed by the work of the Lord, that you are empowered by the Holy Spirit, and that you are not your own.

That is how you can obey these commands, because you are not your own, and the first hint of this is the way in which Paul addresses the Romans and us. He says, "Beloved..." Now, Paul knows this is hard. It's like he's sitting you down and looking into your eyes and telling you, "I know this is hard." He's concerned about you, he's concerned about the church, and he's willing to go the extra mile for you.

This is like a parent sitting a child down to give hard talk to, and they usually begin by taking their hands and saying, "Honey, there's something you need to know." It's a term of affection Paul is using here, and once again, Paul begins by telling you what you are not to do. He says, "Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God..."

Now, in some sense this is repeat of verse 17. It is similar in that we are not to pay back evil with evil, but I think there is also a difference here. John Calvin suggests what Paul is referring to here is a more serious injury inflicted on the believer that is in mind in verse 17. This is not just an insult and not just a slight, but it is, rather, something that gets the attention of God. It is actually something so much that the reason you don't avenge yourself is because you leave it to God's wrath. It's not a slight insult.

What does it mean then to leave it to the wrath of God? Again, our translation is very helpful here in getting across the idea that Paul has. Literally what Paul says is, "You are to give place to the wrath." Now, some have mistakenly thought what this means is that you are to let your wrath melt away as if what Paul is saying to you is, "When you're angry, you need to take a breath. Count to 10. Let your wrath go out of you. Give place to your wrath." Of course, that doesn't fit with what is going on in this passage especially the positive injunction of how we are to do good for those who hurt us.

Others believe what's going on here is you should say to yourself something like, "Well, I could react, but I won't because I know God is much more powerful than me. He is much more just, so God will really get them. He'll punish them far worse than anything I could ever dream up," but that also denies the spirit of what Paul is saying here.

He's telling you to do good to those who hurt you, to desire their good, their conversion, and their repentance. An attitude that says, "I want them to be hurt even more than I could hurt them," is not in line with that. What it does mean is that I acknowledge that God is in control, that he is just, and that he will reign supreme.

I am not to avenge myself. I am not to seek personal vengeance. I am not to desire the harm of my enemy. I am called, Jesus says, to love my enemy in Matthew, chapter 5. At the same time, I am to be concerned about the glory of God and his righteousness. I am to want God to be vindicated and his glory to be seen, and I think this answers a question that some Christians have about the so-called imprecatory psalms.

There are a half dozen psalms in the Psalter in which the psalmist calls upon the Lord to punish evildoers. At first glance, that seems to be directly contrary to what Paul is saying here so much so that some will use it to undermine the authority of the Scripture. They'll say, "That was an Old Testament God, but now we have a New Testament God who is a god of love," rather than understanding the God of the Old Testament is the God of the New Testament and there is mercy in the Old Testament and there is judgment in the New.

One example of this would be Psalm 5. Psalm 5 is an interesting imprecatory psalm because Paul actually quotes it earlier in the book of Romans so he's very familiar with it. Psalm 5, verses 9 and 10, include, "For there is no truth in their mouth; their inmost self is destruction; their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue. Make them bear their guilt, O God; let them fall by their own counsels; because of the abundance of their transgressions cast them out, for they have rebelled against you."

The principle of leaving vengeance to God here helps us. What those psalms are talking about are not personal vengeance but justice, vindication of God's rule and his right. It is a call for God to put things right. Of course, the believer will get a benefit from God setting things right and from having injustice put down and from having wickedness put in its place, but that is secondary. You see, from our perspective it is primary, but ultimately, that's an, "Oh, by the way..." The important thing is God is vindicated in his sovereignty, in his character, and in his actions. That's what is being called for there. That is what is foremost. We leave vengeance to God.

Secondly, when we trust God we leave a testimony for good. Once again, we see Paul's method. He has told us what we must not do. We are not to take vengeance. Now, he moves on to what we must do, and he makes this

point emphatically. He says, "On the contrary, you are to do this." Now, it is very important for us to understand our positive duties.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones puts it so well when he says, "This is the glory of the Christian position. The Christian is not just a negative sort of person. It is a complete travesty of the gospel to suggest that the Christian is merely someone who does not do certain things." No. What we are to do is so much more than to avoid seeking vengeance. We are to positively do good to those who wrong us.

Paul is very practical here. He gives us illustrations, but it is not intended to be an exhaustive list. He says, "...if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink..." Paul is being very practical with us telling us how to treat our enemies. Now, Paul knows we are bound to ask, "How do I do that, Paul? How do you expect me to feed my enemy? How do you expect me to give him something to drink when he's thirsty? How far do I have to go, Paul?" so Paul gives us the answer here at the end of verse 20.

"...for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." Paul is very wise here. It's not just Paul telling us this; it's God telling us. As so often is the case in this letter to the Romans, Paul puts an exclamation point on his point by quoting the Scripture. He gives you his reasonable, rational argument based on truth. Then, he says, "As the Scripture says..." That's what he's doing here. He's quoting Proverbs 5, verse 21, and he uses that to destroy any thoughts we would have of trying to hurt our enemy or even desiring an increase of their punishment.

Do you think in this way? Do you think about those who oppose you and hurt you? Do you desire their good? Do you actively work to bless them? This is very hard. It is unnatural, but when you do it is when you are most like Jesus. That's exactly what Jesus did. That's exactly what Jesus did with Paul rescuing him from sin and from deception and making him his own. It's what Jesus has done with you looking past your rebellion and your attacks and seeking your good making you his child by the power of his grace.

Now, the last point here in verse 20 is difficult and even causes some to change the intent of Paul's meaning here. What does it mean to heap burning coals on someone? Now, some have argued by so doing to others what you do is when they do not repent it brings down on them an even greater punishment than they would have had. In other words, you're nice to them so they'll get an extra bonus of punishment for not responding.

The idea would then be that we do good in order to increase the pain and punishment of those who harm us, but this is, again, contrary to the main message of the passage and even the conclusion we see in verse 21. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." Vengeance is never the reason for showing kindness. Our acts of mercy are not so that evil will be punished but, rather, so evil may be overcome.

What Paul is referring to here is the burning sense of shame that comes upon your enemy knowing that you have responded to his evil with good. What we hope is that the shame and the remorse they experience will lead to repentance. Paul tells us elsewhere that godly sorrow produces repentance, but we must also realize this is not always the case.

We are to obey God's commands because they come from God not because we think a certain result will come about and not because we believe God's commands are always effective in the way we want them to be. No. Rather, because it is God who commands and we love him and we serve him. One response of your enemy may be increased bitterness and rebellion. It's not up to you to determine the consequences.

Let me tell you the story of two Japanese men. One man was named Mitsuo Fuchida. He led the strikes on Pearl Harbor. He was a Japanese officer. He was a thoroughgoing unbeliever. After the war, he had just assumed during the entirety of the war that prisoner of war camps the Americans ran were exactly like prisoner of war camps the Japanese ran, that Americans abused and mistreated Japanese prisoners.

One day, he had an opportunity to speak to a former prisoner who said, "No, actually that's not the case. Actually, in our camp there was a young woman, a nurse, who was very kind to us and treated us well and tried everything she could to make our lives easier in these circumstances." The person told him, "The thing you find incredible is her parents were Christian missionaries who were killed by the Japanese, so we have no understanding of why she felt the need to be good and kind to us, the people who had killed her parents."

This, of course, struck Mitsuo greatly. He began to look into the Scriptures and read the Scriptures. He was eventually converted and became a Christian and set up an evangelistic mission. He was converted by coals being placed on his head. Let me tell you about another Japanese man. His name was Mutsuhiro Watanabe. If you've seen the film or read the book, *Unbroken*, you may know of this figure. He is the famous torturer and persecutor in the camp that Louis Zamperini was in. He delighted in torturing and persecuting Americans and doing all sorts of cruel things to cause them pain.

You may also know from the story *Unbroken* that Zamperini came to know the Lord through a Billy Graham crusade. He became a Christian, and of the many things he did he reached out to his former tormenter. He wanted to share the gospel with him. He wanted to heap burning coals upon him. He wanted to see repentance. He wanted to follow the injunction of Romans 12.

What you may not know is that Watanabe would have nothing to do with it. He refused to speak to Zamperini. He refused to hear the gospel, and he died in his sins. Two men treated in very much the same way in accordance with Romans 12. The point is we follow the commands of God because it is God who speaks not because we expect certain results. Zamperini was not a failure for his actions. There was no failure there. God was glorified in his justice, but at the same time, we must understand things do not always work out the way we want them to.

In conclusion, the last verse of our text gives us a great focus here. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." When we first look at this verse, we tend to think about the external evil that is out there, that we don't want to be overcome by our enemies, but rather we are to overcome them. Our focus is on defeating our enemies, but I think what Paul is really telling us is that the most important enemy we have is sin. The cruelest and most dangerous enemy in your life is sin. What Paul is telling you is not to be overcome by evil, not to give in to sin, not to think like the world, but instead to think and to act like Jesus to overcome the evil of sin with the good of grace. Let's pray.