

Romans 12 – 14 -21 How to live alongside the World

“14. Bless those who persecute you ; bless them don't curse them.
15. Celebrate with those celebrating , mourn with the mourners .16
Come to the same mind with one another. Don't give yourself airs , but
associate with the humble. Don't get too clever for yourselves.
17. Never repay anyone evil for evil; think through what will seem good
to everyone who is watching. 18. If its possible as far as you can , live at
peace with all people. 19. Don't take revenge, my dear people , but
allow God's anger room to work. The bible says , after all , “Vengeance
is mine ; I will repay says the Lord’. 20. No, if your enemy is hungry, feed
him, if he is thirsty , give him a drink . If you do this you will pile up
burning coals on his head.21. Don't let evil conquer you. Rather
conquer evil with good.”

The context of our living

Its good to remember where in the letter this passage appears. It is found alongside the passage in Romans 13 - where Paul takes a strong line on the governing authorities **doing their work**. They, unlike the general populace, don't act as individuals.

Romans 12 :14 -21 is about individuals –its about you and me.

Revenge? As a friend said when I mentioned the topic “perhaps you should head it “Revenge – who is in your sights?” And having people in our sights is the problem.

And the truth is this is a burden you and I do not want to carry.

Dealing with those who hurt us

- Clearly, “revenge” is “out”. We have to find a new and surprising way to deal with those who hurt us.
- Firstly , let’s be very clear about something – Christians are not “soft on evil”. We believe that God created a World which was good and we believe that everything that distorts , damages and spoils or destroys, is not just some variety of goodness – it is it’s opposite - evil. Evil is real , it does hurt and it does damage people and this world.
- How then should we tackle this? Well, the answer starts with us looking to see what God has done about it.

What did God do about evil?

- Romans 5: 6 -11 tells us that when evil had reached its height God came and took its full weight upon himself – opening up a new way for the creation of a renewed humanity – and a new to be restored World.
- While we were still sinners Christ came and died for us. Romans tells us this
- Revenge keeps evil in circulation. It's culture which is never- ending. It affects individuals, families, groups, countries and nations. Its not dissimilar in some ways to a virus – its easily transmitted and affects wide groups of people – if not isolated and stopped.
- But its *very* clear from the passage that God will deal with this whole issue but – in his own time and in his own way.

How should we then live without revenge ?

- Usually the first question that people ask is – how can I forgive some one who isn't sorry?
- Clearly, if someone isn't sorry – there cannot be a full reconciliation.
- But regardless – its clear we are being called to go out of our way to do positive, uncalled for acts of kindness towards those who have wronged us.
- It *may* lead to them being moved to reconcile- it *may* not
- But if we do this we are clearly taking responsibility for our own emotional and mental health
- And we are not letting our future lives become bitter through their actions
- **It seems** that this is what Paul is referring to when he talks about “not letting evil conquer” us?

The contrasting lifestyle – which opens doors

- This passage is about life outside the church – as opposed to the preceding passage which deals with the life in the church.
- It's clear that Christians are intended to have a positive effect on society – when people are in need, as in the present crisis – we can bless them by just being good neighbours.
- The World is full of people complaining about everything- and usually not doing much about the issues they complain about. We must not be the people who curse others – on the contrary. Just the opposite.
- Think about it. What doors will our behaviour open for sharing the Gospel?
- The Roman world was struck by the sharing and love of the church. Is there anything different we should do today?