

**Romans (81)**  
**Practical Words of Exhortation (Part 7)**

Today we will complete our study of Romans 12, Lord willing. We are addressing clearly stated, practical applications of our faith to our lives. We left off with Romans 12:16 in which we read the next of the 17 commandments before us.

#10-#12. ***“Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight.”*** (Rom. 12:16)

There are three commands linked together. We touched on the first two last week. The third reads, ***“Never be wise in your own sight.”*** This goes hand-in-hand with the previous command, ***“Do not be haughty.”*** We foolishly think that if good comes to us, it is because we deserved it, for we earned it. “By my own wit and brawn I am a self-made man.” The king of Assyria thought that he was the cause of his own success. But it was God that had used the King of Assyria as His rod of judgment upon Israel. But the king of Assyria, although an instrument of God in His sovereign dealings in history, had no understanding he was but an instrument of God. He boasted in his achievements as though it had been through his own wisdom and might that he had successfully conquered the nations that had become subservient to him. God, therefore, pronounced His judgment upon the king of Assyria for His arrogance and His cruelty. This is set before us in **Isaiah 10:5-11**.

<sup>5</sup>“Woe to Assyria, the rod of My anger  
And the staff in whose hand is My indignation.  
<sup>6</sup>I will send him against an ungodly nation,  
And against the people of My wrath  
I will give him charge,  
To seize the spoil, to take the prey,  
And to tread them down like the mire of the streets.  
<sup>7</sup>Yet he does not mean so,  
Nor does his heart think so;  
But it is in his heart to destroy,  
And cut off not a few nations.  
<sup>8</sup>For he says,  
‘Are not my princes altogether kings?  
<sup>9</sup>Is not Calno like Carchemish?  
Is not Hamath like Arpad?  
Is not Samaria like Damascus?  
<sup>10</sup>As my hand has found the kingdoms of the idols,  
Whose carved images excelled those of Jerusalem and Samaria,  
<sup>11</sup>As I have done to Samaria and her idols,  
Shall I not do also to Jerusalem and her idols?’”

After God completed His use of the king of Assyria, he then punished him for his pride. We read further in Isaiah 10.

<sup>12</sup>Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Lord has performed all His work on Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, that He will say, “I will punish the fruit of the arrogant heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his haughty looks.” <sup>13</sup>For he says:

“By the strength of my hand I have done it,  
 And by my wisdom, for I am prudent;  
 Also I have removed the boundaries of the people,  
 And have robbed their treasuries;  
 So I have put down the inhabitants like a valiant man.  
<sup>14</sup>My hand has found like a nest the riches of the people,  
 And as one gathers eggs that are left,  
 I have gathered all the earth;  
 And there was no one who moved his wing,  
 Nor opened his mouth with even a peep.”  
<sup>15</sup>Shall the ax boast itself against him who chops with it?  
 Or shall the saw exalt itself against him who saws with it?  
 As if a rod could wield itself against those who lift it up,  
 Or as if a staff could lift up, as if it were not wood!  
<sup>16</sup>Therefore the Lord, the Lord of hosts,  
 Will send leanness among his fat ones;  
 And under his glory  
 He will kindle a burning  
 Like the burning of a fire.

We should be as the apostle Paul in that we ought to give all glory to God for any good within us or any good that we perform. Paul could write of himself,

<sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. (1 Cor. 15:9f)

We are told, “***Never be wise in your own sight.***” This occurs when we credit ourselves with who we are or what we have attained in life rather than giving glory to God. The wise man told his son, “Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil” (Prov. 3:7).

This principle should be recalled when we reflect upon our opinions and perspectives of ourselves as Christians in relation to the world. As Christians we are all grieved as we see a fallen world living in disregard and defiance of the God we serve and love. But if we are not mindful of ourselves, we can become self-righteous, viewing ourselves as inherently better or more righteous than they because of something from us. The result is that become “wise in our own sight.” This is true of us when we do not have compassion or pity on others outside of Christ who are living in their sin. We can easily feel justified as we look down at them. We slip into falsely thinking that we have merit in and of ourselves, for we are not like they are, we do not do what they do. But if we were thinking rightly we would be broken hearted regarding their condition, desiring their redemption, and we would be filled with a great sense of humility and indebtedness to the grace of God for our God having distinguishing us by His grace, having purposed to save us from our sins.

Let us turn back to Romans 11 to remind us of what Paul had wrote to the Gentiles Christians about their opinion and attitude toward the Jewish people who had refused to believe on Jesus Christ as their Messiah. In **Romans 11:25** Paul wrote, “***Lest you be wise in your own sight,*** I want you to understand this mystery, brothers: a partial hardening has come upon Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles has come in.” He went on to explain that it was wholly due to God’s grace that He had mercy on Gentiles and He had withheld His grace from the Jews for a time.

We are also to have this attitude as Christians toward other Christians within the church. It is wrong for us to be ***wise in our sight*** with respect to one another. We can become conceited and think ourselves above others. There can be a false pride based on one’s gifts that God has given, when we wrongly assume that what is a gift of God is something inherent in us or due to us. At Corinth there was this kind of problem

in the body. The believers were divided as to the leaders they had elevated in their estimation to an unhealthy degree. One of the ways in which the apostle sought to correct them Paul was to show that it was the Lord that had called and gifted these leaders, that there was nothing inherent in them apart from the grace that God had given to them that should result in Christians looking up to them in the unhealthy manner that characterized the people in the church. Paul made this statement to them:

<sup>6</sup>I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, ***that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.*** <sup>7</sup>For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? (1 Cor. 4:6f)

That we are susceptible of becoming wise in our own sight is also suggested in 1 Corinthians 12. Here again Paul speaks of the tendency that we may have of unduly exalting some in the church because of the gifts that God has given them to serve in the body. Actually, two kinds of error may surface. There are those who may become puffed up in that they think they are a few steps higher than others, and then there are those who may feel themselves lower than others because they do not perceive they have the more demonstrable gifts as some others in the church. Paul wrote of the need and value of every member in the church. But again, it was because of the tendency of some to think themselves “wise in their own sight.” 1 Corinthians 12: read:

<sup>14</sup>For the body does not consist of one member but of many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? <sup>18</sup>But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. <sup>19</sup>If all were a single member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

<sup>21</sup>***The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”*** <sup>22</sup>On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, <sup>23</sup>and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, <sup>24</sup>which our more presentable parts do not require. ***But God has so composed the body,*** giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, <sup>25</sup>that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup>If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. (1 Cor. 12:14-26)

Again, the point is this, that all we are and all we do is because of the grace of God distributed to us by our sovereign God. There is no basis for you, the Christian, ever, ever, to become “***wise in your own sight.***”

Now Romans 12:9-16 have addressed us primarily (but not exclusively) on relationships between believers.<sup>1</sup> But with verses 17 through 21 the Holy Spirit instructs us believers in the kind of responses that we should give to unbelievers who persecute us. These commands instruct us on how to relate to non-Christians with whom we are having conflict. The major principle put forward is that we are not to treat them as they have treated us, that we are to overcome them doing evil to us by we doing good to them. Here we read,

<sup>17</sup>Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup>If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup>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.” <sup>20</sup>To the contrary, “if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Schreiner, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1998), p. 671.

doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:17-21)

It has been pointed out there is a pattern in the statements of **verses 17-19a**. There are parallels in the ideas that are conveyed. It may be illustrated this way:

- A Pay back no one evil for evil
- B Thinking beforehand what is good
- C in the sight of all people.
- D If it is possible so far as it depends on you
- C' with all people
- B' be at peace.
- A' Do not avenge yourselves.<sup>2</sup>

This parallel structure is called a chiasmus, or when it is seen over a larger context, it is called chiasmic structure. Here is another example of chiasmus in **Isaiah 6:10**:

- A “Make the *heart* of this people fat,
- B and make their *ears* heavy,
- C and shut their *eyes*;
- C' lest they see with their *eyes*,
- B' and hear with their *ears*,
- A' and understand with their *heart*, and return, and be healed.”

The use of **chiasmata** (plural) was common in ancient literature, in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. It was both a rhetorical (speaking) device as well as a literary device to show structure, to develop an argument, and subtly to persuade hearers or readers of the assertion.

Whereas verses 16-19a focus on what we are **not** to do, **verses 19b -21** tell us **what we are to do**:

<sup>19</sup>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.” <sup>20</sup>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.” <sup>21</sup>Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. (Rom. 12:17-21)

The reason that we are commanded and that we are able to keep this commandment is due to our faith in God that He will render justice against sin. God’s wrath is the manifestation of His holy nature against sin. We may trust God that He will deal faithfully with us regarding those who have wronged us in that they had broken His laws.

The reference to God’s wrath and leaving room for it is extremely important in interpreting this text. When we believers are mistreated, abused, and our rights are infringed upon, the desire for retaliation burns within us because we been treated unjustly. We are not to give in, however, to the desire to get even. Rather, we are to place the fate of our enemies firmly in God’s hands, realizing that He will repay any injustice on the last day.<sup>3</sup>

With this in mind we may read the next commandment.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 673.

#13. *“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.’”* (Rom. 12:19)

God created us with an innate sense of justice, which seems to surface in our thinking when we observe the actions of others in the world. This sense of justice is particularly keen, however, when someone does something unjust toward us. It is our sense of justice that produces in us the thought that we are warranted to retaliate, to “pay back” the one who wronged us in the same manner and at least in the same degree that he has wronged us. But here we read, *“Beloved, never avenge yourselves.”*

Rather than seek to retaliate toward the one who wrongs us, we are to *“leave it to the wrath of God.”* In other words, we are to trust God that He will execute His righteous judgment against all sin in His own time and in His own way. We can patiently wait on Him who sees all things rightly and who executes His judgment in an equitable manner.<sup>4</sup>

King David lived according to this principle. He refused to avenge himself on King Saul after he had sought repeatedly to slay David. We read of this in **1 Samuel 24**.

Now it happened, when Saul had returned from following the Philistines, that it was told him, saying, “Take note! David is in the Wilderness of En Gedi.”<sup>2</sup> Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel, and went to seek David and his men on the Rocks of the Wild Goats.<sup>3</sup> So he came to the sheepfolds by the road, where there was a cave; and Saul went in to attend to his needs. (David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave.)<sup>4</sup> Then the men of David said to him, “This is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand, that you may do to him as it seems good to you.’” And David arose and secretly cut off a corner of Saul’s robe.<sup>5</sup> Now it happened afterward that David’s heart troubled him because he had cut Saul’s robe.<sup>6</sup> And he said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.”<sup>7</sup> So David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul. And Saul got up from the cave and went on his way.

<sup>8</sup>David also arose afterward, went out of the cave, and called out to Saul, saying, “My lord the king!” And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed down.<sup>9</sup> And David said to Saul: “Why do you listen to the words of men who say, ‘Indeed David seeks your harm’? <sup>10</sup>Look, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD delivered you today into my hand in the cave, and someone urged me to kill you. But my eye spared you, and I said, ‘I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD’s anointed.’ <sup>11</sup>Moreover, my father, see! Yes, see the corner of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you, know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hand, and I have not sinned against you. Yet you hunt my life to take it. <sup>12</sup>***Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you.*** <sup>13</sup>As the proverb of the ancients says, ‘Wickedness proceeds from the wicked.’ But my hand shall not be against you. <sup>14</sup>After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea? <sup>15</sup>Therefore let the LORD be judge, and judge between you and me, and see and plead my case, and deliver me out of your hand.”

<sup>16</sup>So it was, when David had finished speaking these words to Saul, that Saul said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” And Saul lifted up his voice and wept. <sup>17</sup>Then he said to David: “You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil. <sup>18</sup>And you have shown this day how you have dealt well with me; for when the LORD delivered me into your hand, you did not kill me. <sup>19</sup>For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him get away safely? Therefore may the LORD reward you with good for what you have done to me this day. <sup>20</sup>And now I know indeed that you shall surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in your hand. <sup>21</sup>Therefore swear now to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me, and that you will not destroy my name from my father’s house.”

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<sup>4</sup> Paul will show in Romans 13 that God has appointed civil government to execute justice to lawbreakers.

<sup>22</sup>So David swore to Saul. And Saul went home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Paul provides a Scripture verse to substantiate the truth that God will execute justice. We read in verse 19, “*for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’*” This is a quotation of **Deuteronomy 32:35**. It is from the Song of Moses, in which the ways of God in dealing with His people is celebrated. Within the context of this chapter, God is executing His judgment upon His people, Israel.

<sup>28</sup>“For they are a nation void of counsel,  
Nor is there any understanding in them.  
<sup>29</sup>Oh, that they were wise, that they understood this,  
That they would consider their latter end!  
<sup>30</sup>How could one chase a thousand,  
And two put ten thousand to flight,  
Unless their Rock had sold them,  
And the LORD had surrendered them?  
<sup>31</sup>For their rock is not like our Rock,  
Even our enemies themselves being judges.  
<sup>32</sup>For their vine is of the vine of Sodom  
And of the fields of Gomorrah;  
Their grapes are grapes of gall,  
Their clusters are bitter.  
<sup>33</sup>Their wine is the poison of serpents,  
And the cruel venom of cobras.  
<sup>34</sup>Is this not laid up in store with Me,  
Sealed up among My treasures?  
<sup>35</sup>*Vengeance is Mine, and recompense;*  
Their foot shall slip in due time;<sup>5</sup>  
For the day of their calamity is at hand,  
And the things to come hasten upon them.’  
<sup>36</sup>“For the LORD will judge His people  
And have compassion on His servants,  
When He sees that their power is gone,  
And there is no one remaining, bond or free.  
<sup>37</sup>He will say: ‘Where are their gods,  
The rock in which they sought refuge?  
<sup>38</sup>Who ate the fat of their sacrifices,  
And drank the wine of their drink offering?  
Let them rise and help you,  
And be your refuge.  
<sup>39</sup>Now see that I, even I, am He,  
And there is no God besides Me;  
I kill and I make alive;  
I wound and I heal;  
Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.  
<sup>40</sup>For I raise My hand to heaven,  
And say, “As I live forever,  
<sup>41</sup>If I whet My glittering sword,  
And My hand takes hold on judgment,  
I will render vengeance to My enemies,  
And repay those who hate Me.

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<sup>5</sup> This is the verse on which Jonathan Edwards based his famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of Angry God.”

<sup>42</sup>I will make My arrows drunk with blood,  
And My sword shall devour flesh,  
With the blood of the slain and the captives,  
From the heads of the leaders of the enemy.”

God is faithful to execute justice in the earth. And the wrong that people do in this life appears to be done with impunity by the one who does not believe in the faithfulness and holiness of God. But we who believe in the holy character and the veracity of His Word, know that people who sin will both give an account and receive punishment in this life, or they will answer to God on the Day of Judgment and through the punishment that flows from that judgment.

In contrast to never avenging himself, we next read how the Christian is to respond to his “enemy”, the one who treats him unjustly.

#14. ***“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.”*** (Rom. 12:20)

There are several common interpretations of the expression, “for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.” (1) It symbolizes a form of self-inflicted torment on the part of the one having done evil. (2) It is a deed of kindness in bringing someone live coals for their fire from which they may derive warmth and comfort. (3) It is an expression of sorrow for having sinned against the Christian. (4) It is a way to make the enemy ashamed of himself.<sup>6</sup> When you do good to him who has done evil to you, he will be smitten with guilt over his injustice rendered to you. Probably the 4<sup>th</sup> explanation is best, perhaps (but it would also encompass #2). The point is this, if you retaliate with evil to the one that has rendered you evil, then evil has won the battle. But if you respond by doing good, then good has won the day.

We have an Old Testament illustration of this principle being applied. We read in 1 Kings of the account in which the prophet Elisha gave instruction to Israel to deal with its enemy, Syria.

<sup>8</sup>Now the king of Syria was making war against Israel; and he consulted with his servants, saying, “My camp will be in such and such a place.” <sup>9</sup>And the man of God sent to the king of Israel, saying, “Beware that you do not pass this place, for the Syrians are coming down there.” <sup>10</sup>Then the king of Israel sent someone to the place of which the man of God had told him. Thus he warned him, and he was watchful there, not just once or twice.

<sup>11</sup>Therefore the heart of the king of Syria was greatly troubled by this thing; and he called his servants and said to them, “Will you not show me which of us is for the king of Israel?”

<sup>12</sup>And one of his servants said, “None, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the words that you speak in your bedroom.”

<sup>13</sup>So he said, “Go and see where he is, that I may send and get him.”

And it was told him, saying, “Surely he is in Dothan.”

<sup>14</sup>Therefore he sent horses and chariots and a great army there, and they came by night and surrounded the city. <sup>15</sup>And when the servant of the man of God arose early and went out, there was an army, surrounding the city with horses and chariots. And his servant said to him, “Alas, my master! What shall we do?”

<sup>16</sup>So he answered, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.”

<sup>17</sup>And Elisha prayed, and said, “LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see.” Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. <sup>18</sup>So when the Syrians came down to him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, and said, “Strike this people, I pray, with blindness.” And He struck them with blindness according to the word of Elisha.

<sup>19</sup>Now Elisha said to them, “This is not the way, nor is this the city. Follow me, and I will bring you to the man whom you seek.” But he led them to Samaria.

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<sup>6</sup> William Hendriksen, *Romans* (Baker Academic, 1981), p. 423.

<sup>20</sup>So it was, when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, “LORD, open the eyes of these men, that they may see.” And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw; and there they were, inside Samaria!

<sup>21</sup>Now when the king of Israel saw them, he said to Elisha, “My father, shall I kill them? Shall I kill them?”

<sup>22</sup>But he answered, “You shall not kill them. Would you kill those whom you have taken captive with your sword and your bow? *Set food and water before them, that they may eat and drink and go to their master.*” <sup>23</sup>*Then he prepared a great feast for them; and after they ate and drank, he sent them away and they went to their master.* So the bands of Syrian raiders came no more into the land of Israel.

Now those who retaliate against others who have wronged them often cite the biblical text, “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.” Our Lord Himself corrected this false idea of people feeling justified in retaliating against someone who has wronged them. We read in **Matthew 5:38-42**:

<sup>38</sup>“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ <sup>39</sup>But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. <sup>40</sup>And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. <sup>41</sup>And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. <sup>42</sup>Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

At first glance someone might falsely assume our Lord was changing or correcting the Law of God recorded in the Old Testament. For we read that the Scriptures declare this truth, “An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.” We may read these words in several places. For example, we read in the book of Exodus:

<sup>20</sup>“And if a man beats his male or female servant with a rod, so that he dies under his hand, he shall surely be punished. <sup>21</sup>Notwithstanding, if he remains alive a day or two, he shall not be punished; for he is his property. <sup>22</sup>If men fight, and hurt a woman with child, so that she gives birth prematurely, yet no harm follows, he shall surely be punished accordingly as the woman’s husband imposes on him; and he shall pay as the judges determine. <sup>23</sup>But if any harm follows, then you shall give life for life, <sup>24</sup>*eye for eye, tooth for tooth*, hand for hand, foot for foot, <sup>25</sup>burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe. (Exod. 21:20-24).

In each of the instances where this language is used in Scripture, the context is the setting forth of a principle by which society was to administer justice. Apparently these words were never taken literally, but they were understood to state the principle that “the punishment should fit the crime.” Government should administer just punishment according to the offense, “an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth.”

However, the Jews had corrupted this principle of justice. Rather than seeing these words as a guide for the execution of justice by society, individuals viewed these words as legitimizing exacting personal vengeance when wronged by another individual. They saw it as God’s permission for us to get even with our enemy, someone who has wronged you. Of course this idea continues to permeate the Middle East mindset in which people view blood vendettas as legitimate. Consequently one act of injustice warrants a retaliatory response. Our Lord Jesus was telling His disciples that they were not to live this way. Jesus said,

“But I say to you, do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.”

Our Lord tells us that as individuals, we should not seek retaliation when someone insults us or harms us. We are not to become upset and angry when someone attempts to take advantage of us. We are to be passive and compliant, seeking to overcome evil by doing good.

Now this is how we as individuals are to act and react in our daily lives. These are not instructions to *nations*, but to individuals. Some pacifists take passages like this and attempt to apply these principles to national policies in their dealings between nations. That nations should not retaliate when attacked by

another nation. But this is not a legitimate application of this principle. Nations have the responsibility to “bear the sword” when necessary to defend and protect its citizens.<sup>7</sup> These are instructions for us as individuals in responding to difficult people in difficult situations. Nor do our Lord’s words forbid *defending someone else* who is being abused by someone. Where we may have the responsibility to be passive if abuse is personally experienced, it may be appropriate, even righteous to aggressively and physically come to the defense of another who is being abused by somebody. We are to protect and defend the helpless.

And I might add this, our Lord is telling us that we should be willing to be insulted, but he is not telling us that we are to be passive to the point of not defending ourselves from physical harm. When Jesus said, “*But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also*”, He was not forbidding self-defense. The “slap” to which He was referring was a slap of insult, not one of violence to do harm. We have the authority to defend others with force and to defend ourselves with force. When our Lord would soon leave His disciples He gave them instructions in **Luke 22:35-38**.

<sup>35</sup>And He said to them, “When I sent you without money bag, sack, and sandals, did you lack anything?”

So they said, “Nothing.”

<sup>36</sup>Then He said to them, “But now, he who has a money bag, let him take it, and likewise a sack; and *he who has no sword, let him sell his garment and buy one*. <sup>37</sup>For I say to you that this which is written must still be accomplished in Me: ‘And He was numbered with the transgressors.’ For the things concerning Me have an end.”

<sup>38</sup>Then they said, “*Lord, look, here are two swords.*” And He said to them, “It is enough.”

Two swords would be sufficient for their self-defense against highwaymen in their travels and service for the Gospel.<sup>8</sup>

The apostle Paul concludes this section of commandments to the church at Rome with the command:

#15 “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*” (Rom. 12:21).

We are to do good to others even when they do bad things toward us. We are to respond to cursing us with blessing them, desiring and praying for God’s mercy for them and for our reconciliation with them. May our Lord give us grace to remember these things on those occasions when we are insulted and treated with disregard. And may we have the heart of our Lord who asked His Father even while dying upon His cross, “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do.” (Luke 23:34).

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“Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery kept secret since the world began but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures made known to all nations, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, for obedience to the faith-- to God, alone wise, *be* glory through Jesus Christ forever. Amen.” (Rom 16:25)

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<sup>7</sup> Cf. Romans 13:4.

<sup>8</sup> If our Lord’s earthly ministry was taking place among us today, and because we are living in a violent and lawless society, I have no problem thinking that He would encourage us to buy a gun to defend ourselves and our families. It would be the same instruction that He had told His disciples on this occasion.