

Road Trip Devotion - Romans 12:19-21

by Jake Christian, Adult Ministries Pastor

"Dear friends, never take revenge. Leave that to the righteous anger of God. For the Scriptures say, 'I will take revenge; I will pay them back,' says the Lord.

Instead, 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals of shame on their heads.

Don't let evil conquer you, but conquer evil by doing good." (Romans 12:19-21; NLT)

In the latter part of Romans, Paul spends a lot of time giving specific advice for how followers of Jesus should live and interact with the people around them. And here he gives difficult instructions: Do not take revenge on others. Recognize that it is not our place to punish those who have wronged us - if punishment is necessary, we are told, God will handle it.

But Paul goes even further. Not only are we not to take revenge on others; we are supposed to be *nice* to them! We're supposed to go out of our way to help them and provide for their needs. And why do we do so? To "heap burning coals of shame on their heads." Of course, this sounds a bit like a form of revenge, doesn't it? Nobody wants burning coals heaped on their head - even metaphorical burning coals! And so it is quite possible for me to do exactly what Paul suggests, and still do it for the wrong reasons. I can help the person who wronged me, and be thinking, "I'll show them. I'll make them feel so bad for what they did to me. That'll teach them!" And I would *still* be in the wrong.

Paul's point here is that we are called to overcome, to conquer, evil. And we don't do so by doing evil to others - by responding in kind to what they may have done to us. When we give in and try to take revenge, get even, or put someone in their place, evil has conquered us. Satan wins. And *nobody* benefits from our actions.

But when we choose to do good to others - *even those who have wronged us* - then we conquer evil with good. We demonstrate by our actions that there is a power greater than sin and evil - that good truly is more powerful than evil. And doing good involves acting out of genuine concern for another person - we don't do good when we help out of a desire to hurt or wound. And maybe - just maybe - by doing good to those who have wronged us, we may just show them a better way, and encourage real change in their lives. We can be sure that no change occurs when we respond to evil with evil.

This call to respond to evil with good - *all the time* - is one of the most difficult parts of being a follower of Jesus. It is also one of the most important and rewarding, because it opens up for the possibility of growth and reconciliation, both in ourselves and others. And our model is God himself - who chose to do good to all people by sending his son despite our continual rebellion towards him. Paul says elsewhere in Romans that God continues to be faithful to his people even when we turn from him through our sin. And if God is willing to be faithful to us - to continue to forgive and do good towards us - then how can we expect to do any less to our fellow human beings?