



GOD'S VISION FOR A NEW HUMANITY | A CHANGED RELATIONSHIP TO OUR ENEMIES (33)

May 10, 2026

Romans 12:17-21

PURPOSE

To discover and experience Jesus Christ in our midst
To cultivate mutually encouraging relationships
To participate in God's mission to the world

GETTING TO KNOW EACH OTHER

Discussion Question

- What is a petty hill you would absolutely die on?

WORSHIP 10 MIN

PLEASE OPEN IN PRAYER

RESPONSIVE PRAYER — Psalm 35

LORD, you have seen this; do not be silent.

Do not be far from me, LORD.

Awake, and rise to my defense!

Contend for me, my God and LORD.

Vindicate me in your righteousness, LORD my God;

Do not let them gloat over me.

Do not let them think, "Aha, just what we wanted!"

Or say, "We have swallowed him up."

May those who delight in my vindication

Shout for joy and gladness;

May they always say, "The LORD be exalted,

Who delights in the well-being of his servant."

My tongue will proclaim your righteousness,

Your praises all day long.

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 12:17-21

¹⁷Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.

¹⁸If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰To 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." ²¹Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

BIBLE STUDY 40 MIN

Summary

We are continuing our sermon series entitled *God's Vision for a New Humanity* throughout which we are studying the latter part of the book of Romans. When we are moved by the mercies of God, and when our minds have been renewed to grasp his will, all our relationships become transformed. Having established love as the governing principle of

Christian life together (vv. 9-16), Paul now turns to its most demanding application: the posture believers are to hold toward their enemies. Four negative commands structure the passage, if we add verse 14 which anticipated it: do not curse (verse 14), do not repay evil for evil (verse 17), do not take revenge (verse 19), do not be overcome by evil (verse 21). Because the Christian ethic is never merely prohibitive, and the Christian life is not defined by what it *refuses* but by what it actively *pursues*, each of the negative commands is paired with a positive counterpart. The cumulative weight of these four couplets, then, can essentially be boiled down to the fact that retaliation, in any form, has no place in the community shaped by the mercies of God.

The positive commands deliberately draw on the Old Testament. The prohibition of personal vengeance in verse 19 quotes Deuteronomy 32:35 and situates the Christian's restraint in a theologically grounded deference to divine justice rather than a simple passivity or moral indifference. God is not absent from the moral order but is its guarantor. The exhortation to feed and give drink to one's enemy in verse 20 follows Proverbs 25:21-22a almost verbatim. The reference works on multiple levels. First, it echoes Jesus' own teaching on love for enemies (Matthew 5:43-44; Luke 6:27-35). Second, feeding and giving water to our enemy is similar to the actions Jesus recommended as expressions of this love: turning the other cheek and giving our shirts to those who ask for our coats. And third, such a response to our enemies is a practical way of putting into action our "blessing" of those who persecute us (verse 14).

The meaning of the "burning coals" that follow in Proverbs 25:22b remains exegetically ambiguous in both its original context and Paul's application of it. Paul may intend that acts of unexpected kindness expose and deepen the enemy's guilt before God, which can either drive them to repentance or intensify the weight of judgment, should repentance not follow. More likely, he is noting a possible outcome while leaving the moral calculus entirely with God — which is, after all, precisely his point.

As mentioned last week, this ethic does not float free of its theological foundation, and our series title points us to anticipate where the passage must finally land. Paul's language throughout Romans 12 is saturated with the pattern of Christ's own self-giving. The living sacrifice discussed in verses 1-2 finds expression here, in the command to absorb harm without retaliation and to actively serve the one who inflicts it. Thankfully, we do not have to do this on our own strength, for who could possibly deny themselves for the sake of their persecutor out of their own selfish willpower. The non-retaliatory suffering of Christ is the redemptive act that makes this posture both possible and intelligible. Peter draws the connection explicitly. Christ "when he suffered did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly" (1 Peter 2:23). The new humanity God is forming through the gospel is one that bears the pattern of its Lord, not overcoming evil by matching it but by bearing it, and by that bearing, defeating it. Overcoming evil with good is not a simple moral strategy or a nice sentiment. It is a participation in the way of the cross, where the evil of the world was overcome by the sacrificial love of God in Jesus.

1. Looking at the Bible

- Share with the group some key phrases or ideas that stood out to you from the passage.

2. Looking at Jesus

At Central we believe that all of Scripture points to Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the theological center of the Bible. Every passage not only points to Jesus, but the grand narrative of the Bible also finds its fulfillment in the person and work of Jesus.

- God himself, in Christ, chose to absorb the evil done against him rather than immediately repay it. In other words, we are the enemies God fed and gave drink to. What does that tell us about how God has dealt with our evil, and how does that change the way we think about the evil done to us?

3. Looking at our Hearts

- Focus on verse 18. What does this note of realism tell us about the nature of Christian moral effort? What comfort might it offer in relationships where peace feels out of reach?
- Retaliation in any form is forbidden here, but our instinct toward getting even runs deep. Where in your own life do you find retaliation showing up in subtle forms?
- Consider: withdrawing from someone in your community group who wounded you, the tit-for-tat scorecard that is running in the background of a marriage or friendship, the contempt or dismissiveness you might feel when someone's politics grate on you, etc.

4. Looking at our World

- It's almost natural to respond to evil by joining in, matching hostility with hostility, outrage with outrage. Where do you see that pattern most clearly in the culture around us? What would it look like to interrupt it with good instead?
- Oftentimes we can equate justice and personal vindication, i.e., if I don't make someone pay, they've gotten away with it. How does Paul's assurance that vengeance belongs to God challenge that instinct? Does it feel like a comfort, a threat, or something else?

PRAYER 15 MIN

Pray for each other: Share any prayer requests you have.

Pray for those struggling with difficult relationships. Pray for them to see these not only as trials to endure but also as opportunities to glorify Christ.