



ROMANS Part 116

Chapter 12:17-21

Being at peace with all humanity.



John Lennon, Photo by

To no one render evil for evil, making ideal provision in the sight of all men, 18 if possible that which comes out from yourselves. Being at peace with all mankind, 19 you are not avenging yourselves, beloved, but be giving place to His indignation, for it is written, Mine is vengeance! I will repay! the Lord is saying. 20 But “If your enemy should be hungering, give him the morsel; if he should be thirsting, give him to drink, for

in doing this you will be heaping embers of fire on his head.” 21 Be not conquered by evil; but conquer evil with good.

The surest sign of the spirit of God in anyone is the ability to return good for evil and to love enemies. This is supernaturally weird. It clashes big-time with the basic human nature thing that does good only to its friends and family members and damns its enemies to the outer darkness—or at least un-friends them on Facebook. Whenever someone tells me that they love their wife, or their children, or their parents, I start working a crossword puzzle. No one who loves his or her friends or family members deserves a blue ribbon, or even a congratulatory handshake. Not from me anyway. Even anteaters love their own. Do anteaters ever get blue ribbons? Only for eating ants. Celebrities are routinely asked in interviews what they’re thankful for, and they say, “My family,” or “My kids.” “Ohhh! How amazing!” Well, no, not really. And yet we do live in such an evil age that such a thing actually *is* amazing—I’m sorry to say.

Anyone can love their loved ones. Birds do it. Bees do it. Even educated fleas do it. Even tribute collectors have been spotted loving those who are loving them. But when someone loves an enemy—now *that’s* going to make the 11:00 news.

Matthew 5:43-47—

You hear that it was declared, “You shall be loving your associate” and you shall be hating your enemy. Yet I am saying to you, Love your enemies, and pray for those who are persecuting you, so that you may become sons of your Father Who is in the heavens, for He causes His sun to rise on the wicked and the good, and makes it rain on the just and the unjust. For if ever you should love those who are loving you, what wages have you? Are not the tribute collectors also doing the same? And if ever you should greet your brothers only,

what are you doing that is excessive? Are not those of the nations also doing the same?

God would really have to go out of His way to make the sun shine only on good people, and to withhold it from jerks. Same with rain. I *have* witnessed the phenomenon of rain falling on one side of the street while leaving the other side of the street dry, but this is due to clouds, gravity and wind, and not to the even or odd addresses of either good or wicked citizens.



“...making ideal provision in the sight of all men, 18 if possible that which comes out from yourselves” (Romans 12:17-18).

Here is awkward wording and nearly unintelligible language from the *Concordant Version*. As a substitute for the first clause, I like *The Living Bible* rendering—“Do things in such a way that everyone can see you are honest clear through.” The second clause, “if possible that which comes out from yourselves” is an indecipherable mess. I can only guess at Paul’s meaning, so I will. I think this comment parallels the comment from verse three of this chapter, where Paul says, “[do] not be overweening, beyond what your disposition must be.”

Of course, I must supply further explanation even here, thanks to Knoch’s use of the archaic “weening.” To ween means “to think; suppose; intend.” Paul is discouraging anyone from intending more than he or she ought. In other words, “Don’t bite off more than you can chew, people.” Paul’s “if possible” concedes the inability of any one person to do everything, all the time, in a manner consistently pleasing to polite society. My paraphrase would be, “Do the best that you can for the sake of the cause of Christ, especially when other people are around. Whatever you *can’t* do, don’t.”

“Being at peace with all mankind, you are not avenging yourselves, beloved, but be giving place to His indignation, for it is written, Mine is vengeance! I will repay! the Lord is saying (Romans 12:18-19).

Our charge today from Christ is to be at peace with everyone. This does not mean befriending everyone. It does not mean agreeing with everyone. It does not even mean speaking well of everyone. It simply means, in this context, not wreaking revenge on those who demean, defraud or disgrace you. Why? Because God is going to take care of that for you. To me, this is nice to know. It keeps me cool knowing that God will get hot on my behalf and teach my enemies a lesson they’ll never forget. I’m counting on Him for this and He will not disappoint me. He is always winking at me and saying, “I’m on it, Zender. Leave it to Me.”

According to Paul, vengeance is God’s business. As I said, I like knowing that God understands my need for the redressing of wrongs. God has a big sandaled foot with which He will lovingly kick my enemies in their little enemy

“Now I can kindly dismiss or maybe even smile at the pinheads who are making my life miserable.”

behinds and awaken them to the meanness of their ways. What’s the practical benefit? Now I can kindly dismiss or maybe even smile at the pinheads who are making my life miserable. It doesn’t sound like a very Christian or spiritual doctrine that, “God is going to hammer those unfairly opposing me” but it is. We’re not talking about eternal torment, of course, but adjusting to rights. It’s judgment unto reformation; growth through pain.



This truth is meant to be a comfort. Use it. Paul did. Are we better than the premier apostle? See what Paul said about one of the biggest pains in his life, Alexander the Coppersmith—

Alexander the coppersmith displayed to me much evil: the Lord will be paying him in accord with his acts—whom you also guard against, for very much has he withstood words of ours” (2 Timothy 4:14-15).

Here Paul is at the end of his ministry. He’s arguably the most spiritual man alive and the world’s expert on the transcendent grace of God. It is *this* man who basically says, “God is going to get that cretin Alexander who sabotaged so many of my noblest works and words.” Savoring the truth of divine retribution, Paul could bide his time, count on God’s indignation, and maybe even drop Alexander a postcard of some pastoral scene, writing, “How ‘ya doin’, buddy?” Of course, the postscript of the postcard might read, “Enjoy life while you can, numbnuts.”

If it’s good enough for Paul, it’s good enough for me.

But “If your enemy should be hungering, give him the morsel; if he should be thirsting, give him to drink,

for in doing this you will be heaping embers of fire on his head” (Romans 12:20).

Paul is quoting Proverbs 25:21 here. This verse is simply promoting the concept of killing someone with kindness. It’s a nice little vengeance tactic legitimately wreaked upon roguish, knotty-pated louts as we wait upon God to bring the big-time vengeance to the louts. The reason it’s not considered vengeful is because the act itself is a kindness. It’s not active vengeance, you see, but the passive variety. The goal is to heap embers of fire on someone’s head, which is a figurative way of saying “make the recipient of your kindness feel gut-punched because you’re so nice to them in the face of their swinery.” The ultimate goal is that the recipient of your “kindness” feels the lash (in this case, the heat) of guilt, realizes how milk-livered they’ve been, and comes at last to a realization of God and an appreciation of you. I suppose, then, that we ought to look at the future friendship of such lewdsters as the end-game blessing.

“That’s a really nice thing you did for John today,” says a fellow-believer.

And you say, “What? My pouring the fire of love upon his unworthy scalp? Thanks.”

“Be not conquered by evil; but conquer evil with good” (Romans 12:21).

If you wring your hands, your head and your heart all day over evil, then it will conquer you. You will be “evil oriented” and will lose your peace. This is how evil conquers you: you lose your peace. You will ruin your intestines, both large and small. You will be constantly thinking about evil and what to do about it, or how to get revenge against your enemies. I’m telling you, this is no good for the intestines, or the stomach. It’s exhausting as well to the human spirit. When you let God get revenge *for* you, however, you can then let go of evil and relax. You’re off the hook. God is on it. God can handle being on this hook much better than you can. His intestines are not as delicate as yours.

As soon as you realize that God is on it (after God says, “Vengeance is mine! I will repay!”), this frees you to do a nice thing for your enemy. Don’t you want to impart a kindness to someone on death row the night before his or her execution? Why not? What do you have to lose? The death row person is not going to exist the next day anyway. And basically, your enemies are all on death row. They are miserable people, eaten up



by their own malevolence. They are not only miserable now, but God is going to make them even more miserable later—en route to eventual healing. So don't be like them. They're all headed for the divine firing squad. So why not do them a good turn? Offer them a last meal. Why not offer them a cigarette? Why not even light it for them? "Here, have a cigarette. Here, let me light this for you." Make sure that their blindfold is comfortable, if you think of it. Ask them, "Is this blindfold comfortable for you?" Inspect the knot binding their hands behind them. "Is the knot too tight? Here, let me loosen that a tad." Your grace will be appreciated.

See? You can do many nice things to all the mean people in this world who are slated to taste divine vengeance.

Their God—and ours—is a consuming fire. He's a speeding bullet. He kills, only to make alive again. He does it for you first, and for them later. "God is the Savior of all humanity, especially of believers" (1 Timothy 4:10). —MZ

"Thank you" from Sheryl Crow

Hello to my spiritual family!
I am the fellow believer for whom Martin Zender recently made a rather sneaky (I was not aware of it) plea for a little financial help to assist me in keeping connected. Many of you immediately blessed me with your love and generosity. For those of you who couldn't, I know your thoughts and prayers are with me. For those of you who did, thank you with all my heart. Your response was truly overwhelming. I haven't gotten this much snail mail, outside of bills and junk mail, in many moons. It felt good; refreshment for my soul.

Now it has come to my attention that some of you are wondering whether or not I have received your gracious gifts. My answer is simply this—I haven't made it to the bank yet! Martin wasn't kidding when he said it's hard for me to get around. My bank is in another town and I only get out of the house once a week these days, if I'm lucky. So all I can do is ask you beautiful people to be patient with me. I assure you I've received your cards and letters and will cash your checks (for those of you who sent checks) just as soon as I'm able. You've done such a gracious thing for me,

I have a bunch of brand new friends all over the country (and even abroad) whom I have never met, let alone heard of, but who are closer to me than my own biological family. It is said that blood is thicker than water, but darlings—spirit is thicker than blood! Ours is a bond that will never be broken.

You will hear from me again soon with an update on my computer shopping bonanza.

Love & hugs,

Sheryl Crow



Sheryl Crow pages through my Bible on the occasion of our first meeting, November, 2015.