

March 19, 2014

Being Opposite

Romans 12:20-21 (NASB), ***“BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD.” Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.***

We live in a very violent world and to know this all one has to do is turn on the news or read the news in the paper or online to know this is true. Each and every day it seems that someone has been shot and killed or stabbed or has met with some other kind of violent death. When one turns on the evening cable news shows there is ample evidence of the deep divide that people have over political and religious issues. So how is the Christian to be in reaction to this world that we live in?

We have slowly been working our way through Romans 12 since the beginning of this year in our somewhat sporadic devotionals. Today we come to the end of this marvelous chapter which deals with what the believer’s life is supposed to look like in a world that is lost. If I could sum up how we are to be in just one word it would be: opposite. We as Christ followers are to be the opposite of the way that much of the world is.

In today’s passage we see how we are to react when we are persecuted and mistreated for our faith. Verse 19 says this, ***“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God...”*** As a Christian I have to understand that I am not the judge or the executioner. The Lord is infinitely more qualified than I am to do that. When I am mistreated for my faith (and for other reasons) I am not to look for ways to “get even” or for ways to get revenge on the person who is my ***“enemy.”***

Verse 20 is a quote from Proverbs 25:21-22 which says, ***“If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; And if he is thirsty, give him water to drink; For you will heap burning coals on his head, And the LORD will reward you.”***

The phrase ***“heap burning coals on his head”*** was an ancient Egyptian custom in which a person who wanted to show public contrition carried a pan of burning coals or embers on their head. The coals represented the burning pain of his shame and guilt. The concept then is that if we as believers truly love our enemies and feed them when they are hungry, and give them drink when they are thirsty despite their hatred for us then it should bring shame to them for their hate and animosity they have towards us.

Verse 21 concludes this chapter with, ***“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”*** As Christ followers we are to model to the world the love, the boundless love of the one true God. Too often we resort to the natural human reaction of fighting back or arguing back in the misguided hope that we will win some argument. What we are really to do is be guided by the principle at work in this entire chapter which is be the opposite of the world. You see the world’s natural reaction to insult and injury is to fight back, to get even, and to get revenge. It certainly is not to love the person who is causing you harm.

Does this mean that we have to agree to every philosophy and lifestyle the world offers up? Absolutely not! We are ultimately to stand on the word of God and to share the truth of the

gospel in love and we must understand that this will be rejected as stupid, foolish, and intolerant. Sometimes love is rejected but that does not mean that we are to be “overcome by evil.” Rather we are to overcome that evil with good which is the goodness of God and His great love for us.