

Overcoming Evil With Good Romans 12:20-21

In the 4th century B.C. two orators of Greece, Cicero and Demosthenes, regularly spoke to the people of Athens regarding their future. It was said after Cicero spoke the people would say, “Does not Cicero speak well?” but after Demosthenes spoke the people cried, “*Let us take up arms and go fight the Macedonians.*” Cicero tickled the ears, but Demosthenes motivated the people to action. May this sermon be a Demosthenes to you.

I. The command given . . . “*if thine enemy hunger, feed him*” (v.20).

Often when people wrong us our tendency is to take vengeance or to do nothing. Both responses are uncharacteristic of God’s grace. We have seen how one is to not take vengeance because it is the right of God alone to revenge (v.19), but our text tells us that when we have an enemy we are to *positively* respond with acts of kindness.

(A). **The language of Paul is strong** . . . “Therefore” is the word “*alla*” which means “in contrast to.” This means, “*In contrast to vengeance, feed your enemy.*”

(B). **The language of Christ is stronger** . . . Jesus said to His followers, “*I say unto you, ‘Love your enemies,’ do good unto them that hate you*” (Luke 6:27). Some believe the teaching of Jesus contradicts the Old Testament, but not so! “*Thou shalt not avenge, nor bear a grudge; thou shalt love thy neighbor*” (Lev. 19:18).

(1). Often we don’t feel like following a command . . .

(2). One should not be condemned for his lack of feeling . . .

II. The blessing granted . . . “*thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head*” (v.20).

This phrase “coals of fire on his head” has been given various interpretations like:

(A). **Your enemy’s ultimate judgment is compounded** . . . Robert Haldane takes this view in his classic work on Romans. Since the context is dealing with the God’s day of wrath (v.19), your kindness brings more of God’s wrath for him.

(B). **Your enemy’s conscience will be set on fire** . . . this is the view of Dr. Gill. It means that your enemy will be plagued with guilt over his treatment of you.

(C). **Your enemy will experience the warmth of your kindness** . . . Some of have seen this phrase to refer to the old practice of placing a basket on the head with coals to keep warm on a cold day. Your kind act brings this kind of warmth.

(D). **Your act of kindness becomes an agent of cleansing** . . . When Isaiah met the Lord he said, “*Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips.*” The angel took coals of fire off the altar and cleansed Isaiah. “*It is the goodness of God that leads to repentance*” (Rom. 2:4). Your kindness leads to his repentance.

Paul is quoting from Proverbs 25:22 where Solomon adds “*and the Lord will reward you.*” It is possible that the blessing granted is a cleansing within you.

III. The outcome gained . . . “*be not overcome . . . but overcome evil with good*” (v.21).

Notice the first phrase in verse 21 is passive --- “*be not overcome of evil.*” The fact is all of us will be overcome by *doing nothing*. The second phrase of this text is active - “*Overcome evil with good.*” This is an active, intentional decision to do good; and it is a decision made in spite of feelings. God ultimately uses good to overcome evil.