

Winning the Real Culture War

March 28, 2021 | Romans 12:14, 17-21

Overview

There is a battle being waged for the soul of the world, and for every individual soul within it. And we're currently losing. Not to despair or wallow in defeat; God will prevail. But for now, in his good providence God is allowing us to lose. Because Christians have been battling with the world's weapons on the wrong front. The real war is not *out there* in the culture of the world, but *in here*, in the culture of our own hearts, churches, and relationships. And the way to win is not with snark, sneers, or searing social commentary, but with good old fashioned love. The only way to overcome evil is with good.

Defining the Win

Our greatest "win" when faced with adversaries is to maintain our Christian witness. To act honorably in the view of all; to live peaceably with all (12:17-18). This is our *lead goal*, the part we can control, God helping us. We can act in a gracious, Christ-like way. We can bless when cursed, love when hated, serve when scorned. Any other "win" is actually a loss if it causes Christ's name to be profaned.

Secondarily, if we can win over an enemy, wonderful. If we can shine our light in such a way that people see our good works and glorify our Father in heaven, terrific. But this the *lag goal*, the result we cannot control. It is up to God and the other party. We're content to be who we are while trusting God to change others as he desires.

Choosing our Weapons

Our text offers us an alternative set of weapons to the cursing, evil, vengeful, ways of the world. It calls us to parry the Enemy's attacks with blessing, loving, and serving. As Jesus said, we can give our shirt *and* our coat; we can go the extra mile; we can turn the other cheek. "Turn the other cheek"—that is, turn back to an adversary in love, putting "a new face" on the conflict and seeking to restore the relationship.

Trusting the True Warrior

Structurally, Romans 12:17-21 has an ABCBA structure. That is, verses 17 and 21 correspond, both using the word "evil" twice as they identify the real problem. Then verses 18 and 20 tie together, both exhorting us to do all we can to live peaceably with all people, including feeding our enemies and providing for their needs. That leaves verse 19 alone in the middle. It's the central truth. It reminds God's beloved people to trust in him. It tells us that if our love fails to convert, God's wrath will condemn. "Vengeance is mine; I will repay, declares the Lord."

God promises that all wrongs will be righted. Every evil, sin, abuse, and injustice will receive its just recompense, either in the cross of the Savior or in the condemnation of the sinner. So we need not fear because in Christ we cannot lose. *Nobody gets away with anything!*

...Except those who fly to Christ for forgiveness and a new heart. All those will be eternally grateful not only for their own salvation, but for that of all enemies and adversaries whom God transforms into friends and family forever.



Our Transformed Life
Living the Vision of Romans 12

Discussion Guide

We're talking in this passage about how to respond to enemies and adversaries. Paul probably has in mind people who are outside the faith, but his words apply equally well to fellow Christians with whom we've had a falling out. (Remember Jesus' words, "A man's enemies will be members of his own household.")

1. Make a rough estimate of the percentage of your relationships—family, friends, neighbors, coworkers—that are broken or in some way "out of sorts." What number would you put on it?
 - How would you describe your attitude toward these people right now?
 - How strong is your hope that these relationships will be repaired?
2. It seems that most people decry "cancel culture," yet at the same time participate in it by giving up on each other and moving on so quickly.
 - Do you agree? Why or why not?
 - What do you think is the root cause of this situation?
3. If Romans 12:17-21 is the opposite of cancel culture, what name would you give to this alternative way of being?
4. Romans 12:17 tells us to "give thought" to doing what is honorable in the sight of all. The idea is to really think through our responses rather than just reacting.
 - So what is one relational difficulty that you're facing? Would you be willing to share it? Can we help you game-plan a good response?
5. Romans 12:18 urges us to take pains to live peaceably with all. The tone is similar to Ephesians 4:3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."
 - Think of this verse in light of the quote below by Marva Dawn. How does it challenge you?
 - What strength and motivation can you find to "soldier on" a little longer toward reconciliation?
6. How do Paul's words about love and peacemaking fit with God's wrath and vengeance in 12:19?
 - How do you reconcile these seemingly opposite thoughts?
 - Does the thought of God's judgment upon your enemies ever encourage you? When?
7. To summarize: How now shall we live? What is one tangible way that you individually, and we as a group, can win the real culture war within our own hearts and in our own church?

"As far as it depends on you" (12:18) emphasizes that efforts to restore relationships should be continued, continued some more, and still continued even more, until we are thoroughly convinced that reconciliation is not achievable."

Marva Dawn