

ROMANS

THE CHRISTIAN'S CONSTITUTION

STUDY THIRTY-ONE

Doing Right When You've Been Done Wrong

Romans 12:14, 17–21

We have decided that we want our minds renewed, and the Spirit of God is armed and ready to transform us so we think differently than we were raised, than we were taught. But we keep bumping up against this individual who has done us wrong and keeps doing us wrong. What do we do?

—Pastor Charles R. Swindoll

WE all have built-in, self-protection instincts—natural ways we react without even thinking. We blink when a fly buzzes close to our eyes. We throw our hands out when we lose footing. We honk the car horn when another driver quickly backs up and doesn't see us.

Equally strong, however, is our natural urge not just to defend ourselves but to take revenge. When a bully behind the wheel cuts us off on the highway, our natural reflex is to zoom ahead of the car. When a busybody fires off harsh words about us, our impulse is to fire back. When someone punches us, we punch back. Seems only fair, right? We call it “getting even.”

Christ, however, teaches a better way. Listen to Jesus' words paraphrased in *The Message*:

You're familiar with the old written law, “Love your friend,” and its unwritten companion, “Hate your enemy.” I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. (Matthew 5:43–44 MSG)

Jesus loved those who hated Him. To us, that seems unnatural. But when we love like He loved, He lifts us above the fallen and more common order of relationships into the higher realm of His divine kingdom.

Paul suffered horribly at the hands of his enemies, and yet he learned to love like Christ. He passed along Christ's teaching in his letter to Roman Christians so we can live by them too. In this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, we'll discover biblical principles that will help us react not naturally but *supernaturally* so that we can do right when we've been wronged.



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PREPARE YOUR HEART

*Teach me your ways, O LORD,
that I may live according to your truth!
Grant me purity of heart,
so that I may honor you! (Psalm 86:11)*

In prayer, echo David's request to know and walk according to God's ways. Acknowledge your need for God's supernatural strength to live a godly life. And then thank God for granting you His ability to model the message you're about to explore in Romans.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Is it possible to restrain our natural compulsion to strike back? David modeled restraint when his enemy, King Saul, came after him. David had just been anointed the next king of Israel when he became Saul's personal musician. Whenever he would strum a tune, the evil spirit would leave the troubled king (1 Samuel 16:14–23). But when David killed Goliath in the valley of Elah, he became the hero of Israel (17:20–50), and from that day on, King Saul “kept a jealous eye on David” (18:9).

Filled with intense hatred, Saul became obsessed with killing David. Once, Saul even “hurled his spear at David,” but David dodged it (19:10). Enraged, Saul sent men to David's house to kill him, but Michal—David's wife—helped him escape (19:11–15). His anger burned against his son Jonathan for taking sides with the son of Jesse (20:28–42). Eventually, the king-elect ran for his life like a fugitive.

In a cave in En-gedi, David had his chance to kill Saul when Saul entered the cave alone. “Now's your opportunity!” David's men whispered to him” (24:4). But David held his revenge impulse in check. “Some of my men told me to kill you, but I spared you,” David said to Saul (24:10). What perspective gave David the strength to restrain himself, according to [2 Samuel 24:10–11](#)?

Let David's astonishing example be the backdrop for Paul's teaching as you turn to Romans 12.

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Observation: Biblical Principles for Dealing with Wrongdoing!

Take the first step of this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study, observation, by attentively reading [Romans 12:14, 17–21](#).¹

Put yourself in the place of the persecuted Roman Christians. How might they have responded to Paul's instructions in 12:14?

Isn't it interesting that the very first thing addressed is our mouth? The heart is a well, the tongue is a bucket, and the bucket goes down into the heart and lifts out what's there. And in every depraved heart, which you and I carry around with us, there is a desire for revenge. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What further instructions did Paul give in [12:17–18](#)? Pay close attention to the emphatic adverb, “never”! What does it say? What guideline did Paul give as a goal in all your relationships, including your dealings with enemies?

The opening part of verse 17 in the Greek is, “To no one.” It's out of place for emphasis. “To no one pay back evil for evil.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

What else should believers never do according to [12:19](#)? To whom does vengeance belong? Instead, what should we do to our enemies according to [12:20–21](#)? In doing this, what will happen?

You step back and say, “If I get involved in this, I'm gonna make a mess of it. You know how I am when I get my own way. Lord, this is Your move, take over. Take charge.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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Interpretation: Doing Right When You've Been Wronged

Interpretation seeks clarification of the text's meaning, which often can be stated as a principle. A principle is a timeless statement of truth that applies to everyone, not just Paul's original audience.

Our typical reaction to enemies is to “curse” them. What does *curse* mean? What attitude does cursing express? What principle can you draw from [Romans 12:14](#)?

Look up the Greek word *eulogeo*, translated “bless,” in a Greek lexicon, like the one available at [billmounce.com](#), or in a commentary. What is the meaning and importance of blessing instead of cursing our enemies?

The word bless derives from a Greek term that means, “to speak well of.” It's from which we get our word eulogy. Isn't that interesting? What do we say at a casket to a corpse? We say nice things. We don't curse at a funeral; we bless. Paul's saying, “Don't wait until the funeral. Say the right things now. Give praise often.” —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The alternative to paying back evil for evil is “to respect what is right” (Romans 12:17 NASB). Look at the different translations of [12:17](#) and write the meaning of that sentence and how it would be displayed in believers' lives.

*“To respect what is right” means, “to foresee, to take thought of, to have regard for.” That would include talking it out, doing that sooner rather than later. Search for ways that will communicate respect and regard.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll*

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Context is crucial to correct interpretation. Reread *Romans 12:14, 17–21* in the NET, MSG, and the J. B. Phillips translations. Note the personal aspect of this passage. How would you explain it to someone who just read it for the first time?

You need some habits broken. You need to respond in a transforming way rather than a natural way. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Correlation: Handling Wrongdoers God's Way

During correlation, we compare our biblical text with other passages of Scripture to enrich and establish our understanding. Survey Scripture for people who modeled God's way of handling wrongdoing like David did.

What was Joseph's attitude and response to his jealous brothers who sold him into slavery, according to *Genesis 50:15–21*? How did Joseph's actions reflect the commands Moses issued in *Deuteronomy 32:35–36*?

You wait for God to bring the vengeance, which He will do in His own time, never fast enough for you. But He'll do it. He'll do it. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

Revisit Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. How did our Lord model His message with His life (*Matthew 5:10–12, 38–48; Luke 23:32–34; and 1 Peter 2:19–23*)?

We're not talking about national defense or self-defense. We're talking about disagreements and arguments—those things that lead to lawsuits, fights, and neighbor problems. Quietly trust God, back off, and wait. Trust Him. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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In the wilderness of En-ge-di, young David resisted the most natural tendency to get even. What was Saul's response in *1 Samuel 24:16–20*, and how does it illustrate the proverb, that doing good heaps "burning coals" on our enemy's head (Romans 12:20)? What impact can our response to wrongdoing have on our enemies?

Saul's head smoked when he looked up and there was David with a piece of his robe in his hand, and he realized, "He was close enough for me to feel his breath on the back of my neck, and he never touched me." What kind of man is that? That's God's kind of king. As we back away and focus on doing what is right, our good disarms our enemy. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: Letting Go of an Offense

Application enables us to let the Spirit of God supernaturally work within us—helping us to do things God's way rather than our own way. Three principles stand out from our passage:

1. *Deliberately resist your natural instinct to take revenge.* "Bless those who persecute you" (Romans 12:14).
2. *Consciously fight every temptation to get even.* "Do all that you can to live in peace with everyone" (12:18).
3. *Quietly trust God to handle all revenge.* "Leave [revenge] to the righteous anger of God. . . . Instead, 'If your enemies are hungry, feed them. If they are thirsty, give them something to drink'" (12:19–20).

What past altercations might you need to confess to the Lord in light of the biblical principles you just learned?

You know what happens when you're overcome by evil? Listen to me. You're obsessed by wrong thoughts. You are possessed with plans for revenge. It occupies your waking moments and even accompanies your dreams. And you become a victim. You're victimized by the very thing you're trying to get rid of. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

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God is ready to transform you with His supernatural power! What new habits has the Holy Spirit brought to your mind that can help you not to be possessed by plans of revenge? Why not invite a spiritual mentor or trusted mature friend to hold you accountable as you choose to deal with wrongdoers God's way?

This is your moment to do it God's way. I plead with you, let it go.
—Pastor Chuck Swindoll



A FINAL PRAYER

Close your study by praying this prayer along with Pastor Chuck:

Father in heaven, as You fight my battles, calm my fears, and bring my enemy to his or her knees; guard me from pride. May I kneel along with my enemy in submission to Your sovereign rule as You build a bridge of peace between my enemy and me. In the name of Jesus Christ, who modeled this, I pray.

ENDNOTE

1. To learn more about Pastor Chuck Swindoll's *Searching the Scriptures* Bible-study method, go to the web page, "[How Does Pastor Chuck Swindoll Study the Bible?](#)"

For the 2025 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* Bible study was developed by Mirlenda Noëlliste in collaboration with Aaron Massey, senior vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, and Bryce Klabunde, vice president of *Searching the Scriptures* Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages. Copyright © 2007, 2025 by Charles R. Swindoll, Inc. All rights are reserved worldwide. Duplication of copyrighted material for commercial use is strictly prohibited.

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