**Romans 12:17-21 Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. 18If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. 19Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but *rather* give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance *is* Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord. 20Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.” 21Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.**

For the last several weeks, we’ve been looking at Romans 12:9-21. These verses are titled, “Behave Like A Christian” in some Bibles and “Hallmarks of a Christian” in others. Regardless of the title, these verses give us clear instruction on how we differ from the world, because we must be different. In a painting, if the sky is beige, and the house is beige, and the trees are beige, and the dog is beige, and the grass is beige, I probably won’t be able to see the dog, because he blends in. Likewise, when a Christian looks like the world and acts like the world, we shouldn’t be shocked when he blends with the world. In order for people to see a difference, there must really be a difference.

As we learned two weeks ago - Verses 17 says *Repay no one evil for evil. Haveregard for good things in the sight of all men.* On the night that Christ was betrayed, a mob came to the garden. Jesus knew what was to come. When they went to grab him, Luke 22:50-51 says *And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. But Jesus answered and said, “Permit even this.” And He touched his ear and healed him.* As the mob is gathering, and the hate is burning, and the people are looking to murder, Jesus refused to repay evil for evil. This is a hard one in these times – our flesh wants to argue, strike out, defend our rights! But we must think – does this look different from the world?

Verse 18 - *If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men.* Strive to be at peace. Does this mean if a man attacks your family with a stick you’re to watch them get beaten? No. If it is possible – as much as it depends on you. Hebrews 12:14 *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord.* Far more depends on us, far more is under our control than we like to admit. No one makes us mad, we allow it. No one steals our peace, we release it. No one gets our goat, we open the gate. Our goal must be to live in harmony with all men. Why would they ever want to know more about Jesus if all we show is fighting and arguing and strife with all around us? They wouldn’t. We are Christ’s Billboard to the world – what is the message the world is receiving?

Verse 19 *Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,” says the Lord.* This is a quote of Deuteronomy 32:35. Listen to what God says - *Vengeance is Mine, and recompense; Their foot shall slip in due time; For the day of their calamity is at hand, And the things to come hasten upon them.* We need not tattle on the world, God sees. He will repay in due time. When we repay, it’s imperfect, prideful, and invites retribution. When God repays, it is perfect, just, and fair. Leave the wrath to God. Our charge is to pursue peace.

Verse 20 *Therefore “If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.* As a child, I didn’t get the first part, but I could imagine someone having coals of fire on their head and how it would burn! Their hair would be on fire and everyone would know that I was right and they were wrong. But that’s not what this means. By loving our enemy, feeding and giving drink, those who hate may be turned to love. The coals of fire represents repentance. Proverbs 25:22, which Paul is quoting, says *For so you will heap coals of fire on his head, And the Lord will reward you.* Coals of fire do not represent revenge as I thought as a child, but repentance and return to God as I now know as an adult. The focus is not the coals of fire, but the love of our hearts as we feed and care for the eternal soul of the one that disagrees with us.

Verse 21 finishes *- Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.* And so we find ourselves back in the garden, the words, “Permit even this” still echoing off the stones and our Lord healing the ear of Malchus. Jesus, who could have called legions of angels, destroyed armies, or brought fire down from heaven said, “Permit even this.” There is not one instance in all of human history that I can think of where evil was overcome by evil. Evil does not battle evil. Evil’s argument is with good. How is the good in you doing in the contest? We certainly don’t overcome evil by unleashing our evil.

Be at peace, as far as it depends on you. Such an approach is difficult, doesn’t feel as good as telling everyone off, may seem to not be working at times – Jesus says, “Persevere.” A soft drip of water, given time, will carve the hardest stone. A gentle spirit, given time, may reach even the most hardened of hearts. But we must be persistent and be different. Let’s resolve to be Hallmarks of Christ in these very hard times.