

al body living under spiritual laws, with instructions to leave the secular laws to the civil governments of the world to enforce.

To individual Christians, Paul was moved by the Holy Spirit to write, “*Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good*” (Romans 12:17-21).

On the other hand, God says to civil governments, “You are my sword to execute wrath on evil doers.” Therefore, governments of countries around the world are God’s agencies to control lawlessness and to punish those who would harm the helpless.

In the New Testament, we are commanded, “*Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation. For rulers are not a*

terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: For he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil” (Romans 13:1-4).

And God, Himself, will have the final word as He executes judgment on that last great day, when evil doers and the disobedient receive His condemnation for the evil they have done. “*And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and the books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. ...And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire*” (Revelation 20:12-15).

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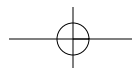
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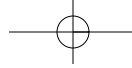
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All people have enemies. Even though Jesus Christ lived a sinless life, He had enemies — religious enemies — men who hated Him because He was righteous and because He taught that all must be righteous in order to be acceptable to God. The end result was that He was finally crucified on the cross. The Romans — the secular





government — crucified Him, but His religious enemies were the ones responsible for His death.

We also have enemies. We who have obeyed the Gospel and are members of the Lord's family are surrounded by people who oppose us because of our godly living. They find fault with us, and work against us. The world, itself, offers all of its temptations, trying to lead us away from the Lord. Unbelief, humanism, and materialism are tools of evil being used to destroy us, while the misplaced zeal of false religious bodies and false religious leaders is set in opposition to Christ and to us because we follow Him. And, always, there is Satan, our arch enemy, with his host of followers, working to see our souls condemned in hell (1 Peter 5:8).

So how do we deal with our physical enemies? Christ said that we should **love our enemies** and do good to them. *"Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"* (Matthew 5:38,39; 43-45).

But how can we love our enemies, those who hate us, despitefully use us, and persecute us? By human nature it would be impossible, but Christians are to grow in partaking of the nature of God, according to instructions given in 2 Peter 1:4: *"...by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."*

The answer, therefore, is in having an *agape* love (the Greek word for the highest form of love) for our enemy. What kind of love is that? It is not an *emotional* love but, rather, it seeks what is best for that person, even though he would do us harm. Such a godly love prompts us to return good for evil. We would not try to hurt him or to cause him to be lost. Rather, we want that person to be saved. We want to help him and, hopefully, to change him.

Agape is the kind of love the Lord had for us when He laid down His life for us — while we were still enemies and alienated from God by our sins. We didn't deserve such love and mercy, but He loved us anyway. As members of His family, the church, we are to have that type of love for the lost, for the sinner, and for our enemies.

But what about the wicked, those who seek to harm us and others? Is their wickedness to go unpunished? If we who are wronged are forbidden to seek revenge, how will matters be righted? The Lord has not authorized us, as Christians, to take the law into our hands and to punish the wicked. Our work is to try to teach and change those who are wrong.

But God has tools for retribution: the civil government of the land is authorized to judge and punish evil-doers in this world, and God Himself will judge and sentence the unrepentant on the last day.

As individuals who have lost loved ones or suffered great injustices, we could take it upon ourselves to try to punish the terrorists and evil doers. But that is not the job of individuals, and it is certainly not the responsibility of Christians. The law, *"An eye for an eye ..."* was not given to Christians. "But," you object, "that is in the Bible! Has God changed?" No, not at all. In the Old Testament, God gave both *civil* and *spiritual laws* to the nation of Israel, because it was a secular as well as a spiritual nation. Its civil leaders were instructed in the punishment of the wicked, and its spiritual leaders provided spiritual leadership. But under the New Testament law — which is binding on us today — Christians are a spiritu-

