

Romans 12:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

Analysis

Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. Paul continues teaching on non-retaliation. **Recompense to no man evil for evil** (μηδενὶ κακὸν ἀντὶ κακοῦ ἀποδιδόντες, *mēdeni kakon anti kakou apodidontes*)—the verb *apodidōmi* means 'to repay, give back'—forbids tit-for-tat vengeance. This echoes Jesus's teaching (Matthew 5:38-42) and Peter's (1 Peter 3:9): the *lex talionis* (eye for eye) is superseded by cruciform love. Natural justice demands proportional payback; gospel transformation produces mercy. The second command, **Provide things honest in the sight of all men** (προνοοῦμενοι καλὰ ἐνώπιον πάντων ἀνθρώπων, *pronoōumenoi kala enōpion pantōn anthrōpōn*), literally reads 'taking thought beforehand for what is noble in the sight of all people.'

This phrase draws from Proverbs 3:4 LXX and emphasizes public witness. Christians aren't merely concerned with internal righteousness but with how unbelievers perceive their conduct. 'Honest' (καλά, *kala*, 'noble, beautiful, good') things are visibly praiseworthy, removing any grounds for accusation. Paul advocates strategic moral clarity: believers should live in such a way that even opponents recognize their integrity (1 Peter 2:12, 2 Corinthians 8:21). Reputation matters not for self-promotion but for gospel credibility—hypocrisy discredits the message; consistent virtue commends it.

Historical Context

Early Christians were often slandered as atheists (refusing pagan gods), cannibals (misunderstanding the Eucharist), and immoral (meeting secretly). Jewish opponents accused them of blasphemy and apostasy. Roman authorities suspected disloyalty to the emperor. In this hostile context, Paul urges irreproachable conduct that refutes false accusations. 'All men' includes both believers and unbelievers; Christians must maintain ethical consistency across all relationships. The church's moral witness—refusing vengeance, practicing honesty—was evangelistic apologetics.

Related Passages

Psalms 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. When you've been wronged, do you reflexively plan retaliation ('evil for evil') or intentionally practice mercy?
2. How does your conduct appear 'in the sight of all men'—neighbors, coworkers, unbelievers—and does it commend the gospel?
3. What areas of your life need greater moral clarity and consistency to remove obstacles to gospel witness?

Interlinear Text

μηδενὶ	κακοῦ	ἀντὶ	κακοῦ	ἀποδιδόντες	προνοούμενοι
to no man	evil	for	evil	Recompense	Provide
G3367	G2556	G473	G2556	G591	G4306
καλὰ	ἐνώπιον	πάντων	ἀνθρώπων·		
things honest	in the sight	of all	men		
G2570	G1799	G3956	G444		

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 20:22 (Evil): Say not thou, I will recompense evil; but wait on the LORD, and he shall save thee.

1 Thessalonians 5:15 (Evil): See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

Matthew 5:39 (Evil): But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.

1 Peter 3:9 (Evil): Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

Romans 12:19 (Parallel theme): Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.

1 Peter 3:16 (Evil): Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

1 Thessalonians 5:22 (Evil): Abstain from all appearance of evil.

1 Peter 2:12 (Evil): Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Colossians 4:5 (Parallel theme): Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

Romans 14:16 (Evil): Let not then your good be evil spoken of: