

“OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 12:19-21

Introduction.

Beloved. Beloved by God. Do you know that’s what you are in Christ Jesus? Beloved by God. Do you grasp the life-transforming and life-giving power of so great a love in your life?

For most of the Sunday mornings we have been in the book of Romans I have greeted you with the greeting from Romans 1:7:

“To you who are beloved by God and called to be saints:
Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.”

Beloved, because of the mercies and grace and peace of God you who were once an enemy of God, are genuinely and deeply loved by God,. As one so beloved, you can love in the way God first loved you.

We have come to the end of Paul’s list of 25 imperatives, 25 exhortations, 25 marks of a true Christian, of one who is loved by God and loves God.

12:19

19 Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.”

Notice, this doesn’t say vengeance is wrong, or that there should not be any vengeance. There should be and there will be. The issue is who is to bring it about and the answer is clearly not us, not ever. God says, “vengeance is mine, I will repay.”

When an injustice happens to us, God is not saying there can be no justice, He is saying there will be vengeance and justice, and it will be He who does it.

Every single sin will be repaid, every wrong will be righted. God will balance the scales of justice. It will happen one of two ways. Either the one who has done evil will pay for his debt in hell; or he will repent and believe in Jesus, so that his debt will be fully paid on the cross and covered by the blood of Jesus. Either they suffer the penalty or Jesus does, one way or the other justice will be done.

I recently spent some time in a Whatcom County Superior courtroom on a jury. Can you imagine someone walking into a courtroom, going up and sitting in the judge's chair? Never.

Paul says don't ever go up and sit on the judge's chair. Don't ever usurp God's authority and His divine prerogative.

The judge's chair is too big for you. You don't know all the facts and details, you don't know what God is doing, you don't know the hearts and purposes of God. And you don't know your own sin well enough. You won't be able to execute justice without anger or selfishness or pride.

God will do it perfectly, leave it to Him. We are called to do our thing, and let God do His thing. Allow God to exact His judgment as He sees fit and in His time as His perfect wisdom dictates.

There is no command in Scripture more contrary to our nature than this one. And do you know why? Pride. Nothing motivates us toward revenge like wounded pride and the sinful desire to vindicate ourselves, to justify our righteousness, to get even, even over the slightest injuries.

Never avenge yourself.

Not against your spouse who was insensitive and uncaring after you'd had a hard day.

Not against your sister who borrowed your clothes again without asking.

Not against that guy at work who spread rumors about you.

Not against your neighbor for blowing leaves in your yard.

Not against your parents, children, relatives or classmates who have made your life unpleasant.

Not even against that person that committed a crime against you.

God has given governing authorities to be His instruments to adjudicate justice. That's what the next chapter of Romans will address.

Leave all revenge and desires for revenge to the wrath of God. God is a righteous God, He has an absolute commitment to seeing that justice is done. It is woven into the fabric of the universe. God has made a covenant with Himself, He will keep track of every wrong, every evil, every injustice, and He will repay it in perfect measure.

First, we are not to take revenge and sin by usurping the power and authority of God.

Second, we are not to fear God will not act, nor fear His slowness even when evil seems to grow.

Third, we are also to heed the warning of Scripture not to gloat or rejoice over the punishment of our enemies.

Proverbs 24:17-18 Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and let not your heart be glad when he stumbles, lest the Lord see it and be displeased, and turn away his anger from him.

It is a sin to delight in the misfortune of others. The Dutch have one word for this, *leedvermaak* (leet-fur-maht). That twinge of satisfaction when someone is put in their place or gets their comeuppance.

12:20

20 To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."

Vs. 14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.

Paul didn't stop with not cursing, but said bless. He doesn't stop with taking no revenge or even desiring no revenge.

Matthew 5:44 “You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, ‘Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.’”

We are called to do good to those who have wronged us. It is not enough to do what any good pagan would do, we must raise the bar and be Christian, Christ-like.

What did Christ do? He loved His enemies, He laid His life down for His enemies.

No one in this world has been more wronged and treated unjustly than Jesus. What did He do with that? He left the vengeance to God.

I Peter 2:21-23 *For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.* 22 He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. 23 When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.

Food and drink.

Food and drink just mean show human kindness. If that person you don't like has a need and you have the resources, ability or words, then share them.

There are many ways to do this, a gift, a kind word, a phone call, a brief note, a bunch of flowers, a meal, running an errand, a visit to the hospital, offering a ride, helping someone meet a deadline, stepping in at a time of need, putting in a good word with their boss, assisting them with some unpleasant duty that has to be done (Geoff Thomas).

There is a better way to get even than vengeance. Eliminate your enemies by turning them into friends. Live the gospel, show genuine love towards our enemies. Remember every friend of God was once an enemy to whom He showed kindness.

Matthew 5:38-41 “You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ 39 But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. 40 And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. 41 And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles.

All these actions you are going beyond to do good. The first cheek, the first shirt, the first mile were all taken, all forced. The second becomes a gift of kindness that changes the relationship.

Heap burning coals on his head.

I know you might like to do this literally to your enemy, but the context tells us that is not what it means. What does it mean?

One of two things will happen when you do good to those who are mean or do harm or wrong.

One, it could mean when they will see the contrast of their evil actions with your good actions the fire of shame and embarrassment will convict their consciences and they will wake up and come to their senses, like cold water splashed in their face. Their hearts may burn within them.

Or, their heart will be hardened and their guilt doubled, and they will feel the burning coals of God’s wrath either in this life or in judgment. A text in Romans 2 sheds light on this.

Romans 2:4-5 Do you presume on the riches of his kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God’s kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? 5 But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God’s righteous judgment will be revealed.

We are to extend love and kindness toward our enemies in the hope that they would repent and come to a knowledge of the truth. But if they don’t, the very love we show increases the weight of wrath on their head. The more of God’s mercy that people reject, the more wrath they heap up

upon themselves. Our desire is to bless and not curse, that they may be saved. We leave the wrath to God.

Jesus' returning good for our evil works in the same way. Either we are convicted of our sin in light of His mercy and we repent and turn to Him for forgiveness; or we resist His love and grace and forgiveness and receive the eternal judgment of God.

12:21

21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

If you are a Christian you are to act contrary to your natural tendencies toward your enemies. Don't let revenge eat you up and destroy your life. Return good for evil.

It's not enough to just not think your husband is an idiot or jerk, speak kindly.

It's not enough to just not honk the horn, pray a blessing.

Not enough to just be silent, not enough just to do no harm.

Not enough to just bite your tongue.

You are commanded to respond to do good, to return good.

Do you want to know if you are a Christian? There is no clearer mark of being a Christian than doing good to your enemies, to those who have hurt you, who have offended you or spoken ill of you. No clearer mark of the fruit of the Holy Spirit than doing good to your enemies.

John 13:34-35 A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. 35 By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Is this hard? Of course it is hard, nigh unto impossible. It cuts against all our grain, we don't want to do it. There is no command in Scripture more contrary to our nature.

You have to pray and ask God to do a new work in you and in your heart.

You have to ask for the help of the Holy Spirit of God. Apart from Him it can't be done.

Then you have to act, simply make an act of the will.

Give thanks for things that are hard to do. They create in us humble hearts, soft hearts.

Ask God to take away sin, take away hardness of heart, cherished grudges, bitterness.

What better way to resist evil and vengeance than to do a positive act of kindness.

Talk about dying to yourself. Talk about being like Jesus.

Here is the beauty of overcoming evil with good. We rise above the sinful impulses of our hearts and culture, we are victors over temptation, we resist Satan's bait, we defeat the enemy of our souls by not returning evil for evil.

As long as you are getting even, you are living in the past, you are remembering a past sin, a past hurt, a past offense. Maybe something from years ago or your childhood. As long as you are trying to get even the other person is winning and is controlling you.

If we are overcome by evil then we have lost, we have been defeated. Our enemy has got our goat. We have handed him our joy in Christ and our commitment to obey Him in doing good. When we return evil, we have given them power over us, they increase our resentment, anger, frustration. They steal our joy and our peace.

You can overcome evil when you have the cross inside you. Jesus' cross is the ultimate stopper of evil. Jesus broke the cycle of evil for evil by overcoming all evil with the ultimate good.

There are countless stories in history of returning good for evil, of incredible forgiveness.

Joseph and his brothers.

“You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good.” Believing God is working good in your life even through other people’s bad actions is what enables you to forgive.

David when pursued by King Saul, did good not harm

Corrie Ten Boom and her prison guard.

Nelson Mandella after 27 years in prison.

Erika Kirk forgiving her husband’s murderer.

Pope John Paul II forgiving his would-be assassin.

“Forgiveness doesn’t excuse the sin, it frees the forgiver.” (Pope John Paul II)

Bob Anderson forgiving and helping his daughter’s killer.

Reed and second grade bully.

Implications and application.

Next week we will celebrate communion. Do you know that it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ? It means we are followers of Him who died for His enemies. Not one of us would be a Christian if Christ had not loved His enemies. The greatness of God’s mercy and the greatness of Christ’s love mean there is no persecution or hurt so deep that we cannot forgive it and overcome it with good.

People who don’t return evil for evil show they are born again, they show that they get it, they see what Christ did and what God does for us and they imitate that. Are you so aware of your blessings that you can’t help yourself, you just overflow with blessings to others?

Beloved, go from here out into the world to live, work, study and play in the name of Jesus. Take with you the love of God. Let your love be genuine, show one another honor, live at peace with everyone, bless and do not curse, be determined to love your enemies no matter what, don’t let evil overcome you this week, but overcome evil with good. And know when you go in that spirit, Jesus himself will go with you.