

Overcome Evil with Good

Romans 12:19-21

July 6, 2022

Context

Theme of Romans: The gospel of God (1:16-17)

Chs 1-11 The gospel as the power of God for salvation

12:1-15:13 The gospel and the transformation of life

- 14 “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”
 - Do not simply refrain from retaliating, but seek your persecutors’ good by praying for it.
- 15 “Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”
 - In love, view the occasion of your fellow believer’s joy or sorrow as if it were your own, that you may share their joys and sorrows
- 16a “Live in harmony with one another.”
 - Have a humble mindset toward one another that results in harmonious living
- 16b “Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly.”
 - Be drawn in love to the poorest, the most ignorant, and the least influential in the church
- 16c “Never be wise in your own sight.”
 - Do not have an exalted opinion of yourself leading you to think you are always right and others wrong.
- 17a “Repay no one evil for evil”
 - Do not try to get even, to seek revenge, to retaliate against anyone, whether a believer or unbeliever
- 17b “give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all.”
 - Rather than brining reproach on Christ and the gospel, be proactive in living your life in a way that will be a testimony to the world (commend the gospel message to them).
- 18 “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.”
 - Seek peace with all men, having a peaceable attitude, promoting peace, and seeking to bring about and preserve peace with them

15:14-16:27 Conclusion

Never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God (19)

Question: What was taught previously in Romans about the wrath of God? How does this relate to verse 19?

“Beloved”

1. Loved by God (1:7)
2. Loved by the apostle Paul

“never avenge ourselves”

1. We will be mistreated
2. When we are mistreated by others, we are never to seek to give them what they deserve

“but leave it to the wrath of God”

1. We are to live with the awareness that God’s wrath will come upon the godless
 - **Col. 3:5–6** “Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. On account of these **the wrath of God is coming.**”
2. We are to leave vengeance in God’s hands. We are not to take it in our own hands.

“for it is written, ‘Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.’”

1. **Deut. 32:35–36** “Vengeance is mine, and recompense,
for the time when their foot shall slip;
for the day of their calamity is at hand,
and their doom comes swiftly.’
For the LORD will vindicate his people
and have compassion on his servants,
when he sees that their power is gone
and there is none remaining, bond or free.”
2. God has taken to Himself the task of avenging those who are wronged by others
3. God will do so in His time

We are to trust God with this

1. Psalms gives us examples of such trust
2. Christ is our ultimate example
 - **1 Pet. 2:23** “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.”

3. *John Murray*: “The essence of ungodliness is that we presume to take the place of God, to take everything into our own hands. It is faith to commit ourselves to God, to cast all our care upon him and to vest all our interests in him.”¹

This verse does not prohibit us from taking our case to those in authority

1. In the family
2. In the church
3. In civil government (next paragraph in Romans)

This verse prohibits taking justice in our own hands, and points us to God as the ultimate One who will see that justice is done.

Instead, do good to your enemy (20)

“To the contrary, ‘if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink...’”

1. Verse 20 is a quotation from Proverbs 25:21-22
2. We are to be so free from a vengeful spirit that we sincerely care for the person who mistreats us, and do good to them from the heart

“...for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head.”

1. *Leon Morris*: “It is clearly a metaphorical expression whose meaning is not obvious.”²
2. Proverbs was written clearly to Solomon’s sons, and Paul writes clearly to the Romans. The first readers would have readily understood the metaphor. But we struggle to understand, not having the knowledge that the original readers had of such things.
3. The closest passage to this and the Proverb being quoted is Psalm 140:9-11, where David asks the Lord to deliver him from his enemies by letting burning coals fall upon them.
4. Does NOT mean that by doing good to your enemy you will increase his guilt and thus his eventual punishment.
 - The surrounding instructions in vv 9-21 are about showing love to others
 - Verse 14 instructed us to bless and not curse our enemies
 - Verses 19-21 instruct us to do good to our enemies
5. Appears to speak proverbially of bringing your enemies actions against you to a halt,³ in line with,

Prov. 15:1 “A soft answer turns away wrath,
but a harsh word stirs up anger.”

¹ John Murray, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 2:141.

² Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 454.

³ Charles Hodge, *Romans*, 633.

6. Possibly also has the idea of producing shame and remorse in your enemy
 - *Lloyd-Jones*: “There have been many, many examples in the history of the church of people even being converted as a result of Christian people putting into practice the apostle’s injunction here. It has been used of God to lead to the salvation of those who have been most opposed to the gospel.”⁴
7. The apostle is quoting from Proverbs, which gives general principles. Doing good to your enemy will generally, but not always, bring about a positive change in them.

“Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (21)

“Do not be overcome by evil”

1. The evil done to us overcomes us if we respond by returning evil. In this case, evil just multiplies.
2. Evil done to us is a temptation to return evil.
3. The apostle instructs us to exercise self-control and not allow evil to triumph.

“but overcome evil with good”

1. We overcome the evil done to us by returning good
2. The world may seek victory through vengeance. But the truth is that victory is achieved by returning good for evil.
3. When we return good for evil, not only are we refusing to be corrupted by the evil, we also are displaying the character of Christ and the grace of the gospel before a watching world.

Question: Can you think of any characters in the Bible who illustrate either being overcome by evil (verse 21a), or overcoming evil with good (verse 21b)?

Conclusion

The gospel is the reason and the way we overcome evil with good!

⁴ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans: Exposition of Chapter 12 Christian Conduct*, 501-502.