

Overcome Evil With Good

Roman 12:14-21

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.
Amen.

It was nice to get away for two weeks of vacation. I read through a couple other sermons I wrote on this text, and realized that I had the same title for a sermon on this text last year. Hmm, I could preach that one again, I thought. I wonder how many people would remember it? I then confessed my evil thoughts, these are God's people, His saints. I have been called to serve Him, by serving them. So I sat and read the texts. I read through surrounding verses and chapters. I read a couple other sermons specifically on the Romans text, and a couple commentaries.

I had opportunity to spend a lot of time considering these three texts and all sorts of things went through my head. There is a lot of forgiveness language in these texts. There is a call to show others their sins, even as you confess your own sins (that whole speck and log thing in the Gospel lesson). But the big thing is this call to forgive those who have sinned against you. And that line in our text, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

How hard is that? To forgive is hard enough, but when we have been hurt by another, what do we really want to do? Certainly, we do not want to forgive. We want to get even. We want to hurt as much as we have been hurt. You know what, even pastors struggle with that.

Forgive those who talk about you behind your back? Forgive those who say you are to blame for what is going on at work? Forgive those who make fun of you? Forgive those who try and get you to water down God's Word, who want you to make it fit with today's culture and the world's way of thinking, and say you are unloving and hard-nosed if you do not.

Do you know what is almost harder? Forgiveness with family members. They live with you day in and day out. It is the same stuff that they do that hurts you, or at the very least, makes you angry. How do you respond?

Here is the situation. He is quick-tempered, and usually for no reason, and you have to bear the brunt of it – how easy it is to be angry back, to escalate the argument, to call names in return.

She seems to have time for just about everybody and everything else, except you. So, why not take time with others yourself, come home late when you know she is home waiting.

Your own brothers sell you into slavery, taking your favorite cloak, a gift from your father. You discover that they spread the blood of a sheep on cloak and told your father a wild animal had killed you. How easy it would be to hate them and pay them back for their evil.

Never avenge yourselves the text says early on, God will take care of vengeance. And then our text ends with these words, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." What does that mean?

Each and every day there is evil out there. Evil attempting to overcome us. And where does that evil come from? You and I would like to think that it comes from outside ourselves, that we are the victim of evil being done to us, that it is never – or at least it is usually – not our fault.

How do you overcome the evil done to you with good? Forgive them!

There is a problem inherent with that instruction though, you find it hard to forgive. And you find it hard to forgive because the evil is not just out there in the world, in others, and being done to you. Jesus speaks about another place where evil lurks. In Mark's Gospel, we hear Him saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man." (Mark 7:20-23)

We find it hard to forgive because the greatest evil that needs to be overcome by good is the evil within us, and which then flows out from us. As much as I could point at the evil done against me, when I am most honest with myself, it is the evil within me, my inbred sinfulness, that causes me the most harm. It is that evil within *each of us* that causes us the most harm.

We do not show kindness to our enemies, and often commit evil against our family and friends by our thoughts, words, and deeds. We are those upon whom God's vengeful wrath ought to fall. It is our awareness of this fact which should lead us to consider what Paul has to say in our text, "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Do not let this evil within you overcome you. Do not let it defeat you. Do not let it overwhelm you and cause you to despair. "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Jesus heart was a pure heart, a holy heart, a heart untainted by sin. In Christ there was and is, no evil. It is the good heart of Jesus that led Him to the cross. Do you remember His words? "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep... *Did you hear this? Listen to it again!* "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.... *Nobody takes Jesus' life from Him, He lays it down. Yes, men may have nailed Him to the cross, but it was by His will. Continue listening to Jesus.* The reason my Father loves me is that I lay down my life—only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father." (Mark 10:11, 14-15, 17-18)

In Jesus, evil has been overcome with good. In His baptism in the Jordan, He was baptized into our sin, His good overcoming and consuming our evil. His death puts to death our sin, nailing our evil to the cross. And along with all our evil, all the evil that has been committed against us by others. Our Good Shepherd laid down His life on the cross, and three days later took it up again – to overcome our evil with good.

There is a reason it is called Good Friday. God's Christ was Good for you! His good overcame evil on that day, and rose from the dead to show us that evil has indeed been overcome.

Today though, evil attempts to overcome us within our hearts, and attacking us from without.

I know there are those out there will tell you what to do, what to try, what you can accomplish all by yourselves to defeat evil. I could point you to yourselves, your works, your deeds, and your thoughts. I will not do so because as has happened to me the past – and as has happened to you – we would again be overcome by evil.

So, let us not look to ourselves, but let us look to perfect goodness. Let evil be overcome by good.

Open your ears and hear me! Dear friends, your sins are forgiven you. Your evil thoughts toward your neighbor are forgiven. Your evil words toward your spouse and family members are forgiven. The evil of your hands, eyes, and minds are forgiven.

Dear friends, let good overcome evil. Eat the flesh of the Good Shepherd, drink of His precious blood. Imbibe the forgiveness of sins, let Good fill you and overcome evil within you. And as Good fills you, it will flow from you and through you – to others.

Christ comes to us and He overcomes our evil with His own good, His perfect blood offered to cover all our sins. As we live in His goodness to us, we are able to overcome evil with good in our lives with others. No, it will not be perfect in us as it was in Him, but that is why we gather together again – each and every week.

We come together in order that Good might overcome evil in us. We fall into evil and God invites us to gather where Good overcomes it – in our ears and in our mouths.

The Goodness of Christ will stand the test of time and endure in you into eternity. Let Good overcome evil, live your lives in the Goodness of Christ. Amen.