



Overcoming Evil With Good

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"Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits. 17 Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men. 18 If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men. 19 Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord. 20 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. 21 Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:16-21).

Introduction

Romans 12 begins with the practical consequences of being transformed by the mercies of God. Paul moves from our relationship with God to our relationship with other believers and, finally, to our response to those who oppose, offend or mistreat us. Our text for the message, Romans 12:16–21 presents a radically different way of living from the principles of the world with the key theme being Living at peace, refusing revenge, and conquering evil through Christ-like goodness.

The world says, "Look after yourself", "Give people what they deserve", "Get even", "Never let anyone take advantage of you", "Treat people according to how they treat you"; But Christ says: "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." — Matthew 5:44. Christianity is not merely about what we believe; it is demonstrated by **how we behave when people treat us badly**. Paul gives us several principles such as:

- 1) LIVE IN HARMONY WITH OTHERS
- 2) DO NOT BECOME SELF-SATISFIED WITH YOUR OWN WISDOM
- 3) DO NOT REPAY EVIL WITH EVIL
- 4) MAINTAIN A GOOD TESTIMONY BEFORE UNBELIEVERS
- 5) LIVE PEACEABLY — AS FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU
- 6) LEAVE VENGEANCE IN GOD'S HANDS
- 7) RESPOND TO YOUR ENEMY WITH PRACTICAL GOODNESS
- 8) GOODNESS CAN BECOME A WEAPON AGAINST EVIL
- 9) DO NOT ALLOW EVIL TO DEFEAT YOUR CHRISTIAN CHARACTER
- 10) OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD

1. LIVE IN HARMONY WITH OTHERS

"Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits." — Romans 12:16. Paul begins with humility and harmony in 3 perspectives:

A. "Be of the same mind"

This does not mean that Christians must have identical opinions about every matter. Rather, it means that we should pursue unity of heart, purpose and love as encapsulated in these verses:

- "Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind." — Philippians 2:2
- "Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." — Ephesians 4:3



A church becomes powerful when believers are united. Jesus prayed: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee.” — John 17:21

B. “Mind not high things”

Paul warns against pride, status-seeking and social superiority. Christianity turns worldly hierarchy upside down. Jesus Himself demonstrated this when He washed His disciples' feet - “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” — John 13:15. The greatest person in the room should often be the person most willing to serve.

C. “Condescend to men of low estate”

This does not mean patronising people. It means willingly associating with people whom society may consider insignificant. Jesus did exactly this. He associated with publicans, sinners, lepers, the poor and the socially rejected—“The Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.” — Luke 19:10

A tree does not become great because its branches are high; its greatness is demonstrated by the fruit it produces and the shade it provides. Likewise, spiritual maturity is not demonstrated by how highly we think of ourselves, but by how willingly we serve others. Therefore, Do not allow position, education, wealth, age, ministry title or social status to separate you from people.

2. DO NOT BECOME SELF-SATISFIED WITH YOUR OWN WISDOM

“Be not wise in your own conceits.” — Romans 12:16. One of the greatest dangers in Christian life is believing that we are always right. Proverbs warns: “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil.” — Proverbs 3:7 And: “Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? there is more hope of a fool than of him.” — Proverbs 26:12. Pride rejects and prevents correction. A person who thinks he knows everything cannot learn anything. The antidote is humility. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.” — Philippians 2:3. So, Before insisting, “I am right,” ask:

- Have I listened?
- Have I considered the other person's perspective?
- Have I prayed about it?
- Is my response motivated by truth and love, or by pride?

A mature Christian does not have to win every argument. Sometimes **winning an argument can mean losing an opportunity to win a soul.**

3. DO NOT REPAY EVIL WITH EVIL

“Recompense to no man evil for evil.” — Romans 12:17

This is one of the clearest commands in the passage. Paul does not say, “Do not repay evil unless the other person really deserves it.” Rather, he says: “Recompense to no man evil for evil.” Peter gives the same principle: “Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing: but contrariwise blessing.” — 1 Peter 3:9. The natural human responses are:

- Someone insults us → we insult them.
- Someone lies about us → we expose them.
- Someone hurts us → we hurt them.
- Someone attacks our reputation → we attack theirs.

But Christianity calls us to a supernatural response. Jesus demonstrated this when He was falsely accused and abused: “Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not.” — 1 Peter 2:23.

Jesus had the power to retaliate, but He chose righteousness. Note this Important distinction—Not repaying evil with evil does **not** mean that Christians must tolerate criminality, abuse or injus-



tice without appropriate action. There are circumstances in which lawful authorities must intervene. Romans 13 teaches that God has ordained governmental authority to restrain evil. The Christian principle is that **our personal response must not be driven by hatred, vengeance or a desire to hurt someone because they hurt us.**

4. MAINTAIN A GOOD TESTIMONY BEFORE UNBELIEVERS

“Provide things honest in the sight of all men.” — Romans 12:17

Our behaviour is being watched. Paul says we should conduct ourselves honourably before everyone. Jesus said: “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” — Matthew 5:16. The Christian's conduct should make the Gospel attractive. Peter likewise says: “Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles.” — 1 Peter 2:12

As an illustration, imagine someone telling their work colleagues: “I am a Christian.” But when challenged, they become vindictive, dishonest, abusive or quarrelsome. Their colleagues may not read the Bible, but they are reading **the Christian's life**. Our behaviour can either open or close someone's heart to the Gospel. So, when you are mistreated, ask: **“What does my response say about my Saviour?”** Note that your response to an enemy may preach a louder sermon than your words.

5. LIVE PEACEABLY — AS FAR AS IT DEPENDS ON YOU

“If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men” — Romans 12:18

Notice Paul's balanced language (a) **“If it be possible.”**; and (b) **“As much as lieth in you.”** Paul recognises that peace requires cooperation. You cannot force another person to be peaceful. You can control your own conduct, but you cannot control another person's response. Therefore, do everything within your power to avoid unnecessary conflict. Jesus said: “Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.” — Matthew 5:9

Notice Jesus did not say, “Blessed are the troublemakers.” He said: **“Blessed are the peacemakers.”** Practical peace-making sometimes requires:

- Apologising.
- Forgiving.
- Listening.
- Speaking gently.
- Refusing to gossip.
- Clarifying misunderstandings.
- Letting go of minor offences.
- Choosing not to retaliate.

Proverbs 15:1 says: **“A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.”**

A fire can be extinguished by removing its fuel. Arguments work similarly. One person shouts; the other shouts louder; and the conflict grows. But when one person refuses to add fuel, the fire begins to die.

6. LEAVE VENGEANCE IN GOD'S HANDS

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

This is a crucial principle. Paul does not merely say, “Do not take revenge.” He tells us **why—Vengeance belongs to God. “Vengeance is mine; and recompence.” — Deuteronomy 32:35.** When we take personal vengeance, we are effectively saying: “God cannot handle this, so I will



handle it myself.” But faith says: “God sees what happened. God knows the truth. God is the righteous Judge. I will leave the matter in His hands.” Joseph is an outstanding biblical example. His brothers sold him into slavery. Years later, Joseph had the power to punish them. Instead he said: “But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good.” — Genesis 50:20 And he forgave them. Joseph did not pretend that what they had done was good. He recognised that **God was greater than their evil.**

You may have been betrayed, falsely accused, rejected, cheated, insulted, misunderstood, mistreated. You do not need to become the judge, jury and executioner. Give the matter to God.

7. RESPOND TO YOUR ENEMY WITH PRACTICAL GOODNESS

“Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink.” — Romans 12:20

This is extraordinary Christianity. Paul does not merely say: “Do not hurt your enemy.” He says: **“Feed him.” and “Give him drink.”** In other words, **actively do good.** Jesus taught the same principle: **“Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you.” — Matthew 5:44.** This is not weakness. Forgiveness is not weakness. It takes greater strength to refuse revenge than to retaliate. Anyone can strike back. It takes the grace of God to bless someone who has hurt you.

In the example of David and Saul, Saul sought to kill David. David had an opportunity to kill Saul in the cave, but refused. Rather he said: “The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against my lord, for he is the LORD'S anointed.” — 1 Samuel 24:6. David trusted God to deal with Saul. He refused to take God's place.

8. GOODNESS CAN BECOME A WEAPON AGAINST EVIL

“For in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.” — Romans 12:20. This expression should not be interpreted as permission to secretly punish our enemies through kindness. Paul's conclusion makes the intended principle unmistakable: **“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” — Romans 12:21.** The purpose is not revenge disguised as kindness. It is the triumph of goodness over evil. Consider what happens when you refuse retaliation—Someone expects you to retaliate, but you forgive. They expect hatred, but You show kindness. They expect bitterness, but you pray for them. Their conscience may be awakened. Their hostility may be broken. Their heart may be changed.

Imagine two fires. One is burning with hatred, anger and revenge. You throw more wood onto it by retaliating. It becomes larger. But if you refuse to add fuel, and instead introduce forgiveness, kindness and prayer, the fire begins to die. **Do not fight the fire of evil by becoming another fire of evil.**

9. DO NOT ALLOW EVIL TO DEFEAT YOUR CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

“Be not overcome of evil.” — Romans 12:21.

This is deeper than simply avoiding revenge. Evil has **two possible victories.**

- **First victory:** evil hurts you—Someone may lie about you, offend you or mistreat you. That is one victory evil appears to have achieved.
- **Second victory:** evil changes you—If their hatred causes you to become hateful, their bitterness makes you bitter, their dishonesty makes you dishonest and their cruelty makes you cruel, then evil has achieved something much more dangerous. It has reproduced itself in you.

The greatest victory of evil is not what someone does to you; it is what their evil causes you to become. That is why Paul says: **“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”** Consider the example of Daniel. He lived in a hostile environment. His enemies deliber-



ately sought grounds to destroy him. Yet: **“They could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful.” — Daniel 6:4.** Their wickedness did not corrupt his character. That is Christian victory.

10. OVERCOME EVIL WITH GOOD

This is the climax of the passage. **“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.”**

— **Romans 12:21.** Notice the two alternatives:

Alternative 1 — Be overcome by evil (i.e. Evil has won)

- Someone hurts you → you become bitter.
- Someone lies → you become dishonest.
- Someone hates → you hate.
- Someone curses → you curse.
- Someone attacks → you retaliate.

Alternative 2 — Overcome evil with good (i.e. Good has overcome evil)

- Someone hurts you → you forgive.
- Someone curses → you bless.
- Someone hates → you pray.
- Someone attacks → you remain righteous.
- Someone does evil → you respond with goodness.

JESUS CHRIST — OUR SUPREME EXAMPLE

Ultimately, Romans 12:16–21 points us towards Christ. Jesus was rejected, mocked, falsely accused, beaten and crucified. Yet He prayed: **“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.” — Luke 23:34.** At Calvary, humanity displayed its worst evil. But Christ responded with the greatest expression of divine love. The cross demonstrates that **God does not overcome evil by becoming evil.** He overcomes evil through righteousness, love, sacrifice and redemption. **“But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” — Romans 5:8.** If Christ could forgive us when we were His enemies, we can ask Him for grace to forgive those who have offended us.

A PRACTICAL CONSIDERATION — WHO IS WINNING?

Romans 12:16–21 asks us a searching question: **When people do evil to us, what happens to us?** Do we become bitter, vindictive, retaliate, gossip, destroy their reputation, withdraw from everyone? **Or** do we allow the character of Christ to be manifested in us? The Christian is not called merely to **survive evil.** We are called to **overcome evil.** And Paul tells us how: **“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” — Romans 12:21.** Three things to remember:

- 1) Do not repay evil with evil. “Recompense to no man evil for evil.” — Romans 12:17
- 2) Do not take God’s place as Judge. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” — Romans 12:19
- 3) Deliberately overcome evil through goodness. “Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” — Romans 12:21

THIS IS A DAILY CHALLENGE, because each day, someone may offend you, misunderstand you, speak against you or treat you unfairly. Before responding, remember Romans 12:21, and ask yourself: “Will my response allow evil to overcome me, or will I overcome evil with good?”

Let us determine that, by the grace of God: **We will not allow somebody else’s evil to destroy Christ’s character in us.** We will forgive, bless, pray, do good, pursue peace, leave vengeance in God’s hands. And we will overcome evil with good. **“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.” — Romans 12:21**

Amen.