

Romans 12:9-21

Overcoming evil with a Renewed Mind

1. Paul begins this chapter with the call to have our minds renewed so as not to conform to the world. He applies this to our relationships where we face:
 - God given gifts that differ. (vs.3-8)
 - Injustice at the hands of those who disagree with us. (vs.9-21)
 1. He coaches us to respond, not with an agenda to correct, make right, or even tolerate but rather to overcome evil with good.
 2. Humility is a major emphasis in Christian living as we see in this whole chapter. It is expressed in the way we understand and use our "spiritual gifts" and also in the way we respond to evil.
2. We might summarize the message of Romans in the context of Reborn Souls living out of Renewed Minds.



3. A repeated exhortation to overcome evil with good (vs.14,17,21) may serve to divide Rom.12:9-21 into three sections that progress in terms of their level of challenge to us.

- 1) Vs.9-14 the saints,
- 2) Vs.15-17a the lowly,

3) Vs. 17b-21 the enemy.

A. To overcome evil with good our love must be expressed in deeds not just words.

“⁹Let love be without hypocrisy.”

- The opening phrase in the Greek text has no verb. It simply reads “Sincere love.” This is followed by two participles - “abhorring the evil, clinging to the good.”
- Christian love is to be expressed in action.
 1. By this time, love had become a catchword for Christian ethics. It was and is all too easy to talk about love and not practice it. This is hypocrisy.
 2. Sincere love is going to be characterized by three things:
 - A particular attitude toward good and evil.
 - A devotion to fellow Christians.
 - A posture of humility toward all, especially those who persecute us.

B. To overcome evil with good we must be clearly committed to the good not just our comfort or rights.

“⁹ . . . Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.”

- Overcoming evil with good involves a **commitment** to move away from evil and fasten oneself to good.
 1. “Abhor” or “shrink back” from evil, to “hate exceedingly.”
 2. “Cling” or “be glued to” what is good. This word is used to describe the marriage bond.

C. To overcome evil with good we must be devoted to one another not to ourselves.

¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; ¹¹ not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; ¹² rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, ¹³ contributing to the needs of **the saints**, practicing hospitality. ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and curse not.

- In the Greek text both “devoted” and “brotherly love” come from the same word **PHILO** or “warm friendship love.” The word translated “love” in verse nine is **AGAPE**.
- Paul uses the phrase “one another” consistently to refer to Christians. [See apptoteach.org](http://apptoteach.org) theology file #808
- Overcoming evil with good involves a commitment to support other Christians in three ways.
 1. **Putting others ahead of ourselves.** “Give preference” could be translated “surpassing one another in showing honor”. This is much like an Eastern custom of

always putting others in the place of honor rather than self. If I were to illustrate this in my response to a specific question - What did you think of the sermon last week? I could say, "Well that's not the way I would have done it." Or I could say, "The pastor-teacher has a passion to reach a certain audience and as far as I could tell he did a great job in doing it." The first response draws attention to myself. The second, shows proper respect for the pastor-teacher. Paul realizes that in the hostile environment of a secular society, we (especially preachers) need all the encouragement we can give them.

2. **Encouraging others in the struggles of life.** The next three issues are related in that they exhort us to "make a big deal about persevering" in three areas as we live in a fallen world that is too often discouraging.
 - "Rejoicing in hope" or "make a big deal of our hope in Christ through celebratory worship."
 - "Persevering in tribulation" or "showing endurance in hard times." Don't give in or up.
 - "Devoted to prayer" or "continuing in prayer."
 - These things will characterize a healthy church.
3. **Being sensitive to provide for the physical needs of others.**
 - "Contributing to the needs of the saints" or "participating (KOINONIA) in the needs of other believers."
 - "Practicing hospitality" or "pursuing hospitality." We are to be assertive in opening our homes to others.

D. To overcome evil with good we must associate with the lowly and not marginalize them.

- This section seems to be concerned with the Christian's attitude toward persecution.
15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. 16 Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with **the lowly**. Do not be wise in your own estimation. 17 Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.
- "Persecute" comes from the same verb used in vs.13 to translate "pursue" hospitality. The persecutors are assertive in coming after the Christians. Christians are (in a similar way) assertive in coming to the support of one another.
- We are to bless those who persecute us and at the same time empathize with those who are suffering persecution. This sounds strange but it is the way we overcome evil with good and it is a part of the "renewed mind" (verse 2).

Matt.5:44 "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

Lk.6:27-28 "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."

- It is all too common to view the lowly (those who need us more than we need them) with disrespect and from a distance. I recall a visitor to the church commenting on the fact that when they dropped off their child in the nursery, they noted that one of the care providers was a Keenan professor at UNC. That image stuck as a witness to the nature of the Christian faith and this congregation.
- We must not separate ourselves or elevate ourselves above those who face hardship in the world. When they suffer, we suffer with them. We who are not suffering are not superior nor are we wiser.
 1. It was and is not uncommon for believers to quickly suspect that those who suffer are for some reason outside the "fellowship" of God's favor. Some may prematurely suspect that "God is teaching them a lesson."
 2. Paul does not seem to be concerned about the need to "straighten out" those who are in the wrong (either believer or non believer) but rather expects us to "bless".

I Cor.12:26 "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer together; and if one member is honored, all the members rejoice together."

Phil. 1:29-2:8 "29 For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, 30 experiencing the same conflict which you saw in me, and now hear {to be} in me. 1 If therefore there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, 2 make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. 3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not {merely} look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, {and} being made in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross."

Note that the need to correct those who are sinning has its place - on the far side of humble, empathetic love.

Four steps in correcting a brother or sister.

- Loving a person's soul** - Love is the commitment to edify a person's spirit life from a posture of humility and empathy.
- Discerning a person's heart** - Don't look at the outward behavior only but recognize that the root of sin is in the heart's posture toward God.
- Challenging a person's life** - Speak the truth in love with empathy, humility, patience, and perseverance.
- Celebrating a person's change** - Repentance must lead to the removal of shame by the special attention of the community.



E. We overcome evil with good we must bless our enemies and not ignore or hurt them.

“. . . Respect what is right in the sight of all men. 18 If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men. 19 Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath {of God,} for it is written, "*Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,*" says the Lord. 20 "*But if your enemy is hungry, feed him, and if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head.*" 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Responding to those who have hurt us.

Revenge	Justice	Peace	Blessing
I demand retaliation	I secure justice	I seek reconciliation	I serve my enemies needs
The carnal response	The civil response	The charitable response	The Christian response

- Overcoming evil with good involves a commitment to be a blessing no matter how much we have been hurt.
- The nature of our blessing those who are evil is significant. We are not expected to endorse their conduct as good but rather are to show compassion for their human needs in ways that would be expected only from a loving friend.
- We are to bless those who persecute us and at the same time empathize with those who are suffering persecution. This sounds strange but it is the way we overcome evil with good and it is a part of the "renewed mind" (verse 2).
Matt.5:44 "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."
Lk.6:27-28 "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you."
- The result will often be a pricking of the conscience and the conviction of the Spirit - "heap burning coals upon his head."
I Pet.2: 8-9 "8 To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit; 9 not returning evil for evil, or insult for insult, but giving a blessing instead; for you were called for the very purpose that you might inherit a blessing."
I Pet. 3:13-16 "13 And who is there to harm you if you prove zealous for what is good? 14 But even if you should suffer for the sake of righteousness, {you are} blessed. *And do not fear their intimidation, and do not be troubled,* 15 but sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always {being} ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that

is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; 16 and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.”

- Christian love for one's enemy is not simply a relaxed mental attitude of no overt hostility. It is assertive in blessing the enemy.
- Christian love of the enemy does not mean doing what the enemy wants but what the enemy's soul needs.
- Christian love for the enemy is not something that the state should or can do for me.
- Christian love for the enemy does not mean that there will never be justice.

