

Overcome Evil with Blessing

Rom 12:14,17-21

It seems nothing tests our faith more than evil aimed at us. Yet the battle against evil offers the world compelling evidence for the power of the Gospel. It all depends on whether we are willing to trust God or follow our strongest natural impulse. People question God's goodness in a world of evil. Today God shows us how to overcome evil. Good for bad. There is nothing tricky about explaining this passage. It just seems impossible to do. But that's the whole point. That's the power of the Gospel. Church, please take to heart this most difficult of God's commands for us. It's a defining moment of our faith and a bold witness for God in a world of evil.

Pray

It's been a while since we unpacked the Gospel from Romans 1-11. I used 5 objects to help us remember 5 Gospel Truths:

1. **No one is Righteous** (wasp trap) we need rescuing R1:18-3:20
2. **Jesus Saves Sinners** (cross) God's righteousness and mercy revealed (blood atonement) R3:21-26
3. **Justified by Faith** (black to gold) great exchange – sin for righteousness, declared righteous. Faith has always been the response that pleases God (Abram) R3:21-5:21

4. **Believers obey God** (heart) Continue in faith. We don't have to dance to Adam's puppet master anymore - strings are cut, we can say 'no' to sin nature and world, because we are united with Christ in death and life) When we serve God, we reap holiness and eternal life R6:1-23
5. **Spirit-led** (balloon) God continues His work of righteousness inside of us (ie gifts, sincere love). This fulfills Jesus prayer for the church that we would be united in love (Jn 17). In view of God's mercy, it is a privilege to offer our lives to serve our new master in the new way of the Spirit R7-8:39,12:1-2. And nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen?

We shifted from unpacking the Gospel in R1-11 - to realizing the power of the Gospel in R12. The foundational motivation for following Jesus is being gripped by God's mercy. It keeps us humble and thankful as God's loyal servants.

A) denying selfishness (lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh, pride of life) and worldly schemes.

B) renewing our mind: trust the transforming work of the Spirit (the mind of Christ – gives us a hunger to know God and share His love)

It takes daily faith to see ourselves and others through the lens of the Gospel.

Faith is the way to receive the Gospel and faith is the way to live in the

power of the Gospel. When God gives me an inclination to exercise a prayer, a call, an act of service...whatever it is, I experience the power of God's will. There's nothing like it. Like Paul, we look forward each day to glory, pressing on (Phil 3:14).

In these past few weeks, we've heard what God expects from us who belong to one another through Christ. *First*, that we faithfully exercise the grace gifts that He intended for one another. We are to think of ourselves as a body: everyone important and everyone connected under the head, who is Christ. *Second*, we must pass on God's grace in a way that meets the deepest need: sincere love. God calls for us to be right with Him and extend this **purity** into our relationships. We are to agree on rejecting (gag, abhor) evil in our walk and talk. Instead of just tolerating one another like typical Canadians, God calls us to be devoted to one another as brother or sister. And He calls us to be honoring: looking first the good of others...which reflects the humility of Christ (Phil 2). And *third*, we worked through a rapid-fire list of what sincere love looks like: meeting the deepest needs in the right way. I summarized them as:

1. Ongoing zeal to serve (as to the Lord), which is sustained through prayer.
2. A koinonia fellowship that meets practical needs (ie hospitality)
3. Living in harmony: united with the same attitude of compassion

There's a warning right after the call for harmony. The killer of koinonia fellowship and care is pride. And the way to kill pride is to be willing to help and associate with people in humble circumstances.

God's commands about responding to evil comes right after the warning, *do not be conceited* (v16). There is a strong connection between pride and revenge. Think about the parable of the king who forgave the debts of the man who could not possibly pay him back (like us sinners). Why did that man turn around and blast the one who owe him a little money? He was enraged that he had to beg the king for mercy. Pride blinded him to the gift. Instead, he sought revenge by squeezing every penny out of his debtors.

There are prideful people around us. Did the king still offer the mercy, considering the character of the man? Yes. And so our job as God's ministers is to offer His reconciliation: to share the Gospel with a world of sinners (2 Cor 5:18-21).

What kind of credibility do we have sharing about God's mercy, if we're known for putting others down and being unforgiving?

Did the prideful servant receive his due justice from the king?

'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. ³³ Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' ³⁴ In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

Jesus used this parable to make a point about forgiving others. And he ended with a warning. *"This is how my heavenly Father will treat each of you unless you forgive your brother or sister from your heart."* (Matt 18-21-35)

It's similar to the Lord's prayer (Matt 6/Lk 11). Can we lose our salvation? Christ died once for all our sins. The concern I would have as a pastor is...Did the person in question receive Christ with a heart that was ready in the first place? (parable of the seeds) It's a terrible life to grieve the Holy Spirit by withhold mercy and holding on to pride instead. Like the servant who hid the master's investment (Matt 25:14-30) — what he had, was taken away and given to others willing to invest for God. Don't fall into the arms of evil,

hold on to Jesus. Don't leave Jesus standing outside, knocking your heart. Here's how to overcome evil.

R12 v14 Bless, Not Curse

We must first recognize Paul is echoing Jesus' sermon on the mount: *love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you* (Matt 5:44/Lk 6:28).

In general, we suffer from a lack of experience (invite reading of VOM etc. and to prayer). Some suffer from guilt for not suffering enough for Christ. This little blip in history called democracy, religious freedom and human rights in North America has us in a bit of bind when it comes to growing and witnessing through persecution. Or does it? The North American experiment is breaking down. Conditions are changing rapidly. It is getting more difficult to be at peace with everyone...as media and public opinion rail against God in more and more ways. The worse thing we can do is to become saturated with the world's thinking...and blend in like a chameleon. The second worse is to be fixated on the world's troubles, pining away for better days, spreading discontent among believers — like a crab. Instead, spread grace through word and deed — like a candle. People need the Lord.

Believers must exercise new faith muscles. I hope that we are earnestly

praying for our young people. They are losing work, security and friends for following Jesus. Serving Christ will meet opposition from the enemy and days of discouragement. Whether that is through an organized official opposition (like N Korea) harsh words or shunning from a family member, a job loss or even harm from a person attending the church. It's all designed to discourage your faith in Christ. Persecution comes in many forms and it's here.

How do we bless those who discourage us?

The following verses shed light.

Be compassionate (v15) Be willing to associate with the lowly (v16) Do what is right in the eyes of everyone (v17) Live at peace with everyone, if God's will allows it (v18) Give practical care when they are in need (v20)

How far do we take 'doing right' and 'living at peace' with everyone?

Our first loyalty is to the Lord. When a person expects you to violate God's law and grieve the Holy Spirit, that is when you walk away or take your stand...depending on the Spirit's lead.

Provoking a fight is not called for. A mature follower of Christ (1 Tim 3:7, Tit 1:7-8) is to have the reputation of being blameless – **not** overbearing, quick-tempered, given to drunkenness, violent, pursuing dishonest gain, mere talkers, liars, brutes and gluttons. **But**

instead hospitable, loving good, self-controlled, and upright.

Blessing is the way of the Spirit. The way of the flesh is to volley evil right back – take revenge.

V17-19 NO 'payback', It's God's job.

Two wrongs don't make a right. The 'eye for an eye' rule is thrown out for God's children (Matt 5:39 go the 2nd mile, Gal 6:10 do good whenever you have opportunity, 1 Thes 5:15 make sure nobody in the church pays back wrong for wrong, 1 Pet 3:9 repay evil with blessing – you were called to this). Evil may be spiked over the net at us...like a volleyball dipped in oil and set on fire. Catch the burning ball and extinguish the flames from harming others. Serve a good clean ball of mercy back over the net. How do we protect our heart from the flaming arrows aimed at us by the evil one? With the shield of faith. Faith to believe God knows best. Leave room for God's wrath (Deut 32:35). God is the only one who's judgement against sin is true. God does not instantly crush all who oppose Him because His kindness leads toward repentance (Rom 2:2-4).

What keeps us moving forward in our faith? The mercy of God. In view of God's mercy, we see ourselves like that forgiven servant but without the pride. And with time in the word and prayer and the good counsel of those who help us bear burdens...we will overcome the sleepless nights of

seeking our own justice and release it into the hands of God. And then we are on the road to forgiveness and wholeness. To the point where we can hope for God's mercy on them, too. The ultimate victory over sin is at the cross. God can take you from hating (where your demand for justice is torture in hell); to care (where you hope their heart softens to receive God's mercy and live).

Blessed is the peacemaker, says Jesus (Matt 5:9).

V20 Practical Blessing

(Paul is quoting Prov 25:21-22a). When we deny the urge to satisfy justice in our own way, it burns. But as we obey God, we grow closer to God and maturing for His service. By trusting God and showing kindness to the 'enemy' a burning begins in the 'enemy'. It is the burning of conviction from the Lord. Both burns can bring God glory. But giving into our need for revenge will deny God the glory He deserves! He deserves obedience from the wronged believer (matures, experiences God's power) which can open the way for the enemy to come to his senses -see he's

eating with the pigs and seek the Lord (prodigal son).

V21 Be an Overcomer

Don't let this world that delights in vengeance squeeze you into it's mold. The good we need to muster, to volley back blessing...is beyond our natural ability. And that is why Jesus sent the Holy Spirit, God's present grace in us. Christ in us. It is a supernatural action. It gains God glory and for us, eternal reward. Jesus promised (Revelations) overcomers will eat from the Tree of Life (2:7), be unharmed by the second death (2:11), eat from hidden manna and be given a new name (2:17), have authority over nations (2:26), be clothed in white garments (3:5), be made a permanent pillar in the house of God (3:12), and sit with Jesus on His throne (3:21).

God calls us to **engage** in the grace of the gospel and the power of the Spirit to win victories over the evil of this world.

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