

“Overcome Evil with Good” Romans 12:14-21

Author: Paul the apostle (a Roman citizen by birth), born to proclaim God’s gospel (Gal 1:15-17).

Date/Provenance: Late 50s AD (58-59). Written from Corinth on his third missionary journey.

Purpose: Systematic proclamation of the gospel that saves (Rom 1:16-17), Paul’s “Magnum Opus.”

- 14 – The reality of evil in this world is difficult for the believer. Paul has in mind persecution based on our doing what is *right* (not mistreatment because we have done evil, see 1 Pet 3:13-17). “Bless and do not curse” is a call to singlemindedness, not instability or vacillation (Jas 1:8). This is hard due to sin and our natural tendency to hate our enemies, but it is God’s pattern for us (Mt 5:45-48). Note, this doesn’t discount the role of imperfect human justice for evil (see Rom 13:1-7).
- 15-16 – The needs of others must be important to the believer (“outward focuses” discussed earlier in this chapter) – hence, we identify with their weeping and are truly joyful in their blessings (Phil 4:4). The body of Christ must *know* one another well as they are truly living life *together* (Ps 133:1, Acts 2:44, Gal 6:2, Jas 5:13).
- 16 – Because we are called to this others-focused love in the Christian community of believers, self-importance is an obstacle. Remember the call to “sober judgment” of v3 in self-evaluation. Also recall the call to competition to “outdo one another in showing honor” of v10 (cf. Phil 2:2)! The book of Judges shows what life is like when everyone does what is right in their own eyes (Judges 17:6, 21:25, cf. Deut 6:18, Prov 3:7, 1 Cor 13:4-7).
 - App: Blessing those who persecute you has application not only to the world but also to the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. It ought not be the case that severe persecution comes from our own natural family or the family of God, but what about when deep wounds do come from those who ought to be closest to us? Be ready to love and forgive...as Christ forgave us when we were his enemies (Rom 5:10, Eph 4:30-32).
- 17-19 – In Mt 5:38-48 in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus corrects misunderstanding of the *Lex Talionis* (“eye for eye” principle of exact justice found in Ex 21:22-25, Lev 24:19-21, Deut 19:16-21) being used as a call to *personally* exact justice as if we stand in the place of God. Again, this is not discounting the place of justice executed by earthly governments (Rom 13:1-7) – but it *does* clearly instruct us not to think justice will not come about unless we do something ourselves (1 Pet 2:21-25). God will ultimately judge all evil (Deut 32:35, Eccl 12:14, 1 Cor 5:13). Doing what is “honorable in the sight of all” does not mean that the world’s moral compass should be our own, but recognizes that even unbelievers have the law of God written on their heart (Rom 2:15, cf. 2 Cor 8:21, 1 Tim 3:7). Due to sin, being at peace with all men is only possible to a certain extent, but it ought not be *believers* who get in the way of such peace. App: What about forgiving non-Christians who do not truly understand what forgiveness entails? An opportunity to display Christ in our actions. App: Don’t seek to apply this first to others, but to yourself.
- 20-21 – Quoting Prov 25:21-22, Paul shows that the OT has the same love of enemies. It is all too *easy* to be overcome by evil, to continue the cycle of hatred, cursing and murder. Yet remember what the Lord hates (Prov 6:16-19) and by God’s grace, live as someone forgiven a great debt and extinguish the darts of the evil one by faith (Mt 18:23-35, Eph 6:16). In Christ, God *has* overcome evil with good (Gen 50:20, Acts 2:22-24). Believer, you are free from the penalty and power of *your evil* deeds, which deserve God’s wrath and displeasure but He has gloriously pardoned!
- App: Coming to the Lord’s Table inevitably confronts us with God’s love for His enemies and the astounding dimensions of it, which He uses for *our* strengthening to do what is *very difficult*, rooted and grounded in the Triune God’s love (Eph 3:14-19). Christian, love those who hate you.