

Overcoming Evil  
Romans 12:9-21  
August 30, 2020

When the Gospel lesson was read earlier, what did you think? Did you think Paul was listing things that really are what it means to be a Christian? Evil is something we should abhor. If you see what is happening in many of the larger cities and even in Albuquerque these days, aren't you abhorred? Who would think we would see this happening in a city a few hours away? You probably walked those streets or drove down them one time or another and now there are boarded up windows.

The virus has changed many of the ways some of us go about life but what is it with all this destruction and violence? We are pretty insulated here in Alamogordo. We have heard about Albuquerque but don't expect stuff like that will be put up with here in our town.

Paul talks in general but then really gets to the heart of the matter when the focus is turned in on us, when he is talking to you. That is where the rubber meets the road. We look at the TV and think we are glad we aren't there but evil really becomes evil when it is at your door, when it is falling on your head.

What is the first reaction that is to come out of you when you are hurt, challenged, or when out of no where, someone does something to you that you didn't ask for and surely didn't desire? Your first instinct is to protect yourself, to strike back, to say something to preserve yourself. Yet, what sense do you get from Paul? He isn't saying that you were not wronged. He isn't saying you aren't being hurt or maligned. No, He is saying that in spite of what is happening to you, you have the choice of handling it in a different way than you really would like.

That is what it is like to be a Christian. Yes, you are a sinner. You know it and sorry to say, others know it as well. Yes, we try as Paul says to live in harmony with one another and if possible, yes, if possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. What might it take to do that though when the relationship is closer to the limits of "if possible"? How much can you take? How much are you expected to take before you get to the point "so far as it depends on you"? That is where the Holy Spirit, who lives in each of you supplies the strength to bend and not break.

Can you walk away from the situation. Most cases you can. You leave it to the wrath of God, put it behind you. Paul then goes one step farther, he says to take care

of the guy or gal that is the one who is bringing it all upon you. They don't want to stop it seems. You may not have any idea why they picked on you.

When you are picked on, you could strike back either with words or actions, but what does Paul say about how to handle the situation? I know your first reaction is probably, why should it be up to me to initiate the reconciliation? I wasn't the one to start all this. They were the one that came after me. I can't think of anything I have done to deserve this kind of stuff from them. Paul understands, he knew he had treated Christians as if they were the most evil persons in the world even though they had done nothing other than trust in a Savior who took them from a life that would only lead to death to a life that leads to life eternal.

Paul says to go after the evil, go to the one who is after you, not with a club like you might think would be the answer but with good, overcome that evil with something not expected, overcome it with burning coals, yes burning coals might be what you thought was a good idea but these coals didn't come out of a fire but are coals that burn to their hearts, like a refiners fire, bringing to the top the dross so that what is left is the pure metal that has been masked by all the impurities surrounding who they could be in Christ.

We may not have any idea why? Why are they acting that way? Oh, we know those times when we weren't feeling well and acted in ways we aren't proud of. Others who know how we normally act will pick up on it and ask if everything is OK. They know from past experience with us that what is going on isn't normal. If they care about us, they might even face the possible cold shoulder or worse, because they really care about us. Maybe the one who is after us has something going on but have no one to step into their un-comfort zone and risk it all to find out what is going on, bringing that cold water, that nourishing meal, even if it is take out these days.

What is the worst that could happen? Time out of your day? Words that can not hurt you as the saying goes but words that sure can sting, unless you see the person as worth the lashes if it means you can get to know who you would want them to be.

We can endure all that comes from them for we know, it was our evil that was heaped on a friend we now know. Until He came to us through the water and the Word, we were enemies. Paul wrote earlier in his letter to the Roman church: **Rom. 5:10-11** For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by His life. More than that, we also

rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Now that we have received reconciliation, where He provided the food and drink to an enemy, us. He was the cause for reconciliation by His death for a bunch of enemies, us, thankfully included.

What do people want from Christians? They want them to shine light into the darkness of this world, of their world. They want something that isn't just fluff but has some meat on it, is real. What is more real than a person, sacrificing themselves for you, not because they want something from you but because they care for you. How does the adage go? They don't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

We have so many half truths to sort through to know if things are as they seem to be these days. Too many times we just want to throw up our hands and walk away. Frustrating as things can be, people should always be worth trying to get to know, to be someone they, even if they strike at us like a snake, someone they can eventually trust.

Have you ever had to walk across a ditch or muddy area you sure don't want to find yourself in? How do you get across it? You need a bridge or at least a board or a log to get you across. What if you have questions as to if what is laid out there is going to hold you up? You might put a little weight on it, a little by little creep across until you see that it is going to hold up under your weight. Is it any different than that enemy? They may have had so many who could not be trusted. They may have been let down, time and time again. How easy it would be to throw up a wall and not get hurt anymore, not trust anyone again.

We might have to set up a different scenario. Yes, we may have to endure, all the while being a blessing and not a curse. Yes, we can abhor evil all the while holding fast to what is good, knowing the only good we truly have is because of the good of one who went to the cross to take all the evil on Himself, paying the debt owed so that we all could know the good, could bask in His goodness on whom He has show His light of truth.

We are to overcome evil with good. We have a great example in the one who overcame our evil. He is the source of good. He wanted good in the very beginning, in fact when He created the world, everything was good, no evil, no hurt, hunger, pain or suffering, everything was not only good but very good. Very good, perfect. Adam and

Eve were the only two to experience what that was like. What a memory. Every day remembering and seeing what you caused. All that evil, and you were responsible. What an ache in that part of your heart. No wonder they looked on to the promise of Genesis 3:15, the promise of a man child who would be born of a woman who would make things right, very good, perfect again. I imagine they hoped for it every day.

Jesus came to be that child, that man to make all things new again. He came for us and for all. He took on the enemy, sin and won, by shedding His blood, giving of Himself not only until it hurt but until it killed Him. He went to the cross to literally give all He had so that we could have all we have in Him. He overcame evil with very good.

How was it for Him that morning when He came out of the tomb into the garden knowing He had finished it, once for all? He stepped out into a different world, a world where many would look back to that day and celebrate it until the day when He would come again, come again to take all believers unto Himself.

He knew the joy people would have as their evil was recognized but also that someone had been there before them making all things new, all things right with God.

We know that joy. We should want others to know it as well. We don't really give it much thought though. We know we are saved, our ticket was purchased by Jesus and given to us as a free gift. We have it already.

There are those though who are led by the devil, the world and their own sinful natures, who are fighting against the gift, either by not believing it or by striking out, thinking it is going to hurt them even more. They surely don't need any of that.

Jesus has given us that gift. It is ours to give out to others by the power of the Holy Spirit. We have an unlimited supply, overflowing and yet it is so easy to just rest in that gift. Why sweat it? Why put yourself out there to have someone persecute you? Just ignore the thought, it will probably go away after awhile.

I pray that isn't so. If it is, how long before you get to thinking you deserve heaven and you may get so far down that path that you start to forget how great a gift He has given you.

Yes, we can be so selfish at times, not wanting to give for fear what we are giving won't be appreciated. We don't own it, it is to be given away. We are to give it to those to provide relief for the thirst and hunger they have or to create that thirst and hunger so that they see the need of what Christ has for them. Evil, fight against it or overcome it with good.