

Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. ¹⁰ Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves. ¹¹ Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. ¹² Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. ¹³ Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. ²⁰ On the contrary:

**"If your enemy is hungry, feed him;
if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.
In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."**

²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.
(NIV84)

Theme: Overcome Evil with Good.

1. Love your Enemies
2. Just as Christ Loved You

When I was growing up, I got myself in trouble time and time again. I was constantly getting in fights with other kids—most of them older than me. You see, they would make fun of me, so I'd retaliate by attacking them. If someone hit me I wouldn't hesitate to hit them back. I can remember one particular instance quite well involving an eighth grader. It was Arbor Day during my 7th grade year. There was a verbal spat between me and this eighth grader, when she (did I mention the eighth grader was a girl) swung her rake and hit me. Most 7th grade boys would have done one of two things: 1. Went and told a teacher. Or, 2. They would have some choice words for that girl and

then perhaps walk away. So what did I do? I yanked the rake out of her hands and hit her with it. I thought I was going to die that day when she told football-coach Dad. It is only by the grace of God that my life was spared that day—and it is only by the grace of God through his Son, Jesus Christ, that he does not count those sins I committed that day against me.

I tell you that story because isn't that how the world often acts? The world seeks to get even. They want to treat others as they themselves were treated. They seek revenge. In fact there is a popular T.V. show on right now that is about that very topic—a daughter seeking revenge on a group of people that got her dad thrown in jail and eventually killed. Many people often don't care who is right and who is wrong. And we often follow suit. We want people to feel how they made us feel—or to do to them what they did to us.

That's why Paul urges us to overcome evil with good. As Christians, we are to love our enemies just as Christ loves you.

An eye for an eye; a tooth for a tooth. That's the world's motto. You mistreat me, and I'll mistreat you. You do something I don't like, and I'll do the same to you. In a way they forget how horrible it made them feel. Who would ever want to make someone feel that way? But that's the whole point, isn't it? They want to make others feel the same way they felt. They want to them feel horrible. Revenge. Retaliation is the name of the game. The world tries to get even. But it often goes beyond simply getting even. The world often wants to get the last laugh—to one-up the other. They want to win the battle. We see this in all the lawsuits today. They don't seek a just penalty. They don't want simply to recuperate what they lost. No, they demand millions of dollars for loss of enjoyment, for being given a bad reputation, and so on. They don't just want to get even; they want to make others pay.

And sadly, at times, we are no different. Like the seventh grade me getting even with that eighth grade girl. We want to get even. We won't want anyone to get the best of us. It's what we are taught to do. Because if we don't get even then we are labeled as soft. We are push-overs. We are taught by the world to stand-up for ourselves. Don't let others get the best of you. But get even in one way or another.

That's what some of Jacob's sons did. Once their sister, Dinah was raped by a man named Shechem. Shechem fell in love with Dinah and asked Jacob and his sons if he could marry Dinah. Jacob's sons consented under one condition. They wanted Shechem and all the men of his town to obey the command of the Lord and be circumcised. Shechem did so and the other men followed suit. But two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, had other plans. While the men were still in pain, they went and struck down every last male of the city. They stole their flocks and plundered their possessions. They even took their wives and children. Jacob's sons took revenge into their own hands. Jacob was angry and ashamed at the sins of his sons.

In the same way, God is ashamed and angry at us when we seek revenge and retaliate. For when we get even as the world does, we sin against the Word of the Lord. Our text for today is filled with such commands. **Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.... Do not repay anyone evil for evil...Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink.** There is no need to get revenge. God knows what's going on. He sees everything that happens in our lives. And he will take care of things. On the Last Day, they will get what they deserve. It's not up to us to make others pay for their sins. It's not up to us to get revenge.

Now, it's not as if we look the other way. We don't ignore those who do us harm. When people sin against us, we don't play it off as no big deal. It is a big deal—not because you were hurt or harmed, but because they sinned against the Lord. And you hate sin. As Paul says in verse 12, **Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.** While we hate the sin that people commit against us, we don't get even. For then we'd be committing the same sin that we hate. Instead we cling to what is good and right. We flee from revenge and stick to love.

Think of David in our first lesson for today. David spent years fleeing from Saul who was trying to kill him. But when David had the chance to kill Saul, he refused to do any harm to the Lord's Anointed. Love instead of retaliation. Or take another one of Jacob's sons, Joseph, did for example. He is the opposite of Simeon and Levi. Joseph's

brothers hated him. So they threw him into a cistern, and then to a caravan headed to Egypt. Joseph ended up as a slave in prison. But years later, when Joseph was the second in command in Egypt and his brothers came to buy some grain during a famine, Joseph didn't seek to get even. He didn't get revenge. Instead he forgave his brothers. And he brought them to Egypt and gave them the best land available to raise their crops. And when Jacob died his brothers doubted that his love and forgiveness for them was sincere. But again he assured them that he forgave them. Good overcoming evil.

But why would we want to do that? Why would we turn the other cheek—not retaliating, but showing love to those who hate us? Why would we pray for those who persecute us? Because getting revenge on someone isn't good to make any friends. If you get even with someone they aren't going to listen to you when you share the gospel with them. Our goal is to follow what Paul says in verse 21, **Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.** When someone mistreats you, sins against you, makes you feel horrible, don't get even. Instead be nice to them, give them food and drink; love your enemies. By doing so, you might give them pause. You might cause them to stop and think about persecuting you or other Christians again. They might wonder why you didn't seek revenge—why you didn't get even like others would have. They might want to know more about Christ. And then you have the perfect opportunity to share with them message of the gospel. And so you would overcome evil with good.

You may have the opportunity to tell him about Christ. And about how when he was crucified he didn't get revenge. He is God. He could do anything that he wanted to do. When he was arrested on Maundy Thursday he asked those who were arresting him for whom they were looking. They said, "Jesus of Nazareth." When Jesus responded by saying, "I am he" they all fell over backwards. Jesus is the almighty Lord. The only reason he was arrested and bound was because Jesus allowed them to do so. He was put on trial, beaten, abused, spit upon, flogged, and eventually crucified. At any time Jesus could have sought revenge. He could have beat them, flogged, them sent fire and brimstone from heaven. But he didn't. In fact when he was nailed to the cross he did the exact opposite. He prayed to God. **Father, forgive them, for they do not know what**

they are doing. There was no revenge. He didn't seek to get even. He could have if he wanted to. But in his love he didn't.

That's because by suffering and dying on the cross Jesus was showing us love. He was showing love for his enemies. That is what we are by nature. Ever since Adam and Eve doubted God and rebelled against his commands, we have been nothing but God's enemies. Born as children of the devil. Our hearts are inclined toward sin. In fact before we were brought to faith we could do nothing but sin. Just a few chapters after the fall into sin Moses records God's impression about man: **The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.** And even now, as Christians, we still sin. We still follow the ways of the world. We seek revenge, we get even. We rebel against God's Word numerous times a day. We constantly reject him for our own wants and desires.

We were his enemies. Yet Christ died for us. He showed love to us by giving up his life on the cross. But not before he took our sins upon himself. Not before he gave us perfect life. Not before he suffered and died in our place. Christ showed true love to his enemies. He didn't get even. He didn't treat us as we treated him. Instead he gave up his life so that we might live forever.

Christ's love for us is our motivation to overcome evil with good. We treat others not as they treat us. But we treat them as God treated us. We love others as brothers. As Paul commands in verse 10, **Be devoted to one another in brotherly love.** You love your brother no matter what he does. He may do some foolish things. He may get himself in trouble. Yet he is still your brother, and you are going to love him no matter what. That's how we treat others. As our brothers. And we treat them as Christ treated us. We show them the love of Christ, by loving as Christ. We love others just as Christ loved us. His love dwells not only in us, but through us. Rather than getting even or seeking revenge, we forgive them. We don't hold their sins against them. Instead we show love to all people—even our enemies, just as Christ loved us.

When I was in seventh grade, I acted like the world. They try to get even, seek revenge. Nothing good can come from that. Rather we

love others as Christ loved us. So that we might have the opportunity to spread the gospel and tell others of his mercy and compassion for us sinners. So that they may be brought to faith through the gospel by the Holy Spirit and become our brothers and sisters in faith. Amen.