

Christ Overcame Evil With Good, Do the Same

by John Piper

Christ overcame evil with good by paying a ransom for our sins, and we are called to do the same by loving our enemies and overcoming evil with good.

Duration: 38:52

Scripture: Romans 2:4, Romans 12:14, Romans 12:17, Romans 12:20

Topics: "Overcoming Evil", "Christian Love"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of love and the need to overcome evil with good. He highlights the concept of giving water and food to one's enemies and wanting their salvation and good on earth. The speaker also discusses how Christ overcame sin and rebellion through the legal transaction of justification and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit. He contrasts Christianity with other religions, emphasizing that salvation is a transaction between God and His people, received by faith alone. The sermon concludes with a reflection on the sacrifice of missionaries who have given their lives for their enemies, and the question of whether love can truly overcome evil in such situations.

Transcript

The following message is by Pastor John Piper. More information from Desiring God is available at www.DesiringGod.org Romans 12, 9 through 21. Let love be genuine.

Abhor what is evil. Hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection.

Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal. Be fervent in spirit.

Serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope. Be patient in tribulation.

Be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality. Bless those who persecute you.

Bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with those who rejoice. Weep with those who weep.

Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited.

Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of

God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.

To the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink. For by doing so, you will heat burning coals upon his head.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Let's pray together. Hallelujah, what a Savior.

Saving, helping, keeping, loving. You will be with me here and now and to the end. And with all of those who despair of themselves and their virtue and their abilities.

And turn to you as their all. So gather a people for yourself, Lord. From around the world today on this Palm Sunday, gather a people for yourself.

Draw in those who are not yet born again. Do a miracle in millions of little places of worship in garages in Liberia or under trees in Guinea. Or sanctuaries and cathedrals where hardly anyone knows you.

And here, Lord, where people have come. Some filled with the Holy Spirit and overflowing with praise. And others looking on as though this was a strange thing.

So do your mighty work. Your Word will not come back to you empty. Help me to be faithful to this written, inspired Word.

Do a saving and sanctifying, encouraging, up-building, reconciling, humbling, unifying, emboldening, releasing, spreading work. In this moment I pray, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Both the fact that it's Palm Sunday and the fact that Romans 1 to 11 comes before Romans 12. Inclines me to title this message, not overcome evil with good. But Christ overcame evil with good.

Do that. There's a huge difference. We are a people, according to Charles Bridges, who wrote a great commentary on the book of Proverbs.

We are disciples of Him who died for His enemies. We are disciples of Him who died for His enemies. So are you a Christian this morning? If so, you're a disciple of Him who died for His enemies.

Are you not a Christian this morning? You are being pursued by one who died for His enemies. You are not here by accident. You're here by divine design.

God brought you here. And He has died for His enemies. That's you.

And you don't have to stay that way. Paul calls us now in verse 20 to love our enemies. And then he calls us in verse 21 to overcome evil with good.

Nobody would be a Christian if God didn't love His enemies. If God didn't overcome evil, the evil of our enmity, the evil of His enmity. If He didn't overcome that, nobody would be a Christian.

God, through Christ, overcame evil with good. And that's why anybody happens to be saved, forgiven, on their way to heaven and not hell. So He did a great work for us.

It all happened in Holy Week. We were His enemies. Maybe some of you still are.

Listen to Romans 5.10. 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? There was an enmity, and it went both ways. We were rebellious and insubordinate and self-centered. And God's just and holy response was wrath and justice.

We were under His wrath. We were children of wrath. We were on our way to destruction.

So enmity was flowing both ways, and there was no hope. And then came that trip to Jerusalem at the beginning of Holy Week, which is where we are now in the life of the church. The plan of God, the face set like flint.

Picture that Luke 9 passage. They were trembling because His face was set like flint to go to Jerusalem. They were trembling.

They could see something in that face and where He was going. What was this about? This doesn't feel like what we thought it was going to be. Three times He predicted what it would be.

The last time was just before He entered the city. Matthew 20. See, we are going up to Jerusalem.

The Son of Man will be delivered over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn Him to death and deliver Him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. And He will be raised on the third day. And that was spoken just hours before He entered the city.

So the big question they had, we have, is why Jesus? Why have you set your face like flint to go embrace the horrific realities of Holy Week of spitting and beard pulling and mockery and beating and lashing and crucifixion? Why are you on your way there? And He answered them eight verses later with one of the most important verses in the Bible. Chapter 20, verse 28 of Matthew says, The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many. The meaning of Holy Week is ransom.

The meaning of the death of Jesus and all the suffering and all the perfection and love that led up to it is ransom. A payment for a deliverance. A ransom.

Christ overcame evil with good in paying a ransom. All of our debts paid. Have you ever thought, you should think now if you haven't, my debt, John Piper's debt was infinite.

Why? Because you measure the grievousness of a sin against a being by the measure of the dignity of the being sinned against. And the measure of the dignity of the being I sinned against is an infinite dignity and an infinite measure and therefore my offense against Him is an infinite offense and if I am to pay this debt, there is only one way I can pay it. Spending an infinite amount of time in hell.

That's the only way I can pay this debt and I will pay unless another payment could be found and it can't be found on earth. Have you ever read Psalm 49 in this regard? Listen to Psalm 49 verse 7. Truly no man can ransom another or give to God the price of his life for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice. There is no one who can die for John Piper.

There is no one who can pay my debt to God. It is an infinite debt. No finite man can pay my debt, especially me.

Here is where all the religions of the world go wrong except one. They say a debt is owing. We are guilty.

Now, do this and do this and do this in order to get right with God. And so the transaction in all the religions of the world in order to be accepted by God is a transaction between man and God and it will not work. None of them will work.

It cannot be done. And therefore verse 15 in that psalm becomes precious beyond words. But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol for He will receive me.

And now on this side of Holy Week we know how He did it. God, looking down on all these infinitely sinful people who deserve an infinite amount of time in hell, engages with His Son in heaven. Son, I design a salvation.

Will you, in covenant with me, bear the sins of all who trust you? Father, I will. Go. And He enters into the womb of Mary and is born Son of God and Son of Man.

And He lives an absolutely perfect life fulfilling every requirement I ever failed to fulfill. And then He stretches Himself on a cross to bear the full brunt of the wrath of God owing to me and all those who will trust Him. And in a moment, as an infinite being absorbs an infinite amount of wrath to remove from all those who will trust Him an infinite suffering forever and make them right with God.

No religion in the world believes this but one. Let's get this really, really clear. Christ overcomes sin with good in two ways, not just one.

There is a moral transformation by which His people begin to have new behaviors, new attitudes, new language and they stop sinning so much. Yes, that happens and that is emphatically not the first thing that must happen. Nobody experiences that until something else, some other kind of overcoming happens first.

A transaction must happen not between you and God first, but between God and God first. Because you can never ransom your soul. Not by any performance of any transformation whatsoever.

The Bible makes it crystal clear. Neither you nor any mere man can ransom your soul for God. Only God can ransom you for God.

And God sent God into the world in the form of His Son and He became a God-Man so that He stretched Himself out and what happened at that moment was not your moral transformation but your legal justification. In other words, you were guilty in the court of heaven. God had only wrath to rest upon you in your guilty condition.

You had failed to meet every requirement of the law. There was wrath upon you, guilt upon you, condemnation upon you and you couldn't do a thing about it. Therefore, God brings into that situation a substitute and He pours His wrath out on the substitute.

And that substitute, in dying and living, fulfills every requirement that His people failed to fulfill. And when God looks upon that divine substitute, He says, Righteous! Everyone who is in Him, righteous, not guilty, gets paid before there is one whiff of a moral transformation in your life. That's the difference between Christianity and every other religion on planet earth.

God makes a transaction with God to justify His people. And we enjoy that by faith alone. And then, the Holy Spirit comes.

Sent by the Lord Jesus, risen from the dead, and on the basis of the blood of Jesus, He is willing to move into this carcass of mine and begin to work a slow, precious transformation. Humility. Love.

You start loving the cross. You start loving God. You start hating sin.

You start wanting to be a good person. You start hating your failures. You start confessing like crazy.

And little by little, you're becoming like Him. But that's second. That's not the gospel.

That's the result of the gospel. So we come now, on that basis, to chapter 12 of Romans. And we see Paul calling us to love our enemies down there in verse 20.

Love your enemies now. You're the disciple of the one who died for his enemies, namely you. You're the disciple of one who dies for his enemies.

Now, if your enemy is hungry, feed him. And if he's thirsty, give him something to drink and you'll bring coals of fire on his head. Don't be overcome by evil.

Overcome evil with good. And so the question is now, what's that? What does it mean to not be overcome by evil? Let's take the negative half, then the positive half. Not be overcome by evil.

What does that mean? In the context of verse 20, where we've got an enemy hating us and we're loving back, not being overcome by evil means don't let your enemy's evil make you evil. This is profound. America, for a hundred years, has been awash in a sea of victim mentality.

The entire discipline of psychology, I've just been reading a history of psychology in an article in First Things. The entire history of psychology in the 20th century is built on the victim mentality. Other people have done bad things to me, that's why I do bad things.

That's the nature of America. We think that way. I'm mad because he did this.

I'm vengeful because they did that. I'm sinfully anxious because they did that. They, they, they, they, they, they, they.

And this text says, don't be overcome by their evil. Don't be that way, America. Don't be that way, America.

Why would you bestow upon your adversary the dignity of triumph in your life? Why would you let yourself be shaped by their wronging you? What's the difference here between that and what Christians are? And the difference is Christ. When Christians are wronged, we don't just consult the wrong done to us, whether it's a spouse, or a child, or a neighbor, or a boss. When somebody wrongs us, we don't just consult that to determine how we will now be.

We consult Christ, who deals with that. And He will deal with it either by burying it on the cross or punishing it in hell. That's really sufficient.

Therefore, get your framework of life emotionally and intellectually from Christ, not them. Don't be overcome by other people's evil. Don't let other people's sins against you make you a sinner.

Let Christ make you holy in response to sin against you. This whole chapter is a spelling out of what that looks like on the basis of chapters 1-11, where Christ did it for us. Oh, that God would create in our church

such a radical Christ-focus, Christ-centeredness, Christ-dominance in our life that we wouldn't operate in terms of victimization, but operate in terms of exaltation of Christ.

Christ, shape my mind. Christ, shape my emotions. Don't let me be shaped by all this junk out here coming at me.

I am Yours. Christ is my King. Christ is my All.

Christ is my Treasure. Why would I bestow such dignity upon such sin as to copy it? I think that's the meaning of the first half of verse 21. Don't be overcome by evil.

What's the positive half mean? Overcome evil with good. It means, following the same contextual suggestion of verse 20, let your love triumph over the enemy's hostility. Let your love triumph over your enemy's sin or hostility against you.

That's the context of verse 20. That's the way I take verse 21. Let your love triumph over your enemy's hostility.

But that's not clear. What does that mean? What does triumph over your enemy's hostility mean? Don't be overcome with evil, but overcome evil. What does overcoming evil mean? Okay, it's the enemy's hostility in verse 20, but now to overcome it would mean it goes away.

I mean, if you love somebody, they stop hating you and they repent and they become your friend. That would be a wonderful triumph, wouldn't it? So surely that's included, but the question is, is that all it means? Does that always happen? One thief cursed Jesus and the other thief repented. Judas hanged himself and Peter repented.

The centurion said, this is the Son of God. And the Pharisees say, good riddance. When Jesus died, He split the world in half.

And when you love people, you split people in half. You split groups in half. Some are moved by your love and repent and are thankful and are convicted for their own sin and your love wins them.

And others stay right at you. Your love doesn't do a thing. In fact, it increases their animosity.

Now the question is, when that happens, have you overcome evil with love? And I think verse 20 says, you have indeed, which is the way I take the coals of fire, which is different probably from the way you have taken them. And so let me try to explain what I mean and why. If your enemy is hungry, feed him.

And if he's thirsty, give him something to drink. For by so doing, you will heap burning coals on his head. What does that mean? You will heap burning coals on his head.

There's a view circulating. Two people have suggested this to me. So I've done some thinking about it and poking around.

Two people, a couple of weeks ago, came up and said, have you heard the interpretation that in those days, they used coals to make fire and fire was important. You cooked your food on it. And if your fire went out, you would go to a neighbor and you would need coals to start your fire again.

And so you would ask for burning coals from your neighbor. You'd put them in a basket and carry them back to your fire and start your fire. And so to heap burning coals on the head was a blessing.

Now when I heard that, I thought, hmm, that's clever. And so I have searched high and low for any shred of historical evidence for such a thing. And it doesn't exist.

It doesn't exist. Somebody made that up. If you know any historical evidence for such a custom in the first century, you come tell me, I will publicly take back what I've just said.

I have searched high and low, commentary after commentary, all over the internet, every historical book I know to look in. It's not there. It's like that old rumor about getting through the eye of a needle.

Jesus said, it's harder for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into the kingdom of heaven, which means you can't be done. Because the next phrase says, with man it is impossible. And this rumor is spread.

There's a gate leading into Jerusalem that's low called the needle's eye gate. And a camel has to get down on its knees and get its burden off, crawl through, and then get up on the other side. So this is a picture of repentance and getting your burdens off and getting on your knees.

That's ridiculous. It doesn't exist. People try to solve problems in the Bible by making things up and then the rumor spreads so wide people don't check them out.

Here are the facts and whether they are compelling as to the meaning, you decide. Every place that the term coals of fire or anything like it occurs in the Old Testament or the New Testament, doesn't occur in the New Testament, are negative. They're judgment.

They're punishment. Therefore, given the nature of the parallel between verse 19, vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord, and verse 20, this will bring coals of fire on their head, I take it to mean judgment. No.

That simply alters the question. The question then becomes, okay, are you saying you love people so that they'd be damned? You love people so that they'll get judged? Is that what you're saying? We posed that question several weeks ago and that's not what I'm saying and it's not what Paul is saying. We know it's not what Paul is saying because of verse 14 especially where you're to bless those who persecute.

You bless and do not curse them. This whole chapter is designed to make people humble and broken and loving and longing for people's salvation and longing for people's good and longing for people's physical, spiritual welfare. This chapter is not designed to put vindictiveness into your heart.

It's designed to leave vindictiveness, if it exists at all, with God, who is the judge, vengeance is mine, I will repay, while you pour your life out for other people. That's the design of the chapter. But here's the important thing to see in verse 19 and 20.

You love a person or a group of people. I'm thinking mainly of missionaries here. 2,000 years worth of missionaries who have given their lives and thousands of them have been killed by those they loved.

Thousands. Thousands of them. 34 years pouring out your life for lepers in India and a mob burns you and your sons to death.

So here's the question I have at a moment like that in view of this text. I say, okay, we're told to give our enemies water and to give them food and to pour our lives out and I would say, yes, even unto death. Christians are people who die for their enemies.

We don't kill our enemies. We die for our enemies. That's what Jesus did.

We are disciples of Him who died for His enemies and therefore, when Graham Staines and his sons die, my question is, did that love overcome evil? Or looking on, do you say, well, that time it failed. A few people got converted and so it worked a few times. Loving people works a few times to overcome evil, but it doesn't work when they kill you.

And I think verse 20 is in the Bible to say, wrong! Because when you spend 34 years pouring your life out for others and what they decisively and finally do with their lives is kill you, you win and they lose. For coals of fire will land on their head. And therefore, no Christian needs to ever even entertain one minute's thought that any act of love fails to overcome evil.

Not one act of love ever performed in the name of Jesus fails to overcome evil. It either wins people to Christ or increases their judgment. Let's look at one other verse to see where I'm getting that idea besides here.

Romans 2, verses 4 and 5. I want my love to be like Christ's love, God's love. And here's the description of it in Romans 2, 4 and 5. Do you presume on the riches of His kindness and forbearance and patience, not knowing that God's kindness is meant to lead you to repentance? Now just stop there and say, that's Romans 12. Verse 14, verse 17.

First half of verse 20. That's Romans 12. Don't you know that God's kindness and forbearance and patience is pointing to repentance? He'll have you.

He'll have you forever in love. Verse 5. But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself. Now, would it not be perfectly legitimate to say you are heaping up coals of wrath for yourself? I think that's exactly what it means.

Both verses. But because of your hard and impenitent heart, you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed. In other words, if you stiff arm this morning the kindness of God to bring you to this service and hear this Gospel message, if you stiff arm the mercy of God and say I don't want it, I am resisting, I will not have it, I want my own private way, you are storing up wrath, more wrath for having been here than if you had not come.

Every time a person is loved and rejects love, wrath increases unless they are brought to repentance. Give your enemy water. Give him food.

Want his salvation. Want his good on earth. And know, if he kills you, you win, he loses.

Therefore, take crazy risks with your life in the cause of love. Take wonderful risks with your life in the cause of love because you cannot lose. So I close.

Christ overcame evil with good. He overcame my sin. He overcame my rebellion.

He overcame my self-centeredness first by the legal transaction of justification between the Father and the Son whereby the Son offered up a perfect life and a perfect death so that all the wrath owing to me was on

Him and every requirement that I was to pay, He paid and now the verdict on me is not guilty, righteous. And then, secondly, He overcame my sin by pouring out the Holy Spirit into my life and on the basis of the blood of Jesus began to work new covenant reality into my life. Little by little, I for shame say, all too slowly as a pastor of this church.

So, Christian, glory in your Redeemer and don't be overcome by evil. Don't be shaped by the sin around you into sin. But rather, overcome evil with good.

Pray and long like Romans 10.1 My heart's desire and prayer to God is that they might be saved. That's the way we should pray for every enemy on planet earth. And know that God is just.

And if it doesn't work and they kill you in the end or just go to their grave hating you, you win. They lose. That's a sad thing.

It will take heaven in order for us to bear the load of those we've loved suffering forever. There you'll find hundreds of sermons, articles, radio broadcasts, and much more all available to you at no charge. Our online store carries all of Pastor John's books, audio, and video resources.

You can also stay up to date on what's new at Desiring God. Again, our website is www.DesiringGod.org or call us toll free at 1-888-346-4700. Our mailing address is Desiring God 2601 East Franklin Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55406.

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