



Overcome Evil with Good (Romans 12:17–21)

Today, we will be focusing on how a Christian should live, when things go bad, and I am talking about excessive over-the-top bad! B-A-D in all capital letters!

How a Christian should respond

- when wrongfully treated,
- when brutality treated,
- when shamefully treated,

How a Christian should respond when a great injustice has occurred, and he is dealt the ill treatment of scorn, malice, and extreme hatred.

In preparation for this message I found an example, a living illustration, of what I wish to convey to you today. In James Montgomery Boice's commentary on Romans, he tells a powerful story about one who overcame extreme evil with good in his life. His name is John Perkins. I did a little further preliminary investigation about him on the internet in Wikipedia which led to other discoveries. John Perkins is an amazing Christian man, a very Christ-like man, a Christian example to imitate. So, what I must share with you comes from Dr. Boyce, augmented by further research.

John Perkins is a black man, an American Christian minister, civil rights activist, Bible teacher, best-selling author, philosopher, and community developer. Although he was a third-grade dropout, he has been recognized with 16 honorary doctoral degrees! Some of the schools you will recognize—Wheaton College, Covenant College, Gordon College, Geneva College, and Nyack College. He has served on the Board of Directors of World Vision and Prison Fellowship. Perkins has advised and/or served on the Presidential Task Forces of five U.S. Presidents. He is the author of 17 books, including the best-selling, *One Blood: Parting Words to the Church on Race*. He is the recipient of 23 awards, 1972 Ford Foundation Fellow, 1978–1980 Distinguished Black American, 1980 Mississippi Religious Leadership Man of the Year, 1980 Who's Who of International Intellectuals, to name a few. Buildings on college campuses are named after him, Fellows Programs at Calvin University, Northern Seminary, and University of Virginia are named after him. A collection of his papers is stored at the Billy Graham Center Archives at Wheaton College. As far as I know, he is still living and 90 years old. I went to Amazon and read excerpts from some of his books, and a major theme of how to bring healing to a racially divided community and lift the poor out of poverty is based upon the life of Jesus. He describes how that is done with three "R"s, 1) Relocation, 2) Reconciliation, 3) Redistribution.

Relocation – Jesus lived among the poor. We need to “live” among the people we wish to minister to. They need to see a living example of Christ in their midst.

Reconciliation – People need to be reconciled to God and to each other

Redistribution – This is not a government redistribution of wealth, but of each person using their God-given gifts and resources to help each other. This is Christian love in action.

This, my friends, is biblical Christianity at its best, and is at the heart of Romans 12. This is the answer to our racially divided nation. Dr. John Perkins is a supreme example of what we will be talking about today, which is “overcoming evil with good.” I am going to tell you his story as I explain today's text.

Sermon handout: Bible Baptist Church of Galway, Galway, NY, Pastor Wayne R. Brandow, Sept 20, 2020

Dr. John Perkins

John M. Perkins was born in 1930 in New Hebron, Mississippi. His mother died when he was seven months old and his father abandoned him. He was raised by his grandmother and extended family who worked as sharecroppers. When he was seventeen, he left for California at the urging of his family after his brother, Clyde, was shot and killed by a police officer.

In 1951, he married Vera Mae Buckley and the same year he was drafted into the U.S. Armed Forces, serving in the Korean War. In 1957, Perkins son, Spencer, invited him to church (this is a little boy) and Perkins became a Christian. In time, Perkins became a pastor and he wanted to return to Mississippi to help the poor blacks he grew up with, so in 1960, he moved his wife and children to Mississippi near his childhood town. Vera Mae started a day-care center.

In 1965, Perkins supported voter registration in Simpson County and in 1967 became involved in school desegregation when he enrolled his son Spencer in an all-white high school.

In the fall of 1969, Perkins became the leader in an economic boycott of all white-owned stores in Mendenhall, Mississippi where he lived.

An experience of terrifying injustice and hatred

On February 7, 1970 on a Saturday night a van of black college students who had participated in a civil rights march were pulled over and arrested by the highway patrol. Perkins and two associates went to the jail to bail them out. When they arrived, they were surrounded by five sheriffs and several highway patrolmen and were arrested and beaten.

Perkins had not been speeding, taking drugs, or resisting arrest. He did not even have a police record. All that he had done was go to the jail to post bail for the students. But he was a black leader, and he was hated.

Perkins was beaten most of the night, along with some of the others. They stomped on him and kicked him in the head, ribs, and groin. One officer brought a fork over and said, "Do you see this?" Then he jammed it up his nose. After that he shoved it down his throat. For part of the terrible evening Perkins was unconscious and so mutilated that the students who were watching him in his cell thought that he was either dead or about to die. It was a case of evil in a particularly vicious, violent, and racist form.

Two caring doctors worked on him. One white and one black. His recovery both physically and emotionally took a long time. Remember, he was a Christian. Something remarkable happened while lying on the hospital bed. He envisioned Jesus suffering upon the cross. He was comforted that Jesus who was also unjustly beaten and falsely accused understood what he was going through. Jesus was nailed to the cross like a common criminal. He hung upon that cross with a heart not on anger and vengeance, but with a heart of love for his abusers. Jesus' enemies hated him, but he loved, and he forgave.

Perkins said in that moment God took the bitterness out of him, and gave him a heart of love not just for poor black folk, but for poor white folk, whose poverty was not found in the way of riches, but impoverished in the area of love. Each white man's face that came before him in his memory, each look of anger and evil, he forgave, and he felt that God was doing a deep, deep work in his heart. God was healing all those wounds which kept him from loving whites. Jesus is in the healing business! He patches up broken bodies and can remove the poison in our hearts. John Perkins began to love all men. Not just those of his own race.

PLEASE NOTE: The purpose of this message is not about what blacks should do in our present national crisis. *This message is about what EVERY Christian should do regardless of the color of their skin!*

Our Bible Passage Today

We have been in Romans 12, where we were asked to give our bodies (our very being) as living sacrifices to God. God is not in this passage calling us to martyrdom. He is calling us to live, to live for God.

A sacrifice is in view. He wants us to live in such a way that would please God. Saying no to our wants and ambitions if they are not in accord with God's ways and saying yes to God.

Yes Lord! Here I am. Use me for your glory. Yes Lord, my gifts, my abilities, my life is yours. Use them all as you see fit.

First, the Lord reminds us we are in a family, God's family. The church is an extension of God's family. The Trinity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit live together in harmony and felicity. He wants us to share in His happiness, in His family life. We become a part by becoming adopted children. We become a part as the bride of Christ. We have a new family. The local church is an earthly manifestation of it. Why should you go to church? Should we go to be entertained, to have our brokenness fixed, to be thought of as a good church-going person? No, we should be there, to worship God and because it is our family. This is where we belong. Our brothers and sisters need us. We need to love them and be loved in our newfound divine family, the church.

Last week we covered a lot of admonitions which showed us what love looks like. One of them sounded exceedingly difficult to do, and at that time I said don't worry about it, we will talk about it next week. Well, next week is here.

Now we will focus on the essence of Romans 12:14, "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. The how to do that is in today's passage, Romans 12:17-21.

Table 1. Romans 12:17-21

<p>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:</p> <p>"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."</p> <p>²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do not repay anyone evil for evil Do what is right Live at peace with everyone• Do not take revenge <p><i>"It is mine to avenge; I will repay," (Deuteronomy 32:35)</i></p> <p>²¹ <i>If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.</i></p> <p>²² <i>In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the LORD will reward you. (Proverbs 25:21-22)</i></p>
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Notice, Paul makes a statement and backs it up with Scripture, two passages from the Old Testament (OT). The OT was the Bible of the early Christian church. Should we use the OT today? If it was good enough for Paul, Jesus, John, and the other apostles, it is good enough for me. Get to know Isaiah. In the New Testament (NT) Jesus is the Christ of Isaiah!

Use the book of Proverbs. Let its maxims guide you. Consider today's Scripture reading from the OT.

Table 2. Leviticus 19:9–18

<p>9 " 'When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. ¹⁰ Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the alien. I am the LORD your God.</p> <p>11 " 'Do not steal.</p> <p>" 'Do not lie.</p> <p>" 'Do not deceive one another.</p> <p>12 " 'Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the LORD.</p> <p>13 " 'Do not defraud your neighbor or rob him.</p> <p>" 'Do not hold back the wages of a hired man overnight.</p> <p>14 " 'Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the LORD.</p> <p>15 " 'Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.</p> <p>16 " 'Do not go about spreading slander among your people.</p> <p>" 'Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the LORD.</p> <p>17 " 'Do not hate your brother in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in his guilt.</p> <p>18 " 'Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.</p>	<p>Here is a long list of things not to do. Why?</p> <p>The key is verse 18.</p> <p>We are to love our neighbor.</p> <p>Doing the things on this list is unloving!</p> <p>Look at Romans 12:1–16. [page 1100]</p> <p>There is a list here as well. A list of what to do and not do. Why?</p> <p>We are to love our brothers and sisters in Christ.</p> <p>Notice how both ends. Do not take vengeance! Let God do that! Focus on love.</p>
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What are we to be? (our NT Scripture reading today)

²² *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,* ²³ *gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23)*

The Lord wants to prepare us for handling injustice. Instead of reacting in anger, we are to respond in grace and love.

Table 3. The Beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–12)

<p>¹ Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, ² and he began to teach them, saying:</p> <p>³ "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>⁴ Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.</p> <p>⁵ Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.</p> <p>⁶ Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.</p> <p>⁷ Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.</p> <p>⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.</p> <p>⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.</p> <p>¹⁰ Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.</p> <p>¹¹ "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me." ¹² Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.</p> <p>¹³ "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. ¹⁴ "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. ¹⁵ Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. ¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.</p>	<p>The literary structure is important.</p> <p>The Beatitudes are fenced in by for theirs is the kingdom of heaven</p> <p>There are seven Beatitudes that tell us how we "should be" if blessed</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. poor in spirit (humble) 2. mourn 3. meek 4. hunger and thirst for doing right 5. merciful 6. pure in heart (single-hearted/ no mixture) 7. peacemakers <p>There is forward movement in the Beatitudes and the eighth Beatitude is the climax. It is also that which is stressed!</p> <p>It is repeated twice – blessed are the persecuted!</p> <p>Persecution is different than the other Beatitudes, because it is not what you should do, it is what is done to you.</p> <p>How we respond is important. If we respond correctly we are salt and light, and God is praised.</p>
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Remember the key to understanding the NT is that Jesus is Isaiah's Christ. Matthew is telling us that Jesus used Isaiah 61 here in the Sermon on the Mount.

¹ *The Spirit of the Sovereign LORD is on me, because **the LORD has anointed me to preach good news to the poor.** He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, ² to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to **comfort all who mourn,** ³ and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor. (Isaiah 61:1-3).*

Read Luke 4:14–21. [page 995 in the pew Bible]

God will be with us when called upon to suffer for Him. Let us overcome evil with good, by loving our enemies.
Let us be salt and light – "a city on a hill" for all to see, that God may be praised!