

“Overcome Evil with Good”

Romans 12: 9-21

Did you know this piece was in the Bible? There it is, in black and white, just exactly what we are called to do as people of faith: Love one another, don't think we are smarter or better than anyone else, treat with respect everyone we meet; be kind to all, even to those who are not kind to us; Pay attention to the feelings of others; Care about them; and finally-Forget about getting even. It is all right there in black and white. how we are called to live our lives as people of faith; How we are called to be as people of faith. There it is, all right there in black and white. Did you know this was in our Bible?

Now, before we start arguing about how we are supposed to read and interpret the Bible, whether we should read it and interpret it literally or figuratively, let's talk about it. Let's think about it.

Okay, say we believe that we should read the Bible literally. As one of my professors in seminary would always say, we either take all of the Bible literally or none of it at all. We don't get to pick and choose what we are going to follow and what stuff we are going to leave out just because we don't like what it is asking us to do.

So this means if we are going to read the Bible literally, and we come to this passage here, there really isn't much of an argument here. Paul tells us word for word what we are supposed to do. If we are going to read the Bible literally, then we are literally supposed to be doing all these things as people of faith. I'll let that one sink in for a moment.

Now that we have done that and since I don't want to leave anyone out in this discussion, let's look at the other side. Let's say for argument's sake that we don't read the Bible literally but rather we see it as more of a metaphor for our life. We see it as more of a reminder to see the larger picture, more of a call to always remember the context that surrounds the passage. So if we continue with this train of thought, we might also say, we realize that the Bible was not written with us as modern day folks in mind. We would also say that we know that the Bible was written for a particular people in a particular time period in a particular context. If we continue with this way of interpreting the Bible metaphorically, we might also say that what matters most for us is the message that the text conveys. That this message, after all is said and done, is what matters most, which also tells us that the message of the passage, the message of the Bible is universal and timeless.

Alright, once again for argument's sake, let's say we follow this train of thought. Yes, Paul wrote for the faith community in Rome, a community filled

with people who were living in a time period much different than ours. We know that this group was forming a new church and needed advice. We know that this community of faith was struggling with what it means to be people of faith living in a culture that called them to a way of life that was so different from the way and life of the Kingdom of God.

Once again, we know that Paul wrote hundreds of years ago, definitely for a time period that was different from ours but we can see that once again, Paul's message is timeless and universal. It so fits with where we are today. As modern day people of faith, we struggle each and every day with the question of what it means to be a person of faith in a world, in a culture that views things so radically different from how the Kingdom of God views life and community.

If we follow this train of thought on how we can read and interpret the Bible metaphorically, we can definitely see how the message of this passage is timeless and universal. We can definitely see how Paul's words still hold meaning for us today as modern day people of faith.

I'll let that one sink in a bit as well.

You see, that's where the problem really lays. No matter how we read or interpret the Bible, there is no way of us getting around the fact that we are called to love another, to love our enemies, to not think we are better or smarter than

others. There is no way of getting around the fact that we are called to treat people with respect and to be kind to others, even kind to those who have not been kind to us. There is no way of getting around the fact that we are called to pay attention to the feelings of others, that we are to care for all of God's creation. And let's face it, no matter how we read or interpret the Bible, there is definitely no way of us getting around the fact that we are called to forget all about getting even when someone hurts us or betrays us.

It is all right here in black and white. It is all right here for all of us to see. It is all right here for us to read. It is all right here for us to understand. It is all right here for us to know what the Bible really says when it comes to us living as the people of God.

And there is no way we can pretend otherwise. Because there it is, in black and white, all right there for the world to see.

As the people of God, as a community of faith, as God's children, named and claimed, we are called to love one another, to love our enemies. We are called to be respectful and to be humble. We are called to let God be the judge and forget about our want to get even. We are called to be kind to one another, even to those who are not kind to us.

It is all right there, in black and white, all right there for the world to see.

I'll be honest, I'm not sure if I am ready to let this one go quite yet. There has got to be a loophole somewhere. There is always a get out of jail free card somewhere. Surely, the Bible has got one as well. We just have to find it.

Okay, how about this? What if we said that this was Paul speaking? He is not exactly Jesus. Sure, he was a great apostle and did many things for the early church, but come on, Paul wasn't the Son of God? Surely his word doesn't carry as much weight as the Son of God's word? Surely, we should rely on Jesus' teachings and commandments before we start relying on Paul's?

Now there is a thought. Let's see this one through a bit. Did Jesus say anything about loving our enemies? Did Jesus say anything about doing good to those who hate you? Did Jesus say anything about praying for those who abuse you?

Silence....oh yeah... Jesus did say all those things. Paul was not the first to speak these words. He heard them from somewhere first. He heard them from the teachings of Jesus. Take a look at Luke 6: 27-28 or Matthew 5: 44. "But I say to you that listen: "Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who abuse you." It is almost word for word. Paul could easily be in danger of plagiarism. He took the very words out of Jesus' mouth and wrote them down for the community of faith in Rome and for us as

people of faith today. Paul's words are almost word for word from Jesus' teachings.

We may be in trouble here. There might not be a loophole for us. But I'm not ready to give up just yet. What Paul and Jesus is asking of us is easier said than done. In order to do what they are asking of us, We would have to change completely the way we see the world, the way we treat each other, the way we treat people who we don't like. I mean, in order to do what Paul and Jesus are asking of us, we would have to change our way of thinking and our way of being.

Okay, I'm not ready to give this up yet. There has got to be a loophole somewhere in all this. Okay, let's see. We know that Jesus didn't write down his words, that other people wrote down his messages. Maybe the disciples got it wrong. It wouldn't be the first time, right?

Okay, let's just say that the disciples wrote down what they thought Jesus said. I wonder if there is any way we could discover what actually influenced what Jesus said, what Jesus meant by his words. I wonder if there was a way we could read some of the same Scriptures that Jesus might have read as a person of faith.

Oh, I know. We'll look in the Old Testament. Everyone knows that the Old Testament is full of an angry God and that all they did was fight. There has got to be a loophole in the Old Testament somewhere. We all know that this part of the

Bible only holds death and destruction. Surely, there has got to be a loophole to Paul and Jesus' words in the Old Testament.

Is there anything in the Old Testament about loving our enemies? Is there anything in the Old Testament about forgetting about getting even?

Silence....oh yeah... There is something. In the words of the Scripture that Jesus read during his time here on earth, in the very words of the Scripture that influenced Jesus as a person of faith, in the very words of the Scripture that shaped and molded Jesus as teacher and preacher, there is something there about loving our enemies. There is something there about forgetting about getting even.

It is all right there in black and white, all right there for the world to see.

Deuteronomy 32:35: "Vengeance is mine says the Lord"

Proverbs 25: 21: "If your enemies are hungry for bread give them bread to eat and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink."

I'm not making this stuff up. It is all right there in black and white, all right there for the world to see.

No matter how many loopholes we look for, no matter which way we read or interpret the Bible, it is all right there in our book that we hold as the Word of God. And it is telling us to: love one another, to not think we are better or smarter than anyone else, to treat each other with respect, to be kind to everyone we meet, even

the people who are not kind to us, to pay attention to the feelings of others, to care for all of God's creation and to forget about getting even.

It is all right there in black and white: Old Testament, Gospels and Epistles. It is all part of the Word of God for the people of God. It is all right there for the whole world to see. It is all right there for us to start following and doing as the people of God. No loopholes. No get out of jail free card. No way of getting around it. It is all right there for us to see, calling us to be people of God's love at all times.

Did you know this was in the Bible?

Looking at the world around us, that is all I want to ask. People of God, do we really know what is in the Scriptures that we hold as the Word of God? Do we really know what we are being called to do as the Body of Christ here on earth? Sometimes, I really have my doubts.

As guns kill and bombs explode, all I want to ask is do we know we are called to love our enemies? Because there it is in black and white, all right there for the world to see.

As programs for food stamps are cut and children go to bed hungry each night, all I want to ask is do we know we are called to treat each other with respect? Because there it is, in black and white, all right there for the world to see.

As angry words and actions tear communities apart, all I want to ask is do we know that we are called to be kind to one another, even to those who are not kind to us. Because there it is, all right there for the world to see.

As I hear people calling for revenge for acts of war and hate, all I want to ask is do we know that we are called to forget about getting even? Because there it is, all right there for the world to see.

As I watch our culture being divided into the haves and the have nots, all I want to ask is do we know that we are called to not think we are better or smarter than anyone else. Because it is all right there, in black and white, all right there for the world to see.

As I worry about the world and wonder what kind of future and legacy we are leaving for our children and grandchildren, all I want to ask is do we know we are called to overcome evil by doing good. Because it is there, all right there in black and white, all right there for all of us to see and start doing in our lives.

As I wonder what is the point of faith, the point of God, the point of church, as I wonder about what the point of all it is, especially as I watch images of Gaza and Israel, images of Ferguson, images of Syria and Ukraine, especially as I watch images of hurt and hate, images of brokenness and sorrow fill our world, all I want to ask is: People of God, did we forget that we are called to continually work for love, to continually act with love, that we are continually called to be the people of

God's love, working to bring about God's vision of peace here on earth. All I want to ask is, Body of Christ, have we forgotten we are called to make a choice out of love each and every time, even as the world crumbles around us. All I want to ask as I watch humankind tear each other apart, all I want to ask is, People of God, have we forgotten what it says in our Bible about loving our enemies, about treating each other with respect, about not acting like we are better or smarter than anyone else, have we forgotten that we are called to be kind to others, even to the ones who have not been kind to us, have we forgotten that we are called to forget about getting even?

Because it is all right there, in black and white, all right there for us and the world to see and to start living out each and every day. It is all right there, for us as the people of God. All we ever need to know about our calling to be the Body of Christ here on earth, is right here, in black and white, a reminder for us each and every day. It is all right here.

And now that we know it is here, May we never ever forget it again. Amen.