

Date of sermon: 8/08/2020
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Romans 12:17-21
Title of sermon: **Overcoming Evil**
Series: Don't Settle for Normal - #10

Romans 12:17-21 - NIV:

¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. ¹⁸ If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. ¹⁹ Do not take revenge, my dear 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.

We are in a series called "Don't Settle for Normal." If you're new with us, we've been in the series for quite a while. I got an interesting gift. I've been out of town. I just got in town this afternoon, so I've been out of town for a little while, and so, I was going through my mail, and I got this interesting gift. You remember last week I told the story about that little creeper that goes underneath the car? For those of you who are new and you didn't see it, go back and listen to it. So, I did that. And I didn't know, but we have some auto mechanic in Eugene that has taken a real heart for this poor auto mechanic-challenged pastor. And so, he sent me a book -- Auto Mechanics for Dummies, basically. It's the coolest gift in the world! I just got it today. And so, to my friend who -- I don't know you, you sent me this -- and you wrote it -- I say to you, don't expect great things from me. I'll read it, but Dear God -- I still want my mechanic! All I want to do is drive this crazy thing, so -- I love you guys, and for those of you who join us online all over the US, it has been great, and thank you for the book on auto mechanics. I think I'm going to tell you of my insufficient ability to invest in gold, and maybe somebody can send that.

I loved worship tonight. I know the worship team's gone, but, you know what -- I love all kinds of music, and to travel from 1885, "How Great Thou Art," to today -- that was such a special time. So, I hope you enjoyed it as much as my heart did. It was beautiful.

The scripture says, in II Corinthians chapter five -- "So, from now on, we" -- this is not the text I'm going to preach out of, so don't run there. But just listen. It's okay. I know you're looking, it's like, "Wait a minute! Supposed to be Romans chapter 12!" Hang on! I'll get there! It's double blessing tonight. "So, from now on, we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he's a new creation. The old is gone, the new is come. All of this is from God" -- here's the line -- "who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." What is reconciliation -- biblical? You reconcile your checkbook -- I know nobody does that anymore. Probably a few of you do, sorry. I grew up, and my mom, that was like -- that was major for her, and she was really fastidious about that, so I'd reconcile, and so, I kind of did it. And -- well, someone in the last 30 years, I decided online was, like, a lot better. But to reconcile two things is to take biblically two people who are at odds -- enemies, broken -- and bring them together in harmony. That's what God says He did with us. And not only has He done that with us, but He says in this text that He's given us this ministry, this assignment. "I

want you to go out, and I want you to bridge the gap between people who are at odds. And as much as it is up to you," says the text that we will look at tonight, "be at peace. Reconcile."

I was having a conversation this week with an individual, and he said, "When did it happen?" I said, "When did what happen?" He goes, "When did we become these polarized, political parties and these polarized views where nobody agrees and we fight through everything? When did that happen?" I don't know. But that's where it is. That's the world you and I live in. And we struggle in that world. It's not an easy world to live in. It's not an easy world because people are afraid of each other, we're afraid of using words that maybe that we've lived and we want to be sensitive, and we want to grow as a culture, we want to deal with things that are either personal or systemic. We want to deal with these things. But sometimes we don't know how. And this text helps us. In our series, we've talked about -- for the first three weeks -- "I have emotions, God, because of all the things. Because of COVID. Because of the racial tension. Because of the political tension. I have emotions, God, that I feel, and I don't know what to do with them." We talked about how God led us through David to deal with those emotions. And then we looked at -- two weeks -- convictions that I need to have if I'm going to make it in this day and not lose my mind. We looked at Joseph and we looked at the Book of Esther, and ultimately, we came to this place where we trusted the providential work of God. But now, we're in the same series, and we're in this section where we're looking at assignments that God has given to us. And the assignment tonight could be given in one word -- reconcile with people. Reconcile. Or, in this text that we look at -- overcome evil with good. I want to use those two phrases as almost synonymous. Let's read together, you can follow along on the screen. And feel free, and always bring your Bible. "Do not repay anyone evil for evil." It's the natural thing. So, when I said, "Don't settle for normal" -- that's the normal thing. People do it. "Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends upon you, live in peace with everyone, and do not take revenge. My dear friends -- ah, but leave room for God's wrath. For it is written, 'It is mine to avenge, and I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary, if your enemy is hungry -- well, why don't you feed them." It's kind of giving us an explanation -- what does it mean to do good? "If your enemy's hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you're going to heap burning coals on his head." Summarizing his point -- do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. Reconcile.

That's what the songs were about tonight. God pursued you. God longs for you, and He overcame evil. What evil? The evil of my heart, the evil of your heart. And He overcame that evil by good. What good did God do? Well, He died on a cross. When Jesus took His place on that cross, and He died, and He did good, He died in our place. But the purpose of that was what? To overcome evil. What evil? Mine. And how did He do it? Through judgment? Condemnation? Scolding? No. In fact, Jesus says in John chapter three, verse 17, "I've not come to condemn the world." That wasn't His intent. He's come to what? Reconcile. How do you and I partner? Because that's the ministry we've been given. He has reconciled us to God, and He has given us the ministry of reconciliation. What does it look like? I want to look at it from this text's perspective when Paul is writing to the Roman, as those who are reading this, who are living in a time easily more evil and harsh than ours. Way easier in terms of making the case that their moral degradation was far more pervasive than ours. Hard to imagine, but it was. And rather than being defeated, and rather than being discouraged, He said, "Move into this world. Take the presence of Christ."

How do we do it? Number one -- He wants to tell you that love chooses to respond unnaturally. It does. It does it in a number of ways. Number one, it chooses to respond with kindness instead of reacting with anger. Go back up to verse 14, I'm in -- again -- Romans chapter 12. Come back a little bit earlier. He says, in verse 14, "I want you to bless those who persecute you." Stop right there.

Do you recognize how impossible that is? Anybody other than me said, "Are you kidding me? Bless people who persecute me?" Maybe -- I would think that I could walk away from them, I could get them out of my life, I could unfriend them on Facebook -- that's awfully powerful. I can take their phone number out of my cell phone. I can do a lot of things, but God, are you serious? Bless them? Yes. "Ah, bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them." He says it in a different way, but it's really the same., in verse 17, "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody." How do I love unnaturally? I choose to respond with kindness instead of reacting with anger. It is natural to live with vengeance, it is natural to get back, it is natural that when one person says something to say something back. After all, stand up for yourself! Christians Aren't Meant to be a Doormat, was one title of a book. It's true! I just don't think it's a doormat to bless people who persecute you. I think it's one of the most courageous things that you can do. I think it's one of the most courageous, hard-to-do, studly, manly, gloriously beautiful. Anyone who does it. A doormat? Try it. You're no doormat if you choose to move towards a person who has degraded you, who has torn you down, who has talked behind your back, who has done everything to assassinate your character. And to think in your own life "God, how can I make their life better?" Bless them. Instead of saying something that is evil, say something that is good. Every day you turn on the news, you see a world that says, "If I don't get what I want, I'm gonna sue you." I was kind of marveled by this Yale student who is suing Yale for an insufficient, or an -- "inferior" was the word -- inferior education. Really? We're gonna sue a school in the midst of a pandemic who's doing everything they can -- I'm not trying to defend Yale; I just happen to be a board member of a university, and so, I understand that every university that is out there is doing their level best to try and figure out how do we move students along and educate them so that they all have a gap year in their life where they learn nothing. Oh, but -- there's a student who says, "I'm gonna sue you! You didn't do what I wanted!" See, that's the natural thing. Love that chooses to respond unnaturally responds with kindness instead of reacting with anger.

Paul secondly says, "I want you to choose to take the lead and set the example." In other words, if they're not gonna love me, I'm not gonna love them. If they don't scratch my back, I won't scratch your back. I don't know if you know horse culture very well, but -- I want to give you a little insight. No horse scratches another horse's back by itself. It just doesn't do it. I've never seen it. If one horse scratches the back of another horse, the other horse reciprocates. I've never seen one scratch the back and the other's like, "Ah, keep going. You know what? I've earned a day off." They are reciprocal. They just work together. But it's not that way with evil. It's not. Evil doesn't come to you and say, "You know what? If you benefit me, I will benefit you." Evil is evil. Evil is destructive. Evil is selfish. Evil looks out for itself. And it's never really interested unless it benefits them of doing anything really good for you. Evil will take advantage of vulnerability. Evil will take advantage of insignificant learning -- or insufficient in terms of a person not knowing something. Evil will set a trap. And Paul says, "Even to that person, I want you to take the lead." Where does he say that? In verse 17, he says, "Do not repay evil for evil, but be careful, and I want you to do what is right in the eyes of everybody." Do what is right. Don't wait for them to set the example -- you do it. Don't wait for them to take the first move -- you do it. Don't wait for them to repent -- you move towards them in kindness. Why? Because that's how the Father pursued you. "Inasmuch" -- Romans chapter five, verse eight -- "Inasmuch as while we were" what? "Sinners, Christ died for us." Before I took a step towards God, God took a step towards me. And there's been seasons in my life where I haven't pursued God, or there was seasons where I was overcome by some of the challenges of life, and it's in that moment, as the song said, that the Father was doing good for me. He was looking out for me. He was going in an advance in my life. Theologians called it the "prevening" [or, "prevenient"] grace of God. It's the grace that goes before you. It's the grace that awakens every day with a gift of mercy. It's the grace that goes in front of you, preparing the way. Strengthening you for it. That's

what he says he wants you to do. "I want you to take the lead and I want you to set the example. And you don't wait for evil to take the first step -- you do it. And I want you to choose to overlook an offense rather than make it a really big issue." Verse 18 says it this way -- "If it is possible, as far as it depends upon you, live at peace with everyone." I don't know about you -- I don't have any evidence of this other than anecdotally -- but probably 90 percent of most conflicts that I've ever been involved in, if I take the initiative to move in peace, they can be resolved. All of them? No. I think the text is real. As much as it is possible. As far as it depends upon you. But here's the challenge. Don't you dare sit at home and wait for the other person to take the initiative. "As much as it is up to you." In other words, you take the initiative. You take the step. You move towards the presence of that other person, and you choose to overlook an offense rather than make it a big issue.

I was having a conversation with someone, and I realized then, in the midst of the conversation, I was waiting for something. They began the discussion, and I was waiting for an apology. This person owes me a huge apology. They've sinned against me. It didn't come. Wasn't any ownership. I have a choice. This person wants my help. Do I sit back and say, "I'm not helping you 'til you own up"? "I'm not helping you until you fess up. I'm not helping you until you apologize. I'm not moving a step forward." My friends, if God did that to me, I wouldn't be here today. If God played that game with me -- "I will not love you, Mark, until you love me first. I will not die for you until you own your sin and you grovel on your knees in front of me." If God said that to me, I wouldn't be here! And by the way, you wouldn't be here either.

No, I have to -- if I'm going to love in a way that is unnatural, and I'm going to overcome evil with good, then good has to take the first step. As Sandy says, in Peacemakers, in the absence of trust, vulnerability always takes the first move. And when evil is present, good must act first. Choose to overlook an offense, and choose to forgive rather than to get revenge. Verse 19 says it this way -- "Do not take revenge, my friends. Don't take revenge." The old phrase that I think my mother taught me, "Don't get your pound of flesh." Don't seek to get here on earth what only God can perfectly do in Heaven. Why? Have you ever thought about that? Why don't get revenge? Why not? Do you know how many movies are built upon revenge? Do you know how many good movies are built upon revenge? Just confession. Do you know how many movies have that justice where the good guy comes out of the ashes of death and gets revenge, and you feel it in your soul, "I could watch this movie again." True confession. I think that's why a lot of movies are successful, is because they play to our flesh. I'm not trying to condemn you and make you feel bad for watching them. That way I haven't named away, because I don't want you to feel really guilty. But I think it's -- let me offer it this way. Why not seek revenge? Because it will wound you in a way that forgiveness will heal you. Revenge will wound you in a way that forgiveness doesn't. It heals you.

Of the significant moments in my life where I've forgiven people who have hurt me deeply -- and I can tell you every time I've done it -- I've walked away from that scenario a free man. The first time I ever met my dad after 40 years of his abandonment and horrific life -- I remember in North Hollywood sitting there with him, and I shared with him I had one goal and that is to tell him that I'd forgiven him. And after 40 years, and we'd spent an hour and a half together, and he had not asked me one question about my life, my wife, my vocation -- nothing. And when I forgave him, I walked out of the house, I went to the airport to fly home, and I nearly didn't need an airplane. I was free. Don't get revenge is not because revenge is not good. God will do it! He says, "Give room for God's wrath." You and I, the only thing that is redemptive, and the only thing that is healing, and the only thing that is beneficial is for you and I to tackle evil with good. If we tackle evil with vengeance, it will destroy us. Don't do it. There's too many illustrations of people who have been just venomously

eaten alive like a gangrene inside of their soul because they've allowed their vengeance and their anger at the past, whatever it was, to just eat them alive. Want to overcome evil? God says, "I have a tool for you -- it's called 'good.'" Don't seek to address evil by revenge. Choose to forgive. Choose to release them. Why? Because love trusts that God will be the final judge. It's not that God doesn't care about justice -- He does. There's a wave of people today that are focused on justice. I'm with them. But be very careful. Because the pursuit of justice of your own is a trap. Let me say that again. The pursuit of your own justice is a trap that the enemy sets for you, and it will snare you the rest of your life. You can seek justice for others, but when the scripture talks about forgiveness, when the scripture talks about releasing, God is really looking out for your own soul. To pursue systemic justice, good thing. To pursue justice as a judge, or as a defense attorney -- absolutely a beautiful thing. But when you take it upon yourself to overcome evil that has been done to you, and you become the judge of evil -- it's a position that you and I can't handle. And so, He tells us in this text, "It is mine to avenge." That's what God says. "It's mine to avenge." Why? Because God can avenge evil and it doesn't taint Him. Oh, but He will. Trust me. God will. He will take all things and He will judge them. Do I have to wait until the end of time? Not always. Not always. There are seasons in our lives where we see God step in, and how does He do it? Sometimes He does it through people. Sometimes He does it through situations. Sometimes people cannibalize each other. You see it all the time, people who rise up with self-righteousness, and they're going to judge other people, and it seems like only a few months come, and they get torn down. All you have to do is watch the news, and every day there's an exposé of somebody else who was ruining people's lives, sexually destroying young women, and they get judged. It's not that God waits for Heaven to judge all people. He doesn't. He does a fine job here on this earth. But you and I, if we take it upon ourselves to level the playing field, it will damage us. But love trusts that God will be the final judge. And so, He says, "I want you to forgive." What does it mean to forgive? Let me give you a couple of very tangible things. When I choose to forgive, I don't share the wound for sympathy from other people. I forgive them. When I choose to forgive, I don't intimidate or threaten or leverage a person for future benefit. I release them. When I choose to forgive, I let the other person save face, because it is not my passion to destroy them. Or to strengthen shame in their heart, which is the enemy's desire. I let them save face. When they're embarrassed, and they come to me, and they say, "I am so shamed," I might say something like, "It's a good thing Jesus died for your sins and mine." I'm not minimizing the damage they've done. I'm not negating what has happened. I'm trusting that God will be the ultimate judge, and it is my assignment -- overcome evil with good.

When I forgive, I participate in the acts of kindness. If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If somebody has wounded you, go buy them a drink. Non-alcoholic, preferably. Because if you do this, you will heap coals upon them. Summary, Paul says -- "Don't be overcome by evil." What does it mean to be overcome by evil? I think it's this -- it's to react with evil. When I react with evil, I'm overcome by it. When I get discouraged and I give up, I become overcome by evil. Ahhh -- give evil what it does not expect or deserve. Do good.

July -- it happened to be 2004. There were nine US soldiers who were coming home from Iraq. They had seen evil. My brother was a part of some of those teams. He'd seen people blown up -- in fact, his best friend was blown up right in front of him. And they came back, and -- they're not the same. They've been wounded. They've been hurt. They've looked into the eyes of people who don't see humans the way you and I see humans. They saw evil. And on this particular day, of July 2004, nine US soldiers were among the passengers on a certain plane. And when they came on the plane, one by one, people in first class went back, tapped the shoulder of a soldier and said, "Would you take my seat? I'll take yours." And one by one, all nine soldiers were moved to first class. Not by the airline, but by people. In responding to this event, Della Evans, a flight attendant on American

Airlines, said it this way. "It was a privilege to be flying with those two groups of unselfish people -- those who would put their lives on the line to protect their fellow citizens and their freedom, and those who were not ashamed to say, 'Thank you.'" You see, sometimes we think that evil is -- well, it's that person who's hurt me. Sometimes it's a soldier who has seen evil. Looked at it right in the eye. And it actually may affect them the rest of their life, as it does friends that I know. I can't eliminate what they saw. I can overcome the evil that they've experienced. Sometimes by taking them to lunch. Sometimes by exchanging my seat with them on an airplane. But Paul said this -- "Give evil what it does not expect or deserve. Do good." Why? Because that's how you beat it. That's what God says.

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