

Pentecost 14 / August 30, 2026

Romans 12:21

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Overcome Evil with Good

Paul several times in the letter to the Romans has spoken directly to, or alluded to, the struggle between good and evil, sin and righteousness in the believer. God delivers us from the condemnation of evil in Christ, but He doesn't deliver us from the struggle with evil in the world or in our souls. In fact, the greatest battle between good and evil takes place in the souls of believers as we struggle with our own sin and sinfulness. In chapter seven Paul spoke to the struggle with our own sin and sinfulness, using himself as an example. He wrote, *"I find it a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand."* He lamented the fact that all too often, evil won and that instead of the good he wanted to do, he wound up doing the very thing he hated. With deep sadness he confessed, *"Wretched man that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death?"* Thanks be to God for His goodness in Christ, which overcomes the evil of our sin and sinfulness with forgiveness.

In baptism, the Holy Spirit creates a new nature in believers, fashioned after the righteousness of Christ. The nature created new within us in Christ seeks to please God in words, thoughts and actions. The sinful nature in which we are conceived and born, is hostile to God in action and in attitude. In baptism God creates a new nature that is in harmony with His Spirit. However, the old sinful nature in which we are conceived and born, remains and actively opposes every good intention, thought and action of the new nature that is pleasing to God. This struggle between good and evil is in the hearts of all believers. All believers struggle with sin and sinfulness. All believers need to know where to turn for help, empowerment and grace. We turn to Christ and to His cross where we find strength to resist, grace to help and forgiveness to raise us up. Evil is overcome in and with the goodness of Christ.

Why does God allow evil to exist in the world? God allows evil to exist in the world to highlight His goodness, especially His goodness in forgiveness in Christ Jesus. God allows evil to exist in the world so the world would see its sin, acknowledge its sinfulness and see its need for Him, its only God and Saviour. God allows evil to exist in the world so we would see that the only cure for evil is His goodness in Christ Jesus. Why does God allow evil to continue to exist in the hearts

of believers, who have already come to see their sin, confess their sinfulness and have received Christ as their Saviour? God allows the evil of our sinful nature to continue to exist alongside the nature He has made new in Christ so that we would see our continued need for His grace and favour. We see our sin so we would always see our need for Christ our Saviour. We confess our sins and sinfulness so that we would continually draw close to Christ for the forgiveness of His grace and the empowerment of His Holy Spirit to resist sin and overcome evil with His goodness.

Evil in the world and evil in our souls is overcome only by the goodness of God, who in Christ paid the debt of our sin, who opens our hearts to faith by the word and working of the Holy Spirit. We overcome evil in our hearts by turning to Jesus in confession for absolution and for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit to walk in newness of life. His grace is sufficient to meet every trial, test and challenge of our sinful nature. His grace is sufficient to resist and overcome the sinfulness that abides within us. Christ is the High Priest who on our behalf overcame sin in the obedience of His life and who paid our debt through the sacrifice of His death. He is an ever-present help in every trouble. The author of Hebrews reminds us, *"We do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need."* Christ overcame evil with the goodness of His cross. We overcome evil with the goodness of Christ!

The first struggle with sin recorded in scripture is that of Cain, who was angry with his brother Abel. He was jealous, because the Lord accepted Abel's sacrifice and rejected Cain's. It didn't turn out well. The Word of the Lord came to Cain saying, *"Sin is crouching at the door. Its desire is for you, but you must rule over it."* Sin ruled over Cain. He did not overcome the evil in his heart with good. What could Cain have done differently that would have prevented the first fratricide and murder in the bible? What can we do when we have extraordinary feelings of anger? The Lord spoke to Cain to warn him. How the Lord spoke to him is not stated. But the Lord speaks to us in His word, a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Take your anger to the Lord in His word. Read the scriptures, listen to His voice. If it makes us feel better and helps us vent safely, we can read aloud some of the imprecatory psalms, which pray curses and calamities upon one's enemies, until the bad feelings pass. When they pass move on to forgiveness and pray the Lord to forgive both yourself and the people with whom you are angry. Only God's

anger can burn forever without harming Him. Our anger will burn us up unless it is quenched with the water of forgiveness. Evil can only be overcome with the goodness of forgiveness in Christ.

Cain could have prayed. He could have poured his hurt and anger to the Lord in prayer and called on Him for help in His time of need. The Lord says *"Call upon me in the day of trouble and I will deliver you."* When we are troubled with evil thoughts, feelings and evil we can pray in confidence knowing the Lord has promised in our baptism to hear us when we call and to deliver us in time of trouble. Cain could have confessed his sin and sinfulness. He could have looked into his own heart. Whether someone has wronged us or not, we all have wrong in our own hearts and in our lives. We all have our own sins and sinfulness, so that we all need the Lord's mercy in forgiveness for the sake of Christ. When we see the evil in our own hearts and consider how it manifests itself in our lives, we can be kinder towards others and more forgiving of their sins, since we all need the forgiveness of God in Christ. Evil can never be overcome by evil. Evil is only overcome by good. We overcome evil with the goodness of Christ in the goodness of His love, which we daily experience as forgiveness.

How deeply engrained is evil in our sinful nature? Consider our first response to the words Paul quotes from the book of Proverbs, *"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink, for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head."* Doesn't that sound like the perfect strategy to get someone back? If evil is the motivation for doing good, we are being overcome by evil. The purpose of doing good to enemies is not to make them suffer, but to make them friends. It was for this purpose that Christ came into the world, that by doing good to those who hated Him, they would be transformed from enemies in repentance to friends in forgiveness. The greatest good Christ did was to offer Himself on the cross for the forgiveness of our sin. The burning coals on our heads is the realization of our sins and sinfulness by which the Holy Spirit opens our hearts to receive Him and His forgiveness.

On the day of Pentecost Peter heaped burning coals on the heads of those who heard him preach, accusing them of rejecting and killing the Christ. He said, *"God has made Him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified."* They cried out, *"what shall we do?"* Peter said, *"Repent and be baptized...in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins."* The burning coals of the law are meant to open eyes to see our sin, open our lips to confess our sinfulness and open our hearts to receive Jesus and the forgiveness of His cross. Even as Christ overcame

evil with the goodness of His cross, He overcomes the evil of our sinful nature in forgiveness. He empowers us with the Holy Spirit to overcome evil in our lives and in our relationships with those with whom we are in conflict, with the goodness of His love in forgiveness, first in our relationship with God and then in our relationships with others. God who has overcome evil in our lives in forgiveness for the sake of Jesus, empower us to overcome evil in our lives and in our relationships with others with the goodness of Jesus in forgiveness and love. In His Name. Amen.