



## Sermon, Sunday, September 10, 2023 “Love in Action”

**SCRIPTURE: Romans 12:9-12** <sup>9</sup> Let love be genuine; hate what is evil; hold fast to what is good; <sup>10</sup> love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honor. <sup>11</sup> Do not lag in zeal; be ardent in spirit; serve the Lord. <sup>12</sup> Rejoice in hope; be patient in affliction; persevere in prayer. <sup>13</sup> Contribute to the needs of the saints; pursue hospitality to strangers. <sup>14</sup> Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. <sup>15</sup> Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep. <sup>16</sup> Live in harmony with one another; do not be arrogant, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to be wiser than you are. <sup>17</sup> Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. <sup>18</sup> If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. <sup>19</sup> Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, says the Lord.” <sup>20</sup> Instead, “if your enemies are hungry, feed them; if they are thirsty, give them something to drink, for by doing this you will heap burning coals on their heads.” <sup>21</sup> Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

### **Introduction: Justified by God through Faith in Jesus Christ.**

In early AD 56, when the Apostle Paul was active in Corinth, he heard the news about the church in Rome and sent a long letter. This epistle is immortalized in the book of Romans. A central theme of the Romans is righteousness through faith. It means that we are recognized as righteous by God by believing in Jesus Christ. For 2,000 years, the church has not abandoned its claim that we are justified by God through faith in Jesus Christ. People outside the church may question these claims of the church.

To solve social problems or defeat evil, we must fight against them, and the question becomes how can we become righteous just by believing in Jesus.

Social problems and evils do not disappear by themselves without any effort. In fact, the early Christians knew and experienced these realities of the world better than anyone else. Early Christian history records the hardships Christians had to undergo against the evil and persecution of the world. The persecution of Christians by Emperor Nero, triggered by the Great Fire of Rome in AD 64, is famous. Also, the persecution of Christians that occurred during the reign of Emperor Domitian was very severe. We do not know how many Christians suffered injustice during this persecution.

By the way, what should we do if we have been unfair in this situation? In today's text of the Bible, the Apostle Paul says something that is far from the reality we are facing. **Romans 12:14 says, “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them.”**

Those who are good at calculating profit and loss can never agree with these words of the Apostle Paul. By the way, the Apostle Paul goes further here and asks Christians to act a little more actively. **Today's text Romans 12:17 says, “Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.”** This verse says, “**Do not repay anyone evil for evil**”. However, we generally think that we must resist the evils of the world to achieve social justice.



At the end of this verse, Paul says, **“But take thought for what is noble in the sight of all.”** This verse means to pursue good works not only for oneself but also for others. This is the best way to benefit each other. But is such a life possible in today’s reality?

### **Body: Overcome evil with good.**

To give an answer to this, the Apostle Paul explains in detail the meaning of the words **"Do not repay anyone evil for evil". Romans 12:19 says, Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave room for the wrath of God; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."**

The Apostle Paul advises us not to avenge our enemies directly, but to leave them to God. However, it is not easy to accept Paul's advice. This is because these words seem to insist that we should just move on even if we are treated unfairly at home, at school, at work, or at church. Also, these teachings are so idealistic that they seem far from the reality in which we live.

But there is a reason why Paul said this. First, it is because taking revenge directly destroys our souls. When our enemies are judged, we may be temporarily relieved, but the trauma remains. In fact, in our lives, judgment or retaliation are the things in which our violence is exerted. I often watch TV dramas and feel that the contents of the dramas are becoming more and more violent and sensational. Because this seems to be what people like, more violent and sensational dramas and movies are produced. A person becomes a completely different person depending on what they see, what they eat, what they say, what books they read, and what kind of people they associate with. The more we experience violent things, the more they leave negative trauma in our lives.

Nevertheless, it is difficult for us to agree with the statement, **“Vengeance is mine, I will repay.”** Because, in the world we experience, God's judgment doesn't seem to work. The evil people around us live splendidly and healthily before dying. On the other hand, there are many good people who suffer until death. In this reality, it is hard to believe that God judges us.

I said that the first reason why we should not directly avenge our enemies and leave them in God's hands is to avoid destroying our souls. So what is the second reason? That is, we ourselves can be enemies or evil. The Bible tells us that the roots of evil are very deep. The story of Adam and Eve in Genesis shows the universal human desire to become like God. Also, the murder of Cain's younger brother, Abel, means that humans’ will for murder is fundamental to our nature. Cain killed his brother out of jealousy, not because Abel was wrong. The Bible says Satan and the devil operate behind every evil act. This means that evil and sin are universal human phenomena.

However, please do not misunderstand this statement. To say that we ourselves are evil and that we can be enemies of others does not mean that we should not distinguish between good and evil and leave evil alone. We must be able to carefully judge the evil and absurdity of society, resist when we need to resist, and fight when we need to fight. Of course, making judgments and choices is not easy. That's why the Bible tells us to stay awake. For our judgment and choice, **the Bible says: “Do not be overcome by evil but overcome evil with good.”** We should not take these words of the Bible as mere moral or social ethical teachings. They contain more substantive content.

The most important thing to understand from this passage is to admit that we cannot overcome evil with our own strength alone; rather we must overcome evil with good. By the way, good is not our ability, but God's ability.

So, the important thing in our lives is to live by God's good ability. Today's text **Romans 12:9 says: “Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good.”** This verse exhorts us to fall into God's love.



At the beginning of my sermon, I said that the theme of the book of Romans is “to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ.” The righteousness spoken of here is goodness.

We are people who live in dependence on God's good power. With such faith, we can confront evil in the world. The evil is in others and in ourselves. But what is certain is that the evils of the world have yielded to Jesus Christ. So please do not despair in front of evil. I hope you will overcome evil with God's good power.

**Conclusion: Goodness leads the enemy to the path of repentance.**

Now let's summarize today's message. Today's text **Romans 12:20** says: **“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.”**. The second half of this passage, **“you will heap burning coals on his head”** is hard to understand. In fact, this passage is Paul's quotation from Proverbs 25:21-22. This verse shows our love and forgiveness toward our enemies. When our enemies are in trouble because the burning coal in their houses has gone out, we give them the burning coals from our house in a bowl so that they can put it on their heads and go to their houses to rekindle the fire. Furthermore, this passage suggests that Christians can lead our enemies to repentance if we extend forgiveness to them instead of threatening them. I hope we all have the blessing of overcoming evil with the power and strength of Christ.

