

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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The Power of Love

"Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him' " - John 14:23. These words, spoken in answer to a question raised by Judas, explained to that disciple how some in the world would know Jesus, while others would not. The presence of the Father and Son would be with those who, out of love, would keep (obey) the words of Jesus. The path of obedience is the path of love followed by the Divine Presence.

The greatest power in the universe available to human beings is the power of love. It is not arms or armies of the earth, the alliances of nations, or the wealth of mankind. It is the power of love. This article will introduce that great power for your consideration. When all else fails, love will prevail. "And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love" - 1 Corinthians 13:13. We will consider love from three viewpoints.

Love has great power on ourselves. Every emotion, good or bad, reacts back upon us. Anger, pity, scorn, etc., all reflect back into the one who expresses those emotions. When we love others, we ourselves become better people. People with hearts full of love for others enjoy a quality of life others only dream of. The principle expressed in Galatians 6:7, 8 is especially applicable to love: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man sows, that he will also reap. For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life." This principle is central in the exercise of our faith. Galatians 5:14 - "For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' " The commands in the Old Testament law relating to others all reflect this truth. Exodus 20:13-17 gave the commands about murder, adultery, stealing, bearing false witness and coveting. Our love for our neighbor "as yourself" shows this great power.

Love has great power on others. Love allows us to even exert a certain power toward our enemies. "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him a drink; for in so

doing you will heap coals of fire on his head. Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." - Romans 12:20, 21.

The conquering power of love is illustrated in Proverbs 15:1 - "A soft answer turns away wrath." Brother C. D. Plum, an aged preacher from Parkersburg, West Virginia, told me the story of baptizing a lady during a gospel meeting who warned brother Plum of her husband's violent temper and what he might do when he learned of her becoming a Christian. Brother Plum went to visit her husband (a saloon keeper) and tried to talk to him. The husband slammed a fist into brother Plum's jaw, knocking him to the floor. Brother Plum slowly got to his feet and pointed his finger to the other side of his face. The husband stared in disbelief, then lowered his fist and began to weep. Brother Plum baptized the man before the gospel meeting concluded. There is no more disarming action that we may take than that of loving others. God's love in repeatedly forgiving Israel is vividly portrayed as a conquering and drawing action in Jeremiah 31:3 - "Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you." The drawing power of Christ's death for us was predicted in John 12:32 - "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me" (KJV). Love has a binding power on others: Colossians 2:2 "...their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love...", and in 3:14 - "And above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection."

Love has the power to direct God's blessings. The One whose mighty power orders and guides the universe is influenced by our love. "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" - John 14:23. God is keenly aware of our love for Him - "For God is not unjust to forget your work and labor of love which you have shown toward His name, in that you have ministered to the saints, and do minister." - Hebrews 6:10. There is a strong connection between the unfolding of God's plans and our love for God. "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose" - Romans 8:28. The love we express toward God is motivated by a consideration of what God has done, and is now doing toward us. "We love Him because He first loved us" - 1 John 4:19. "But if anyone loves God, this one is known by Him" - 1 Corinthians 8:3. God knows our love for Him, and our blessings are proportionate to that love.

Do we realize the enormous power of love? Probably not. But we can grow in our understanding of that power and its influences on ourselves, upon others, and even on God Himself. May God help us to grow in love, and thus enjoy the benefits of such love. The greatest example of the power of love is that of Jesus, whose love for us took Him to the cross to die for us. "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" - John 3:16.

When we give our lives in service to God we demonstrate our love for Him. Frances H. Havergal has well expressed the power of love in her hymn, "Take My Life and Let It Be":

"Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee;
Take my hands, and let them move
At the impulse of Thy love.

Take my love; my Lord I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store;
Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee."

- Carl Witty

Overcoming Evil

There are verses in the Bible that I find myself drawn to over and over again. They are so packed with meaning and with depth that it almost staggers the imagination. Some verses become this fountain of wisdom that pours forth new understanding and refreshes the weary soul. One such verse for me is Romans 12:21 – “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

This verse comes at the end of a series of short statements that begin in verse 9 of the same chapter. In fact, Romans 12:9-21 is my personal “go to” passage when I am needing something to succinctly remind me what it means to live as a Christian, and what I ought to be striving for in my life and in my relationships. Each sentence in the entire passage is packed with meaning, and could serve individually for the basis for sermons and entire books. The culminating verse is the same: “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

On the surface, the meaning of the passage seems relatively straight forward and common sense: It means something like “don’t be evil, and instead be good.” That seems to be a relatively simple statement that most all humanity could agree with. On some level it seems most people have a moral code, and believe that it is better to be on the good side rather than the evil side. Even if their moral code is not informed by the Bible, most people still think it important to strive to be good. As people we have an innate sense of right and wrong, and we also have an innate sense that it is better to be good, and that evil is a wrong that needs to be corrected.

But that is not all that Romans 12:21 has to say about the nature of good and evil, that one is preferable over the other. It is also dealing with “overcoming evil.” It is a sad fact of reality that this world is filled with injustice, suffering, and evil. And the question for any person living is how best to respond to the evils we see around us, overcome them, and (hopefully) set things right. It is not only the Christian who wishes to see a more just and moral world freed from evil and sin. As stated before, most people (if not all, even those who deny it) have an innate sense of right and wrong. When we are wronged by someone, cheated, lied to, hurt — we experience an evil that we desire to see set right, restored to something good.

When we experience evil, it seems that our immediate thought to setting things right is to return in kind. If someone insults me, then I feel justified insulting them back. If someone hits me, it seems only natural to hit them back. If someone does something that I perceive to be even worse, then the response needs to be just as bad if not worse (to teach them a lesson). It’s a sort of perversion of the command in the Mosaic Law “an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth” (Exodus 21:24). Jesus addresses this perversion of justice in the Sermon on the Mount (see Matthew 5:38-42). What makes it a perversion is that the Mosaic Law was prescribing a limit to justified recompense for wrong. If someone takes an eye, the payment to make restitution needs to be an eye (or the equivalent of an eye) and no more. The original law was not meant to be a justification for revenge. So, Jesus says, when you are slapped, don’t slap back, but “turn the other cheek” (Matthew 5:39).

Much of Romans 12 deals with this element of human relationships, the desire for revenge or to get even. Paul says, “bless those who persecute you, and do not curse,” and “repay no one evil for evil” (Romans 12:14, 17). A Christian’s response to evil cannot be one of “getting even,” but we are called to a higher path. Jesus said we are to “love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you ... [being perfect], as your heavenly Father is perfect” (Matthew 5:44, 48). God’s example is to love humanity despite humanity rejecting Him, and sinning against him. God chose to return our evil with love.

And this brings me to the final part of analyzing Romans 12:21, because the verse does not say: “Do not overcome evil with evil, but overcome evil with good.” It says “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” When we react to the evil done against us by trying to take “justice” into our own hands, we aren’t really overcoming evil at all. We might feel good about it in the short term, insulting someone who insulted us, but did we actually do anything about the evil in the world? In such an instance we only became evil ourselves. We duplicated the evil in the world. Not only the evil done to us, but we perpetuated evil and spread it around. In that sense, if we respond in kind to evil, we are not actually doing anything about evil. In such a scenario, we have become “overcome by evil” ourselves.

So, brethren, let us hear the words of the Apostle Paul. Let us not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good. It is the only path for the Christian.

- Eric Hamilton

- > "Little by little one walks far!"
 - > "Don't grumble because you don't have what you want; be thankful you don't get what you deserve!"
 - > "Because He is...we are! Because He did...we can! Because He gave....we have!"
 - > "The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7b).
 - > "When a person is wrapped up in himself, he makes a very small parcel!"
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THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: "*Pearls And Pigs!*" (Text: Matt. 7:6); Sunday evening: "*When A Little Becomes A Lot!*" Part 2 (John 6:1-15).