

# Overcoming Evil with Good, Part 3

by Jay Adams

Edited transcript of conference [message](#)

## [More Transcripts](#)

Tonight we are looking at Romans 12 once again, and we are looking at verse 17. Let me read it for you. "Never return evil for evil to anyone. Plan ahead to do what is right [or fine] in the eyes of everyone." So you're supposed to overcome evil with good. That's right. So you're supposed to show love, be more concerned about the other person than yourself. That's right. Well, now how do we go about doing that? We've looked a little bit at how to do it. We've looked at how to respond to those who curse us, and we read in verse 14: "Bless those who persecute you; bless and don't curse." And here, in more general terms, we have the same thing except with a different emphasis: don't return evil for evil to anyone. Now, the first thing I want you to see in this--and this is very important--is that we have an absolute. When it says never return evil for evil to anyone, that's an absolute.

We don't have too many absolutes in the Bible. We have one more in this place in verse 19: "Never avenge yourselves...." But an absolute is a very interesting thing. It's quite handy if you're willing to accept it. A lot of people don't like absolutes. They like something that is relative, something you can get around, something you can find a loophole for, something that has to do with only certain classes or certain groups, or something that has to do with a certain situation. And that's the way many things are, even in the Bible. When the word all is used, for instance, it rarely ever means ever last human being who ever lived. It usually means all of a certain group. Well, here we have an absolute, and an absolute is very handy because it solves lots of problems in one fell swoop. When you have an absolute statement, it means you don't have to sit down and worry about when it applies, to whom it applies, where it applies, or any of the rest of it, because you know if it's an absolute statement, it always applies. It applies to everybody in all situations at all times. And that's what we've got here, an absolute. And when it says, "Never return evil for evil to anyone," that's what it's saying--never, never, never, ever.

Well, I hope you get that point because there are always people saying, "Yes, but...." And then they have some particular situation that they think is an exception to the rule. But there are no exceptions to the rules when we have absolutes. When it says, "Never," and it says, "Never return evil for evil to anyone," it's giving us an absolute statement that has no exceptions whatsoever--ever. But you say, "How about...." No, I don't even want to hear it. "But you don't know what I'm going to say." I don't care to know what you're going to say. "But why don't you want to hear it?" Because this is an absolute statement; there aren't any exceptions. "But you don't know my situation." I don't need to know your situation because when you have an absolute, it always, always applies. And so here is something you can write down. You can put it in words of fire and etch it right smack in the middle of your soul and say, "I can never return evil for evil to anyone--never!" You know, that ought to give you a lot of

relief. You don't have to sit around thinking of excuses. You don't have to think of ways of getting around this. You don't have to sit and sweat about the exceptions because there aren't any exceptions.

Now, this is an absolute rule. But all of us have problems with that rule. A lot of us have the attitude at times, "I'll give him what he deserves." They think that's a winning attitude. And remember, we've been talking about how to be winners, how to be conquerors of evil, how to win out the battle over the evil one. That isn't the way to win. The way to win is not to try to get even. Getting even is at best a stalemate because you haven't done anything more than the other person has done. But we're not even supposed to come to some stalemate with evil. We're to conquer evil. And conquering evil means you've got to be better than evil. You've got to be stronger than evil. You've got to have something that's greater than evil, that really overcomes evil, that does conquer evil. Evil isn't going to conquer evil. And so we may never return evil for evil to anyone.

Early in the game, children begin to think in this wrong, unbiblical way. Defending themselves, they say such things as, "But she pulled my hair first, and I want my handful." That's the attitude a lot of people grow up with; they never change--never any different. O, maybe it's not hair pulling, but it's the same basic attitude. In this, there is a kind of a perverted sense of righteousness in which somebody is saying, "It's only fair. I want to even up the score." We're going to see when we get to verse 19 that it's not your business to even up the score. It's not your business to deal with the other person's wrong. It's your business to overcome evil wherever it attacks you by returning good instead of evil.

Now, some people go to great lengths and tremendous effort and spend long hours thinking about how they can get even with others. It's amazing at how hard some people work at this. I read a few years back about a fellow who paid his alimony to his wife every month in nickels. First of all, he had to think about that. And that must have taken a lot of thought just to come up with that scheme. Then he had to go to the bank every month, maybe a dozen banks to get that much money, and he put it all in a wheelbarrow, and he would take it over to his former wife's house and dump it out. Now that took time, that took energy, that took thought, that took planning, that was hard work. I reckon it took him at least five hours a month to do that kind of thing. People will go to great lengths just to "get even" (pay back evil for evil). Well, we're not allowed to retaliate.

God talks about this when He talks about love. In the great love chapter, 1 Corinthians 13, we read in the last part of verse 5 that love doesn't act in an ugly way, isn't self-seeking, isn't easily irritated, and doesn't keep record of wrong. These are the kind of people that keep record of wrong, the kind of people who store up those things in their mind, and they say, "Now I've got this person. I know how much he did wrong to me: item 1, item 2, item 3, item 4, item 5, item 6. Now, let's see, item 1 in response to 1, 2 in response to 2, 3 in response to 3, 4 in response to 4, 5 in response to 5, and 6 in response to 6." They're going to get even on every score, every count. But you're not even supposed to remember the wrongs, let alone list them, or supposed to find out how you can respond to every one of them. But there are people just like that. I've seen people at the fellowship supper who take an ice cream scoop and scoop the potatoes out and put them on a scale and weigh them just to make sure that the scoop wasn't a little fuller than the last one. There it is on a scale weighed out so that nobody can complain. They've got to have everything

exact. And there are people just like that when it comes to getting even, as they call it, with somebody else. It's got to be settled exactly, evenly with that person. God told you you may not pay back evil for evil to anyone. You are not to get even. Proverbs 26:4 says, "Answer not a fool according to his folly." That means if you do the same thing to him or equally as bad a thing as he did, you'll be like him, and you'll be a fool just as much as he is. But then it says in the next verse, 26:5, "Answer a fool according to his folly." Now, is that a contradiction? No, what it means is, answer him Biblically. Meet his curse with blessing; meet his evil with good so he won't boast and go on in his foolish ways. You're to meet his evil act with a good act.

"Okay," you say, "that's fine, but how?" Alright, now we get down to one of the most practical things of the week. And this is the part that I'm looking forward to. Look at the second part of the verse: "Plan ahead to do what is fine in the eyes of everyone." Now, most of your translations don't have "plan ahead" in it. In fact, probably none of your translations have that. And that's a shame because that's exactly what the Greek word means. The Greek word is "to think about ahead of time," and that means to plan out something beforehand. What have you got, some of you? Let's hear what you have. "Be careful." What a terrible translation. Read another one. "Respect." That has nothing to do with it. "Take thought of." That's getting a little bit in the direction. "Provide." Provide in the old English sense of the word is "to see beforehand." Vide comes from the same root as visor (what you see out of), and pro is beforehand. So that had the meaning once, but it no longer has the meaning of planning ahead. What else have you got? "Have regard." Not too good either. It's "Plan ahead." It's just exactly what we mean by plan ahead (to think about ahead of time so as to plan what you're going to do). And to lose that in the passage is to lose the key to how you can implement this very important absolute command of God.

You are not to try to respond to evil on the spot. That's why most people fail. Most people fail because, in the heat of the battle, they try to come up with some response, and that's the last time to try to think about a response to evil, a good response, because you're all upset, and you're angry, and perhaps your toes have been smashed, and you may be tired, and you may be weary. Who knows what's going on. But the last time to think about responding to evil in the right way is when you're in the battle itself. It's just like the last and worse time to think about punishment for a child is when you're in the battle with a child. You've got to think of the punishments long beforehand and not try to think of them when the problem is right at hand because it's always going to be a bad punishment. And you'll probably back down on it later on, and if you do, then you've taught the kid you don't mean what you say.

Now, this says, "Plan ahead to do what is fine in the eyes of everyone." We have a God who planned ahead. We have a God who planned the way of salvation beforehand. "Before the foundation of the world," we read that Jesus Christ was the one who was slain in the sight of God. It was planned. His death was planned, redemption was planned, whom He would save was planned, eternal life was planned. Everything was planned ahead of time. And that's why God's program never fails, because He plans what He's going to do, and He plans His work, and then He works His plan. Some of us who are created in the image of God think that we can go without planning when God doesn't even go without planning. What a foolish thought on our part. You have to learn to plan if you're going to respond well to evil doing instead of poorly to evil doing. That means you have to take time out when you're

feeling sharp, when you're keen, when you not down underneath it, when you're not angry, when you're not upset, when you're not tired. Take some good quality time and sit down and pray and think about Biblical principles and think about the problems that you're facing and the difficulties out there with people and the evil that's coming your way from them and plan. According to Biblical principles, plan how you will respond to that evil with good.

If somebody has wronged you, what will you do in response? You can't just sit there. You can't moan, you can't whine, you can't gripe, you can't get nasty, you can't get mean. You've got to return good for evil. Now, what good are you going to return? That's what you need to know. In the clutch, you'll never come up with good response, so plan ahead. You need to put as much thought and effort into planning how to respond to evil with good as that man did who thought about how he was going to get even with his wife and thought about those nickels that he would pour out on her doorstep every month. Planning means hard work, planning means creativity, planning means time, planning means effort, planning means putting all you've got into it until you come up with good answers and good solutions. And a lot of people aren't willing to do that kind of work. They'd rather get by with a shoddy piece of work. They'd rather just get by. They'd rather just do any old thing. But God isn't satisfied with that. He says, "You plan ahead. I want you working at that so that it comes out well."

Look at what Paul says in another place. In 1 Thessalonians 5:15, here's what we read: "See to it that no one returns evil for evil, but rather, always seek ways of doing good to one another and to all people." He's talking about the same thing. And he repeats what he says over here in slightly different words but making the very same point. And it's interesting when he says "seek ways of doing good one to another," that word seek is a very powerful word in the original. It's a word that means to pursue as a hunter pursues his prey. It is a word that's used of a hunter. And what does a hunter do? Does he go out into the woods if he's after a deer and go out and shoot a couple of rounds of ammunition and say, "Well, I got my ammunition discharged and didn't hit anything. I guess I'll go home."? Not on your life, he builds a blind; he thinks about where they're going to be. People drive the deer in his direction. He plans everything out ahead of time. He knows exactly what he's going to do if he sees one. And he goes after him and he seeks him and he hunts for him. And he works at it and he keeps at it until he finds one. A hunter pursues his prey, and that's what this word means. Pursue those ways of responding to evil with good. You are to work at it.

Christians don't like to work anymore. They don't like to do anything hard. We'd all like to have instant holiness, and we'd like to have it on Thursday morning at 2:00 am so we didn't feel the transition from the previous situation. We'd like to have it while we're asleep and wake up with it. It doesn't happen that way. Discipline yourselves for Godliness is what the Scriptures say. And the Scriptures are telling you tonight in 1 Thessalonians and here in Romans that you've got to work hard at finding ways, seeking ways, pursuing ways, planning ahead for ways to respond to evil by doing good. That may even involve in certain cases to learning how to do it--sitting down with another Christian and role-playing a circumstance, saying, "Look, I'll be the boss; you be me. Now here's how the boss thinks.... How would you respond to him?" The other person says, "Na, that wouldn't work too well. Let's on work on something else." And you work and you work and you work until you come up with something, and you say, "Ah, that's good! We've got it." You've really got to work. And I think a lot of our

problems in our Christian lives are that we're lazy. We want everything easily. We want everything just like that. But you've got to pursue--hunt down those ways. You've got to plan ahead to do good.

Now I want you to notice something else. In this verse, it says "Plan ahead to do what is"--do all your versions say "good"? Well, they should say "fine" because there are two different words for "good" in the Bible. The one word is in verse 21, which we already looked at. That means good over against bad, good over against evil. But this is a different word. This is a word that goes beyond that and means do something well with finesse, do it finely, so people say, "Boy, that was a fine party. That was a fine experience. That was a great time we had." That's another problem with Christians. We're willing to do something just to get it done, but we never put a spin on the ball. We never give it that extra touch. We do it so tastelessly so often. Let me tell you right now, if you've ever been to a beautiful wedding, I mean a beautiful one; if you've ever been to a fine party or a lovely banquet, none of those things ever happen without prior planning and effort and thought and time expended by somebody. Somebody planned for weeks and weeks or months ahead of time for that wedding so that every touch of color was just right. You don't put together a beautiful or fine experience of any sort by just doing it all at the last moment and shoveling everything in quickly just to get by. There are some books out now on foreign languages that are entitled, *Getting by in German*, *Getting by in French*, *Getting by in Chinese*. And that's okay because most of us will never learn how to use those languages with finesse. But there's no getting by in this thing as far as God is concerned. He says, "Look, don't return evil for evil to anyone." Never do it. That's an absolute.

Plan ahead to do what's fine in the eyes of everyone. Do it with finesse. Do it in such a way that even the world has to look at it and say, "Man, those Christians are doing it right. When they do something, they do it right." And you know what so often is true about Christians when we do anything, we do it in such a sloppy way. We've got so much sloppy agape, I don't know what we're going to do about it all. This says do good in such a way that it's fine, fine in the eyes of everybody, not only do believers look at the way you handle evil and say, "He's really got it together," but the unbeliever looks aghast and says, "Man, those Christians, you can't keep up with them." Usually Christians are there with too little, too late, and it's sloppy. Instead, we ought to be out front pointing the way, doing it so well that the world comes over to see how we're doing it and says, "We want to learn." Take Christian schools, they ought to be so far superior to anything in the world that they ought to have teachers come up all the time to learn how to do it. We ought to do it with finesse. Everything we do ought to be done that way. This word *kelos* (fine) is more than just good. It means to do it with finesse. So when you plan ahead to respond to evil with good, it's not just good put out there on the plate--raw bloody meat thrown down as if you were feeding tigers. But the good that you give to other person in well-seasoned, cooked to a turn, garnished all about, served by candle lights. It's done with finesse. And when the world sees the way you respond, it knows that you have a real incentive to do things well. And what is your incentive? Not only the winning of that other person, but far more than that, the pleasing of your Lord Jesus Christ. He's the one whom you please when you do things well.

And it says do what is fine in the eyes of everyone. Do people become our standard then? No, that's not what it's saying. The Bible's your standard. What the Bible tells you, do it in such a fine way that even unbelievers are amazed, and they have to say

it was done well. Unbelievers are not our standard, but they are our concern. And we ought to be so concerned about the way we represent our Lord before unbelievers that whatever we do, and especially when we're returning good for evil is done in such a way that the He is honored, even in the eyes of unbelievers who can't find anything to pick apart about what we've done. Has someone been cheating you in business? You need to take some time to plan some really fine responses to that. Has somebody been gossiping about you? All that energy that you would normally as a sinful response put into tearing that other person down in eyes of other--let all that energy and time and effort be put into how you will do good to that person who has been gossiping about you, and how you will do it with finesse. Are there any rooms for any exceptions on any of this? No, remember, this is an absolute. Never, it says, never return evil for evil to anyone. There isn't a single exception to that rule.

So, my friend, do you want to be a winner? Do you want to win the battle over evil? It's going to take effort, it's going to take commitment, it's going to take time. By the way, the word commitment is a word that's never spelled out. Everybody talks about it; nobody knows what he's talking about. Let me tell you at least four things that I think belong to the word commitment. Maybe there are more, but at least four. You understand what it is that you are giving yourself to. You can't commit yourself very intelligently to something you don't understand thoroughly. So you have to have an understanding of whatever it is you're committing yourself to. Not only do you have to have an understanding, you have to have a desire to do it to have a real commitment. And that desire does not mean you have to like it. It means you have to desire to do it because you know your Lord wants you to do it. And you desire to please Him, so you're going to do it whether it seems pleasant to you or not. You may not like to spend the time and effort and exert the creative thought that is necessary to do a fine piece of work in responding to evil as this says. You may not like to plan ahead the way this says. You may not like to hunt down those answers as Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:15. But you desire to please your Lord, and He says do it, so you're going to do it because you want to please Him. Now, the third thing that commitment involves is ability to do it. A lot of people really understand what they need to do; they desire to do it, but they really don't know how to do it. We've been talking about that here tonight. You know what to do. And the last thing is you have to be willing to put the time and effort into it to get it done. That means you have to actually take your schedule at times and block out time to do it. Not just to have good intentions, but to actually write it down, put it on the schedule, and then follow that schedule. And I'm sure there are some of you here tonight who know that you need to give time for this thing, you know there are some people you need to respond to, you know you couldn't do it with finesse unless you took the time, just as you would have to take the time to do a really fine job for wedding or a party or a dinner or a conference or anything else. This conference didn't get put together without somebody spending a lot of time ahead of time thinking about it. And you know you've got to do that, but you'll never do it unless you find time for it on your schedule. That's why I'm saying to you right now take out a pencil, and you take out a paper before you leave this room and write down either the time or the fact that you need to find that time as soon as you get your schedule. If you don't do that, you're never going to obey this commandment. Commitment involves those four things. Understanding it, desiring to please the Lord in following His Word, ability or know how and willingness to give the time and effort required to get it done. That's what I mean when I talk about commitment. It may involve more, but it certainly involves at least those four things.

You've got to be committed to the Word of God in anything God commands you to do, and here is one that's going to take commitment. Aren't you glad that Jesus Christ didn't even the score with Satan, that He didn't try to get even with Satan. Remember at the beginning of this message, we were talking about getting even with other people and how this forbids it. No, He didn't get even with Satan. He triumphed over Him! If I have three kings in checkers and you have two, and you get one more, we're even. That isn't what Jesus did, and that isn't what He wants you to do. He wants you to triumph over evil, conquer evil, win over evil, defeat evil wherever it attacks you. And you'll never do it until you're committed in the full sense of that word to planning ahead about how you will respond in a fine way with finesse to evil. Thank God that Jesus Christ did far more than get even.

[www.eternallifeministries.org](http://www.eternallifeministries.org)