

March 16/17, 2013

The Gospel Story: Overcome Evil with Good

Romans 12:9-21

Pastor Bryan Clark

I doubt too many people would argue with the statement, “There is evil in the world.” Probably where we would have lively debate is how we define the term *evil*. I think according to both the Old and New Testament, the definition of evil would simply be: that which is contrary to God—any attitude, any action, any belief system that’s contrary to God’s truth and God’s will and God’s way would be considered evil. If we define it that way, then I think we would agree that there’s evil in every school; there’s evil in every work place; there’s evil in every neighborhood; there’s evil in every community. We feel it every day. There’s this war between God and God’s truth and God’s way and God’s will, and the culture and this determination to do things our own way.

So here’s the question of the day: How do we overcome evil? Do we overcome evil with governments? With politics? Do we overcome evil with laws? With power? With protests? How do we ultimately overcome evil?

That’s what we want to talk about today. If you have your Bible, turn with me to Romans, Chapter 12. Two weeks ago we started into Romans chapter 12 and reminded ourselves that, starting in chapter 12, it’s the outflow of the magnificent theology of chapters 1 through 11. On the basis of what we have learned and experienced—salvation by grace through faith—it is reasonable to expect that we would sacrifice our lives back to God, not because it’s an obligation, not because it’s a religious duty, but because what we’ve learned is: that’s where we find life; that’s where we find joy; that’s where we find significance. Therefore, that’s the reasonable response to what we have learned. We learned that we should not be conformed to this world—by today’s discussion, conformed to the evil of this world—but rather we should be transformed.

How does that happen? By the renewing of our minds, we learn to think differently based on this truth in chapters 1-11. Where does that start? It starts with the right view of ourselves. Verse 3: **We ought to not think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think.** A true understanding of grace does not produce spiritual arrogance; it produces humility. It actually sets us free from our selfishness and our self-focus and sets us free to think of others as more important than ourselves. Two weeks ago the outflow of that was then, together as a church, we experience great unity. But in the midst of great diversity—understanding there’s nobody that’s *more than*; there’s nobody that’s *less than*—we’re all just faithful to the calling that God has given us.

Now we’re picking it up in verse 9. The two paragraphs that we look at this morning are in a unique Greek style. We really don’t have an equivalent in English, but basically the characteristics of this style that would have been very common in the first century are these: 1. It’s a moral exhortation. In other words it isn’t just to talk about morality, but it’s a talk intended to motivate people to live this way. 2. It’s rooted to some tradition. We would say in our case it’s rooted to the teachings of Jesus, and I would say specifically, the Sermon on the Mount. That becomes obvious as we go through it. And 3, it seems to be rather random, almost disorganized. But there’s a purpose to that technique. The idea of the technique was, rather than have people analyze every word or phrase and try to outline it, it was meant to have more the full effect of—if you put all of it together—this is radically different than how we were living before. In other words, think about it like this: If you take the phrases that we are going to talk about this morning, imagine putting them

in a bucket, like a bucket of water. And you take that bucket and you splash it on a wall and it splashes all over that wall. So imagine all these words and phrases just kind of randomly splashing on the wall so that when you look at it, it's not so much that you are analyzing every detail as if there's this clever outline, but you're overwhelmed by the fact that if you look at all that, the call is, as a Christ follower, to live radically differently than the rest of the culture. That's the effect of the style. So trying to stay true to that, we're not going to over-analyze every single word or phrase, but try to get the big picture and, hopefully, it has the intended effect on us. It begins in verse 9:

Let love be without hypocrisy. (*NASB, Romans 12:9a)

Literally the Greek is love un-hypocritical. You might think of that as kind of the heading to the paragraph. Whenever we talk about the concept of love, I think that's a difficult conversation in this culture because I don't think we understand the definition. When you think about how people define love in our culture, it's usually about *something that makes me happy*. It's about *something that gives me pleasure*. It's about *something that meets my needs*. As a matter of fact we love pizza and we love our spouses. We use the same word for all of that, so there's already this level of confusion. Certainly there has to be a difference between the two. But when you think about: "I love something," or "I love someone," because of how you make me feel, because you give me pleasure, because you meet my needs, because you make me happy. As soon as I say that, you hear it. That's very selfish. It's about *me*; it's about *my* needs; it's about *my* wants. Suddenly this isn't love at all. It's a very selfish orientation. Biblical love is not a feeling. Biblical love is a commitment of the will. It's a choice to think of somebody else as more important than myself. It's a choice to give myself away. It's a choice to do what's in *your* best interest if I truly love you. This is the word, *agape*. So far in Romans the word *agape* has been used to describe God's love for us. This is the first time it is used to describe our love for one another. It's a very strong term. So this is a commitment of my will: as God has loved me, I choose to love you.

The word *hypocritical* is actually a Greek word that came out of the theater. It was the idea of *wearing a mask or playing a role*. When you are in the theater, you wear a mask; you pretend to be somebody you really aren't. You're fulfilling a role. So to be a hypocrite is to pretend to be something you're not. It's to wear a mask. To be a Christ follower, we don't *pretend* to love people; it's genuine from the heart and that's possible because we've been genuinely changed, radically changed from the inside out. I have a renewed mind. My days don't have to be consumed with selfishness and self-focus because I've found my life; I've found my significance. I've found my value in being rightly related to God. So rather than being selfish every day, I've been set free; I have the freedom to think of others as more important than myself. So that's the idea of this paragraph.

Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good. (Vs. 9b)

The words **abhor** and the word **cling** are very strong terms, literally *hate evil* and *glue yourself to that which is good*. Now this is an interesting phrase in light of our culture. We have convinced ourselves as a culture that tolerance means that we don't judge anyone. I have no right to say what is right or wrong for you. There may be things in my own life that I think are right or wrong or good or evil, but with this relativistic backdrop, I have no right to say that's good or evil for you. Therefore the "PC" (politically correct) attitude of the day is to say: I shouldn't judge you. I would suggest to you that's not love at all. As a matter of fact, I'll go a little bit farther. I would say that is just pure cowardice and it's rooted in our selfishness. It's rooted in our relativism where we think there's no such thing as right or wrong, no such thing as good or evil. But I think it's rooted deeper than that. I think it's rooted to the fact that we as a culture become very selfish and ultimately the

thinking is this: as long as it doesn't bother *me*, as long as it doesn't hurt *me*, then I don't care what you do, which I would suggest to you is *indifference*. If we believe, based on God's Word, that evil is corrosive; evil is destructive; evil is contrary to God; and evil will destroy your life, I cannot just sit by and watch you destroy your life without saying something, without caring about that. To genuinely love someone who's involved in behavior that's corrosive and destructive, the loving thing to do is have the courage and the backbone to say, "I'm concerned about that. I think what you're doing is going to destroy your life." We talked about this earlier in Romans—that I should be as passionate for righteousness as I was at one time about sin. I should hate evil because evil is destroying people's lives and I should be glued to that which is good because that's God's way; that's the way of life.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; (Vs. 10-11)

The idea is that we're family. The language is: **be devoted to one another** with the love that a family has—a good, healthy, functioning family. Families are full of diversity. Families are full of ups and downs, but at the end of the day we say, "We are family; we are in this together. We are going to make it through." That's kind of the idea here, that with a family-type love, we hang in there and we care about one another, and we stick together.

That phrase **give preference** is an interesting one. It literally means *to out-do one another*, as if it's a contest in giving value or honor. The word **honor** literally means *to give somebody value*. In other words what the text is saying is: as a Christ follower, one of the ways that we show love is we actually try to out-do one another in expressing value for one another. To say, "Hey, you have value; you matter; you're accepted; you're wanted here." Imagine what it would be like if every weekend, when we walked through those doors, we were actually having a contest to see who could out-do the other in expressing value to one another. All week long you're out in the trenches and you're getting beat up and people are not saying real edifying things to you. And so you finally have a place where you feel safe and people say, "We just want you to know you are loved here; you're accepted here, and you're valued here for who you are." So the text says we should out-do one another in trying to value one another in this way.

Not lagging behind in diligence—the word **lagging** basically means, "*Don't be lazy*." Don't be lazy in diligence. In other words, it takes discipline to live this way. You can't be lazy and just think this way of life is going to naturally flow out of me. You know, I've become so spiritual that every day it just flows out of me, without me even thinking about it. The text is saying, "No way". You can't be lazy about this, but rather you should be disciplined. One of the things I've concluded over the years is discipline is discipline. I think sometimes we convince ourselves that we're very disciplined in some areas of life and not so disciplined in other areas of life. I don't think that's true. I think you're either disciplined or you're not. When I see people that are undisciplined, it shows up everywhere. It shows up in their finances. It shows up in their relationships. It shows up in their schedule. It shows up in their life. To be undisciplined is to be undisciplined. I think sometimes what confuses us is if we have certain areas of our life where we think we're really disciplined, but if you stop and think about it, those are the areas of life that we most care about. That's where my heart is; that's where my passion is; that's what I *want* to do. It takes no discipline to do what I want to do. It takes selfishness to do what I want to do. That's not discipline. Discipline is to do the hard stuff. Discipline is to do the stuff that I *don't* want to do. Discipline is to do the stuff that comes hard to me. That's where discipline is tested. Either you're disciplined or you're not. But what the text is saying is: you have to renew your mind with the truth that we've studied in Romans and discipline yourself to live in a way that's contrary to the culture. The flow

of the culture, the current of the culture, is going the opposite direction and we get up every morning and we choose to walk contrary to the current. That's really hard to do and we'll never do it without discipline, without diligence.

Fervent in spirit—the word **fervent** basically means *to light a fire*; it means *to boil over*. We would say passion—that this isn't something we are doing out of some obligation; this isn't my religious duty. Based on what I have learned in Romans 1-11, this has become my passion. This is who I am from the inside out. It's boiling over in me and I'm passionate about living this way, in serving the Lord. Verse 12:

Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer,

Rejoicing in hope is Romans chapter 8. There's a joy in my heart because I know that no matter what this world throws at me, no matter how much it beats me up, no matter how much it abuses me, no matter how much it confuses me, nothing can separate me from the love of God! God has made me a promise. He has justified me and I'm destined for eternal glory, and no matter what happens in this world, my future is spectacular! So that creates a joy in my heart that, in my best moments and in my worst moments, I know the future is spectacular and that gives me joy. It also helps me persevere in the midst of tribulation, in the midst of persecution. It says in the text—**persevering in tribulation**. It's good to remind ourselves that the Christians in the first century, first century Rome, were actually persecuted. We think we're persecuted if somebody says an unkind word to us. These people were genuinely persecuted. Some of these people would die for their faith. So these are strong terms here, but they would persevere because they knew that their future was glorious.

Rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer which is focused, which is a reminder that God lives in me and God's in charge, and it's God's power that ultimately gets me through this. Verse 13:

...contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.

The word **contributing** there isn't a word that means give money. There are such statements in the New Testament, but that's not what this word means. This is the word that means more, *come alongside*. We would say, "Roll up our sleeves; get in the midst of the mess; get involved." Remember that in the first century they didn't have restaurants; they didn't have social programs, and they didn't have hotels. It was very hard to be a Christian in first century Rome. You might lose your job; you might lose your home, and you might be persecuted. So it was necessary for the church to come together, to roll up their sleeves, to get into the mess, to make sure everybody is okay.

So if we take that first paragraph, that's basically talking about love that's *un-hypocritical*. I'm not pretending to love; this is genuinely who I am. I've been set free. I have a renewed mind. I don't think of myself more highly than I ought to, but I actually think of others as more important than myself. This is the freedom that God has given us. So I take that paragraph; I put it in a bucket; I throw it against the wall; it splashes on the wall; and the overall effect is, "Wow, this is radically different than who I was before." This is radically different than how people live around me. God has called me on the basis of His salvation, on the basis of how He has changed me to live a radically different life-style as a witness to the presence of Christ in me. That's the idea of the text there. Verse 14:

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse.

You say, “What does that mean?” It does not mean: God bless them as they persecute me. No, it doesn’t mean: make them more effective in persecuting me. It carries more the idea that when people persecute me, when people are unkind to me, when people make my life miserable, rather than wanting God to curse them—you know, every night praying before I go to bed, “God rain down fire and brimstone on this person who’s making me miserable.” Rather our heart is, “God I want them to experience Your blessing. I want them to experience Your life. I want them to know what has so radically changed me. I don’t want You to curse them. I want You to change them that they might experience Your blessing.” One of the things that has really helped me over the years is to constantly keep in mind when people say unkind things, when people do things that are unkind, when people make my life miserable, I want to run it through my grid of realizing these people aren’t happy. These people are disappointed; these people are wounded; these people are hurt; these people are angry. These people are feeling it every night behind closed doors. They’re feeling this pain; their lives are miserable, so they’re venting on me. And rather than wanting God to curse them, my heart should be that they would come to know the truth that has set me free—that they would know God’s blessing.

Trust me, if the people you go to school with, the people you go to work with, your neighbors, if those people are people that you wish God would curse, they feel that. But contrary to that, if you genuinely in your heart of hearts want them to know God’s blessing, you want them to know God’s love, even though they’re making your life miserable, you do want them to experience God’s grace, they will feel that and it makes a lot of difference in the conversation.

Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep. (Vs. 14-15)

I think this is really the test of what’s in our hearts. There are people who make our lives miserable and there’s a tendency within our self-righteous hearts, in their hour of weeping, to think, “*That’s what you deserve. You had it coming.*” We, in a sense, feel vindicated. Can we genuinely, with hearts of compassion, weep with those who weep because we genuinely care? But I think the harder challenge is: can we rejoice with those who rejoice? When people experience something good in life, sometimes it’s difficult to rejoice with that, especially if our life is a little stinky at the time and things are not going well. We should have got a promotion; that should have happened to us. And so rather than rejoicing with those who rejoice, there’s a bit of envy; there’s a bit of jealousy; there’s a bit of ugliness that shows up in our hearts. If we’ve genuinely been changed, if we have a renewed mind, we should be able to rejoice with those who rejoice. We should be able to weep with those who weep. Why? Because we genuinely care and that matters to us.

Be of the same mind toward one another; do not be haughty in mind, but associate with the lowly. Do not be wise in your own estimation. (Vs. 16)

Those are interesting statements. We are to be *one mind*. How does that happen? It happens when we do not have a haughty mind, an arrogant mind, a prideful mind. It happens when we don’t think that we are *wise in our own estimation*. The evidence of that is who we associate with. The lowly in first century Rome would have simply been those who were the outcasts. Again, if you imagine a world without any social programs, the people that just weren’t cutting it—they basically lived in the streets. They were the outcasts; they were the lowly. And there was a tendency to think, “That’s not me because I’m better, because I’m smarter, because I’ve figured it out.” And so we develop an arrogant mind; we become *wise in our own estimation* and we think, because of our greatness, we’re not like that. And so what the text is saying is: if you’re going to have the mind of Christ, let’s remember that Christ loves them, that Christ gave up His life for them, and the only reason you

have what you have is because of the grace of God, not because you're so wise or so smart, or because you figured something out.

Now it would be interesting for us to have a discussion about who would be **the lowly** in our culture. Now I have to be really careful with this, but let's think about the lowly as those who are just outside of our circle of relationships. In other words, think of it like this: We all have a tendency to surround ourselves with people like ourselves, people in our same socio-economic class, people who are maybe our same age, people who have the same interests, people who have the same political views, people who have the same theological views, people who have the same social views. We kind of weed out the rest and we distill our relationships down to those people who are like us. So what happens is: every time we talk about something, we all agree with one another. And so that convinces us that we are right and, by implication, everybody else is wrong. We're right in politics; we're right in the social things; we're right about everything. How do I know that? Because everybody around me agrees with that, and that develops this *haughty mind*, this arrogant mind that starts to think, "*I'm really wise and I'm really smart.*" How do I know that? Everybody around me agrees with me. And what happens is, as people, we become more and more narrow and more and more arrogant, and we're not associating with people that challenge me.

One of the things I started trying to be very disciplined about several years ago is, in a sense, take a relationship inventory. I don't want to be like that and so I do an inventory of my relationships in the sense of: do I have people in my life with meaningful relationships that differ from me in socio-economic class, differ from me in theology, differ from me in political views, differ from me in social views, differ from me in lots of ways, so that my life is not consumed with reminders that I'm right all the time? But rather it causes me to think; it causes me to listen; it causes me to try to understand, to try to enlarge my world view. It causes us to be much more humble and less opinionated. I would suggest for every single one of us, it would be healthy to be less opinionated and to become better listeners, and to surround ourselves with people that aren't going to constantly convince you that you are right about everything, but will maybe challenge you to grow and to think and to stretch yourself in order to open up meaningful dialogue about the things that really matter. I think that's what he's talking about when he says, "Don't become haughty in mind and don't estimate yourself to be really wise." Don't put yourself in an environment where you think you're always right, but rather put yourself in a context where you are more humble—you're growing; you're expanding; you're rethinking some things. Verse 17:

Never pay back evil for evil to anyone.

(Seems fairly obvious; there's never a time when evil is acceptable.)

Respect what is right in the sight of all men.

Now that's an interesting statement. **Respect or honor or value that which everybody would say is right.** Think of it this way: This goes a lot with what I was just talking about—with a haughty mind and being wise in your own estimation. Think about your environment at school, your environment at the work place, your environment in your neighborhood. Isn't it true that we tend to think of the differences? This is what we believe; this is what they believe. And so we tend to focus on the ways we're different politically, the way we're different socially, the way we're different in our belief system—and that tends to create separation. But what the text is saying is: work really hard at thinking about the things we share in common that are good, that are right. In other words, is there something in your school, something in your work place, something in your circle of relationships where you could say, "I think everybody there would agree in the name of humanity, this is right?" This is the right thing that we should do and can't you rally those people together around something that everyone would say, "This is right; this is decent; this is what we should be doing?" And is it

possible that starts to bring people together and we have something in common and we start to create some energy that might produce more productive dialogues and discussions. So that would be the challenge out of that statement to think about: what is it that for you with the people you work with, the people you go to school with? Is there something there that everyone would say, “That’s right and I can get passionate about that, and let’s do that and let’s change that?” That’s what the text is saying. Verse 18:

If possible, so far as it depends on you, be at peace with all men.

In other words, we are to be peacemakers. The text embraces the idea that there sometimes is nothing I can do to change a conflicted environment but, as much as it depends on me, I should not be the cause of the conflict. Over the years I have just been amazed over and over and over again at certain people where—every environment they are in—there’s conflict. There’s conflict in their marriage; there’s conflict with their kids; there’s conflict at work; there’s conflict in their neighborhood; there’s conflict in their relationships. Everywhere they go there’s conflict, but it’s never their fault. It’s always somebody else’s fault. The text is saying we should be peacemakers. As much as it depends on me, I should do what I can do to make peace. Verse 19:

Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord. "BUT IF YOUR ENEMY IS HUNGRY, FEED HIM, AND IF HE IS THIRSTY, GIVE HIM A DRINK; FOR IN SO DOING, YOU WILL HEAP BURNING COALS ON HIS HEAD." (Vs. 19-20)

Now this is an interesting one to think about in our culture. In a culture that wants to believe that God is love, but God has no wrath—that God is all love but there is no judgment—this is another reminder that God is indeed a God of wrath. We had it in chapters 1 and 2 and here we have it again in chapter 12. There’s the reminder that, at the end of the day, God is the judge. God does have wrath, has judgment on those who reject His salvation but, at the end of the day, the wrath is His. The judgment is His. The revenge is His. It’s not ours.

So here’s the question of the day: *If we as a culture convince ourselves that God is a God of love but He is not a God of judgment and wrath, will that make people in our culture more loving or more violent?* I would suggest to you it makes people more violent. The more we go down this path: that God is love but there’s no judgment; there’s no wrath; there’s no accountability; it puts into people’s heads the belief that if that’s true and somebody has wronged me, if God’s not going to make them pay, it’s up to *me* to make them pay. If there’s going to be vengeance, it has to be *my* vengeance. If they’re going to pay for what they’ve done to me, it’s up to *me* to make them pay. And what we create is a culture that says *an eye for an eye*. If you hurt me, I’ll hurt you because, at the end of the day, God isn’t going to settle this out.

The point of the text is: if you believe judgment is ultimately up to God, that God will judge, that vengeance is God’s, that God will deal with wrath, it sets me free to love my enemy. It sets me free to respond to them as Christ has responded to me, remembering that when we were enemies of God, God saved us; He made us His friend. When we were in rebellion against God, God made me His child and God is saying, “I want you to do for others as I have done to you.” But I can do that freely knowing, at the end of the day, God sorts it out. God will take care of judgment; that’s not my business, which actually sets me free to even love those who have wounded me. I think the last verse is a summary of the whole thing. Verse 21:

**Do not be overcome by evil, (Don't be conformed into the world's evil mold, but rather...)
but overcome evil with good. (...which is everything we've talked about).**

Again, it isn't the point to go back and dissect every word or phrase—but to get the big picture. While this is radically different from who I was before Christ; this is radically different than the way most of the culture lives. But this is the outflow of being radically changed by the power of Jesus. How do we overcome evil? It's not with governments. It's not with laws. It's not with politics. It's not with power-moves. It's not with protests. We overcome evil by everyone, every day, living on mission, reflecting the life change of salvation by grace through faith. Ultimately it's through good that evil is overcome.

So let's do a little bit of a heart check here as we close: If right now you find yourself thinking: *Now this is really helpful. People should love me more; people should accept me more; people should rejoice with me and weep with me.* You know, you're thinking, *"I hope these schmucks are listening (laughter) because I should be treated better!"* If that's what's in your mind and heart, it's a total miss...it's a total miss! You still don't understand something. This is about a total re-orientation. This is about me not focusing on myself every day. This is about being set free from that. It's about not thinking more highly of myself than I ought to think, but to think of others as more important than myself. If you still don't get it, it won't work to just try harder. This is meant to be the outflow of a renewed mind, the outflow of a changed life. What you have to do is go back to Romans 1-11 and ask yourself: what do I still not understand? What do I still not believe? Because, ultimately, there's got to be something there that you still don't buy into. You still don't fully understand grace. You don't understand how you've been radically changed. You don't understand the outflow of that. And so you have to somehow correct your thinking in order to correct your behavior.

Lastly, it isn't uncommon to hear people say one of the reasons they don't like churches is, "Churches are filled with hypocrites." I would agree with the statement. There are hypocrites in every church. There are hypocrites in every business. There are hypocrites in every neighborhood. There are hypocrites in any environment where there are people. There's no way to avoid that. Are there hypocrites here this morning? I'm sure there are. What I've noticed over the years is that people that say they don't like churches because churches are full of hypocrites are people who are trying to deflect attention away from their own hypocrisy—and that's why they say that.

But here's what I would say. If you genuinely want to find people that model the lifestyle that we have talked about this morning, in other words, good examples of people who live this way every day, I would say to you, "This room is full of them!" If somebody comes up to me after the service and says, "I would like a list of names of people who model this every day," it would be no problem. Let me get out my list, because this auditorium is full of people whose lives have been radically changed by the power of Jesus. We're not perfect, but every day we get out of bed and we say we want to represent Jesus; we want to live this new life; we want to be set free; we want to think of others as more important than ourselves. We want to live without hypocrisy. We want to rightly represent Jesus in our neighborhoods, in our schools, in the marketplace, and it isn't easy—but every day we seek to live that way. That isn't a celebration of how great we are. It's a celebration of the truth of the life-changing power of Jesus. It's true; it's real; it changes us—and the evidence is sitting in this room. So what we celebrate this morning is the life-changing power of salvation by grace through faith. To God be the glory!

Father, we are thankful this morning that the message is true. This isn't a bunch of religious talk that produces no life change Monday through Friday. Lord, we know this is real. We know that it is true because in this room this morning are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of people whose lives have been radically changed by the power of the gospel. Lord, we thank You that You have set us free to live a new way, a new life, to celebrate the freedom that we now have in Christ, for Your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

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The Gospel Story: Overcome Evil with Good

A Study of Romans

Romans 12:9-21

Pastor Bryan Clark

Opening Discussion

1. What will be the most effective means of convincing the people around us that “The Gospel Story” is true? What does this mean in practical terms?
2. What is the difference between behavior that is coming from the inside out and behavior that simply conforms to the rules and expectations of a particular group? Which model is more effective? Why?
3. Why is selfishness and pride contrary to the message of the Gospel? Can someone really understand and believe the message of grace and be selfish and arrogant? Why or why not?

Bible Study

1. Review Romans 12:1-3. Summarize these verses in your own words.
2. Read Romans 12:9-13. Define the biblical concept of love. Is it more a commitment of the will or an emotional feeling? Compare I Corinthians 13 and Philippians 2:1-11.
3. Using Romans 12:9-13 as a guide what does it mean to “love your neighbor as yourself?”
4. Read Romans 12:14-21. Compare with Jesus’ words in Matthew 5:1-12. What does this look like lived out in everyday life? Do we just let people walk all over us as Christians? When do we take our stand and when do we not?

5. What does it mean to “respect what is right in the sight of all men?” What are some values or behaviors that would seem right to pretty much everyone where you work or live or go to school?

6. Focusing on 12:19-21, what truth about God sets us free to love our enemies? Do you think downplaying the wrath of God and only defining Him as a God of love makes people more loving or more violent? Why?

7. Summarize 12:21. What does this verse mean? What does it mean to be overcome by evil and what does it mean to overcome evil with good?

Application

1. Write yourself a letter to explain how to live as a Christian according to 12:9-13. How does this look at home, work, school, etc...

2. Do the same for Romans 12:14-21.

3. Read these letters to yourself once a day for the next 7 days as a reminder of how we are to live as Christians. When you find yourself acting contrary to what Paul says here in Romans pull out the letter and reread it to yourself. Next time the group meets review how this went for you.