



February 2015

Sometimes in life, regardless of our best efforts to manifest the love of God in our homes, our workplaces, and our communities, we encounter individuals who exhibit unkindness or even hostility in return. It can be tempting to respond to them with unkind words or behaviors of our own. But how does God want us to respond? He wants us to be strong on His Word by loving others as He loves.

1 Peter 3:8,9:

Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful [compassionate, tenderhearted], be courteous [friendly minded]:

Not rendering evil for evil, or railing [abuse] for railing....

Romans 12:21:

Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

To overcome means “to be victorious” or to “conquer.” We would not try to conquer the darkness in a room by introducing more darkness, for we know that darkness is dispelled by the introduction of light. So why would we try to overcome, or conquer, evil—anything contrary to the Word of God—with more evil? Instead, we need to introduce good. One way we can conquer evil is by extending God’s love and goodness to others.

Romans 2:4 shows us the effect of God’s goodness on someone’s life.

Romans 2:4:

Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?

Goodness means “kindness” and “actively beneficent in spite of ingratitude.” God’s goodness leads a man or woman to repentance. To “repent” indicates a genuine change of heart and life, from worse to better. God, out of the riches of His goodness and forbearance and long-suffering, extended His goodness to us—giving us the opportunity to change. He did this not because we deserved it but because we needed it.

When we encounter people whose behavior toward us is contrary to the Word of God, we can recognize that behind that behavior is usually a person in need. Rather than rendering evil for evil or railing for railing, we can show them God’s goodness, giving them an opportunity to change their life from worse to better.

Jesus Christ, who always did his Father’s will, provides a powerful example for us to follow.

1 Peter 2:21-23:

For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously.

At times during his public ministry, Jesus Christ was questioned, accused, and personally insulted. Yet he “did no sin.” All the way through his arrest, “trial,” and crucifixion, instead of returning evil for evil he persisted in extending God’s love and goodness to others. As a result, one of the malefactors (evildoers) crucified with him had a change of heart and believed on Jesus, who then promised him a future paradise—a definite change from worse to better (see Luke 23:39-43). What a sterling example Jesus was of overcoming evil with good!

Responding with God’s love and goodness, being actively beneficent in spite of ingratitude, has many benefits:

- It gives the individual who exhibits unkindness an opportunity to change their life, if they choose to.
- It may open the door for us to meet needs with God’s Word.
- It gives us an occasion to receive rewards for doing the Word.

I Thessalonians 5:15:

See that none render evil for evil unto any man; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

God's will is clear. Rather than rendering evil for evil, we can strive to "ever follow that which is good." When we encounter others who exhibit unkindness or even hostility toward us, let's remember that behind those actions could be a person in need. Our response, drawn from the wellspring of God's love and goodness in our hearts, may lead them to repentance—to a genuine change of heart and life. Truly, we can be victorious, overcoming evil with good, as we respond with God's love and goodness.

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