

YOU

Sermon Series: When Emotions Rise

To be used with: Session 4: Redirecting Anger

Sermon Title Possibilities: Overcoming Evil with Good

Scripture: Romans 12:14-21

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *“When Emotions Rise,”* these sermon outlines will follow the same theme as the small group study, so the pastor can reinforce the study from the pulpit.

Introduction: You’ve heard the old saying, “Don’t get mad; get even.” That might be all right when you’re having some harmless fun, but is that really the way we should deal with conflict in the home, in the church, or in society at large? I’m not talking about when someone breaks the law. In those cases, the government has a duty to punish them. If people were allowed to get away with breaking the law, civilization would fall apart. We’ve already seen what has happened in certain parts of the country when law enforcement gets lax. I’m not talking about matters of law and justice; I’m talking about when someone commits a personal offense against you. Is “getting even” really the way to handle it?

If you think so, I suggest you go back and read the Bible a little more carefully. Because people are made in God’s image, you must be careful how you treat them – and yes, that holds true even when they do you wrong. The apostle Paul certainly knew his fair share of persecution. He knew what it was like to be slandered and unjustly prosecuted, and he had also experienced his share of physical violence. Yet in spite all of these things, Paul told the Christians in Rome not to take vengeance on their persecutors. Instead, he called on them to have the following attitudes.

1) Moderation.

- a) Bless those who curse you.
 - i) Paul wrote this letter from Corinth.
 - (1) He was run out of the synagogue.
 - (2) He was brought up on false charges.
 - (3) His life was likely threatened.
 - ii) The word “bless” means to invoke God’s blessing.
 - (1) A lesser man than Paul might have prayed for God to strike his enemies dead, or at least bring a plague on them.
 - (2) Paul had once been a persecutor of the church himself, so he knew how God’s grace could change a person.
 - (3) The world expects you to curse those who curse you, but when you bless those who curse you, you will get their attention!
- b) Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.
 - i) We are all part of the same body, so we share in each other’s triumphs.
 - (1) That means you avoid sulking when others get recognition.

- (a) My Dad had four younger brothers, and his youngest brother was the only one with a college degree. Dad was very proud of his brother's accomplishments, and he often bragged about him to others. Members of the church are brothers and sisters in Christ. Shouldn't we take that kind of joy in others' achievements?
 - (2) When you rejoice in other people's achievements, they're more likely to rejoice in yours.
- ii) Likewise, one person's tragedy affects us all.
 - (a) W.A. Criswell gave this advice to pastors on dealing with grieving families: "By far the most comforting and endearing thing that the pastor can do with a bereaved family is just to cry with them."¹
- c) Be of one mind.
 - i) Other translations say, "Be in harmony with one another".
 - (1) When musicians harmonize, they do not play the same notes, but the notes blend to make a beautiful sound.
 - (2) We may not always agree on everything as followers of Christ, but we are to love one another in spite of disagreement.
 - ii) "Mind not high things" – That is, avoid snobbery.
 - (1) The Bible commands us to remember those who are needy. People of higher classes tend to look down on them.
 - (2) Our only ground for boasting is in Jesus.

2) Meekness.

- a) Don't repay evil with evil.
 - i) This does not mean Christians shouldn't stand up for themselves.
 - (1) Paul was willing to stand up for his rights as a Roman citizen when it was necessary.
 - (2) He was simply saying, "Two wrongs don't make a right."
 - ii) "Provide things honest" – Other translations say, "Do what is right."
 - (1) Remember that others are watching you.
 - (2) Your response should not be what gives you the most satisfaction, but what brings the most glory to God.
 - iii) "Live peaceably with all men"
 - (1) Try to get along with people even when it's not easy.
 - (2) Notice Paul said "if it be possible". It is impossible to make peace with someone who is determined to fight.
- b) Avoid taking revenge.
 - i) Revenge is not the same as justice.
 - (1) Justice is based on principles of right and wrong. Revenge is driven by selfishness and the desire to see your enemies suffer.
 - (2) Even in matters of justice, you should choose your battles wisely.
 - ii) Why is it wrong to seek vengeance?
 - (1) It usually creates a cycle of vengeance, and it solves nothing.
 - (2) You stoop to the level of your enemy.
 - (a) Vance Havner used to say, "A bulldog can always whip a skunk, but it's just not worth it!"
 - iii) Rather than seek revenge, let God handle it.

- a. God has promised He will repay.
- b. He will handle the situation better than you ever will.

3) Mercy.

- a) Show kindness to your enemies.
 - i) If they have needs, meet them as you can.
 - (1) You don't do it because your enemy deserves it; you do it because God has commanded it.
 - (2) If God only gave what you deserve, what would you get?
 - ii) What did Paul mean when he said your acts of kindness will "heap coals of fire on his head"?
 - (1) Your kindness will cause him pain by troubling his conscience.
 - (2) Your actions might even drive him to repentance.
- b) Overcome evil with good.
 - i) Paul said we should not allow ourselves to be "overcome with evil".
 - (1) When you maintain an angry and bitter spirit, you're allowing evil to overcome you.
 - (2) Bitterness eats away at you, and it changes your whole personality.
 - ii) How do you overcome evil with good?
 - (1) Show kindness to your enemies (Matthew 5:44).
 - (2) If they refuse to accept your kindness, let God handle them.
 - (3) Learn to forgive (Ephesians 4:32).

Conclusion: On April 9, 1865, General Robert E. Lee surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant, bringing an end to the Civil War. Grant was known to be a tough negotiator, and Lee was uneasy about meeting with him. To Lee's surprise, Grant's surrender terms were quite generous. Lee never forgot Grant's kindness to him. After the war, he became president of Washington College in Lexington, Virginia, now known as Washington and Lee University. He served there until his death in 1870. One day he heard a member of his faculty make some unkind remarks about General Grant. Lee said to him, "Sir, if you should ever again presume to speak disrespectfully of General Grant in my presence, either you or I will sever his connection with this university."

I don't guarantee that showing kindness will bring about reconciliation. I do guarantee it will make an impact. You may not see the immediate results, but it will make an impact, nonetheless. I know it's only natural to want to take vengeance on someone who has wronged you. That's just human nature. Just remember, though, human nature is sinful. God has a better way. "Be not overcome of evil but overcome evil with good."

1 Criswell's Guidebook for Pastors, Nashville: Broadman Press, 1980, p. 298

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