



"Hard work spotlights the character of people: some turn up their sleeves, some turn up their noses, and some don't turn up at all."
—Sam Ewing

15-Oct-10

Evil Is Real (Part Six)

From [I Peter 2:19-24](#), we could make a convincing theological argument that Christian suffering *is* our fight against evil because we receive the slings and arrows of others and experience the most inner turmoil in the midst of our fight against evil. We have a fleshly body and a carnal nature that inhibit us from doing the good we want to do. Thus, we suffer mentally, emotionally, spiritually. We suffer because a great struggle—a war—against evil is taking place inside.

Having ventured into the subject of suffering, the apostle Peter continues on it in [I Peter 3:8-9](#): "Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous; not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing." He repeats, from [I Peter 2:21](#), that we have been called to this. [God](#) has called us, not just to suffer, but also to return [goodness](#) for evil. We have been called to react the same way to suffering that [Jesus Christ](#) did—and as we see in the gospels, He responded by doing good.

So all those who suffer, thinking that they are suffering for righteousness sake, if they are not reacting properly, they are not doing what they were called to do. The suffering and the godly reaction must go together!

Otherwise, we are merely suffering to no good end. Peter continues in [I Peter 3:10-12](#), quoting from [Psalm 34:12-16](#):

For "He who would love life and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips from speaking deceit. Let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek [peace](#) and pursue it. For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous, and His ears are open to their prayers; but the face of the LORD is against those who do evil."

Notice the situation that Peter applies this idea. In verse 8, he writes, "All of *you* be of one mind," and then, "Love as brothers." He brings the fight to our community, the church! It is within the church, like it or not, that we may have the most trouble with the evil inside. Why?

In [the world](#), Christians shine like beacons because the contrast between themselves and the uncalled is so stark. We keep God's commandments, the holy days, the food laws. We try to do good. However, when we are among each other, and the contrast is less discernable, how do we react? Do we react as Christians or as carnal? We often seem to be able to get along well with the world because we know where everybody stands, but among church members, we frequently have problems. Sometimes problems crop up because we lower our guard, and at other times, it is because we expect so much of our fellow Christians.

We do not want the evil in us to come out and defile our relationships within the church. Yet, if we see problems arising, then we know that evil is present. We have just allowed *ho poneros*, the wicked one, among us. It becomes imperative, then, to stamp it out as soon as possible. Thus, Peter advises: "Turn from evil. Do good. Seek peace and pursue it. If you do not, God will turn His face against us"—and we certainly do not want that. In [I Peter 4:1-3](#), he continues:

Therefore, since Christ suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same mind, for he who has suffered in the flesh has

ceased from [sin](#), that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh for the lusts of men, but for the will of God. For we have spent enough of our past lifetime in doing the will of the Gentiles—when we walked in lewdness, lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

What weapon does he say we possess to fight this evil? We have the mind of Christ. Paul fought against disunity at Corinth and came to the same conclusion (see [I Corinthians 2:16](#)). We have access to the same Mind that prepared for and resisted the temptations of [Satan](#) the Devil for forty days. It is ours to access, if we only will. As Peter says plainly in [I Peter 4:1](#), if we truly arm ourselves with such a mind, we will cease sinning. We will be applying it to our situations and resisting the motivations of the evil within us. We will not let that evil emerge. If we have and use the mind of Christ, we are taking the fight to the enemy. We are not just allowing evil to pull us around by the nose but taking the offensive to confront it and overcome it.

We must ask ourselves, then, if we have truly committed ourselves to the task of recognizing and fighting the evil within us. Peter says that we "should no longer live the rest of [our] time in the flesh." To put it another way, are we committed to stamping out our carnal natures? More positively, have we committed ourselves to live the life of Christ, to do the will of God? Or are we still reserving the right to "enjoy" evil on occasion? Each person has to answer for himself.

If we are not already, it is time to begin evaluating ourselves, trying to plumb the depths of our wicked hearts. We must begin seeing the evil and eradicating it, committing ourselves not to repeat the evils we have done. In [Hebrews 12:1](#), Paul says that we need to "lay aside every weight" that besets us, that holds us back. Throw it off! It is crunch time!

In this vein, Peter provides us two major pieces of counsel. First, in [I Peter 4:7](#), he writes, "But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers." With this, he attempts to rouse us with hard, cold reality. We do not have time to indulge our desires and lusts! The return of Christ—the terminus of our period of judgment—is upon us! Besides, we

could take a walk and be hit by a bus. Is our current spiritual state what we want to hand in for our final grade? It can be that close! Why do we dilly-dally about this? It is time to get serious!

The second piece of advice is found in I Peter 4:19: "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator." In verses 17-18, the apostle had warned that we will be "scarcely" saved—by the skin of our teeth, as it were. It will happen, not because of any righteousness we possess, but because of the grace of God. Remember that He sees our "desperately wicked" hearts; He knows how depraved we are even still. We must understand this—and be thankful—but it should also motivate us to make the utmost effort to please Him. Our righteousness will never be good enough for salvation, but because the gracious, righteous Judge is watching and evaluating what we do, we are bound to strive to cooperate with Him in being transformed into His image. Thus, Peter says that we must dedicate our lives to doing good. We know that God is faithful and will save us despite ourselves, but we still must show Him that we are serious about living His way of life.

As Christians, we are engaged in a two-pronged maneuver: destroy the evil within ourselves and replace it with acts of goodness. This assault begins with the realization that evil remains in us, but through God's intervention in our lives, there is also in us a germ of good that is ready to grow. With His continued help, we can nurture it to eternal life.

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[God's Good Work in Us](#)

by John O. Reid (1930-2016)

Despite the privileged position of our calling, God does not cut us any slack in terms of trials and tests to perfect us. Like a loving father, He chastens, corrects, and gives us perfecting experiences, metaphorically purging and pruning us as branches with the goal of increasing our productivity. Like

Job, we need to acquiesce to God's sovereignty- including His absolute control over the shaping experiences in our lives. Like Joseph, we should expect a roller coaster ride in our spiritual journey, realizing that God has taken on the responsibility to bring His creative work through to conclusion. As His adopted and begotten offspring, we need to yield to His shaping power and not become weary of His correction as He perfects the good work in us.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Is the Christian Required To Do Works? \(Part Two\)](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The apostle James informs us that "faith without works is dead" (James 2: 20). Continuing in his theme of the Christian and works, John Ritenbaugh exposes just how corrupt sin is, and by this we can begin to understand just how holy God is—and just how much we need to change to conform to His glorious image.

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