

The Reality Of Evil

Self-realization

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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Back in the 1980s, it was a pretty well publicized thing when Ronald Reagan (the President at the time) had the audacity to call the Soviet Union "the evil empire." Do you remember that? Do you remember the media reaction to that? Oh, Ronald Reagan was the worst thing that had ever come along the pike because he dared to call another nation **evil**.

First, they derided him for his simplicity. How could he explain the Cold War in such black and white terms—that they are evil and we are good? At least, most people thought that was implied by his use of the term "evil" (as being the other guy). Then, after they derided him, they chided him for being judgmental—saying that the USSR was not evil. It was just different, and opposed to the way that we considered to be "good government."

Now that you have recalled that, do you recall the outcome of the process that began by Ronald Reagan saying that the Soviet Union was an evil empire? We won the Cold War! Now, it's not quite as simple as that, but that's basically what happened. By defining the enemy in stark terms and facing the problem realistically, Reagan's America defeated the evil empire of the Soviet Union.

In 1989, the Berlin Wall came down and that "evil empire" lost its superpower status over a few years. It is still trying to regain its lost territories, its lost military, its lost atomic weapons, and its lost prestige. It is slowly gaining them back. But for over a dozen years, Russia (as it is called now) has been sidelined to be just a medium power—and sometimes less than that. Their economy is in shambles, and they've lost a lot of their contacts around the world with the people that used to support them. Can we Christians learn a lesson from this?

Conversely, over eight of the last nine years, we went through a presidency that saw everything from a post-modern viewpoint. That is, a way of looking at things in which no absolutes exist. There's no right. There's no wrong. Every belief and opinion is equally valid—according to that way of looking at things. Bill Clinton failed to define America's enemies in any real terms. In fact, we didn't have any enemies during his administration—unless it was right-wing religious people. Those were the only people they really dared to tar as being "evil," because right-wing religious people tended to oppose everything they did.

But in terms of, let's say, international relations, our problems were just "conflicts" that we fought before we made those people that we were fighting our "friends." So, we sent our boys to Haiti, Bosnia, Somalia, Kosovo, and many other places. Bill Clinton was the number one sender of military people around the world (up to his time) of all Presidents. And we went to those places with no clear objective. We ended up staying for a long time—with our boys over there not knowing exactly why they were there—except being a multinational "meals on wheels" type of effort. But, thankfully, very few of those boys came home in body bags.

As we saw with the example of Ronald Reagan, the effects of this did not come to pass until a few years later. And the same thing happened, for us, with Bill Clinton's example. I mentioned that our boys did not come home in body bags because of his forays into international relations by the use of our military. But, ironically, we were less fortunate at home.

By ***failing to recognize evil*** for eight long years, America paid the piper with about 3,000 American citizens [civilians] slain in New York City, Washington, D.C., and in Pennsylvania—in the September 11 attacks. The "evil" that went unrecognized was radical Islamic terrorism. We did not make a moral judgment about it! And so, we did not anticipate it. We did not take it seriously. We did not have our guard up against it. We did not prepare for it. And so we succumbed to it.

And how many people are grieving now four months later (which also happened to be the end of ten years of Church of the Great God—January 11, 1992 to 2002). But people are still grieving after four months. And they will be grieving for the rest of their lives because an American President and his whole team (and, in a way, much of the nation) would not make a judgment about evil.

I think there is a spiritual lesson in these examples—one positive, one negative. ***Is evil real to us?*** Most of us (here) are Americans, but it applies to Canadians too. It applies to everyone who is a Christian. Is evil really **real** to you, and to me? Have we seen it? Do we know how evil works? Are we aware of the forms that it takes? Do we even realize that we are in a WAR against evil? And are we prepared to fight that war?

Sun Tzu, a Chinese military strategist from centuries ago, wrote a book called "The Art Of War." It's now used as a business textbook, basically, on how to 'make it' in this world. But he did have one very interesting yet simple point about this particular topic. He said, "***Know your enemy.***"

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How can you fight an enemy that you don't know anything about? You're going to get slaughtered, because you won't know how to react to him. Or, you don't know how to react in the first place. You don't know his tactics. You don't know his stratagems. You don't know his numbers. You don't know his armament. You might be going out there with your ten thousand (thinking that you can beat anybody), but he has a million! And, if you don't know your enemy, you are going to die on the battlefield.

That's what I'm talking about today. Do you know your enemy? Do you know how **real** evil is? And I think that maybe what you are thinking that I am going to talk about is NOT what I'm actually going to talk about. God is not afraid to call a spade a spade. Have you ever noticed that? Have you ever noticed how **blunt** God is?

The King James Version of the Bible is normally the one we use when we are trying to figure out how many times a certain word is used. It renders various Hebrew and Greek words into "evil"—"evil doer," or anything with the term **evil** in it—639 times. That's a lot! Did you know that God talked about evil that much, to where He mentioned something along that line nearly 640 times?

That's not all. I just did "evil." Various forms of **wicked**—"wicked," "wickedness," "wickedly," etc.—appear 494 times. Now we are approaching 1100 words in the Bible which have to do with evil. **Cursed** or "accursed" is found 94 times. So we are now approaching roughly 1200 sentences in the Bible that have to do with evil. And I didn't even figure out how many times it talks about "sin," "iniquity," "trespass," and other words that are similar to that. I didn't look up "hate" or any of the specific sins. Basically, all I looked at was those three words: evil, wicked, and cursed. God talks about **evil** quite a bit. So it's not something that we should take lightly. IF God's Word treats **evil** as *real* and as *very present* with us, THEN we need to take notice.

The Old Testament primarily uses one word for **evil**. That is the word *ra'*. It means "bad"—either ethically, or otherwise. One time, it talks about bad figs. Of course, the "bad figs" stood for bad people. It is the opposite of good. *Ra'* simply means *bad*, what is *not good*. It can denote evil words, evil thoughts, or evil actions. What is *ra'* is wrong in regards to God's intent, as well as its affects on men. So something that is *ra'* (evil) is something that God thinks is evil; and it is something that, when it affects men, is evil. It affects them as evil.

It often describes **inner attitudes**. That is, what we have inside—in our heart—towards God, and towards other men. The kings often did "evil" in the sight of the Lord. And it was their inner attitude of idolatry (and other evils that they did) that came out in those acts of rebellion against God. That is, in their idolatry, in their slaying of children, in their

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going to war without calling upon God, etc. So it often describes inner attitudes towards God or man, and desires to bring harm or disaster on another. It can also describe **moral deficiencies** that harm the self or others. It's a very broad term; and it just means anything that is bad, and any thing that comes out bad.

The New Testament has two main words that it uses for **evil**: *kakos* and *poneros*. *Kakos* describes things that are bad, or wicked, in character. It is, basically, the New Testament equivalent of *ra'*. So *kakos* describes things that are bad, or wicked, in character. *Poneros* defines things that are evil in their influence, or their effect. So what this means is that *kakos* is the general word for bad, or evil, or wicked. But *poneros* is a very specific word that describes how evil works. It describes evil in its influence, or effect.

To put it simply, *poneros* denotes evil that causes labor, pain, sorrow, and further evil. When you come down to it, it basically means **active rebellion**. Certainly, that active rebellion in the Bible means rebellion **against God!** It's a much more heinous form of evil than simply what *kakos* is. *Kakos* just describes evil. *Poneros* describes evil in its action and its effect.

To bolster that, there is a phrase in the Greek Bible—*ho poneros*. If any of you know anything about Greek, "*ho*" is an article. It means, "the." Guess what *ho poneros* means. "The wicked one." Do you know who "the wicked one" is? Satan, the devil! So that gives you an idea of the specifics of *poneros*. It describes the same sort of evil that Satan is!

Romans 7:19-21 [Paul says] For the good that I will to do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good.

Evil, in both verses 19 and 21, is *kakos*. If you want to use another definition other than just "bad," it basically means *ungodliness* or *sinfulness*. We'll get to a little bit more precise definition in a moment.

Remember that Paul is writing this sometime in the 50s AD—to the people at Rome—and he is still having this war go on in him. How long had he been in the church by this time? I believe Romans was written in the mid 50s—about 55 AD. So, by this time, he had probably been in the church—been converted—for about twenty years. And he was still feeling this struggle in him (against this "law of sin") that was within his members. It was within his body, within his flesh.

He was saying, "*I don't want to do this! It is with my will [my mind] that I say 'I will not do this.'*" But he would do it anyway, because of that **evil** that was in him. So, he finds that even after conversion—after a long period of conversion—that there is a law, he says (a principle, let's say, or an attitude, a mindset, a tendency) of evil still present **within** us. It's almost like your worst nature—that "devil on your shoulder" kind of thing. But it's worse than that. It's in us! (Not just lurking over our shoulder.)

Romans 7:14 For we know that the law is spiritual [He's talking about God's law here.], but I am carnal, sold under sin.

Now we come to maybe a better definition of that **evil** that he's talking about, which is in him. That is, this *carnality*—this *tendency towards evil* because of the flesh that clothes us. He says that our carnality is what sells us into slavery. That's what "sold under sin" means. It means that we have pretty much become a slave of sin. Paul says that elsewhere too—that we have to stop being slaves of sin and become slaves of righteousness.

But it's a STRUGGLE because, with our minds, we have already thrown off the shackles of sin; but our bodies and our flesh—that human nature that is within us—are trying all the time to draw us back into those shackles. And so we are constantly throwing them off, and trying to stay out of them. But human nature just has that awful tendency to **enslave** one to sin.

We know that in the beginning, when we are first born, our nature is essentially neutral. We are a "tabula rosa," let's say. We are a clean slate. But because we are clothed in flesh, we have a tendency (if we are going to go in any direction) towards evil. We do NOT want to deny our flesh what we feel are necessary things. And what is "necessary" just depends upon the individual.

By the time that we actually begin to think rationally and logically, we are already one foot (at least) on the evil side—because our human nature is already beginning to be built on that end. We are trying to fulfill the desires of our flesh. And that is why Paul says here that we tend to sell out to evil.

Let's go to Matthew 7:11 and get a "smack between the eyes" from our Savior. That is what He does here. He's talking to His disciples. (This is the Sermon on the Mount.) He says:

Matthew 7:11 "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your

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children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!"

Does He use *kakos* there? Not a chance! It's *poneros*. "*If you then, being—for lack of a better term—like Satan...*" "*For being wicked, for being depraved...*" That's not pulling any punches, if you ask me. This **evil** means *morally bad* and *in opposition to God*.

And Christ uses that as an example in contrast to the goodness of God, who always gives good things. So here we are. We are shown (on this one end) as being really evil—just like Satan. And He compares us, or contrasts us, to God—who is always good. And He says, "*There's nothing in common between these two,*" except that we (being evil) every once in a while figure out how to do something good for our children, or our own.

That brings in something that was mentioned in the sermonette, which is what happened in the Garden of Eden. They were told not to take of the tree of the knowledge of good **and evil**. But they did! Ever since then, mankind has been repeating the same process. What they've done is decided to take for themselves the choice of deciding what is good and evil. What it has done is (basically) place us on the debit side of the ledger all the time—because our nature tends to be evil, wrong, bad, ungodly, depraved.

That's not something to be very happy about, is it? But these are the plain words of Scripture. We are a mixed bag, with a tendency towards evil and rebellion against God—but divinely called by God (which is also something that was mentioned in the sermonette; John 6:44) and given the **challenge**—to move from the evil side to the good side. And all these things that we've done over the past (however many years that we have lived)—is our baggage which we are supposed to [come away from] to complete this challenge—to go *from evil to goodness*.

How aware are we of **the evil within**? Do we acknowledge, like Paul does in Romans 7, that evil is still present within us? I'm not old enough to remember this, but I've been told that Pogo (the cartoon character) said, "*We have found the enemy, and the enemy is us.*" How true it is, spiritually.

There's evil in the world. That's for sure, because it is made up of people just like us. They are unconverted. And so the evils that are in the world are, in a way, obvious and easily avoidable. They are so raw and blatant. We can see those things as being **evil**, can't we? And it is quite easy to avoid them. Really they don't, or shouldn't, matter too

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much to us—because what power do we have to change them? We can't do anything about them. So our best bet is just to keep them out of our own lives, and not succumb to them.

In the past (in the church) we use to hear sermons (and I remember them especially, from being out in the Pasadena area) in which certain ministers would talk about the things that we have to overcome. And they would give us the three "S"s. Do you remember the three "S"s? Self. Satan. Society. I was trying to remember some of those sermons, and I have to say that they are not very memorable. I think the reason why is because they spent an awful lot of time on *Satan* and *society* and not enough time on *self*.

We can't change Satan. We can **fight** him, certainly. We can't change society. It would be worthless to fight society. We'd end up on a gibbet somewhere. That's throwing yourself over the cliff, which is against the Sixth Commandment. That would be running towards persecution and having a martyrdom complex—to try to fight society. The evils of society you **avoid**. God has called the weak of the world. We don't have any power in this world. We just have to keep them at arm's length. But what is our job? Let's look at what Jesus said in Matthew 7.

Mark 7:14 When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand."

I thought this was very interesting that He said this. "Hear Me, everyone, and understand." It's very emphatic.

Matthew 7:15-16 "There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; [There is nothing from outside that can make the man "evil."] but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man [that show that a man is "evil"]. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

What was Jesus trying to tell us? I think it's pretty simple. "**Work on yourself!**" He said. The evils that we have to face down and stomp into the ground (as it were) are what's *inside*. Then, verse 20 is said privately to His disciples.

Mark 7:20-22 And He said, "What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness,

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an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness."

And He could have gone on, and on, and on with sins. All of them are generated from **inside!** So He says, for the third time:

Matthew 7:23 "All these evil things come from within and defile a man."

He's saying that *externals* are far down the list of what He wants us to overcome. If we change the inside, the outside will be clean. I'm talking about "of ourselves." The evils that we have been called to **fight and subdue** are what we conceive, nurture, and express from *within*. Remember how James says, "looking in a mirror"? That's what we must do. Those are the evils that we have to fight—the evils that we see in the mirror.

So, far from "perfect" and "righteous," our Christian lives are a running battle to overthrow the accumulated evil of our lives that happened *before* conversion as well as what evil we retain and do *after* our conversion. Yes, we were baptized in the waters of baptism—symbolically buried there. That is, "the old man" with all of his sins. And we are raised to newness of life—"the new man," which is **challenged** (as I used the word before) to increase the perfection and righteousness of "the new man" day by day.

But that doesn't say that we have gotten rid of that **evil nature** that has built *within us* (for who knows how many years). It's still there. The fight is still there. I know that I certainly sinned very soon after my baptism, because God didn't take away my evil nature. I still had to fight it. What happened was that I was forgiven of all the evil I had done before. But the habits, the attitudes, and all those things I had built up during those eighteen or so years were still there. And I'm still fighting most of them, if not all of them. It's scary to me to think that I've been doing this for eighteen years already. But it's true. Those evil habits that we developed over all those years (without the knowledge of God) are still there; and they still need to be put down every day.

Let's go back to the Old Testament, please—to Jeremiah 17:9. We all memorized this at some point in our conversion. We all know it by heart. But do we really believe what God says here? This is God speaking. It says in verse 5, "Thus saith the LORD." So He is giving us an evaluation of mankind here. In verse 5, He's talking about curses. He says, "*Cursed is the one who does this and that.*" In verse 7, He says, "*Blessed is the man who does this and that*" — basically, one who trusts in God. But... There's always a "but." Verse 9 is not focused on the blessed or the cursed. It's talking about everyone, as a whole. It's become general again.

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?"

Do we believe that? It's not just a memory scripture. God means this! That's cutting. That's pointed. That's barbed for anyone, like me, who has a bit of pride. I thought I was pretty good. I thought I kept the commandments. I thought I get along pretty well with most everybody. But am I fooling myself? Or am I really giving a sincere effort? Are the things that I do merely a show to make people like me? To conform? Am I doing all this for the right reasons? What is my heart really? God says, "You can't know it. It's desperately wicked and deceptive as all get out."

And who does it deceive the most? You! Me! Itself! Have my motives been good yet for doing anything? Probably, I think. But God's answer is that only He really knows our real character. And thank God for that! I'd hate to see myself as I really am, although part of the Christian life is trying to come to that realization.

Do you remember, just last week, the parable of the Pharisee and the publican? Think about it. The Pharisee was a perfect example of "the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked." He fooled himself into thinking he was a good guy in all of this. Lifting up his eyes towards heaven, taking on a pious position right next to the altar, thinking that he was so much better than that wretched publican. But who's the one that came away justified? Not in his own eyes, but before God. The publican—the one that most of us would say, "*Ooh, stay away.*"

He was humble enough to realize that his heart was, indeed, desperately wicked. And he didn't know the depths of the evil that he could do. Or maybe I should say that he had a good idea of how far down the depths of his evil were. He had a good idea that—next to God—he was dirt, and less than dirt (the dust in the balance). And which one of them did Jesus say earned His respect? The one that realized the **evil** within him!

God doesn't pull any punches here. The human heart—the seat of man's intellect, his emotions, his inclinations—is *dishonest* and *evil*. How's that! I think most of us, when it comes down to us, take evil far too lightly—and especially the evil that is within ourselves. We don't like to think of ourselves as evil. We always like to think that we are the guys in the white hats. We're the good guys. We do everything right. Everybody else has the problem. "*Why are they treating me this way? I've just been lily white all my life.*"

Well, that's the sort of attitude that leads to sins like **self-righteousness** and **pride** and **sloth** in terms of overcoming and growing. It's the kind of way of looking at ourselves

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that comes out in *poneros* — active rebellion against God. IF we reach the point in our lives where we think that we are the good guys, and that we don't have anything more to change or repent of, THEN our growth slows. It stops. And it starts to go in the other direct, because it is exactly the opposite attitude from what God is looking for.

Now, who is **our example** of the Christian life? Well, of course, it's Jesus Christ. He's the One that named Christianity—after Himself. To be a Christian is to live the life of Christ. Did He take evil lightly? Let's go to Luke 4:1-3. We won't go through the whole temptation of Christ, but I want you to see what Jesus did here.

Luke 4:1-3 Then Jesus, being filled with the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan [He had just been baptized.] and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, being tempted for forty days by the devil. And in those days He ate nothing, and afterward, when they had ended, He was hungry. And the devil said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command this stone to become bread."

Let's notice a few facts here. He had just been complimented by God the Father.

Luke 3:22 "You are My beloved Son; in You I am well pleased."

So Jesus must have been feeling fairly confident. You would think that if a voice boomed out of heaven and said, "*I am pleased with You*"—that's just a massive pat on the back, right? Then verse 1 of chapter 4 says that He was filled with the Holy Spirit. He was pumping, full with the power of God—the strength of God. And it was just at that point that Satan decided to tempt Him—before He started His ministry. The idea here is that He wasn't just tempted with these three or four things [noted] in the rest of the chapter. He was tempted for 40 days straight, every day! This was quite a test. This was something a lot bigger than what we've ever gone through. And so, what He went through here, was **awesome** in terms of Him having to face evil.

And it seems, from what we can read here, that the worse temptation came at the very end, when He was seemingly His weakest. He had not eaten for 40 days. But was He passive all that time? Do you think our Savior just sat there in the wilderness for 40 days, and allowed the evil (the temptations) to come at Him—like one wave after the next? I don't think so. He didn't fast, I don't think, just because He had nothing to eat. He's the One that wrote Isaiah 58. He knew the spiritual strength that comes from fasting. He was "weak as a kitten" physically at the end of 40 days. Spiritually, He was

strong as the Son of God after 40 days.

So it seems like the temptations were not just wave after wave; but wave after wave that built up—each one a little bit harder after the next. What did He do? Each one was harder to resist. How did He face it? Well, however we read it, Jesus bent all His will and strength to overcome each one. He pulled out every spiritual weapon, to defeat each temptation.

I can say that. It doesn't say that He pulled out His copy of Deuteronomy and began instructing Satan on the finer points of God's way of life. He already had them in His mind. So He was prepared, by **study**. When you are out in the desert for 40 days and you are **fasting**, what do you do? Well, you probably do two things. He **prayed** constantly. And if He wasn't actually praying, He was **meditating**, I'm sure.

I just gave you *four tools* that should be used in getting rid of the evil: (1) fasting, (2) Bible study, (3) prayer, and (4) meditation. He didn't need to do Bible study. He already was the Word of God. He knew it backward and forward. But it was certainly there in the mix, because He thought about it. And when Satan had a temptation, what did He do? He quoted the Scripture verbatim. Those words—that He had given to those men (who wrote them down before He became Jesus)—came right back to mind; and He flung them at Satan like a weapon.

So He never treated **evil** as if it did not exist, and He knew His own flesh. He's the only one that has ever totally resisted **the pulls of the flesh**. He had them just like you and I do. But He was strong enough (in the Spirit of God) that He was able to resist them. But we see this little vignette in His life—that it was no easy task for Him, nor is it easy for us. But, if we want to be like Him, we have to approach it just as He did.

We are going to be spending the rest of this sermon in I Peter. Please turn there. I find it interesting that Peter was the one who wrote these words. John may have been the disciple that Jesus loved, but Peter had a certain way about him, a certain approach to life in which things like this made a great deal of impression on him.

And so his works—both I and II Peter—are full of advice on how to be diligent to make your calling and election sure. In chapter 2-4 specifically, he is telling us *how* we are to resist evil, *how* we are to do good, *how* we are to not be what the rest of the world is like. Maybe it was tough for him. Maybe that's why it made such an impression, and maybe that's why he passed it along. But it's a good thing that he did. It's a good thing that God inspired it, because it's here for our admonition and our learning. Here Peter is talking about submitting to masters.

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I Peter 2:19-21 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called...

That's very interesting. What did he say that we are called to? **Suffering!** We were called to get hit over the head for doing good.

I Peter 2:21 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps.

Don't for a minute think that this was just talking about the last day of His life. Christ suffered every day of His life. Satan didn't stop tempting Him. And His flesh didn't stop pulling Him towards the evil.

I Peter 2:22-23 "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth," who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously.

We think back to Jeremiah 17:9. He committed Himself to the One who really knows what our *character* is, and what our *heart* is really like.

I Peter 2:24-25 Who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Now, as I mentioned before, we could make a very convincing theological argument that Christian suffering **is** our fight against evil—because it is in ***our fight against evil*** that we receive the slings and arrows of others, and that we cause ourselves the most **inner** turmoil. We have a body of flesh, of carnal nature, that doesn't want to do what is good. And so we **suffer** up here—between the ears. We suffer because we have this great struggle, this WAR, going on inside.

It's very interesting that Peter brings up Christ's suffering here, and that He had evil

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done to Him. People reviled Him. People threatened Him. But the interesting part is Christ's reaction. Peter says that He didn't do anything like that in return. This is His real *example* towards us. He didn't act evilly in response. Out of Him did not come defiling sin. Remember Mark 7—**evil** comes from within, from out of the heart.

But what did He do? He did ***self-sacrificial acts of goodness*** towards His revilers and His persecutors. And, not only for them; but, as Peter goes on to say, He also did it for us—His brethren. His whole life, He was constantly doing self-sacrificial acts of goodness. We could go back to Acts 10, where it says basically that He didn't do evil because He was constantly going about doing good. There's **our example!** He didn't let the evil get Him down. He didn't let the evil change His course. He just kept on *doing good*. That's how He fought it.

But I'm getting into the next sermon, so let's drop down to chapter 3. Peter talks to husbands and wives in the meantime, because his original idea was **submission**. But he has gotten into this area of suffering wrongfully, or suffering in general, and he gets right back to it.

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.

That's interesting that he says that again—that you are called to this. We can throw that back into I Peter 2:21 and find out that what Peter meant there was that we were not just (1) *called to suffer*. We were (2) *called to return goodness for reviling*. We were called to do the same thing that Christ did. It's not just to suffer. It's to react the same way to suffering that Jesus Christ did!

So all those who suffer (thinking that they are suffering for righteousness' sake)—IF they are not ***reacting properly*** — then they are not doing what they were called to do. *The suffering* and *the reaction* must go together! Otherwise, we are just suffering unprofitably—to the detriment of our body, let's say, or whatever kind of suffering is being put upon us.

I Peter 3:10-12 For "He who would love life [he's quoting Psalm 34] 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

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open to their prayers; but the face of the LOORD is against those who do evil."

I find this very interesting, because where does Peter bring down this idea? To what place? To what situation? In verse 8, he said, "All of *you* be of one mind." And then he goes on to say, "Love as brothers." Where does he bring the fight to? **Our community, the church!** Isn't that interesting? It's in the church, in our community—like it, or not—that we are going to have (maybe) the most trouble with our evil character.

You know we shine like beacons (like floodlights) in the world—compared to those people. We keep the commandments of God. We try to do good. But when we are here amongst each other, how do we react? Are we reacting as Christians, or are we reacting as carnal? That's where Peter brings the fight to. That's why I thought it was very interesting. We can all get along out there in the world, because we know where everybody stands. But when we get into the church, (that's where) we have our problems.

If we see problems within the church, then what do we know is present? **Evil!** Evil has come out, in one form or another; and it is imperative that it be stamped out as soon as possible. So Peter gives this advice (and he gets it from Psalm 34): "*Turn from evil. Do good. Seek peace. Pursue it.*" If you don't, what does he say there in verse 12? God will turn His face against those who do evil. And we certainly don't want that. We don't want the evil that is in us to come out, and to defile our relationships within the church. Then we've just allowed *ho paderos*, the wicked one, amongst us. Then, who knows what hell will break out?

I Peter 4:1-3 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 [licentiousness], lusts, drunkenness, revelries, drinking parties, and abominable idolatries.

What is the weapon that Peter says we have, which will fight this evil? We have *the mind of Christ*. Check it out in I Corinthians 2. Paul fought the same thing at Corinth. He came to the same conclusion. "*Look, you guys are divided in this church. Use the tool! You have the mind of Christ. Why are you allowing these things to divide your unity?*"

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This is the same Mind that we have access to, which prepared for and resisted the temptation of Satan the Devil for 40 days. It's ours to access, if we just will. Peter says it very plainly, there in verse 1, that IF you have such a mind THEN you've ceased from sin. What he means is that you are applying it, and you are not letting yourself get dragged down by the evil that is there within us. None of that evil (that comes from within, that can defile a man) is being allowed to come out.

In fact, that evil is being **stamped out** inside, so that it never can arise to the surface again. Of course, it's a struggle. We are human. I understand that. But, as John puts it, we have stopped living in sin. If we have the mind of Christ and we are doing this properly, what we've done is that we've taken the fight to the enemy. We are not going to just stand around and allow ourselves to be pulled by the nose—by evil. Rather, we are going to take the offensive and put it out, and overcome it.

So we must ask ourselves if we have truly committed ourselves to the task that Peter is giving us here, in verse 2. That is, that we should no longer live the rest of our time in the flesh (to the lusts of men). To put it another way, have we committed ourselves to stamping out our carnal nature? To put it positively, have we really committed ourselves to live the life of Jesus Christ? Or, are we allowing some of the evil to exist, to be nurtured, because we like it—because it's fun?

When I went through the parables of Matthew 13, I showed that the entire context of chapters 12 and 13 are about coming to **the decision to commit** to either *Jesus Christ* or to *Satan the Devil*. Like Ronald Reagan, God (if I can be so crass) believes in black and white. You either accept Him and His way, or you are in the other boat. So we ask ourselves: Have we personally committed to God—and all that comes with it? Or are we still reserving the right to jump back into the other boat? Each person has to answer that himself.

But we are two months shy of Passover. It is time to begin evaluating ourselves—trying to plumb the depths of this heart. It is time that we begin seeing the **evil**, and putting it out—making commitments not to do what we have been doing in the past. As Peter puts it, so eloquently here, we've been "doing the will of the Gentiles." That is, doing the will of those who do not know God—who are far from the covenant, who are far from God's holiness.

Have we committed to stop doing that and to start going His way? That's the question. We have this evil in us; and it must be put down, stamped out, gotten rid of like leavening. In Hebrews 12:1, Paul says that it's time to lay aside every weight that besets us—that holds us back. Throw it off! It's crunch time.

I Peter 4:7-11 But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another, for "love will cover a multitude of sins." Be hospitable to one another without grumbling. As each one has received a gift, minister [or, serve] it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone [serves, or] ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom [Both of whom] belong the glory and the dominion [the sovereignty] forever and ever. Amen.

Do you think Peter ends with a bang? I do. He hits us very squarely. *"The end of all things is at hand. Get serious!"* It's time to stop asking God for our own desires and lusts. It's time to start asking God for things that are really **worthwhile!** Things are close. And if they are within twenty years, they are still close. I don't know. I could walk outside and get hit by a train. It's that close! Why do we dilly-dally about this? I don't know. I do it too. I procrastinate. I put things off. I think, *"Oh, I can work on that later."* But can we? Peter says, *"The time's at hand."*

He goes on, in verses 17-19, to say that we will be saved (pardon the expression) *"by the skin of our teeth."* We will "scarcely" be saved, he says. And it's not because of any righteousness that we have. It's because of the grace of God. Remember—He sees our hearts. He knows how depraved we are, even still. And even the most righteous are just "scarcely saved." So we have to really think about this. Is it not high time to take the effort to the utmost? I think so. Our righteousness—however far we take it—will never be good enough for salvation. But we need to do it, because there is a Judge who is watching us and seeing what we do, and seeing how we measure up.

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.

We have to commit ourselves to "doing good." We know that God is faithful! He'll save us despite ourselves, but we still must show Him that we are serious about this way of life. That is, that we are serious about **doing good** and **destroying evil**. And that evil that we must destroy is within ourselves.

Now, I know that this has not been a pleasant sermon. I know that I've received criticism in the past for being too "down" on people. I've come across pretty sternly in this sermon—as if we are all **evil from head to foot**. Well, we are. But there is a germ of

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good that is in us. And we have to make that germ grow. We have to become as good as we possibly can. That is, in the very image of Jesus Christ. And we must start with the realization of evil in us. We can't think, in any wise, that we are any good.

Mr. Armstrong said repeatedly...I don't know how many times I heard him say that he thought of himself as a worthless hunk of junk. And it was **that attitude** that made him what he was to this church. It made him *pliable in God's hands*; and God could use him to do what he did in his life, and in his ministry.

I have another sermon in two weeks; and I hope to present the other side—the more encouraging side, the more helpful side to this. So please don't get mad at me and send me e-mails for being discouraging. I want to head that off, right now. As I mentioned, this is a pre-Passover, pre-Days of Unleavened Bread sermon—to get a jump on things. It's only two months and a few weeks away. I hope you take this as **a call to arms** — to defeat evil and establish goodness forever.