

ALPHA 8: How Can I Resist Evil?

by Associate Pastor: Jerry Krueger
Copyright © 2010, Jerry Krueger. All rights reserved worldwide.
This material may be printed or copied for personal use only.

Romans 12:21 “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

Over the last few weeks we have been talking about questions that people have as they move through the Alpha course. Last week the topic was the Holy Spirit. Hopefully you gained new insight into the person of the Holy Spirit. That you understand the Holy Spirit is a person of the Trinity, the triune God. That the Holy Spirit is not an “it.” The Father who is creator, Jesus Christ who is Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit who is counselor, comforter and the presence of God in us and in our lives are the three persons of the Trinity.

The presence and power of the Holy Spirit is what nudges us, stirs us, speaks to us in a palpable way, and gives us the ability to flee from evil when we are confronted with it, and when we ask How Can I Resist Evil?

There is evil in the world. You read the paper, see the TV news, and perhaps in your own life you have had a run in with evil. What is evil, and how do we resist it? First of all, “evil is the antithesis of good.” God is good. Frequently we say, “God is good.” And the response is “all the time.” In the NT book of James 1:13-15, it says, “no one when tempted, should say, “I am being tempted by God”; for God cannot be tempted by evil and he himself tempts no one. But one is tempted by one’s own desire, being lured and enticed by it; then, when that desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and that sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death. Do not be deceived, my beloved.”

We are tempted, lured and enticed by our own desire. And that desire can birth sinful behavior and actions which, according to the scriptures, leads to death.

So how do you define evil? For some people, evil is defined as broken systems in the world that defy ethical and moral actions. Corrupt political systems, inept social services, or bureaucratic entities that crush individuality or overwhelm humans. That is a way to think about evil. Another is to say the word, standby...”Satan.” Yeah, I said it. John Wesley is the founder of Methodism, and he spoke of Satan in his sermons.

For many people it is more difficult for them to find belief in the devil than belief in God. If God is good, and evil is the antithesis of good, where does that leave us? *Ha-satan* in the Hebrew actually means “accuser” or “adversary.” In the book of Job, Satan is seen as an accuser in Job 2:10; and Zechariah 3:1-2. In the NT Matt. 4:10; Luke 10:18, 2 Cor.2:11. The devil is represented as a diabolical evil in opposition to God and God’s purposes.

However you see evil, evil exists.

There is a caution here that we must address. Whether you see Satan as a mere literary device, the personification of evil, or you see Satan as a separate, distinct being and the cause of all evil, we must admit that Satan, evil, is in opposition to God.

Have you encountered or been confronted by evil? On several occasions I have been confronted with the presence of evil.

Many of you know that I got married in February to Rev. Susan Brown, also a United Methodist minister. We got married in Ohio then drove to Jim Thorpe, Pennsylvania, to the resort area of the Poconos Mountains. We didn't know much about the place, other than we were going there by car for our honeymoon. This quaint town, constructed in a valley on the banks of the Alleghany River, had many quaint houses and businesses. Monday morning we take a walking tour of the town and find to our dismay, that the local attractions are closed until St. Patrick's Day. There were several historic large churches in the town, and being pastors, Susan and I said, "We'll go visit the churches, that will be fun." Our first stop was a church that was closed. Windows boarded up, door bolted with a huge lock on it. A crudely hand written sign said, "CLOSED for GOOD." I wondered why they closed, and was it good that the church was shuttered and locked. The next church we came to had a towering steeple and beautiful stained glass windows. Tiffany windows hand crafted by Mr. Tiffany in the 1890's - yes, like the Tiffany Jewelers. This second church was closed, and was now a storage warehouse facility for documents. It had been deconsecrated, several years before.

I looked at Susan and wondered what was going on. We stood on the ice covered sidewalk in a sleety, windy day, and the Spirit nudged me. "Pray. Pray, Pray." "What?" At that moment my godly wife said, "I think we should pray." We prayed for the town and churches and pastors and began to walk back to our old, restored hotel, wanting to get out of the wind and the sleety snow, so we looked for a business that was open.

We spotted an open store, and I started to go in. Susan said, "Jerry look at the window display." In the display were 4 statues of gargoyles and impish creatures surrounded by crystals and rocks. There was a painted sign that said, "Gargoyles are not anti Christian. Turn to your left and look up at the tower of the courthouse. There you will see gargoyles perched on the tower." I went in, Susan stayed outside. I asked the lady if they had any books on Christianity. This after noting that there were books on spirituality, New Age, nature worship, the occult, and tarot cards etc.

She laughed with glee as she told me, "No, there are no Christian books here." I told her I was a pastor, and she said with a very serious, prideful look on her face, "We have successfully closed three of the churches in this town in the last few years." She was part of a witch's coven.

I left the store, and we chose to leave town and go to Gettysburg the next day. We were in the presence of evil. That night we were watching the Olympics in our room, when I noticed movement on the wall near the ceiling. And it was a bat - a very mobile, large wingspread, hovering over the bed, not a little New Mexican free tail bat, but a great big bat flying in the room. I promptly told Susan, "Call the front desk." Later the guy came up, caught the bat in a coffee can, and said, "Hope it wasn't rabid."

Now I had confirmation a few days ago about this town when one of Susan's acquaintances asked where she went on her honeymoon. When she told her, the lady's face fell and she said, "We went there four years ago in the summer, but left when we saw the covens congregating in the streets of town."

In the United Methodist baptismal liturgy we say, "Do you renounce the spiritual forces of wickedness, reject the evil powers of this world and repent of your sin?" We understand that evil exists. Many people don't want to discuss sin, let alone the devil. Dana Carvey on Saturday Night Live used to play the church lady who blamed everything on Satan for any behavior she deemed immoral. The comedian Flip Wilson gained fame with the catch phrase, "the devil made me do it."

When I speak of God, I don't just say goodness, and when I speak of evil, I talk about the evil one, Satan. I believe there is a power opposed to God's will and God's purpose on earth to me. Call it what you will. Satan, devil, adversary, whatever, evil exists.

In our Lord's Prayer we say, "and deliver us from evil," in some texts it reads "deliver us from the evil one."

The book entitled, *The Screwtape Letters* by CS Lewis, is a series of fictional letters between Screwtape and Wormwood. Screwtape being Wormwood's uncle. They are both devils. One, a rookie, one, the well practiced old pro. CS Lewis makes this statement in the opening of his book. "There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an **excessive and unhealthy interest in them**." Lewis goes on to say, "Readers are advised to remember that the devil is a liar." Amen to that. Satan is the prince of lies. John 8:44 says, "Satan is a liar and the father of lies."

Jesus cast out demons in his ministry, and prior to his starting his ministry, he was confronted by Satan after fasting for 40 days in the wilderness. But Jesus rebuffed him by quoting scripture.

How does evil manifest itself? What does it look like? Is it some horned, red guy with a pitchfork? Not necessarily. Evil can be when we began to think that we don't need God's power. When we think in our own will, our own power, our own knowledge, when we think we can make the best decision for ourselves and others without God's help. When you begin to have doubts about your life, about God, then temptations will come. Raising doubts about your faithful financial church giving comes from the evil one. Raising doubts about your faith comes from the evil one.

Evil in whatever form you believe it to be, is opposed to God's goodness. 1 Timothy 6:7 tells us that "God has given us all things richly to enjoy." The evil one does not tell us of the warm friendships that we can have as Christians, or the love of Christ, or the comfort of the Holy Spirit in times of crisis.

In Genesis 3:4 Satan says to Adam and Eve, "You will not surely die." This in response to Adam and Eve toying with the idea of disobedience. Playing a game with no rules is chaos. A speed limit of 35 mph lets us know that driving 70 on that road will be dangerous or fatal. Our obedience to God is for our love relationship with him. It is not a harsh sentence to be served. God gave his son to us as an atoning, sin covering, and sin destroying sacrifice for each person who calls on the name of God to save them.

God does not put temptation in our path. We mentioned that earlier in James 1: 13- 15.

The evil one rejoices when we lose time to pray, when we question God's motives in our lives, and when we begin to believe failure in life is our only option. Temptation is not the same as sin. Sometimes temptation is placed before us and at that moment, you have the choice, the free will, to choose or not. You are free to avoid the website that is full of pornography; you can opt to not participate in gossip. You can opt to share love and speak words of encouragement to your spouse, co worker or kids, rather than hammering them with heartbreaking, spirit crushing words. Jesus rejected sin. If we strive to live like Christ, "He was tempted in every way, just as we are, but was without sin." (Hebrews 4:15) We can call on the name of Jesus Christ and the power of the Spirit that lives in us, to combat sin and evil.

We resist evil by not being like the world. Listen to what Paul writes to the church in in Romans 12:2, "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be **transformed** by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."

People, do not give evil or Satan more than their due. Satan is a conquered foe. Luke 10 17-20 tells us that as the 70 who were sent out by the Lord Jesus, "they returned with joy. Jesus said, I watched Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning. See I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing will hurt you."

Pray in the name of Jesus Christ to God the Father through the power of God the Holy Spirit. There is power in the name of Jesus. As Christians we are not condemned, we are set free.

One of my favorite passages in the Bible is from Ephesians Eph. 6:10-20. Putting on the full armor of God, in God's strength, not in our own strength. I have no capability and strength to battle in my own power. I can only be armored up in God's power. Six pieces of equipment are named to put on your full battle gear.

1. Vs. 14, **the belt of truth**- a solid foundation of Christian belief and truth. We do this by listening to the sermon, by Bible reading, and prayer. This gives us clarity as to what is of God and what is not.

2. We put on the **breastplate of righteousness**. This is the righteousness that comes from God through what Jesus has done for us on the cross. James 4:4-7 says, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Come near to God and he will come near to you." When you fall, admit your shortcoming and get up and draw close to God.

3. We need the boots or **shoes of the gospel of peace**. If you are a Christian then your witness is needed to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ to all.

4. **Put on the shield of faith**- Faith is the opposite of skepticism and cynicism. Don't let yourself be swayed by doubt and attacks.

5. **Put on your helmet of salvation**. Protect your mind from putting junk in it. We have been saved from the penalty of sin, we are being saved from the power of sin, and we shall be saved from the presence of sin.

6. Finally, **take up the sword of the Spirit**, which is the Word of God.' Know scripture, and use it to bind back the evil one and remind yourself of the promises of God.

We are called to pray, and to action. That is how we go on the offensive against evil. Prayer was a very high priority of Jesus, and it should be for us as well. Prayer gives us the authority and power to demolish strongholds, as written in 2 Corinthians 10:4.

We are called to action. We should pray for others, minister to them, pray in the name of Jesus.

This is not a ying and yang thing. This is not equitable. It is not God on one shoulder and Satan on the other. That is not biblical. God is the creator of the universe. Satan is only a part of creation. A fallen part. A small, lying part.

In the end, we know who wins. Jesus returns and the enemy is defeated as written in Revelation 12:12.

How do we Resist Evil?

We ask Christ to be Savior and Lord of our life. We pray that God's Spirit nudges us, we pray in Jesus name. We read scripture, we put on the full armor of God, and we walk in the light. We give The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit thanks and praise and ask for guidance, courage, boldness, discernment, forgiveness and grace, all the days of our lives.

Let's pray: Romans 12:21 "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."