

DELIVER
US FROM
EVIL



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Topics subject to change without notice

FEBRUARY 3 – EVIL DEFINED

Since the September 11 tragedy, we've been hearing a lot of talk about something called "evil." Well, evil has been around a long time, but it hasn't been considered quite the thing to do to mention it in our times, because after all who is to say what is evil. In our society one person's evil may be another person's good. What evil? Whence came evil? Did God create it? What does the Bible say?

FEBRUARY 10 - MORAL AND NATURAL EVIL

The word "evil" appears 612 in the King James Version of the Bible. A study of the use of the word in different passages reveals that there are different kinds of evil, and evil is used in different ways. Sometimes even God is said to use evil forces to bring about His will. Examples of that might be the universal flood and the destruction of Sodom. If God does so, may we? Is all natural evil punishment for moral evil?

FEBRUARY 17 - THE PAIN OF EVIL

Surely no one doubts that innocent people suffer from the evil deeds of evil men. It is stamped clearly and permanently on our minds by the history of December 7, 1941 and September 11, 2001. When such a disaster strikes, there is a time of shock and grief, a time for tears, a time of grim determination, a time for action. There's also a time of pondering, a time for thinking.

FEBRUARY 24 - DELIVER US FROM EVIL

The title of the fourth sermon in the series is also a petition in the model prayer which Jesus used to teach His disciples to pray. Could He be saying we should pray to be delivered from an evil lifestyle? Or for forgiveness for an evil lifestyle? Or from the suffering effected by the evil deeds of evil people? Or something else? What could that something else be? Is there any deliverance? If so, where? And, how?

"EVIL DEFINED"
Matthew 6:6-12

Webster defines "evil" as an adjective as anything "morally reprehensible, sinful, wicked <an impulse>; anything "arising from actual or imputed bad character or conduct," or anything "causing discomfort or repulsion;" "anything causing harm. As a noun it is "something that brings sorrow, distress, or calamity; the fact of suffering, misfortune, and wrongdoing." The words in the languages of the Bible that are translated into the English "evil," mean about the same, and we'll be discussing some of the different Old Testament and New Testament usages later in our series. From the dictionary definition, you can understand why I said awhile ago that "evil" is a word that, until most recently (well, since September 11) hasn't been used a lot in our culture. We've been educated not to make value judgments; I mean, we're taught from preschool through university not to call anything or anybody evil or good, that those qualities are only in the eyes of the beholder, --that one person's bad may be another person's good, so, who's to say what's good and what's evil. Anyone who's familiar with the Bible's quickly reminded by all that, of the verse that says, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter!" (Isa. 5:20). My friend, for too long, we've denied the reality of evil in our world. For too long we've labored in vain to make right that which is evil in the sight of God. For too long we've been silent about what God has said is evil. Evil does exist. If we didn't know it before, we should have learned it on September 11. Still the accommodative mind tries to rationalize the events of 9-11 as a possible good --we shouldn't hold anyone accountable for it, because it's debatable.

But, how big or disastrous or destructive must evil be before it fits our definition of evil? Is the reckless, brutal murder of one person, evil? Or must the number be 3,000? or 5,000? Or, at what number between 1 and 5,000? Or perhaps the evil on 9-11 is not in the loss of human life after all, but the destruction of two of our beautiful and portentous buildings that graced the skyline of one of our great and prominent cities? Or perhaps it wasn't any of that. If that wasn't it, could it have been the attack on our pride that made it evil? Like nothing ever before, it was done right here on American soil. How dare anyone commit such a brazen, insolent and presumptions act on us! Why does the death of (what was it?) 5,000 people on 9-11 grab and hold our attention, and arouse our anger and send our troops into war, but the brutal inhuman killing of 30 to 40 million little, innocent, helpless preborn babies doesn't? I'm just trying to define "evil." What does "evil" look like? We saw how the dictionary defines evil, but how do we define it?

What do you say we let God define it for us. The word "evil" appears 612 times in the King James Version of the Bible, 132 times in the New Testament, so, God has a lot to say about evil. In Romans 1:18-28 He mentions a number of things He considers evil. For the sake of time, I'll not read the entire passage; I'll just quickly list the evils mentioned there. He said of the Gentile people of that day that they were (1) given to worthless speculation, (2) they exchanged the splendor of the imperishable God for images like perishable man, birds, four-footed animals and reptiles. (3) They lusted in their hearts to immorality. (4) They degraded their bodies among themselves. (5) They exchanged the truth of God for falsehood. (6) They worshiped and served the creation rather than the Creator. (7) They abandoned natural sexual intercourse for what's unnatural, (lesbianism and homosexuality). (8) Because they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up to a worthless mind, to practice evil things. (9) They filled themselves with all (10) wrongdoing, (11) wickedness (12) greed, (13) malice, (14) hate, (15) envy, (16) murder, (17) deceit, (18) Meanness, (19)

gossip, 20) disloyalty, (21) Inhumanity and (22) they lived unmercifully. That is one of the most inclusive lists of evil behavior found in the Scriptures.

But there are others. For example, let's look at Ephesians 4:25-31. Here He's talking about the change that is brought about by conversion to Christ and His way of life, the best, by the way, that man has ever discovered, and here's what He says: "...put on the new man which was created according to God, in true righteousness and holiness. Therefore, (1) putting away lying, Let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another. (2) Be angry, and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your wrath." (Why? --Because it's evil.) (3) Don't "give place to the devil. (4) Let him that stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. (5) Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth (Why? Because it's evil." but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. (6) And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all (7) bitterness, (8) wrath, (9) anger, (10) clamor, and (11) evil-speaking be put away from you, with all (12) malice" (Why? Because bitterness and anger, and clamor and evil speaking are evil).

Philosophers and psychologists and sociologists, some schools of religious thought and others who have from time immemorial studied the problem of evil have most soundly pondered the question of its origin. Many have there been who have touted believers with the affirmation that since God is the Creator of all things, it was He who created evil. Augustine, philosopher/theologian first introduced the idea (and Thomas Aquinas developed it further) that evil is not a created thing, but the absence of something, that something being the righteousness of God of course. It's like darkness. Darkness is not a created thing, it is the absence of light. Remember? The Scripture says that "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:1-3).

The unbeliever chides us again with the idea that if God does exist, and if He is all loving as He's said to be, evil has to exist by His will and power, --else He is not all powerful. If He is almighty as He's said to be in Genesis 17:1, He could eliminate evil --if He willed to do so. But, since evil exists, God must not will to free the world of it, therefore He is not all powerful. Or if He is all powerful, then He cannot be all-loving because He wills the existence of evil.

However, the person who makes that kind of argument against the existence of God or for God as the author of evil, finds himself meeting himself coming back. In his recognition of evil he's admitted the existence of right and wrong, good and evil, both of which are established on the foundation of a universal faith or conviction (Heb. 11:1) that certain conditions are right and others are wrong. And you see, that conviction isn't established, nor can it be maintained in the absence of a Moral Lawgiver who is Christ the Lord. There's no proof for or foundation for a moral law in the absence of a moral Law-giver. For God to abolish evil it would be necessary for Him to suspend man's ability to choose between good and evil. But, God is glorified and the world is a better place because of man's capacity to make those choices.

The Psalmist wrote, "O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth! who hast set thy glory above the heavens. Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings hast thou ordained strength because of thine enemies, that thou mightest still the enemy and the avenger. When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little

lower than the angels [deity], and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: All sheep and oxen, yea, and the beasts of the field; The fowl of the air, and the fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas. O Lord our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!" (The 8th Psalm).

In order for man to accomplish the purpose for which God created him, he must possess intelligence --the capacity to assimilate and evaluate information and choose a course to pursue. If he must have that capability to do good, he must also be free to do evil. The choice is his. And I repeat, God is glorified and the world is better because God created man with that ability. He could have made us little robots without that capacity, you know.

When He'd finished His creative work, God looked upon it and pronounced it good --all of it -- everything He'd made (including the man and the woman) was "very good" (Gen. 1:31). Man was not made evil; he had to learn to do evil (Gen. 2:17; Gen. 3:5). Therefore, evil originates, not with God, but in the evil hearts (minds) of people. It soon became apparent to God "that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Gen. 6:5). Jesus said, "From within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man (Mark 7:21-23).

Therefore, evil is man-made. Each of us must chose to do good or evil with our lives, and herein is God glorified that man can choose to serve Him and do good, not evil, all the days of our sojourn here. That others choose to do evil to other people is to their discredit, not God's. My friend, I sincerely hope you're a Christian, but if you're not, I pray you'll choose to be today. What a joy it would be to hear from you this week that today you confessed your faith in the living Christ and were baptized into His death, where He shed His blood for your salvation; that you were buried with Christ in baptism and raised with Him in newness of life (Rom. 6:3-4). I pray you will.

God put the death sentence on evil. He said, "The day [you do it ML] you shall die." ("Death" means "separation.") And the day the first man and his wife disobeyed God, they committed the first act of evil and he and his wife died --that is, they were separated from God. But of course God knew Adam would commit evil, so He built into His plan, a way for reconciliation between man and Himself. When He announced punishment for the evil done by the man, the woman and the tempter, He also announced His eternal plan. It's recorded in Genesis 3:15 and it says, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel." The plan was to send His only begotten Son to be so abused and slain by sinners as described in that verse, and then His resurrection to a glorious victory of evil. The Scripture says, Romans 5:12 "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned."

So, since we've all sinned (done evil), we all come under that sentence of death --separation from God. But by the grace of God we can all be reconciled to God in Jesus Christ, His Son. Therefore Paul could write, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ (said the apostle Paul), as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be YE reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." If you haven't, I

pray you will be reconciled to God through the death of His Son this very day.

"MORAL AND NATURAL EVIL"

In our introductory study of Evil in our program last week, we mentioned that the word "evil" itself appears in the King James Version of the Bible 612 times. In its various forms it's translated from two Hebrew and four Greek words, and with their cognates such as "sin" and "wickedness" and "bad" and others, brings the total to many, many more times than that. We said then that the precise usage in the Scriptures, must be determined by the context in which it appears each time. We also mentioned that we would be studying about that a little more in depth later. Well, this is later.

According to the Zondervan Pictorial Dictionary of the Bible, in the Old Testament "evil" most often refers to what is physically undesirable, what's bad as opposed to what's good. Rotten figs and poisonous herbs are bad --or evil in 2 Kings 4:38-41. In Genesis 38:7 the word is used to describe moral evil, --what was "wicked in the sight of the Lord."

The Holman Bible Dictionary also says that "Evil" can be of two kinds: (1) "natural evil" such as destructive natural forces, ranging from tornados and floods and earthquakes to cancer and MS and other painful and devastating illnesses, and (2) moral evil, which finds its source in the choice of actions of human beings, such as the well-planned Oklahoma City bombing of the Murrah Building at 9:02 a.m. April 19, 1995, and the more recent 9-11 incidents we've referenced several times in these studies. There'd also be the more ordinary evils --some so ordinary and frequent, as a matter of fact, that they're hardly considered evil any longer, such as idolatry and adultery and murder and , crime of all kinds and cruelty (human and animal) and slavery and racism and dishonesty in all its forms like lying and stealing --and, well you can extend the list. And of course, we're aware that some natural evil is the result of the moral evil of mankind, such as the fiery destruction of Sodom in Genesis chapters 13-19. Perhaps we could even think of natural evils that would result from nothing more than human carelessness or thoughtlessness. I suppose we'd call these "accidents," still the results could be disastrous natural evils because they tend to disrupt or challenge the order Divinely established at the beginning.

First let's consider "natural evil" for just a minute. Life can flourish only in a stable environment, therefore, in the creation of things, God established certain natural laws to maintain that stability. For the purpose of illustration, let's suppose that when you set your cup filled with coffee on the table this morning, then turned loose of it to reach for your food, you could never know for certain whether the cup of coffee might (1) stay where you put it, (2) drift upward and splash on the ceiling, or (3) unpredictably slide horizontally one way or another across the table in any direction and wander off into the next room. Well, life could never go on in the turmoil and confusion that that sort of irregularity among the natural forces would present. Such regularity and those forces --or laws --are absolute essentials of life! To put it another way, they're good! Even the simplest tasks we do --just habitually, would become extremely complicated --well, it'd be impossible to live without these certainties.

However, some of the things we label "natural evils," are simply the proper and regular functioning of those same natural forces we confess are good. You can think of any number of illustrations of that. The meteorologist, for example, can predict the weather in a given locality on the controlled flow of wind around the high and low pressure systems and their movements across the continent. We call that "good." But that tornado that we define as an "evil" is but the performance of those same winds moving in uniformity, too.

It's sometimes said that a tornado or other such evil (under this definition) is an "act of God."

And since it's an "act of God," the conclusion is that God could prevent it if He should choose to do so and/or if He really possessed the power to do it. Therefore, it's believed by some that much evil in the world is God's doing as the universe obediently responds to His established order. But, such evil is not moral evil. Nor is it due to any inability or unwillingness on God's part to prevent it; it's because of the ordained regularity of His established order. That means, then, that while we rightly believe and teach that God is omnipotent (all powerful) or we quote Jesus in Matthew 19:26 as saying, "With God all things are possible," we understand He is limited in His power to do without disrupting or suspending the dependability of His established order. You see then, that God limited Himself in the creation by establishing regularity and law. Let's not be too quick to blame God for evil in the world, for it's as David said in Psalm 5:4, "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness: neither shall evil dwell with thee."

One other thing must be said about God and evil. In the Old Testament we come upon such statements as this found in Jeremiah 11:11, "Therefore thus saith the Lord, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they shall not be able to escape; and though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them." Another similar thought is found in Jeremiah 18:8: "If that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." Obviously the "evil" done by the Lord upon sinful people is evil in its natural effects not in its morality. It is the execution of Divine justice, and the justice of God is not morally evil. God is known for His justice. The Scriptures say, "He shall judge the world in righteousness, he shall minister judgment [or justice] to the people in uprightness" (Psa. 9:8). "The Lord is known by the judgment [justice] which he executeth" (Psa. 9:16). "He loveth righteousness and judgment [justice]: the earth is full of the goodness of the Lord" (Psa. 33:5).

When God revealed to Abraham that He planned to send evil or destruction on the wicked city of Sodom, the old patriarch interceded for Sodom. He asked, "Would You also destroy the righteous with the wicked?" (Gen. 18:23). Then followed that plea for 50, 40, 30, and finally if 10 righteous people could be found there, would He destroy the city? Finally, in verse 25, Abraham answered his own question and stated an eternal truth about the nature of God. He said, "Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" And so He does! Always! God did right with Sodom and He will do it with us.

Now, let's consider some of the Bible verses in which the evil is obviously moral. We're not talking about natural calamities now, such as earthquakes, floods, tornadoes now we're talking about immoral deeds; acts of terrorism, for example, and other deeds of violence. Einstein said, "I do not fear the explosive power of the atom bomb. What I fear is the explosive power of evil in the human heart." Oh! My! Yes! Yes! Yes! That's it! That's what we've seen, isn't it? "The explosive power of evil in the human heart." But, for too long, evil has abounded, and we've said nothing and done nothing. So let me say this: "We have less to fear from what evil men are doing than from what good men are not doing. The surest way for evil to abound is for good men to do nothing to resist or defeat it.

The Bible teaches good men to learn to "discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:14). Sorry! But at the very heart of the troubles of our violent society in this 21st century is our unwillingness to recognize that some things are evil and some things are good, and our inability to distinguish between them. For at least three generations we've been brainwashed in our government sponsored education system (with the exception of a few responsible teachers who refused to go along with it) that there is no right and wrong. Therefore, the most violent crimes conceivable are defended as good and

acceptable behavior on some occasions. We're told never to teach a child he's done wrong or has the wrong answer; simply tell him it'd been better had he done otherwise, or a better answer would've been. My friend, some things are wrong. Some things are right. Even Jesus, the loving Savior, spoke of an "evil eye" in Matthew 6:23, an "evil generation" in Matthew 12:39; "evil deeds" in John 3:19; an evil man in Matthew 12:35 and evil thoughts in Matthew 15:19.

Having learned to discern between good and evil, we're taught in Romans 12:9 to "Abhor that which is evil; cleave to that which is good." "Abhor," simply means to regard with extreme repugnance, to loathe, to turn aside and keep away from that which is evil. A good commentary on that verse is I Peter 3:10-12: "He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile: Let him eschew [turn away from NKJV] evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue [pursue NKJV] it. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil."

Charles Carrol, one of the signers of the Constitution of the United States of America said, "Without morals a republic cannot subsist any length of time; they therefore who are decrying the Christian religion, whose morality is so sublime and pure [and] which ensured to the good eternal happiness, are undermining the solid foundation of morals, the last security for the duration of free governments." Let us pray.

You've heard me say it before, and it should be so obvious it should never have to be said, but I'm saying it again: we cannot secure the peace and tranquility and safety of our citizens by enactment of more laws, by putting more policemen in the streets and building more prisons. Civility, I mean treating one another with propriety and respect, cannot be forced by legislation, it has to come from the hearts of the people themselves. It has to be a part of the national character. It's as Jesus said, "A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. 12:35).

So the challenge before us is to change the heartbeat of America. If it wasn't obvious before September 11, it must be by now that we're on the wrong course. We must make a turn in direction. Whereas we've removed God and His Son Jesus Christ and the Bible from our social and educational life, we must invite Them back. Only God can deliver us from this evil condition into which we've willingly and blindly stumbled.

That's the role of a nation's religion. But, obviously 20th century American religion failed us miserably. It has degenerated into nothing short of cheap side-show entertainment. I heard it described recently in a national news program as "nut-case-religion." That's an apt description alright. That in itself is evil. Am I saying that the practice of some religion is evil? You got it right, my friend. That's what the Scripture says. Malachi 2:17 says, "Ye have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet ye say, Wherein have we wearied him? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delighteth in them; or, Where is the God of judgment?" If we're going to rid our land of the evil in it, we must begin with our religion. America's great need in this desperate hour is the kind of faith or Christianity you read about in the New Testament. My friend, we simply must get back to the Bible for our religious faith and practice. If you read your New Testament any at all, you know that what you're seeing today wearing the label of Christianity is a far cry from what you're reading about in that New Testament. If you're not a Christian like you read about in the New Testament, I hope you'll become so real soon. Turn to God and His way in repentance now and be baptized into Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins just as the New Testament teaches in Acts 2:38. Will you?

"THE PAIN OF EVIL"

Volummes have been written about why innocent and good people must suffer evil. Pay a visit to your library or your nearest book store and you'll find any number of good books and articles on the subject. And probably about any of them will be helpful. Philosophers and theologians, too, have worked for centuries on the question, so I'm not about to suggest to you that I have the last word.

In an earlier message in this series we discussed evil as being of two kinds: Natural evil and Moral evil. The first of these (natural evil) is that which comes upon us because of the functioning of the controlled system in which we live. For example, the fire that serves a good purpose to cook a meal or warm our house on a wintery night, may also destroy the house, or even consume our lives. The other kind (moral evil) is the evil or sinful scheming of evil and wicked men.

Of course we know, don't we?, that the natural forces are made for the good of all men. Jesus said that God makes His sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and He sends rain on the just and the unjust (Matt. 5:45). Therefore, it should come as no surprise to us that when those same good forces operating well within their established order, produce a tornado or a flood, it should come upon the evil and good people alike.

We make a mistake when we blame God for the evil in the world. We may not know how or why it all happens, but we should think about it before we blame God for it. Very often people think God is punishing them for some unusual sin in their lives.

Is extraordinary suffering punishment for extraordinary evil in our lives? This is probably the oldest and one of the most common explanations for the existence evil. You may remember, this was the rationalization of Job's friends, who came from afar to comfort and encourage him. "Job, what terrible sin have you done, that so much evil has come upon you?" Well, that isn't very comforting when you're suffering like Job was. Also, in John 9 Jesus is said to have seen a blind man, who had been so from his birth. "And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?" Do you see what I'm saying? They just assumed that the birth of a blind baby had to be punishment for some sin. And in Luke 13 it's said that some people told Jesus of some Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus asked them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were greater sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered this fate? I tell you, no, but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." Then He spoke to them about another tragic event down in Jerusalem from which people had drawn the same conclusion. People still think this way, but it's false reasoning.

Personally, I've always found comfort in the fact that some of the people in the Bible who lived and worked closest with God, were some who seemed to have suffered greatly and even unjustly. There were Joseph and Moses and Job and Elijah and John the Baptist and Peter and James and Paul and the apostle John exiled on Patmos for the word of God, not to mention the Son of God himself. You could name others, I'm sure, which all goes to show that, in spite of the "gospel of health and wealth" that's being preached all over the country nowadays, becoming a child of God and living for Him does not immunize a person from suffering.

I like what Matthew Henry, respected scholar and author of the Methodist faith said, "Extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment of extraordinary sins, but sometimes the trial of extraordinary grace." We'll get back to that in a few minutes.

Often it's easy to explain anything that happens to us as being, "God's will," but we need to be careful about that, too. Not everything that happens to us is arbitrarily the will of God for our lives.

Some things may be the working of Satan. Job comes to mind again. Satan said to God, Job only serves you for the blessings you give him, and if you hadn't built a wall of protection around him and his family so I can't touch him, He would curse you and die. So, God stood aside while Satan made attack after attack. By it all Job's unmovable faith was well confirmed.

And in Luke 13:11-17 there's the woman whom Jesus healed who had been "bowed together" or "bent over" so that she couldn't straighten up, whom Satan had bound for eighteen years. So some things are the workings of Satan. But listen to me carefully now, my friend. If some terrible tragedy should strike you or your family, you beware of and avoid that person who tells you that it's because you are possessed of the Devil. I can conceive of no better way of compounding the problem of human suffering than by telling the suffering person it's because he's demon possessed! I don't mind telling you, it angers me to hear that some self-styled spirit-filled prophet has told a poor distraught, agonizing soul that he has a devil. It could possibly be true, but it probably is not true!

Then too, some of our suffering is our own doing. Yes, that's what I mean, we bring some of our problems on ourselves. God has an immutable law which some people either don't believe or they're trying to prove it wrong. It says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting." We reap what we sow. Oh yes, we do. Jesus taught that.

The Bible says that when Jesus was on trial, "Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest's servant, and cut off his right ear" (John 18:10). Jesus' response to that was, "Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword" (Matt. 26:52). Violence begets violence. People who live violent lives, shouldn't be surprised if they suffer violence. When people ignore God and His word; when we leave Him out of our lives, we subject ourselves to whatever the evil world can thrust in our ways.

God has made us with free will, the exercise of which may bring evil as well as good on ourselves, or on those whose lives are affected by ours. We're free to act carelessly or thoughtlessly. Most accidents are the result of carelessness or thoughtlessness. If the person or persons involved had been more alert or cautious, much evil or suffering could have been avoided. We're also free to act ignorantly, and we often suffer for it. We just don't know any better than to do some of the things we do from which we suffer terrible consequences. We're free to act deceitfully and maliciously. Cain maliciously murdered his brother Abel (Gen. 4:1-15). Jacob deceitfully obtained the blessing that belonged to his brother Esau (Gen. 27). David acted deceitfully to cause Uriah's death and is as guilty as if he had committed the deed himself (II Sam. 11:14-21).

Much of the evil in the world is because people choose to be vicious and mean to one another. And, we're free to sin, which is the cause of --not all --but very much of our suffering. The Bible says, "The way of transgressors is hard" (Prov. 13:15). Again it says, "Many sorrows shall be to the wicked" (Psalm 32:10), and it's been demonstrated over and over again in our own experiences.

God gave man this freedom of will, knowing well that it involved the possibility of our making evil choices and suffering for it. But, He was willing to take that risk so He might deal with us through persuasion, not force, not as robots, but as moral and spiritual beings like Himself. By His creating us so, He imposed a limitation upon Himself to always have His way and do His will in our lives.

But someone is sure to be thinking that if God is all-knowing and all-powerful and all loving, why does He stand aside and let evil prevail in the lives of the innocent, as in the case of the baby born blind that we mentioned awhile ago, or the man in Acts 3 who was born a cripple? Or the 9-11 death of

thousands? Why does He permit the rape or robbery or killing of honest, upright, hard-working, decent, God-fearing citizens? Such suffering may not be God-sent, but as in the case of Job, it couldn't happen if He would only exercise His power to prevent it. And that's a legitimate question to which there are different answers, but let me suggest just one --the one that's mentioned in the passage from II Corinthians 12.

In the earlier verses Paul had related an unusual --even a unique --a once and for all -- experience. His being taken up into the third heaven or paradise and seeing things which God forbid him to repeat down here on earth, has never happened to any other human being. Paul knew that. He only referred to it in self-defense. But such rich experiences as that --unique to him only --could have made him a proud and arrogant man. That would have destroyed his effectiveness in the Lord's work. So, what happened?

He says, "Lest I should be exalted above measure [lest he should be self-exalted, proud, haughty, high-minded] through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh," he said. Now we're not concerned at the moment about what this "thorn in the flesh" was, rather we're interested in why this dedicated man of God was given this cause of suffering. Why must this saint have to suffer so? He did suffer greatly with it because he said he besought the Lord three times to remove it and He wouldn't do it. Why? Augustine, fifth century theologian-philosopher said, "God judged it better to bring good out of evil than to suffer no evil to exist." There's the answer. "No, God didn't send it. Paul said it was "a messenger of Satan to buffet me." But God brought good out of the evil by it, keeping Paul a humble man. And God had given Paul sufficient grace to suffer victoriously. That's what Matthew Henry meant as we mentioned earlier, "Extraordinary afflictions are not always the punishment of extraordinary sins, but sometimes the trial of extraordinary grace." So God says, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

Suffering refines character. Lives immersed in tragedy are not merely touched, but they're turned 180 degrees in their course. The dross of pride and self glory and vanity and presumptuousness are purged in the sweltering furnace of affliction. Adversity is the garden in which bloom humility and patience and fortitude and thanksgiving and trust and hope. So, Paul says in Romans 5:3-4, "We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope." Let us pray.

No discussion of the subject of the suffering or pain we bear because of evil in the world, would be complete without reference to at least one other passage that bears strongly on it. It's II Corinthians 4:17 and it says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Whatever may be the extent of our suffering, it is light and but for a moment when it is compared with the eternal weight of glory which awaits the Christian sufferer in heaven. The whole story of suffering can't be told in this life.

We're grateful, my friend, that you joined us for today's program and I pray you've been blessed by it. There's no possible way we can know all the concerns, thoughts and perhaps even doubts that pass through the mind of people in pain. We've tried to present some of the thoughts we've gleaned from the study of God's word (as time has permitted) that might be a source of help and strength for some struggling soul who is seeing this program.

Before we leave, I have this urging from within to encourage you to become a Christian. The Christian has more with which to fight the evils that come barging into all our lives than the unbeliever. I sincerely hope you will renounce sin and turn to God and be immersed into Christ, to rise to live the new life of the Christian the rest of your days here, come what will.

"DELIVER US FROM EVIL"

Matt. 6:9-13

Evil is of two kinds: Natural and Moral. The first can best be described as those disasters that come upon the earth and its inhabitants through the fixed processes of the natural order that are essential to the existence of life. These would be such things as floods and lightning and winds and earthquakes and the like. Moral evil, is of course, the evil that springs from the evil hearts of men in breaking the moral code of God, the Supreme Ruler of the universe (Matt. 15:19). We've learned that God sometimes uses or sends natural evils upon people or nations of people to render just judgment on them for the moral evil they've perpetrated on innocent others.

It's generally thought that because this petition "deliver us from evil" follows immediately the one in the model prayer: "lead us not into temptation," that Jesus is teaching His disciples to pray for deliverance from moral evil we ourselves are tempted to do. Perhaps that's the intent. And well we might pray such a prayer every day. For as the Scripture says in 1 Peter 5:8, the Devil, goes about as a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour. He's vicious. He's deceitful. He isn't playing a game with us. He's dead-serious, and we need to get serious about his evil, too. Remember: "Vice is a monster of so frightful mien, / As, to be hated, needs but to be seen; / Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face, / We first endure, then pity, then embrace" --Alexander Pope.

Therefore, Christians are taught to "Abhor [despise] that which evil; cleave to that which is good" (Rom. 12:9). "Abhor" and "despise" are strong words. The apostle John also wrote, "Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good" (3 John 1:11). We're also taught to "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (I Thess. 5:22) and, "Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). Also, "Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice" (Eph. 4:31). "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby" (I Pet. 2:1-2). "He that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile. Let him eschew [avoid or refuse] evil, and do good; let him seek peace, and ensue [pursue] it" (I Pet. 3:10-11).

Well, we certainly need to be praying that petition, "Deliver us from evil," every day because we're promised, that "The eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil" (1 Pet. 3:12). And, "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations" (2 Pet. 2:9).

Charles R. Erdman says of this petition that it is for our "protection from moral peril" meaning, I think, from such disasters as those of 9-11. (Charles R. Erdman, An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew, page 56). McGarvey says it "includes deliverance from the evil thoughts of man's own heart, and from evils from without as well as the temptations of Satan" (The Fourfold Gospel, page 253).

As at no other time in the history of our great country, Americans find themselves needing to pray, "deliver us from evil." One day while I was preparing these messages, I drove through a residential area where the houses had iron bars over the windows and doors, and I thought what a sad sad commentary on our present-day American society. Then I thought of the sign I and others in our area have in our front yards of the security systems we have on our houses, and I was smitten with the same sadness. Recently, I was running low on fuel in my car. I was in an area of the city with which I'm not familiar, but I had to have fuel. I pulled into a national brand gasoline station only to learn that I

had to "prepay" even in broad daylight. What a commentary on the residents of that neighborhood, that they'd fill their gas tanks and drive away without paying. I got back into my vehicle and drove on. A few days later a friend told me how he'd gone out in the morning to find his vehicle had been broken into over night and some valuables were stolen from it. How depressing! That was in what's considered a good neighborhood. I took my wife, Lois, to the shopping mall one night and went out to the parking lot to bring the car around for her. It was quite a distance from where we'd parked. The security guard followed me in his vehicle and kept an eye on me every step of the way. I must've been in greater danger of evil than I'd even suspected. And this is the America that you and I have created for ourselves. How depressing and discouraging!

I've mentioned these few, but real experiences in which evil and wicked men with evil and wicked intentions prey upon innocent and unsuspecting people everywhere. Reports of these things fill our daily news casts and news papers. They're so commonplace, we hardly recognize them as evils anymore. Well we've been educated well that there is no such thing as aberrant behavior. We've developed a permissive and evil society of violence and fear in America, and we're rushing swiftly headlong into self-destruction. That's an inevitable unless of course we change the basic ideology on which we're building --from --materialistic, atheistic, humanism to faith in God. And as much as I dislike saying it, from my vantage point, it doesn't appear that we have the will to change our direction now. We're hopelessly --and perhaps helplessly --entangled in the tentacles of an evil monster we created for our own pleasure and prosperity --that has gotten out of control and become the instrument of death for our once great and mighty nation. Never in America has it been more appropriate to pray, "Deliver us from evil."

It's characteristic that the decay of a nation's morals and ethics follows closely on the heels of the exploitation and corruption of its religious faith by evil men. And in the twentieth century when American religion became mere big-time show-business, marked by greed and thrills, it was evident that evil had triumphed over truth and America had begun its descent down the western slope. That was when the salt of the earth lost its saltiness and was cast out so that, it's just as Jesus said it would be in Matthew 5:13, men are now walking on it. It happened to the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah in the Old Testament period of history, as examples and warnings for us today (1 Cor. 10:1-6).

It may be a small thing with some people, but it's a very serious thing with God when men take liberties with His word for their own personal gain -- and --glory, to make Him say things He never said and approve of what He never sanctioned. Surely, if you're at all acquainted with the New Testament, you know that what is marketed today as Christianity is very far different from Christianity you read about in that Book. Contrary to popular opinion, a religious faith steeped in error is not better than no religion at all; for it satisfies its adherent and anesthetizes him to true faith in Christ Jesus in Whom there's salvation for his soul. Historically, the fall of a civilization begins with the perversion --or loss -- of its religious faith.

Since it's historically true that the fall of a civilization begins with the perversion (or loss) of its religious faith, a civilization must turn first to to its religious faith to prevent such a catastrophe, wouldn't you say? Yes! Of course. The faith "once for all delivered to the saints" in the Scripture (Jude 1:3) is America's greatest need in these perilous times of evil. That's our strongest defense against evil --the New Testament kind of Christianity. We simply must get back to that. We must return to the New Testament kind of Christianity and demand that of our preachers and other leaders --New Testament Christianity. The most fantastic thing about that is that it works!

Therefore the Holy Spirit says through the apostle Paul, "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome

evil with good" (Rom. 12:21). That must surely mean that good is more powerful than evil and will overcome evil in the lives of men when it enters the contest. Yes, of course that's what it means. It was demonstrated well in Elijah's encounter with the prophets of Baal in I Kings 18.

The apostle Paul wrote, "The weapons of our warfare are not carnal (meaning not physical like guns and knives), but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds" (2 Cor. 2:14). Good and right will always win out over evil when it's in the contest.

Remember too, that Jesus taught us to pray "Deliver us from evil." It is within God's will and power to respond positively and powerfully to that kind of praying, else our Lord would never have taught it. Sooo, there's hope. Our hope is in God. In spite of all we've said, and I believe what we've said is true, it's even as President Bush said in his State of the Union Speech on January 29th, "Evil is real; and it must be opposed." Evil, as we experience it in the public forum every day like we described it awhile ago, has prevailed in our country only because our national policy to deny the existence of evil, and in view of that, we've given it only token opposition.

But, we've come to the time we must stand up and oppose what we really know in our hearts to be evil. It's time to stand up and be counted on the side of truth and right. Can you imagine --can you imagine --can you imagine how a country like ours which was founded upon faith in Almighty God, 94% of whose citizens still profess faith in God, has found that God is forbidden by our national Constitution in the education of our children?

But there's hope. We still have those mighty weapons Paul wrote about, prayer and truth and right, which through God are mighty to bring down strong holds! When people (individuals or nations of people) repent and turn to God, He forgives their transgressions and remembers their evil against them no more. He did so with the sinful city of Ninevah. Jesus said the men of Ninevah "repented at the preaching of Jonah" (Matt. 12:41), and He reversed His intentions of destroying the city. He would have saved Sodom, too, if there could have been found as many as ten righteous souls there (Gen. 18:32). And He said of His own people Israel in the Old Testament period: "If my people, which are called by my name, shall humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways; then will I hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land" (2 Chron. 7:14). There's no doubt about it, He'll do that for us, too, if we'll repent and turn again to Him. What about you, my friend? Are you a Christian? I mean a real Christian, following in the teachings of the Savior? I hope so, but if you're not, I pray you'll turn to God in repentance, then surrender to the will of the Master by being baptized into His death, be buried with Him and raised with Him, in baptism for the remission of your sins, just as we're taught to do in Romans 6:3-4 and Acts 2:38 and other places. Do it today, will you? If we can help you, call us at once. It's important.

I hope you've profited as I have from this four-week study of evil. There's much more to be said about it, of course there is, but we'll have to do that in other messages on down the way. Your comments have been good and I appreciate your taking the time to write. I've built a file of your comments which will be helpful in future studies. Your requests for the little book have exceeded anything we've ever done before. We may have to go back to the printer for more; we'll know after this week's broadcast.

Saul of Tarsus was widely known for his vigorous pursuit of evil against the saints of God in the very early days of Christianity (Acts 9:13). Once he was convinced of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, he was immediately baptized (Acts 9:18) and became just as widely known as the most persecuted Christian of his day. From his Roman prison cell, he sat down to write what he knew would be his last letter. He addressed it to his Timothy young friend and co-worker in Ephesus. And here's

what he wrote in closing: "Make every effort to come to me soon;" he said, "for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. At my first no one supported me [stood by me KJV], but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen." Remember to pray, "Deliver us from evil."