

Overcoming Evil

1 John 4:1-6

April 29, 2018

Back in March¹, we talked quite a bit about false teachers, so this morning, we're going to jump past verses 1-3 and focus on a topic that is brought up in 1 John 4:4, "You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world."² The "one who is in the world" is a reference to none other than the devil, aka the evil one. 1 John 3:12 begins, "Do not be like Cain, who belonged to the evil one..." The Bible's description of the devil as "the evil one" should keep us from being underwhelmed by him. We shouldn't be overwhelmed by the evil one, but neither should we be underwhelmed. What I mean is that the devil not just a "meanie." He's not just impolite or a little out of line. The devil is evil and his works are evil.³ This morning we're going to talk about overcoming evil.

All we need to do is look at the headlines in the news to see that evil is rampant in our world. I don't just mean problems, I mean evil – that which is encouraged and celebrated by the devil himself. Things like abuse, human trafficking, pornography, and illegal drugs, just to name a few. Do you ever get tired of all the evil in our world? Do you ever get fearful of it? What can we do about it? We're going to talk about that today. Christ-followers need to respond to evil in 3 ways. The 1st thing that we need to do is simply...

1. Acknowledge that evil exists. John tells us in 1 John 5:19, "We know that we are children of God, and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one." Rather than acknowledging evil though, it might seem easier to deny that evil exists, to just stick our head in the sand and pretend it's not there.⁴ Edmund Burke is credited for saying, "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing." Something worse than denying evil might be hiding from it. We acknowledge that it exists, but rather than doing something about it, we choose to separate ourselves from any potential danger. We draw back and keep away from anything outside the safety of our own homes.

Do you ever worry about the kind of world your kids/g-kids are growing up in? Ever fear that they might not make it? I'd have to admit I do some times. I would just as soon keep them at home all the time and never let them wade out into the challenging realities that come from the evil in today's world. Consider how Jesus prays for His followers in John 17:15, "My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one." God's plan for us is not to stay locked up in our homes. Here's some great encouragement from 1 John 2:14, "I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one." John is actually referring not just to young men but also to young women in this verse.⁵ He emboldens their faith by reminding them of who they are as Christ-followers. Even though they are young, they need not fear the devil.

Despite their youth, young people have all the spiritual power they need. They are strong. God's Word lives in them. They can overcome the evil one! This is significant for us as we see the difficult world that our children and grandchildren are growing up in. They are going to be fine. Why? Because the world is such a happy, easy place to live in? No, because the One who lives in them is greater than the one who is in the world.⁶

¹ The Apostle John has a way in his letter of mentioning a topic and then coming back around to it. He does this with topics like "sin" and "love" and he also does this with the topic of "false teachers." John sort of loops around and around in an upward spiral, each chapter kind of building on the others. This makes it a bit more challenging for us preachers, who are trying to work through the book verse by verse. So, please bear with me as we move further and further along in 1 John.

² This is now the 6th of 7 times that John will address his readers as his "children." See 2:1, 12, 28; 3:7, 18; 4:4; and 5:21.

³ 1 John 3:8 says, "The one who does what is sinful is of the devil, because the devil has been sinning from the beginning..." He's been sinning from the beginning, which means the devil has been involved with evil since at least as far back as the garden. He is the original instigator of sin and he now has a long history of evil. He is our sworn enemy and we should be sober to the reality of his evil work all around us.

⁴ But that's like keeping ourselves busy rearranging the chairs on the Titanic... while it slowly sinks into the sea, while we do absolutely nothing to save those who are about to die.

⁵ See my explanation for this in the introduction to my sermon "Living with Eternity in View" from 1 John 2:12-17, on 3/4/18. Here's a link:

<http://www.efcbemidji.org/media>

⁶ Later on, 1 John 5:18 says, "We know that anyone born of God does not continue to sin; the One who was born of God keeps them safe, and the evil one cannot harm them."

We need men/women of faith who will take action in the fight against evil. Consider the challenge of Eph. 6:10-11, "Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes." John Stuart Mill is credited for saying, "Let not any one pacify his conscience by the delusion that he can do no harm if he takes no part, and forms no opinion."⁷ We must acknowledge that evil exists, and then, we must take our stand against it! Our second response to evil is to...

2. Guard against allowing evil into our own lives. Very sadly, some who call themselves "Christians" are participating in evil. They have actually moved over into the darkness that they supposedly detest. They have thrown in the towel and given up on their faith. Much like Cain, who we talked about last week, sin desires to draw us into evil. Genesis 4:7 gave Cain this warning, "sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it." 1 Corinthians 10:12 warns us as believers,

"So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!" Recently, our culture has been talking about three different men named Bill: Billy Graham, Bill Hybels, and Bill Cosby. As we consider the lives and testimonies of each one of these men, it causes us to consider what we might learn from them about how to guard our lives from evil.

In my study this week I came across a document called the "Modesto Manifesto." It dates back to 1948, when Billy Graham was just 30 years old. Modesto refers to Modesto, CA where they were having an evangelistic outreach at the time. The Manifesto was a 4-part resolution to live lives of biblical integrity. Billy Graham and the men serving with him, agreed not to allow evil to win, in their personal lives or in their public ministry. They resolved to put up a guard against 4 evils:

1. Financial impropriety and greed.
2. Sexual immorality.
3. Divisiveness and a critical spirit.
4. Lying and deception.

I'd like to read you a short excerpt from Billy Graham's autobiography, "Just As I Am."⁸ During their ministry in Modesto, California, Billy Graham realized that they needed to deal with the problem of the negative stereotypes of traveling evangelists. The moral failings of other evangelists were causing a bad reputation for anyone else who was trying to proclaim the gospel. Billy gave his team a homework assignment to list all of the key challenges to being effective in their evangelistic efforts. In his book, Billy writes:

"When they returned, the lists were remarkably similar, and in a short amount of time, we made a series of resolutions or commitments among ourselves that would guide us in our future evangelistic work. In reality, it was more of an informal understanding among ourselves – a shared commitment to do all we could to uphold the Bible's standard of absolute integrity and purity for evangelists. The first point on our combined list was money. Nearly all evangelist at that time – including us – were supported by love offerings taken at the meetings. The temptation to wring as much money as possible out of an audience, often with strong emotional appeals, was too great for some evangelists. In addition, there was little or no accountability for finances. It was a system that was easy to abuse – and led to the charge that evangelists were in it only for the money... In Modesto we determined to do all we could to avoid financial abuses and to downplay the offering and depend as much as possible on money raised by the local committees in advance.

The second item on the list was the danger of sexual immorality. We all knew of evangelists who had fallen into immorality while separated from their families by travel. We pledged among ourselves to avoid any situation that would have even the appearance of compromise or suspicion. From that day on, I did not travel, meet, or eat alone with a woman other than my wife...

Our third concern was the tendency of many evangelists to carry on their work apart from the local church, even to criticize local pastors and churches openly and scathingly. We were convinced, however, that this was not only counterproductive but also wrong from the Bible's standpoint. We

⁷ As noted online at <https://quoteinvestigator.com/2010/12/04/good-men-do/>

⁸ Billy Graham, *Just As I Am*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI, 1997, pp. 128-129.

were determined to cooperate with all who would cooperate with us in the public proclamation of the Gospel, and to avoid an antichurch or anti-clergy attitude.

The fourth and final issue was publicity. The tendency among some evangelists was to exaggerate their successes or to claim higher attendance numbers than they really had. This likewise discredited evangelism and brought the whole enterprise under suspicion...In Modesto we committed ourselves to integrity in our publicity and our reporting.”

Scripture warns us to guard against evil in our personal lives. In Ephesians 5:15-16 it says, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise. making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.” Billy Graham may have used the KJV at the time, “See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise. Redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” Do you need a Bemidji Manifesto in your life? Which evils do you need to put up a guard against? Our 3rd response to evil is to...

3. Overcome the evil around us by doing good. There is some very simple but profound advice about overcoming evil in Romans 12:21, “Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” We might think to ourselves: Can’t we just hire somebody like Jason Bourne or Liam Neeson? It seems like that would be a better strategy for overcoming evil. Just have them go take care of business! You know, go out there and really crack some skulls. But, unfortunately, the problem of evil in our world is not solved by a 2-hour Hollywood movie. We must overcome evil in the REAL world and God will help us to do just that, not through violence, but rather through faith and good works.

Doing good may not sound quite as cool or attractive, but that is what it means to be on mission with God in this world. For genuine Christ-followers, the proper response to evil is to overcome it by doing good and pleasing God.⁹

The end of 1 John 3:8 tells us that, “...The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil’s work.” Jesus’ death on the cross won a final victory over evil, once and for all. And now we have the ability, as Christ’s followers, to apply the power of that victory to our daily fight against evil. Through Christ, you and I can overcome the devil’s evil work in our world. Put another way, what Christ accomplished in the past, empowers us to overcome evil in our present struggle.¹⁰

One of the great evils that we need to overcome in our world is the evil of abuse. There are various forms of evil in our world today, but abuse is one of the most disturbing. One example of this is human trafficking. This is a global evil. One place where God’s people are actively taking a stand against this evil is in the DR Congo. The EFCA has a ministry there called, “Tabitha Centers.”¹¹ They are overcoming evil by providing a way out for women who are trapped in trafficking. There’s an article out in the FH that talks about this. Let me read you a brief excerpt:

“The passion and vision behind these centers traces directly back to a Congolese woman named Claudine Selenga... She began with courses on sewing, cosmetology, cooking and more, reasoning that if the girls could learn valuable skills as a viable alternative to prostitution, they might not be at the mercy of desperation...Now, girls are mentored by women from local churches, who help them learn a chosen job skill and understand the Bible’s answers to life’s questions. From a single center in 2013 with 12 girls, now more than 3,000 girls are enrolled in these courses in 120 different centers around Kinshasa, with a vision to see 1,000 centers open by 2020.”¹²

You don’t have to travel to Africa to find this kind of evil though. Sadly, it’s right here in our own community. That’s why we now have an anti-trafficking task force in Beltrami County. It’s composed of people from various local agencies, law enforcement, and a few Christians.¹³ They are overcoming evil together by first acknowledging that it exists, right here in our own community. Then, they are

⁹ 1 John 5:4 tells us, “for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.” “The world” referred to here 2 times, is not the physical planet, it’s the world system that is under the control of the evil one. And anyone born of God, anyone with faith in Jesus Christ, can overcome that evil, world system.

¹⁰ “The victory they have (νενικηκατε, perfect tense) is a past victory that continues into the present. 1 John 4:4. Akin, D. L. (2001). *1, 2, 3 John* (Vol. 38, p. 174). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

¹¹ We’ve also talked about the value of child sponsorships like Compassion and Global Fingerprints. And, we are blessed to support Kathy Austvold in her ministry of helping women find employment through the sales of Shrishti products.

¹² See the EFCA 2017 Annual Report, “*Better Together*” brochure, pp. 8-9.

¹³ Including those such as Support Within Reach, Law enforcement, the Juvenile Center, mental health professionals, BSU professors, Evergreen, and even a local ministry representative named Jim Hodgson.

networking together and collaborating to protect women and to arrest the perpetrators of these horrible crimes.

Unfortunately, the evil of abuse doesn't stop here though. It's broken my heart in the past few years, to learn of a growing number of women and children who are being abused right in their own homes. Abuse is evil. It should bother us greatly, how often abuse happens in supposedly "Christian" homes. This is not ok. Men who call themselves Christians should not be abusing their families, whether that is emotional, verbal, physical or otherwise. The Bible does not condone abuse of any kind, ever. There's been some confusion over the Bible's teaching on submission. When the Bible urges men to lead in their homes, it's not condoning abuse. This is a terrible misrepresentation of God's good design. Men are called to be protectors and servant leaders who lay their lives down for their wife and kids. Christian husbands and dads need to be the ones standing up against abuse, not the ones committing it.

If you or anyone you know is suffering abuse, please get help today. Get out of that situation TODAY, whatever it takes. Separate yourself from it. Don't ever think that this kind of evil is ever ok or that somehow God expects you to endure it. And if you are an abuser and you want help to quit, come and find me after the service.

As Christians, we are called to fight against evil of every kind. We need to do what we can to overcome evil whether it's on the other side of the globe or whether it's right here in our own community, in our own homes, or in our own churches.

*This sermon was preached at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji
on April 29, 2018 by Pastor Jerry R. A. Johnson*