

## Sermon 35, Pray Like This, Pt. 10: Deliver Us From Evil, Matthew 6:13b

"What are the pleasures of sin to the pleasures of paradise?" — Thomas Watson

Evil is a reality. "Christian Scientists, like Hindu Mystics, want to think it away as an illusion; others would see it as good in the making, or good misunderstood; but in the Bible evil is as real as good, and the distinction between them is ultimate." — J. I. Packer, *Growing in Christ*, 203

"He who commits sin to avoid suffering, is like one that run into a lion's den to avoid the stinging of a gnat." — Thomas Watson

- I. Wrong Definitions of Evil
  - A. God's Equal and Opposite
  - B. A Physical Substance
  - C. An Illusion
  - D. Good in the Making
  - E. Good Misunderstood
- II. The True Definition of Evil
  - A. An Ethical Reality
  - B. A Breaking of God's Law, 1 John 3:4
  - C. A Deprivation of Goodness
- III. Deliverance From Evil
  - A. Its Necessity
    1. We Are Born Evil
    2. We Are Born Suffering
    3. We Have Abundantly Proved that We Can't Be Good
  - B. Its Agent: The Triune God
  - C. Its Facets
    1. Deliverance from the Evil of Sin
      - a) Jesus' Punishment and Resurrection
      - b) The Father's Imputation of Righteousness
      - c) Spirit-Empowered Ethical Transformation
    2. Deliverance from the Evil of Suffering
      - a) Our Suffering Is God's Loving Gift, Rev. 3:19
      - b) Our Suffering Benefits Us, Ps. 119:71
      - c) Our Suffering Creates Glory, 2 Cor. 4:17
      - d) Our Suffering Will End Soon, Rev. 21:4
    3. Deliverance from the Evil of Satan, Rev. 20:10
- IV. Pray for Deliverance from Evil!

**Proposition:** Because evil is a wicked reality from which only God can deliver, pray for deliverance from evil!

For many of us in this room, evil is not something happens far away, or a reality that exclusively affects other people. For the law enforcement officers, the military personnel, and the people who work in and for the legal system in the state of Wyoming and in Campbell and Sheridan counties, evil is something you interact with every day. Sometimes you see how pathetic it is, how stupid and pointless. Sometimes you see how wrong it is, how twisted and perverse. Sometimes you see how damaging it is, how many relationship it tears apart, how many bodies it cripples, how many lives it snuffs out. Those of who live on quiet streets in safe suburban neighborhoods, for whom evil is rarely anything worse than a child throwing a tantrum, are very grateful for your work day after day in fighting against the effects of evil. You are part of the way God answers this seventh and final petition in the Lord's Prayer, "Deliver us from evil." That's right: because of the work of our cops, our state prosecutors and county attorneys, and our judges and soldiers, we have largely been safe from many manifestations of evil in Campbell County, Wyoming.

But those of you who work in law enforcement or military contexts will be the first to tell the rest of us that now is no time to stop praying "Deliver us from evil." Oh no. Evil is powerful and growing; evil threatens every one of us. Unless you are totally naive, you don't need me to tell you that you ought to pray to be delivered from evil! In fact, what I want to do today is to look at what evil is, and then at how God delivers us from it. If we know just how bad it is, and how amazing God's deliverance is, then we will be motivated to continually pray that God would deliver us from evil! In fact, we will see that evil is so bad that only God Himself can deliver us from it. That's why we have to pray this seventh petition, "Deliver us from evil."

### **I. Wrong Definitions of Evil**

But before I can tell you what evil is, I need to tell you what it isn't. What are some popular and very wrong views on the nature of evil?

#### **A. God's Equal and Opposite**

The first false idea is that evil is God's equal and opposite. Some of you have likely seen one or more of a popular group of seven movies, the first of which came out in 1977. This movie's title was *Star Wars*, and it is built around the premise that in and through all living thing flows a pantheistic "Force." This Force has a light side and a dark side, and can be accessed to do what humans or other sentient beings want it to do. Why do I bring up these films? Because they illustrate perfectly, in their doctrine of the Force, the idea that evil is equal and opposite to good. As you may remember from the films, is there any hope of destroying evil, or permanently eliminating it? No. What are the characters always trying to do? To "bring balance to the Force." That's the best we can hope for in a world where we have a bad god and a good god, eternally locked in a struggle with each other. The good god cannot and will not finally and ultimately triumph, because the bad god is just as strong as he is.

Is that the world you want to live in? A place where evil is just as permanent as good, and where the most we can hope for is balance? That's not the world of the Bible. God is almighty, and Satan is weak and limited. God is all-powerful, and Satan is subject to Him. We don't believe in two equal and opposite gods. The Yin-Yang is a non-Christian and therefore an anti-Christian symbol.

### **B. A Physical Substance**

But another popular idea about evil is that it is some kind of "thing." For example, Christians in past generations in this country sometimes thought that alcohol was evil. I heard about one man recently who set out to disprove that idea by brewing beer in his home. He told his children to watch the liquid carefully to see when the sin entered into it. Now, we know that alcohol is not evil, and that drugs are not evil. They just are — sort of like guns, or coal, or golf balls. But it is easier to believe that evil is a physical substance, because then you're not so responsible for the evil that you do. "Oh, this whiskey always makes me act bad. Oh, I just couldn't help myself — I found a gun in my hand and I started shooting."

Throughout history, this idea has been popular. Paul referred to the idea that evil can inhabit a physical substance as one of the "basic principles of the world." This can be seen, say, in the OT teaching about how certain things are "unclean." This was an example: God was not telling the Israelites that it was sinful to touch a dead body, merely that touching a dead body was *like* being sinful. Sin is always an action committed by a rational creature. It is not and can never be a thing in its own right. And that means you can't blame your computer for your porn problem, or your nightstick for committing an assault and battery, or your beer can for making you sin in drunkenness.

### **C. An Illusion**

Evil is also not an illusion. Some of you may laugh at this, but the fact of the matter is the hundreds of millions of earth's people labor under the delusive idea that evil doesn't really exist, that there is no such thing as evil. Christian Scientists believe this. So do most varieties of Buddhism and Hinduism. According to some varieties of these Eastern religions, the whole world is an illusion, simply a dream that the nothingness is dreaming. And so, when the Khmer Rouge, the ruling Cambodian Communist Party, killed something like 40% of the population of Cambodia in less than 2 years in the mid-1970s, some Buddhists could have said, "This too is illusion." Indeed, the core idea of Buddhism is that suffering is the great problem of existence and the key to avoiding suffering is to stop desiring that things be any different.

We know that evil is not an illusion. How do we know that? Because God would not let His own Son die for an illusion. No, Christ died for a real problem that was really hurting, killing, and destroying God's good creation. Don't you dare take the route of calling evil an illusion. It's not. It is a powerful force active in this world against God and against everything good that He has made. We should pity those who think that the answer to their suffering is to deny its reality. We should be motivated by this false idea about evil to spread the good news that evil is real! If your mother is dying, or if your baby was killed by a drunk driver, or if your

grandfather was killed in action in Vietnam, or whatever it may be, the Bible says that that really happened and yes, it was just as awful and horrific and bad as it seems. Other religions don't say that and can't say that. They say, "Well, it was an illusion. That evil thing didn't really happen to your loved one." But Christianity admits and realizes the full horror of evil.

#### **D. Good in the Making**

Another way to understand evil is that it is simply good in the making. A little bit of pain and suffering and badness is necessary if we are ever going to progress. This is the justification that has sometimes been used for Darwinian evolution. Yes, it's bad that so many species had to die out, at an untold cost of misery and pain over hundreds of millions of years — but really, all of that was necessary so that we could be here today with all the advanced features that we have.

Or, more popularly today, you might hear this argument as "Well, it's good to have wolves in Yellowstone, because they balance the ecosystem." You might ask, "What about all the suffering of deer and elk that are ripped apart by sharp teeth while still alive?" And you might be told, "Oh, it's really a good thing. It's nature's way of making sure that everything stays in balance." On this reading, the death of innocent little bambi is not truly a horrific thing that ought never to have happened. It's simply part of the greater good of the whole ecosystem. The screams of the rabbit carried away by the hawk? That's not wrong. That's simply the circle of life.

Brothers and sisters, don't you believe it. Little baby bambis should never have had to die. Rabbits and mice shouldn't have to live in overwhelming fear of talons from the sky. You and I should not need to fear the fangs of the rattlesnake, or the guns of a thug in a back alley. This is not how the world was supposed to be, and any attempt to write off the pain, suffering, and fear in this world as nothing more than "the circle of life" or "a balanced ecosystem" or "the dark shadows in the picture and the dissonances in the music" is an unbiblical approach. As we will see later, these ideas have some truth in them. Don't misunderstand me; they are not totally false like the first three ideas were. But they miss the total picture. In claiming to see evil as part of the total picture, they make the mistake of thinking that because it *is* it *ought to be*. Yes, the picture has dark parts and the music has dissonance — but that darkness, that dissonance, has no right to exist and never should have been there. The first time you kill a chicken, you feel the full horror of what you have done. After a while, you don't care anymore. The same is true, we know, for any kind of thing you do. You can get to the point where you can machine-gun innocent people and not even care. Is it sinful to kill a chicken? No. But it never should have had to happen.

#### **E. Good Misunderstood**

The last of these false views of evil is fairly similar to the previous one. This is the idea that whatever happens is really for the best, and we just need to remember that. So, when we hear that ISIS is slaughtering Christians in the Middle East, we can say, "Well, maybe this will wake up our leaders to recognize the threat that Islam poses." Is that true? Well, sort of. Maybe such horrific actions will have some good results that we can fairly easily trace. And indeed, we can

further affirm that in all things God works for the good of His people, as Romans 8:28 says so memorably.

*But that doesn't take away the evil of evil events.* The fact that God can bring good out of evil doesn't mean that the evil then ceases to be evil. As we have recognized for decades now, to say, "The Holocaust was good in that it motivated Jews to find a homeland of their own where they could live in safety" has a kernel of truth in it. But insofar as it reduces the sheer horror of the gas chambers and the cattle cars and the incineration ovens to a simple "gas chambers —>state of Israel" diagram, it is shockingly wrong. To suggest in any way that the Holocaust was simply a misunderstood good is to undermine the horror of its evil. Yes, we confess that God will bring good even out of evil. But we do not and never will confess that therefore evil isn't so bad. The fact that God works in the evil actions of evil men to bring about His own good purposes does not let those evil men off the hook, or make their evil actions less appallingly horrific. Joseph's brothers meant it for evil; God forgave the evil and worked for the good of the whole world through their evil. But does that mean we can look back and say, "It wasn't really evil for them to beat up their brother, throw him in a pit, sell him to slave traders, and lie about it to their father"? Of course not. Evil is still evil, and evil is still something from which we must beg deliverance.

## **II. The True Definition of Evil**

Well, if evil is not an illusion, not simply good in process (and therefore a lesser degree of good), not simply good misunderstood, a physical substance, or the equal and opposite of goodness, then what is it?

### **A. An Ethical Reality**

Well, we already said that evil does not belong to the physical world. Instead, evil belongs to the domain of ethics. What domain do ethics belong to? Well, they are generally studied as a department of philosophy, but they are lived as part of the domain of morals. Ethics refers to that which is morally binding, to some kind of "oughtness" which is not a physical reality but a moral reality. Evil is an ethical perversion. Evil is rooted in the will of the rational creature and always ultimately can be traced back to a deliberate choice to do something that ought not to be done. Evil is a violation of moral oughtness. That, at least, is what you would call a philosophical definition.

### **B. A Breaking of God's Law, 1 John 3:4**

So let me bring it down to earth. Next time evil confronts you, will it come and say, "Hi John — I am evil personified. I am here to get you to violate moral oughtness"? I don't think so. You would say "Huh?"

When defined in a down-to-earth way, as the Bible does, we find that evil is simply, always, and only one thing: "Sin is lawlessness," as the Apostle John says. Sin is the transgression of the law, the violation of the law, the breaking of the law. Sin is any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, the law of God. God's law says "Worship God." Evil says, "Don't worship God." God's law says, "Honor your parents." Evil says, "Dishonor your

parents.” God’s law says, “Respect old people.” Evil says, “Disrespect old people.” In fact, that is how tiresome and boring evil is. It is nothing short of contradiction. Whatever God says to do, evil is standing by to say and do the opposite. God says, “Be faithful to your spouse.” Evil says, “Be unfaithful to your spouse.” God says, “Take care of the earth.” Evil says, “Trash the earth.” And on and on and on it goes. If you want to see all the forms evil can take, buy a newspaper subscription or turn on your TV.

### **C. A Deprivation of Goodness**

So, then, we can say that evil is, in its full sense, the taking away from a person or an action the goodness that he/it should have had. Evil is a deprivation of goodness. It is not simply a lack of goodness. As Bavinck says, following Thomas Aquinas, a negation is this: “A stone does not see.” But a privation is this: “A blind man cannot see.” The stone has not been deprived; it never had the faculty of sight. But you were created to be good, and all your actions should have been good.<sup>1</sup> The transgression of the law you were made to keep deprives you and your actions of the goodness that they should have had. Derivatively from this sense, then, we can say that the earth and nature are subject to evil. A wolf cannot do evil per se, but we can say that its actions in killing bambi are the result of our evil and would never have happened unless we had plunged the whole creation into sinfulness. The creation should have been a place of harmony, peace, and goodness — and our sin has deprived it of that and turned it into “nature red in tooth and claw.” It is not that nature is sinful; rather, it is that our sin corrupts and oppresses nature, depriving it in some sense of the goodness with which God created it.

### **III. Deliverance From Evil**

So evil, as we have seen, is the transgression of the law or the privation of goodness. That — evil in its full scope, as everything that ought not to be and would not be in a perfect world — is what we pray against in this seventh petition. We seek deliverance from evil.

#### **A. Its Necessity**

Why do we need to be delivered from evil? And why do we need specifically need to pray for this deliverance?

##### **1. We Are Born Evil**

The first reason is that we are born evil. We were all virtually contained in Adam and represented by him. When he fell, we sinned in him and fell with him, even though we didn’t actually exist yet. Just as you can understand that the U.S. government issued a bond before you were born, yet you today are one of the ones liable to pay that bond, because your lawful representative sold it as a way of raising money, so your lawful representative sinned before you were born. As a punishment for that sin, God consigned the entire human race to a state of sinfulness. As Paul put it, “For God has consigned all to disobedience, that he may have mercy on all” (Rom 11:32 ESV). Every one of was consigned to this realm of disobedience, bound over to it as punishment

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<sup>1</sup> Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, 3:137.

for our race's sin in the person of our head. "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psa 51:5 KJV).

And so, because we are born evil, we need to be delivered from this evil that has clung to us from the moment of conception.

## **2. We Are Born Suffering**

But furthermore, we are born suffering. A glance at the world around us will show little babies in the NICU, barely clinging to life, riddled with birth defects and health problems, unable to swallow or see. Or think of the infants born to drug-addled parents, beaten and kicked and not taken care of. Or those born in conditions of starvation, or born to little 12-year-old girls whose pelvises are too small to let them out and so the little baby lingers in the womb until it dies and then rots and kills its mother. Or, if you think that can't happen here, think of the tens of millions of precious tiny babies who have been ripped limb from limb while the cops stand by and protect not the babies but the abortionists. We are born suffering, as a human race. Those who have looked into the ashpits of Auschwitz and seen the skeleton of a baby there, or stood in a mud hut and watched a child die of meningitis, have often turned away and questioned whether God exists and whether this evil of suffering is so great as to prove that God is either absent or malicious.

The answer that we as Christians give to those who have suffered and those who have witnessed that suffering is this: God has consigned all to disobedience, and hence to misery, that He might have mercy upon all. We are born suffering because we are born evil. We as the human race are guilty with Adam's guilt and sinful with Adam's sin; if it were not so, then we would be good, not bad, and happy, not suffering.

## **3. We Have Abundantly Proved that We Can't Be Good**

Finally, not only are we born wicked and born miserable. We are also born unable to make ourselves better. Trying to clean the sin nature up by your own power is like mopping a dirt floor. The more you try, the worse it gets!

A brief survey of world history will show you that human beings can't be good. Yes, there have been a few noble, generous, well-behaved people, even among those who did not believe in God. But in general, most people have been petty, vain, small-time profiteers, restrained only by fear of getting caught. You cannot find a society that endured under a good government for more than a few centuries. But forget world history. You and I have proven abundantly that we can't be as good as we know we ought to be. When was the last time you said something you regretted? Did something you regret? Thought something that you should have been ashamed to think? If it was more than a day ago, then you're kidding yourself. Your heart, too, is full of evil, and you need to be delivered from it.

### **B. Its Agent: The Triune God**

Well, it should be obvious that we need to be delivered from evil. But who can do it? Who is stronger than evil? The answer is that God, being unpolluted with evil, is able to deliver us. He can overcome evil in all its forms. That is why His title is Deliverer, as well as Rock and Fortress

(see Psalm 18:2). God is a deliverer. How does He deliver us from evil, and what evil does He deliver us from?

### **C. Its Facets**

#### **1. Deliverance from the Evil of Sin**

The first evil from which God delivers is the evil of sin. This is truly and properly speaking the evil of evils, the root of all evil. Just as good can be divided into the good, the useful, and pleasant, so evil can be divided in the wicked, the harmful, and the repulsive. Evil properly speaking is wickedness; it is sin alone that produces the harmful and the repulsive. God creates only the true, the good, and the beautiful.

So sin is the evil of evils; sin is the evil which produces every other evil. But how does God deliver us from the evil of sin?

##### **a) Jesus' Punishment**

First of all, He punishes the evil of sin. Sin demands punishment; otherwise, God would treat the sinner just like He treats the righteous, and thus would overthrow His own holiness. God cannot tolerate any sin or evil. He must punish it. But rather than punishing us for our sins, He determined to punish His own Son, Jesus the Anointed One. Do you believe this? Do you believe that out of the thousands of people crucified by the Roman Empire, one of them was the Son of God bearing the punishment that your sins deserve? That's what this book says. If it's not true, then we have no hope that anyone else will suffer for our sins. The very best we can hope for is that our existence will end and that we will be annihilated, turned into nothingness. But it is true: Jesus Christ suffered, died, and was buried, on account of your sin, if you believe in Him. That was the first step in the divine process of deliverance from evil. First of all, the evil had to be borne by someone innocent.

##### **b) The Father's Imputation of Righteousness**

But God the Father was active too in this plan to deliver from evil. He counts Jesus' righteous behavior as yours. He adds it to your account, so that it truly belongs to you even though you did not personally do it. That's okay, because your representative did. The one authorized to act on your behalf did the good deeds you were supposed to do and then suffered the penalty your bad deeds so richly deserved.

We talked earlier about how God consigned all to disobedience. But He has mercy on everyone represented by His Son, the perfect Advocate. The good deeds you didn't do are yours, because God has given them to you

##### **c) Spirit-Empowered Ethical Transformation**

But God has not only given you credit for good things your representative did for you; He also gives you Himself. His Son died on your behalf, but now lives in your heart. His Spirit, too, is a gift. That's right: God gives Himself in the Persons of His Son and His Spirit, both of whom come to live with you and in you. They don't just live with you; the Spirit especially changes you so that you begin to look and act like Jesus. The Holy Spirit transforms you, stamping the character of a son of God onto you, giving you the power to resist temptation and to flee from



sin. Do you see the Spirit at work in your life? Do you see yourself becoming more like Jesus? As you grow in personal holiness, in doing the good deeds done not by your representative Jesus, but actually done by you personally, you are progressively delivered from evil. Already, you are delivered from the guilt of sin. Progressively you are being delivered more and more from the power of sin. And someday, through the work of the Triune God, you will be fully delivered from even the presence of sin.

That's what Scripture calls deliverance from evil.

## **2. Deliverance from the Evil of Suffering**

But there's more! The evil of sin is what evil is, properly speaking. It is the transgression of the law. But in a derived, metaphorical sense, suffering is an evil too. Suffering is a result of sin; it is something that ought not be in this world, created very good. But our salvation is not just from sin. Our salvation is deliverance from the evil of suffering too. Now, I'm not talking in prosperity gospel terms. The Biblical gospel is not the good news that nothing hard and nothing bad will ever happen to you again. No, the Biblical gospel is that Jesus took the punishment your sins deserved so that you wouldn't have to. In that sense, in the sense that you won't have to face God's judicial wrath, you are delivered from suffering — or, better, “from the wrath to come.” But in other ways, too, our salvation removes the sting of suffering. It does not remove all suffering, but it does in many ways take the evil out of it.

### **a) Our Suffering Is God's Loving Gift, Rev. 3:19**

First of all, our suffering is God's loving gift to us. “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent,” (Rev 3:19 NKJ) warns Jesus. He sends us chastening — suffering — as a gift of His love. How can we say that something is evil to us when it is the gift of a loving Lord who wants to make us more like Himself, so that we may share His holiness?

### **b) Our Suffering Benefits Us, Ps. 119:71**

Not only is the suffering we do as Christians a gift of God's love; it is also beneficial to us. “It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes” (Psa 119:71 NKJ). That's right — it's good for us. Evil is still evil. Sin is always a horrific thing that should not be. But things that only exist as a result of sin, like suffering, are only evil derivatively, and their evil can be transformed for those who experience it into a testimony of God's goodness. We can look at affliction and say, “Much of the evil of this experience has been taken out, so that I can truly say the experience has been good for me.”

### **c) Our Suffering Creates Glory, 2 Cor. 4:17**

Moreover, our suffering “works” or “produces” a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory — one beyond all comparison! The fact that God brings good out of evil doesn't negate the evil of that thing, as I said a few moments ago — no more than it negates the goodness of the good He brings out of it. Our suffering, ultimately a result of the evil we do and live under, is made into an occasion of good for us through the mighty working of God Himself.

### **d) Our Suffering Will End Soon, Rev. 21:4**

Oh, and our suffering is short-lived. “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21:4 NKJ). When will this happen? As soon as you get to Heaven. It could be any day, even any minute. For none of us will it be longer than a few decades, maybe a century at most. A century ago WWI was ablaze on the fields of Western Europe. Yet who is now alive that participated in that fateful conflict? It will be merely a blink of an eye before we are in Heaven, seated at God's right hand. Surely the temporary nature of your suffering is enough to make it less! When the dentist is drilling your teeth, you say, “This will be over soon, so I will sit here and take it.” If you had reason to believe that he would continue doing it for two weeks straight, you would probably just get up and leave. But God shortens our suffering, so that we need endure only for a short time.

### **3. Deliverance from the Evil of Satan, Rev. 20:10**

Finally, Satan himself will be cast into the lake of fire, never to trouble the saints again. You need not fear him, in that sense — his time is short, every day of it fixed by God, and there is nothing he can do about that.

### **IV. Pray for Deliverance from Evil!**

Well, since evil is so bad, so horrible and awful, something that has no right to exist and is not just a lesser form of good but a genuinely bad thing, you must pray to be delivered from it. Pray to be delivered from the evil of sin, from the evil of suffering, and from the evil in your own heart and in the world around you. Don't succumb to false doctrines about evil. Believe the truth. You who love the Lord, hate evil — and beg Him to deliver you from it, through the resurrection of His Son and the mission of His Spirit. Amen.