

Overcoming Evil with Good, Part 1

by Jay Adams

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I find among Christians today 11th-hour thinking, a kind of pessimism, a kind of hang in there by your toenails attitude, a kind of attitude that says, "If I just don't lose what I've got, I've won." There's very little of the spirit among Christians today that says, "Let's go for it. Let's get in there and win." There's very little of that. And Christians ought to be moving forward. They ought not to be moving backward or just standing their ground. Even if it is the 11th hour, we ought not to be moving backward or just standing ground. The Lord says, "Occupy [or be busy] until I come." And that's what we've got to get a hold of.

We have in Romans 12:21 a challenge that says, "Do not be conquered by evil, but conquer evil by good." You see, that steward among the three who buried the Lord's money, and at His return dug it up and said, "Look, I've got it all. It's all here, just what You gave me. I didn't lose any of it" had a very wrong attitude, because our Lord said to him in Matthew 25, "You lazy, wicked servant." He said, "I was afraid. I knew that you were a hard Master, one who picks up what He doesn't put down, one who reaps what He doesn't sow, and so I buried it." The Lord said, "You wicked, lazy slave." The ones He commended were the ones who went out and doubled that money, the ones who did do business until He came. And it's your job and mine to change the picture to the metaphor that Paul uses here--to conquer evil in our lives individually until He comes. He didn't say you could conquer it for the first years of the church, you could conquer it through the Reformation period, you could conquer it up until recently, but now you can let up. He expects us to go forward and to continue to go forward until the very last moment before He comes. "Occupy [do business, go forward, conquer evil] until I come."

Now the interesting thing here is that He's talking about a certain kind of evil. He's not talking about the kind of evil that you bring on yourself. Peter talks about that in his letter, and he says, "Let no Christian suffer because of his own evil doing, because of his own sin..." (1 Peter 4:13-16). This is not something we bring on ourselves. An awful lot of evil we do bring upon ourselves. We bring a lot of trouble into our own lives by our sin, by our failure to follow the Lord, by our own aggressiveness not following what God says in His Word and just launching out on our own, doing what we please. But that's not what He's talking about here. He's talking here about suffering and evil doing that is brought upon you because you're a Christian--suffering that is wrong; that you had nothing to do with bringing upon yourself and that you cannot in any way keep from coming upon you. But it's going to come your way because you live in a world of sin and especially because you're living for Christ in a world of sin.

Jesus faced an awful lot of that kind of suffering. He seemed to be like a magnet that drew evil to Himself. And the reason was because His life was so exemplary. He was perfect. He was the light of the world. He was the one whose light shown so brilliantly, so beautifully, so strikingly that it exposed the lives of others all around Him. And it showed so clearly by contrast what their lives were like. And when a person lives like Christ, he will bring upon himself what Christ brought upon Himself. When he lives like Christ, men will say as they did about Christ, "I don't like that person. His life stands out as a contrast to mine. And I don't like that contrast. It shows me up to be unfavorable." And that's why men tried to put out the light. That's why darkness tried to put out the light. But it could not, because light always is more powerful than darkness. So this is evil, then, that comes upon you in this world that you have nothing to do with. It's evil, problems, difficulty, attacks, slanders, persecution, and ostracism that come upon you because you're a Christian living as you ought in a sinful world. How do you handle that evil?

The first thing I want you to notice is that Paul speaks about the whole issue in terms of war. He says, "Don't be conquered" (Romans 12:21). That's what that word literally means. "Overcome" is in some of your translations have, but it's a war term. It comes right off the field of battle. It has all the smell of smoke and sweat and blood and toil and anguish attached to it that any term that has to do with battle does. And what it means is, in battle to conquer. So in battle don't be conquered by evil, but in battle conquer evil by good. It's the word that's used all through the book of Revelation where it speaks of the overcomers or the ones who in battle have won.

You may not think of yourself as in a war. An awful lot of thinking in our Christian world today has moved from the metaphor that so frequently occurs in the Bible of warfare to other kinds of thinking. We hear so much about how good and wonderful and sweet and lovely Christians are, and how they ought to love themselves and do good to themselves, and all about glorious self-images, and all this garbage that comes in from psychology from the outside and is not found in the Bible anywhere. And we hear very little today about the fact that we're in battle, that we're in rough, hard times, and we are soldiers who are expected by our Lord to obey our marching orders. And we're going to open up those marching orders a little bit tonight and as the week goes on and see what our great Commander in Chief has told us that we must do in this war.

But first of all, I need to convince you--because we don't talk that way anymore--that you are in war. The war has been declared, and you're a part of one side. And there's another side that's out to get you and conquer you destroy you. Back in Genesis 3:15, God declared war, and that war has never ended. In that passage, God said, "I will put enmity [or warfare] between your seed and the seed of the woman." He was speaking to Satan. And He said there would be Satan and his crowd, his seed, and there would be the woman and her group. And the two would be perpetually at war--the war between the seeds. And it was not very long after that war was declared by God that we began to see that it was a reality. The first fatality was a Christian, one who believed in the Messiah to come, as Cain slew Abel. The first man born upon the earth was a murderer and destroyed his brother, and the war was real. And ever since that war has been going on, the war between the seeds, between the host of the devil, the evil on, and the host of God. Those whom He redeems He takes captive out of the evil one's army and makes them His own, and makes them His soldiers as they desert the evil one and become the soldiers and children of God.

You are in a war. Now, you may not sense that war. There are a lot of people today who don't realize we're in a war with Russia. They don't sense that there's any war going on. Ever once in a while we read about the Cold War. And Satan has had his cold wars as well as his hot wars. There have been times when he has used one tactic and times when he has used another. One of Satan's tactics has been murder. But wherever he murders the church, wherever the seed of the serpent destroys physically the seed of the woman, the blood of the saints, as Tertullian said, becomes the seed of the church. And a stronger, purer church, though it may have to go underground for awhile, develops and grows up in the place of a weak and sickly church that was flabby with a lot of unbelief and compromise in it. And it may very well be that God, if we do not get on the stick where we are, will use Russia or some other nation to do something in this country to change the picture right here, because we have today a church that's fat and sloppy with a lot of excess baggage and a lot of people who don't mean business. God has always taken churches like that and purified them. And it seems that in His providence He has allowed the evil one to use murder, which is one of his tactics.

But the other tactic the evil one has used so successfully is mixture. And that's the one that has succeeded more than murder. Mixture, the weakening of the church: mixing ideas, mixing beliefs, mixing people. The mixed multitude that came out of Egypt has existed ever since among the people of God. And it has always weakened the people of God. And so in the cold wars that Satan has fought, it has been the insinuation of his ideas, his beliefs, his attitudes, the secularization of the church of which you may hear something now and then. That's part of the war, and you and I are being affected by it whether we recognize that fact or not. You may not want to be in war, but you have no choice. It's just as when a nation declares war on some other, or a nation attacks your nation. You may not personally have any particular desire to be in that battle, but if war is declared and the planes start moving and the bombs start falling and the guns start shooting, you're in it, and you'd better watch out. What's done behind the scene whether you personally declared war or not can sometimes destroy the effort much more effectively than what goes on out on the battlefield itself. There are battles to be fought at home, and the 5th columnist and the rest of it in the Second World War probably did as much damage as the soldiers out on the field. And so many of you who don't recognize that there is a war going on have got to be awakened to the fact that you are in a war and there is a battle.

In the book of Daniel--if you really want to become aware of this war--one of the things that God does in that book is from time to time pull the curtain aside and let you see some of the forces that are at war with one another in the invisible world, the effects of which take place in this world. You can see the host of Satan and the host of God encamped and fighting against one another and Michael the archangel of God who stands up for God's people to resist the evil one and his host. There is a war going on in the invisible world around you and right here in this world too, and you need to become aware of that fact. What God says to you if you are on His side, if you are one who has come to faith in Jesus Christ and put your trust in Him and believe that He shed His blood on the cross for your sin, and you have been rescued out of the army of the evil one and been placed into the army of God--what He says to you as one of His soldiers is, "I don't want you to be conquered in battle by evil." That's your battle order to begin with. You must not lose life's battle. Do not become overcome by evil.

Now, I find Christians everywhere sitting around licking their sores. I find them walking down the aisles on crutches with battle scars. I find them in very bad shape. I've been in this counseling business now for 17 years in some depth, and I have seen Christians defeated again and again and again by evil. In fact, you wonder how many Christians anywhere are winners; are going for the gold medal. Not many of them are even standing ground. Not many of them are even standing back where they once were. They reach a point and then they recede, and everything goes to pieces. Divorce in the church has gone crazy. Marriages are in shaky condition. The whole business is very shaky. There are lots of Christians, but there are very few today who are winning life's battles. And yet your individual orders are, do not become conquered in battle with evil.

There was a woman I knew who was a Christian, the wife of an unsaved husband. And whenever she met one of her Christian friends, they'd say, "How's it going Mary (or whatever her name was)." And she'd say, "You know, it's pretty hard being married to an unsaved man." "Yeah," they'd say, "we'll pray for you." And she'd go to prayer meeting, and whenever anybody asked what the requests might be, she'd say, "Please pray for me. You know, I'm married to an unsaved husband." And everybody would say, "Yeah, we understand." And they'd pray for her. And then one day her husband got saved, and she was furious. She couldn't handle victory. She had built her life around failure. She had built her life around taking it on the chin. She had built her life around the whole business of an unsaved husband. She was the wife of an unsaved husband. That was her reason for existence. And all the business about "Pray for him; ask the Lord to save him" was a lot of nonsense. She didn't mean it at all, because once it came, she didn't want it. She didn't know how to live. She didn't want to win. She didn't want victory.

There are a lot of Christians like that today. There are a lot of Christians who have built their lives around defeat, who have built their lives around losing, who, if you talk with them, will say, "Oh, it's tough in this world as Christians." And I'm not denying it's tough, but that's all you hear out of them. You never hear a note of victory. You never hear a challenge about going forward. You never hear about winning a battle. You never hear about going for it. You never hear about a gold medal. All you hear about are the suffering, the heartaches, the failures, the defeats, and the trials. That's not the way it's suppose to be. The Scriptures say, "[Christian soldier], don't be conquered by evil but conquer evil by good." You're not to be defeated. In life's battles, you're suppose to stand fast as we read elsewhere in the Scriptures. Stand fast. Do not let the evil one win. You're to resist. You're to dig in. You're to fight, and you are to win.

Remember Paul's attitude as he expressed his whole ministry in 2 Timothy as he looked back upon it: "I have fought the fight, I have kept the faith, I have run the race, I have won. And there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord will give to me and to all those who love His appearing." He didn't have an attitude of defeat. If ever a man could have had that attitude, it would have been the Apostle Paul. Sometime this week go back and look at 2 Corinthians 6 and 11, and look at the list of things that Paul had to face: floating around a night and a day in the deep, beaten with rods 5 times by the Jews, stoned at Lystra (and that doesn't mean any other way than by stones. You have to explain that these days), left in a pile of stones as though he were dead. The Apostle Paul, however, didn't complain about these things. What did he say? "I fought the fight, and I won by the grace of Jesus

Christ." You're to be a winner. You're not to be a loser in this battle with evil. You're to win, and you can win.

You say, "This all sounds interesting, but you're talking like a Christian ought to be a pretty aggressive person." He ought to be the most violent person in all the world. He's a man of utter violence Biblically speaking. He's a person according to the Bible who is to tear down strongholds. He's to defeat the enemy. He's to take him captive. He's to have a weapon in one hand and a weapon in the other hand, not just one but one in every hand. That's the way he's described by Paul in Corinthians. He's a violent person. You say, "I thought the Bible teaches to turn the other cheek." It sure does, but turning the other cheek is the most violent, the most aggressive thing that you could ever do. It is not passive. There's too much thinking about Christianity as doormatism where you lie down like a doormat and say, "Okay, go rub your boots on my back." That's not the picture. That's not even what turning the other cheek means.

Here we're told, "Don't be conquered by evil, but conquer evil by good." You are to overcome evil, not draw a truce with evil--some uneasy kind of truce like that steward who buried his money and said, "I got everything that I was given." You're suppose to double it. You're suppose to get more in return. You're suppose to win. Not even a truce with evil--some 39th parallel, some uneasy truce where the other guy isn't going to keep it, and you're really going to lose anyway. You're to go out and personally, individually where you are, where you live, in your particular battles with evil--you are to gain ground and win. This doesn't mean the church is going to overcome the world before Christ returns. It isn't going to. But it means you personally as an individual are suppose to be winning. And when you win, you've got to do it God's way. You are not to be conquered by evil, but you are to conquer evil by good.

When someone attacks you, you've got to use God's method of responding, which is the most violent, the most aggressive, the most powerful way of handling evil there ever could be. God's method is not to return evil in kind. That's why so many Christians are defeated. That's why so many Christians are failing. That's why so many Christians are going down under the attack of the evil one, because they are doing in response what is done to them. But that's not God's way. You don't return evil with evil. You don't conquer evil by doing more evil. How could you? If you do evil in return--if somebody spits at you and you spit back, if somebody curses you and you curse back, if somebody does harm to you and persecutes you and you try to get even with him, you're just spreading more of the same. You're not conquering evil at all. You've only joined the forces of evil. That doesn't conquer it. But evil, as powerful as it is, is not anything compared to the weapons that God has given to you. He has given to you weapons that are far more powerful than all the weapons of the evil one. He has given to you not the carnal weapons of man's warfare, but He has given to you good. You are to do good to those who persecute you. You are to do good to those who do evil to you. And you are to overcome the evil that they do by the good that you do in return. Only good is stronger than evil. Only light is more powerful than darkness. The darkness seems to pervade, but just let the sun rise and the darkness disappears. And no matter how hard it might try to retain itself, darkness cannot overcome light. Light is more powerful than darkness.

No wonder God's children are not winning battles, because they're using the methods of the evil one to fight back. And not only are those methods and weapons not as powerful as God's weapons, but God never trained you in the use of evil. And so you

don't even know how to do it very well. You're going to lose every time. God says use good in response to evil.

If it weren't so tragic, it would look ludicrous to see Christians out there with little pop guns with a cork on the end of a string dangling down trying to fire away at the enemy when God has given them atomic bombs! That's the difference between the weapons of evil and the weapons of good. The weapons of God which are goodness in return for evil doing: turning the cheek when somebody hits you on it. These weapons of God are as different as an atomic bomb is from a pop gun. Why then are Christians out there with pop guns popping away at the enemy and hardly even injuring him?

Here's how it works just to give you one example. A Christian soldier who was in the army was having a hard time of it as a Christian. Every night he'd read his Bible in the bunk, and then he'd get down on his knees and pray. He was the only Christian in that place. And his fellow soldiers started to laugh at him and make fun of him. They'd get noisy when he started to read his Bible and when he began to pray. And because they weren't winning (as he kept on doing it), one night when he was down praying, a group of his fellow soldiers got together and beat him while he was praying with his eyes closed with their soldier boots. He couldn't see who they were because he was bowed in prayer. But the next morning those very boots that had been thrown and beat on him stood by the beds of those men who did it, shined by the man who had been praying. And that was the end of the persecution. Never again did they turn on that man. That man, instead of using evil to conquer evil, used good to conquer evil.

A woman I was counseling whose husband was going away on weekends when he should have been with her decided that, since he went away these weekends in camping, she would do something good for him instead of being furious and wining and complaining as she had been. So she started doing good. She'd pack weekend lunches. She'd put little surprises in his back pack. She would do all kinds of good things to make his weekend more pleasant. And it just changed everything in that home.

Doing good instead of evil in return for evil, a more powerful weapon than evil could ever be! Think of the cross itself. There you have the epitome of it. When Satan thought he was gaining his victory, when he thought he had defeated good, when he thought that he was in ascendancy, the very act by which he thought he was winning was turned on his very head and meant the end of his kingdom. That was the picture way back in Genesis 3:15 where we read about the beginning of this war where God predicted that the heel of Christ would be bitten by the evil one. And by that heel, He crushed the head of the serpent. The very act itself in which it seemed that evil was winning was the act that defeated it.

My friend, if you're a Christian, you don't need to lose. You don't need to be defeated. And I want you to think about your life tonight. There are some of you who know that you have been defeated. You've been living a life of defeat. You've been living a life in which you have been down dragging week after week, month after month, and year after year. You've heard a lot of preaching. You've read a lot of upbeat books. You've heard songs and sung them. But inwardly you've said to yourself, "Maybe others can do it, but I can't. Maybe Paul can do it, but I'm not Paul." Maybe one of the reasons why you've been defeated is because you have failed to open your marching

orders. This week as we look at Romans 12:21, we're going to open those orders; we're going to see precisely how God says to go about doing this. We're going to look at item after item after item in a concrete fashion. (Tonight's just background.) We're going to show you how you can turn that life of defeat into a life of victory, and how you can overcome evil wherever you are no matter how powerful it may seem to be.

In the fifth chapter of the book of Romans, here is what Paul says, "Where sin abounded [and we're not denying for a moment the abounding nature of sin. It's pervasive. It touches every life], nevertheless, grace far more abounded." We don't minimize sin and its deleterious effects in life, but we maximize a Savior who is greater than all our sins. That's why you can defeat evil, because your great General has already demonstrated how, and because He has defeated evil, and because He has defeated the evil one for you so that you might also be more than conquerors. My friend, take heart and determine this night, if you're down, if you're under, if you're defeated, if you're in some miserable situation, determine that this night you will go on top.

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