

## How to Defeat Evil

Romans 12:21

Sermon Transcript by Rev. Ernest O'Neill

We've been talking in recent weeks about personal relationships that we have with each other. And this last verse in Romans chapter 12 deals particularly with the evil that comes to you and me from other people -- and how to defeat that evil. You may say, "Well, what evil?" The forces that come through other people at you or at me -- to destroy us professionally, domestically, personally, psychologically, or spiritually. How do you defeat those forces? First, by seeing what those forces have as an objective in your life, and then by seeing what that objective is. Those forces, or the force of evil that comes from other people to you, have as an objective the destruction of your heart's peace. That's it. Your heart's peace -- that's really it. The forces of evil that come against you through other people are out for one thing -- to destroy the peace of your heart. The peace of your heart that comes from knowing that God is your Father, that he has your life planned, and that he will not allow anyone to destroy it. The care and the concern that you have for the rest of us, which fills your heart with a sense of peace. The forces of evil are out to destroy your heart's peace. That is, the love and the faith and the peace that you have about God as your Father and about the rest of us as your friends. The forces of evil are out to destroy that above everything else.

There's a good illustration of this in this book I'm holding in my hand. This was written by a doctor called S.I. McMillen and it's called, "None of These Diseases". He has a good example of this power of evil and its objective in our lives in a story he tells about a real incident that took place in a doctor's office. He begins like this: "'Doctor, my wife and I have driven 30 miles to talk with you. Neither one of us knew a sick day, until a few months ago when we developed insomnia. We both take sleeping capsules now -- sometimes two or more a night -- but we don't think that is the answer. I began to develop pains in the pit of my stomach -- but I had an x-ray and there is no trouble there. My wife started to have pains over her heart, but a specialist examined her and said there wasn't anything wrong. We drove over here this afternoon to see if you could help us.' They were a pleasant looking couple in their 70's who had retired from teaching school. I had never seen them before. I was very busy that afternoon and was a little nonplussed about helping them in the short time at my disposal. After I had asked the woman a few questions, and made a superficial examination without finding anything wrong, she pulled a letter out of her pocket. 'Doctor, you may think I'm foolish, but our troubles seemed to start right after we got this letter. Here it is. Read it.'"

"Here's the letter; 'Dear George, I understand that you are selling some eggs to Harry Bickerstaff. You people ought to know that I have invested considerable money in the chicken business and I'm able to supply more eggs to the people of this little hamlet than they can eat. You ought to know that my business is hurt by you dabbling around in a few hens and selling eggs to Harry. I think you ought to stop. Signed, Manning Casper.'"

"Her eyes were wet with tears when I looked up at her. She continued, 'We felt we had a right to sell those eggs to Harry, because he preferred our Rhode Island brown eggs to the white ones. But from that day, Manning Casper has refused to speak to us when we see him on the street. We feel terrible, because we never had an experience like this. We have been upset over the whole matter. I think our whole trouble stems from eggs -- just eggs.' When she suggested that they go home and

give up their egg business, I told her it might be worth a trial. Several months later, the couple's daughter told me they had done just that, and they had never felt so well in their lives. They stopped taking sleeping capsules, and did not have an ache or a pain. Of course, they had a perfect right to continue to sell eggs. Perhaps it was a foolish thing for them to give in to Manning Casper. Or was it? They had already spent close to \$200 for x-rays and other examinations, while their profits from the eggs amounted to only a few dollars. In dollars and cents, it wasn't a paying business. Besides, they were losing their peace of mind, the value of which is priceless." That's it!

I don't know what you all think about the abortion question and even the question of freezing production of nuclear weapons. But you know the power of evil is not out necessarily to take our husbands or our wives from us, or even to take our jobs from us. It isn't actually too concerned with the freeze of nuclear weapons production, or not freezing the production of nuclear weapons. The power of evil, strangely enough, isn't actually concerned with abortion being legal or abortion being illegal. It isn't very concerned whether Israel holds on to its state or not. But evil is after one thing -- to destroy your heart's peace. That's right. And there's nothing it enjoys more than to see all us -- who call ourselves Christians -- preoccupied with all kinds of issues that have some public value, but really don't govern our day-to-day lives. The things that govern our day-to-day lives are our heart's peace. We may win on abortion and we may win on the question of the freeze of nuclear weapons production, and we may win on the state of Israel -- and we may still lose our heart's peace. We may still have thousands of people living in misery, resentful against each other and resentful against society.

Loved ones, the truth is, the power of evil that comes against you and me through other people is out for one thing. It's not so much world domination -- that will come or not come -- according to God's good pleasure and will for us as a world. But the power of evil is out to disturb your heart's peace -- to take away from you the peace and the rest in your heart -- your affection for God your Maker, and your affection for the rest of us. The first need we have in defeating that evil is to see what it's trying to do. The second thing we need is to see who our real enemy is. You remember that piece in the Bible that we referred to a couple of weeks ago -- Ephesians 6:12.

Ephesians 6:12: "For we are not contending against flesh and blood, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places." Your roommate breaks a confidence that you had with her. You told her a secret, and she blabbed it all over the dormitory. Or your business colleague did something bad to you and has left you holding a tremendous debt that is going to take you years to pay off. Or your marital partner or your girlfriend let you down in something, which you were absolutely depending on them to do. Or one of your peers has absolutely broken the trustful relationship that you had with them. They aren't your enemy. They aren't! They haven't suddenly decided to make a 180 degree turn and destroy you. They haven't. They've been deceived by the one who is your real enemy. They don't really want your destruction any more than they want their own destruction! But they have been deceived by your real enemy.

You remember I told you last week about my friend in seminary, who had that snarling face -- carved in wood by some African -- hanging on his wall. It was obviously a picture of Satan. And underneath, it said, "Man, know thine enemy." That's your enemy. That dear roommate of yours, that dear colleague of yours in business, that friend of yours at school -- has been utterly persuaded by Satan that the real obstacle to them moving forward another step in their little society -- is you. He has deceived them into allowing their friendship and loyalty to you to be crowded out and blocked

out by this overwhelming conviction -- that if they can just get the upper hand of you, they'll move forward in their own lives. He has used the rush of circumstances, and the pressure of events, to persuade them that this is what they must do. And they've been deceived into doing it.

Loved ones, that's it. It's not people themselves. They don't hate your guts, and they don't want your destruction. They just are deceived at that moment, so that all they can see coming from Satan is, "If you tell this lie about that person, or if you take advantage of him financially this way, you'll just move on. And it's not such a bad thing anyway." I ask you to look to yourselves. Isn't that the way it works? We're always convinced, "Well, it's not too bad a thing anyway. Sure it isn't. It's not really wrong what we're doing -- and it won't really hurt them." Loved ones, the first step in defeating the evil that comes through other people to you is to see who your real enemy is, and to see that it is not those little souls that are your friends or your colleagues, or even that are regarded as your enemies. They are not your real enemy. They are blinded and deceived. They hardly even know the effect the thing is going to have on your life. There is only one who wants your destruction, and that is Satan himself.

And the second step is to see that Satan has been destroyed. That he has been de-fanged, that the poison has been taken out of his bite, that Jesus destroyed Satan and his power to do you harm when he destroyed death and sickness and sin. That's what that verse means in Colossians, where it says, "Jesus disarmed the principalities and powers." It means the principalities and powers can still make a lot of noise and can still make a big show, but they can't actually hurt you or harm you. That's expressed so clearly in the first chapter of Job. You remember how it describes God talking to all the angels, and how Satan comes in and says to God, "Oh, look at Job! You're saying what a great man he is. But he's great because you put a hedge round him, and you won't let anybody touch him." And God said, "All right. I will let you touch him. But you're not to take his life." And that's the situation. Your real enemy is Satan, and he has to get his permission from your dear Father who loves you. That's it.

God will not let Satan do anything that will radically destroy your life professionally or socially or psychologically or spiritually. If you say, "Well, why does he let him do anything to me at all?" You know why! For the same reason that God made us free agents -- to ensure that we would love him by choice -- not because we have no other alternative. That's why God allows Satan to test our faith in God, and our faith in the fact that he has destroyed all evil and rendered it harmless as far as we are concerned. So really, all that Satan can do is give us a mirage. He says, "You're going to fail! This is going to destroy you! This person is going to destroy your life! Believe me! Believe me! Believe me!" It's untrue. He knows it. He knows his only hope is to get you to believe the lie. That's it. And he has no power, loved ones. Some of us have a tendency to say, "Yes! He has great power." But he hasn't. His power has been destroyed by Jesus, who destroyed all evil and crucified the world's power to affect your life. What you get coming through is simply the appearance of power.

And so the second step is to see that Satan has been destroyed, and that he cannot affect your life. If you say to me, "Boy! He gives a good appearance of affecting it. I lost my job!" Do you see that the Father allows all kinds of things to happen to us -- which we would interpret as having an absolutely destructive and detrimental effect on our lives? But he's just using it to bring us through to a deeper place with himself. But of course, as you're on your way through there -- losing the little baby, or losing your job, or with your finances in chaos -- Satan is blasting you, "Look! Look! It's gone. Everything is destroyed." And God knows it isn't destroyed. But he's giving you this opportunity to look not at the things that you can see, but to look at the fact that

on the Cross, Jesus disarmed the principalities and powers.

Now it might be good to look at that verse we mentioned earlier. It's Colossians 2:15: "He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him." It's essential to see that. Now, if you will identify your real enemy, and if you will see that he has already been destroyed and cannot do you any real harm, then that protects you from the evil that comes from other people. It protects you from that evil. But it doesn't actually overcome the evil.

Look now at the last verse of Romans 12 and you'll see how you overcome the evil. It's Romans 12:21: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good." You drown it out -- that's it. You drown out evil with good. So the next step is to ignore absolutely and completely the attitudes of your enemy, or the behavior of your enemy, or the words of your enemy, or the actions of your enemy. That's the next step. Ignore them. Do not dwell on the lie that they told about you. Because it's not going to do you any harm anyway! Jesus has taken the poison out of it. It cannot affect your life in any way that God does not want it to affect your life. So ignore it! Stop looking at the thing the way society looks at it. You know how it goes. They all come around you and they say, "Boy! That was a real bad thing he did to you. Oh you poor soul! I don't know how you put up with that." Or, "The way she treats you in the office -- it's just terrible." Or, "The way he talks to you is terrible!" And you get out your handkerchief and you say, "Yeah, you're right. It is! It is!" And you have a good, self-pitying confidential cry together. [Audience laughs.] Don't, loved ones! Whatever they did -- the lie, the money they took, the words they spoke against you, the sarcasm they used against you -- it's not going to do you any harm anyway! Do you know what it's like? It's like the flailing of a blind boxer. That's all it is. It's like the flailing of a poor old deceived blind boxer -- and you're the heavyweight champion -- and you're saying, "Boy, how he hit me there! Ahh!" [Audience laughs.] It makes no sense.

So, don't look at the attitudes that they have to you, or the words they've spoken against you, or the actions they've done to you. Don't! That's Satan's trick. He's involved in trying to get you all worked up to believe that that is really harming you -- then to try to get you to react the same way against them. Then, he steps out from the middle and let's you fight each other for the rest of your lives. So don't do it. Ignore it! Forget it! It's not doing you any harm anyway. It's like Muhammad Ali -- and here's a little 4-year old child that's blind -- that's it. And the little 4-year old blind child is slapping him from time to time. That's all the effect that evil coming through other people against you can have on your life. Because your God loves you, and he has no intention of letting anybody -- Satan or man -- disrupt the plan that he has for your life. And he will work all things according to the counsel of his will. He will work all things for good, to those who love him. So loved ones, completely ignore the things that your so-called enemies do against you. You know of course, what that does? That takes care of that eggs problem, doesn't it? Then you can sleep at night and you don't think about the same things over and over again, with resentment and with a spirit of bitterness and criticism.

So the next step is: ignore completely what they're doing. Ignore it as if it hadn't happened. And the fourth step is -- and you better gulp at this -- love them as if they were your dearest friends. That's it. That guy or that girl, that man or that woman, who has done their best to destroy you -- love them as if they were your very best friend. Want the best for them -- that's what love is. Want the best for them. See them as just ordinary people, having ignored their attitudes and their actions towards you and seeing that it can't affect you anyway. Love them with all your heart. Want the very best for them. In your prayers, and in your behavior and your words

and your action, overwhelm them with your desires for the best for their lives. They deserve it, of course. Because what they've done to you is a cry of help: "I'm in the thrall of Satan. Help me. I'm beginning to be taken over by him. Help me." The more evil they try to do against you, love them all the more. The fiercer the fire, the more water you pour upon it to put it out. The greater the evil that appears to have come from them, the more love you give to them. That's it. Drown out the evil with good. That's the only way to do it.

I thought some of Jesus' words were so strong that we should look at them, because this tends to be so alien to our normal way of thinking, with all the revenge and the "right to stand up for yourself" that we're encouraged to believe. So look at some of his words -- which are very clear -- in Matthew 5:44: "'But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.'" You see, you can't love them while you still think of them as an enemy. You can only love them if you see them as poor little blind 4-year olds, being used by an evil one who is actually originating the evil, trying to slap you, but really not doing you any harm.

Then look what it says in Luke 6:35: "'But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the selfish. Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven; give, and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For the measure you give will be the measure you get back.'"

Look at verse 27 further up the page: "'But I say to you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.'" That's it, loved ones. How do you deal with the evil that comes to you through other people in your professional life or your personal life or your domestic life or your social or psychological life? First, you identify your real enemy. Then you see that he has been rendered harmless by Jesus and cannot actually have any effect on the real course of your life. And then thirdly, ignore absolutely and completely the things that the so-called enemies appear to be doing against you. And then fourthly, love them with all your heart as your dearest friend. That's it. And anything else is just eggs -- just eggs. Really. A waste of time, and it's death to you. That's it. Let us pray.

Dear Father, you have set us such a clear example. You commended your love towards us, in that while we were yet enemies, Christ died for us. Father, we see that. We see the persistence with which you have loved us through the years -- even as we have turned our back on you, ignored you, paid lip service to you, and made vows and broken them a thousand times. You've kept on loving us, overwhelming us, and drowning our evil with your love. Father, we thank you. Now we pray for each other, and pray Lord, for everybody here who thinks they have an enemy, or has experienced some evil from another person at work, at home, or at school. Lord, we pray for them now, that they will see reality, and they will see that there is nothing that can come against them, but you have already filtered it lovingly through your hands, and you are sure that you can turn it to good in their lives. So Father, we are free to love not only our friends, but to love our enemies. To want the best and to work for the best -- not only in the lives of our friends, but in the lives of our so-called enemies.

So Father, we commit ourselves to taking that tack right now -- from this time forward in our lives -- so that our minds may be filled with whatsoever things are lovely and of good report. Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with each one of us now, and throughout this week, and forever more. Amen.

