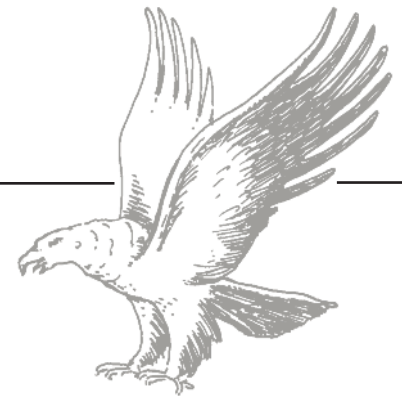


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



August 23, 2015

How to Overcome Evil

When others mistreat us, the usual response is the wrong one. The Bible points to a nobler—and more effective—approach. But it requires a radical change in our thinking.

“Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men. If it is possible, as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men. Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord. Therefore ‘If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head.’ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:17-21).



The evil to which Paul refers in this context is not the random suffering that we all encounter in our lives. The illnesses, accidents, losses, and natural disasters that we all experience can be chalked up to living in an imperfect world. The evil that is much harder to handle is that which is inflicted by—and can be blamed on—others.

How should we respond to these injustices? The natural response is to get even, to make the perpetrator pay for what he has done. It’s only fair, we reason; he hurt me so he deserves payback!

But in practice, that kind of response creates an escalating cycle of anger and violence in which no one wins. Hasn’t the world already seen enough of that?

Paul advocates a radically different approach. (This is not original with him. Jesus taught it in the Sermon on the Mount [Matt. 5:38-48], and Solomon taught it before Jesus [Prov. 25:21-22].) This strategy involves two components: The first is negative—a prohibition, something we must avoid; the second is positive—an overt action we must do.

First, *we must resist the urge to get even.* We must not attempt to even the score, to return the evil upon the perpetrator. That means no reprisal, no retaliation, no revenge, no counterplay. We have to let it go.

Instead, we must implement the second component: *We must demonstrate genuine goodwill toward our enemy.* We must feed him when he is hungry, give him water when he is thirsty, demonstrate that we really, truly love him.

If we neglect either component of this strategy, we fail. For example, if we show fake charity, but privately stab our

enemy in the back, we are nothing more than hypocrites. The evil to which we are reacting has overcome us; we have become the very thing we hate.

In like manner, if we manage to keep our passions in check yet refuse opportunities to extend kindness, then we become cold, uncaring, cynical people. Our heart becomes a breeding ground for bitterness and resentment. Our refusal to reach out with sincere goodness becomes a malevolent spirit that poisons our whole life.

This approach to dealing with injustice is what makes disciples of Christ so rare among the human race. While others are busy striking back or maintaining an enemies list, Christians are practitioners of a more noble ethical standard. Overwhelmed by the undeserved love given to them in the death of their Master, they return that favor by treating others—*especially* their enemies—with unqualified love. They are eager both to forgive and to show kindness, because their hearts have been captured by the spirit of Christ. They have learned the secret of overcoming evil with good.

– David King