

Effective Christian 5: Erase Evil with Good

by Pastor Kurt Hoover

Litany adapted from Romans 11

Pastor: who has known the mind of the Lord

All: or who has been his counselor?

Pastor: Or who has given a gift to him

All: that he might be repaid?

Pastor: For from him and through him and to him are all things

All: To him be glory forever.

Pastor: We worship You Lord in the name of the Father and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

All: Amen

Genesis 50:20-21 ²⁰ As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today. ²¹ So do not fear; I will provide for you and your little ones." Thus he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

Romans 12:14-21 ¹⁴ Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. ¹⁵ Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. ¹⁶ Live in harmony with one another. Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. Never be wise in your own sight. ¹⁷ Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. ¹⁹ Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord." ²⁰ To the contrary, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals on his head." ²¹ Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Luke 6:27-36 ²⁷ "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, ²⁸ bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. ²⁹ To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer

the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic^[b] either. ³⁰ Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. ³¹ And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

³² "If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. ³³ And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. ³⁴ And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount. 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 evil. ³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Imagine with me a child that was raised by his parents in such a way that that child was completely generous. Never afraid to give to others... his stuff, his time, ... her feeling, her thoughts...

I mean this parent would have to erase all fear, all doubt, all sense of sacristy or loss in that child. And consistently provide them with that atmosphere that does that. It might be a fools errand right... the most we could hope for would be that from moment to moment a sense of selflessness would break through. In reality it would be impossible to give a child such a sense of provision that they are able to freely give themselves and their stuff to their playmates.

I watch our MomCo preschoolers on Friday mornings from time to time... I know how impossible this task would be. Right. Every child is born with an innate sense of selfishness unwilling to share their toys, their parent, their friends, food ... you name it.

Don't get me wrong, I have seen some amazingly altruistic things as well. A tear, a smile, a feeling expressed... ask nicely... and the child often without thinking gives up their precious.

I have also seen some innately generous children, but I don't think even their parents know how it happened. We as human beings are not capable of creating such a sense of security in our children that they are set free to give away their toys, much less themselves.

Thus the need for the Covet commandments. God didn't give us the commandments because he thought we could actually keep them. No he gave them to use because we need to be told ... do not covet your neighbors stuff or relationships... in fact share with them... and not only them but the oppressor and the unfaithful... because you already have all that you need. God provides.

We are not able to create that sense of security and provision... And yet this is what Jesus did and does. Jesus gives us such a sense of security and provision that we ARE able, if just once or twice a day, give away our goods, our tunic, even our sense of revenge or justice, to see the need of another human being... and overcome evil with good.

Jesus is that presence, that word, that Spirit in you that overcomes the evil in you and the evil done to you with good!

Luke 6:35-36:

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 evil. (pause)

³⁶ Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

The Most High, God almighty... is kind to the unfaithful and the evil. !!

What? I guarantee that those words leaving Jesus mouth caused many a head to turn. And unless we are just skimming over the text it makes our head turn as well. Jesus revealing something about God that we may have noticed in the world around us, but did not want to admit.

God cares about those who don't deserve it. The rain falls on the just and the unjust. We see it everyday and yet when it becomes an intellectual exercise it may actually be impossible to accept.

There is no one among us now who is thinking to themselves... 'I am OK with that.' 'I am not Ok with God's kindest to the ungrateful and the evil people in my life. Never mind my mercy toward them, I can not even accept God's mercy toward them.'

This commandment from the young teacher, whose words carried power, was and still maybe the hardest commandment to accept. Love your enemies (Luke 6:7&35) ³⁶ *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.* (Luke 6:36)

Even if I can prove to you the reality that doing good in the face of evil actually breaks the cycle. Even if I gave you the top ten moments in History of sacrifice - where good, erased evil... it is just may not be in our human nature to be merciful. In fact we must have a word of promise and hope that sets us free from ourselves in order to - ³⁶ *Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.* (Luke 6: 36)

Which is precisely why Luke and Matthew go into such depth recording these word of Jesus that turned so many heads.

Jesus did something to the crowd that day. He changed their hearts. He set them free. He brought them back to who they really are in spite of every attempt by nature and nurture to shape us otherwise. Jesus created children, not of a father or human will,

but children of the Most High! And He does the same thing for you today! Right now!

I remember when Eli was in second, maybe first grade. He was playing in the basement with the children of one of our best family friends. I think the two oldest were playing by themselves in the guest room. Which let Eli play with his best friend, a little girl, his age and her older brother a year older than them.

Try as he might Eli could not keep the peace between these two siblings. This happened often. The older boy wants to play one game and Eli's best friend wanting to play something a little less appealing. As a little boy he is wrestling with his desire to play the ball game, while his best friend has no desire to play another sport game and thinks they all should just play house.

Eli tries compromise after compromise... until a fight breaks out. And not just any fight, but a knock down-drag out, that brings the two older girls into the room to try to restore order.

And in the midst of this chaos that has brought me to the top of the basement stairs... Youngest child crying, oldest children yelling... I see Eli standing between his two friends and I hear words that will stay with me the rest of my life.... Not the words so much but the Spirit with which they were spoken.

He is visibly upset with the older boy who has made himself Eli's enemy by his relentless teasing of the little sister. He is deeply concerned for his friend who is in tears... The ivory tower of wisdom and ethics being poured out upon them by the 2 oldest kids... trying to fix it... there isn't much new under the sun.

And I hear the tears well up in his little voice as he completely bears the vulnerability of his heart... 'I just want us all to get along. I want you to love each other' A declaration against the evil

that children left to their human nature will create, and must learn to deal with ... without Mom and Dad.

It was not the words but the anguish and the power with which his vulnerability was spoken. Silencing the room. Leaving him so exposed that he ran up the stairs. (I mean now everyone knew just how much he cared about these two). Words of truth that broke open the selfish power struggle that had erupted in that basement. Good that erased, even for a moment, evil.

I didn't tell my child to do that. I don't think I had even given such advice, all that often, to a first grader. Nor do I think Eli had decided in that moment, out of his own free will, to bear his heart.

I do believe there is a power at work in all of us. A power that Jesus called being born from on high. A power born of water and Spirit and specifically not born of flesh and decision...

I do believe there is a power at work in us that breaks us free from ourselves, and our masks, and our selfishness... And I do think that words like 'hope,' and 'faith,' and 'love' just get at the start of defining it. But, sometimes the best word we have for this power is 'love.'

I believe that power comes from Christ who is alive in us making it possible to be who we truly are, in a world that seeks to define and control, consume and distract us. Galatians 2:20 – *It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me.* I believe that power comes from Christ taking over my selfish impulses and routine ways of dealing with the world.

How does Jesus do this? He speaks to us. He cuts through the nature and nurture of self... rebirthing us as children of God, in any given moment.

This is what Jesus did and does. Jesus gives us such a sense of security and provision that we ARE able, if just once or twice a day, give away our goods, our tunic, even our sense of revenge or justice, to see the need of another human being... and overcome evil with good.

Jesus is that presence, that word, that Spirit in you that overcomes the evil in you and the evil done to you ... with good!

You are a child not of your parents, not of your own identity or free will... you have been set free!! ... you have all that you will ever need...Because You are a child of the Most High! You have complete security in God's provision. God will give you each day's bread as you need it. All the compassion and energy, joy and opportunity, goods and perspective... each day it's daily bread. And your daily work, often will be, kindness to those who are most in need and least deserve it... those who make themselves enemies of you.

God IS kind and generous with the unfaithful and the evil. And his word has set you free this day to be that same loving and generous presence. As your Father in heaven is merciful, You are merciful!

You are Mercy, God's promise to a lost and distracted world! You are a child of the Most High!