

*Devil In a Blue Dress*

[for REVIEW: this is the next-to-last installment on a series from the Lord's Prayer]

“Deliver us from evil.”

When you pray this part of the prayer wouldn't you agree that we're thinking of the evil and tragedy and conflict that attacks us or threatens us? “Deliver us, O God, from the terminal disease, from the wrath of our enemies ...from the storm, the hurricane, the fire that threatens to destroy us!”

But there is a much more epidemic evil from which we need deliverance – not the evil we suffer, but *the evil we do!* The evil we carry out!

Oh, but we say, we're *Church members!* We sing the pretty songs and say “Amen!” to all the prayers. From what evil could we possibly need deliverance?

You see, from the perspective of Christ Jesus, evil isn't the sorrow, and the calamities, or the tragedies we endure – but instead evil is the *hate*, the *bitterness*, the *impatience*, and the *wickedness* with which we treat one another. We'll always have unpleasant circumstances and misfortune to endure, but what concerns Jesus more is the pain we inflict on each other.

And I'm not talking about the evil out there, but about evil in here, in the heart. We need deliverance from the *evil we do* or fail to do!

So when we pray “Deliver us from evil,” it's not always the cry of people who are victims of suffering, but it is the prayer for people who bring pain and misery into the lives of others – and again you argue, “That's not me!” – But listen! It is the prayer for people who bring pain or trouble not with weapons of violence but through silence or indifference, or lack of curiosity. Edmund Burke: “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing!”

And often times, the reason good men do nothing – or good women, is because they can't identify the evil in their presence. Albert Speer, the architect who helped to build the Third Reich of Adolph Hitler said, “Evil grows invisible because we are a part of it!”

Speer was the only defendant at the Nuremberg war trials after World War 2 to accept full responsibility for the charges against him, even for the acts of which he was ignorant. He wrote later, “If I was ignorant, I ensured my own ignorance. If I did not see, it was because I did not want to see.”

You wonder how that's possible?

Because we choose to believe there are people living around us who are *different* from us. We see fellow citizens as those “other people.” We put them out of our circle of influence, out of our circle of care! (In fact, it becomes overwhelming to care for *everyone!* We don't have the abilities to care for the martyrs, and the thousands of children who are sold as sex-slaves, and the aborted infants, and the Americans without health care, and the poor, and the families ruined by the oil disaster!) There are people we have trouble reaching *with the love of Christ* ...because of our selected prejudices.

Now I just suggested that we can “bring pain and misery not with weapons of violence but through our silence or indifference.” Isn't that the driving force behind racism? We fail to even name it? To identify it? To call it evil?

How easily the homeless or the poor, the young or the old become invisible to some of us, because we may choose not see them as real people, or important people with real feelings.

If you're currently at a place in your life where you're comfortable, no problems, and you don't experience evil – would you look again? Because it is often in the peace and comfort of our

own *contentment* that the evil of indifference exists: when good people do nothing! For in the calm we are often *quite satisfied* with our personal circumstances, and we neglect the ministry to which we identify ourselves!

Elie Wiesel, a survivor from the German concentration camps, said, “The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference.”

Where do you need to be delivered from the evil of indifference?

[“*Amazing Grace*” by John Newton] When John Newton wrote about his blindness and his transforming ability *to see* – it wasn't simply his conversion and his ability to understand God's grace or God's influence in his life – but he recognized the truth of his own human condition, his condition without God, and what God wanted *for* him! Newton understood his own corrupt or depraved nature ...but he could also have been referring to his new ability to see those habits of sin, the wicked attitudes that were tattooed on his mind and his will. With the help of God's Spirit, John Newton became a new man, from the inside out!

The apostle Paul talks about this in his own life, too! [READING Romans 7:15-17]

<sup>15</sup>I don't understand myself at all, for I really want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do the very thing I hate. <sup>16</sup>I know perfectly well that what I am doing is wrong, and my bad conscience shows that I agree that the law is good. <sup>17</sup>But I can't help myself, because it is sin inside me that makes me do these evil things.

Paul is talking about the insight he has, with the Spirit of God in his life. [READING Romans 7:18-20, 22-23]

<sup>18</sup>I know I am rotten through and through so far as my old sinful nature is concerned. No matter which way I turn, I can't make myself do right. I want to, but I can't. <sup>19</sup>When I want to do good, I don't. And when I try not to do wrong, I do it anyway. <sup>20</sup>But if I am doing what I don't want to do, I am not really the one doing it; the sin within me is doing it... <sup>22</sup>I love God's law with all my heart. <sup>23</sup>But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me.

We can be blind to the root of evil in our lives! And Paul explains how that happens in the next chapter: [READING Romans 8:5-7, 9]

<sup>5</sup>Those who are dominated by the sinful nature think about sinful things, but those who are controlled by the Holy Spirit think about things that please the Spirit. <sup>6</sup>If your sinful nature controls your mind, there is death. But if the Holy Spirit controls your mind, there is life and peace. <sup>7</sup>For the sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will... <sup>9</sup>But you are not controlled by your sinful nature. You are controlled by the Spirit if you have the Spirit of God living in you.

You know, we often think of evil in the same terms we think of the kidnapper or the criminal: one who is obviously ugly, wicked, and mean! We think we could identify evil so easily. But evil is a more subtle, seductive presence. Something even pleasing. We've grown attached to evil. Evil may be our familiar friend.

Fred Stoeker is a former college athlete who has co-written a book “*Every Young Man's Battle*” addressing how a young man can remain pure in the real world of sexual temptation.

He writes that one of the most difficult assignments believers have is to integrate or braid our sexual urges with the emotional, spiritual, social, and relational person Christ intends for us

to be. Many young people have the tendency to see their sexual escapades as something separate and distinct from their faith decision, and so they remain sexually active, indifferent to the clear warning of God!

Fred Stoeker illustrates his point by using a story of the good old Church hypocrite: You probably know some people who are very religious when they go to church on Sunday, but you'd never know they were Christians by the way they act during the rest of the week. Sure, they say all the right words and go through the right motions on Sunday, but that part of their lives is reserved for Sunday. Come Monday morning, they sound more like they went to hell on Sunday rather than Church. Those people haven't fully integrated their spiritual life with the rest of their lives. <sup>1</sup>

How are you integrating your relationship with God, so that the Spirit of Jesus is influencing who you are and what you do?

There's evidence that indifference can destroy the Church as well! [REVIEW Revelation 3:15-17]

<sup>15</sup> "I know all the things you do, that you are neither hot nor cold. I wish you were one or the other! <sup>16</sup> But since you are like lukewarm water, I will spit you out of my mouth! <sup>17</sup> You say, 'I am rich. I have everything I want. I don't need a thing!' And you don't realize that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked.

Is there anything more disgusting than a lukewarm drink? The Church in Laodicea had become lukewarm, distasteful and repulsive. The Church had been exposed for its indifference! In fact, it was blind to its faults – and on the verge of being abandoned by God!

Let's not settle to follow God halfway! Learn to live with God's Word and embrace its instruction: [READING Romans 12:9-11]

<sup>9</sup> Don't just pretend that you love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Stand on the side of the good. <sup>10</sup> Love each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other. <sup>11</sup> Never be lazy in your work, but serve the Lord enthusiastically!

So how will this awesome prayer "Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done," find fulfillment in our lives, our Church, and our world? When we genuinely ask God to deliver us, "enlighten us," to our own evil.

With all the competing dreams and ambitions, Christians want to maintain their focus on the purpose of God! But that's easier said than done, because most Christians don't understand the purpose and plan of God! But those who do are involved in Sunday School in their Churches, or bible study groups, or daily devotional time with God. And you can do the same!

I don't know how many times we've heard about popular and successful coaches, business leaders, teachers, nurses and parents who were able to integrate the love of God's Spirit in their hearts with their relationships to men and women in their care.

A story illustrates the point: [from an article by David Cho]: An hour before the wave of the green flag, the huge crowds of auto racing fans around the Bristol Motor Speedway in Tennessee were told over a booming loudspeaker that they were in for an unexpected treat.

A prominent sports figure would be delivering a message of salvation beneath the grandstand. A few thousand curious spectators gathered there, and after a band played some religious songs, the smiling, golden-haired preacher bounded to center stage.

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<sup>1</sup> *Every Young Man's Battle*; by Stephen Arterburn and Fred Stoeker; WaterBrook Press, 2002

The speaker who drew the crowd was Joe Gibbs.

Gibbs was well known ...as the owner of a highly successful racing team that bears his name. And who could forget his three Super Bowl wins, or his election to the NFL Hall of Fame. Gibbs barely acknowledged his own celebrity and jumped right into his message, urging the masses to give their lives to God. By the end, dozens came forward “to receive Jesus.”

If there are two constants to Gibbs’s careers in football and auto racing, they are these: He wins championships for teams, and he wins souls for Christ.

“I have strong beliefs and a faith, but it’s a personal thing that you live out,” Gibbs said in an interview.

Joe Gibbs and Tony Dungy are just a couple of the many men and women who understand what it means to live their whole life with Jesus Christ as Lord!

Is Christ your authority in all that you do?

INVITATION: Are you recognizing any evil and indifference in your life? What has God revealed to you? In what relationships have you been negligent? With what needs have you been indifferent?

Bad-mouthing the boss at work is all too common today. Employees crack jokes and complain about their leaders from out of disrespect. But this behavior only worsens what might already be a bad situation.

Imagine what work would be like if, instead, all the employees began praying for their leaders. What would your workplace be like if we chose to lift up in prayer the people for whom we feel at odds? Great things could happen, not just for them, but for us as well.

Paul wrote, “I urge you, first of all, to pray for all people... for kings and all others who are in authority.” He singled out governmental authorities, but his instruction could apply to leaders in virtually any group.

Why pray for your boss? First of all, isn’t that the real application of God’s faith and love in your life? And secondly, God allows us to help Him change people and situations. And finally, God helps you through your prayers to see others through His eyes – and your heart will soften toward this person for whom you’ve previously felt anger or bitterness.

If you’re recovering from blindness – are you willing to repent from your old habits and begin living to honor Jesus Christ on the throne in your heart?

“The corruption of our own hearts and the degradation of our own spirits are evils that we must pray to be delivered from, day by day and moment by moment... ‘Deliver me from the corruption of my own heart.’” – Spiros Zodhiates

COMMENT:

We want to give each other the courage to live with conviction! What area of your life needs to be integrated with the goodness and love of God?

If you’re wondering why you can’t seem to make the “connection” with God – it may be that you’ve separated yourself from God through habits or indifference that may really be rebellion against God.

If you can acknowledge your faults and sins to God in prayer – then you can know God’s kindness, forgiveness, and love. Let’s start this day as a new day! The first day in the rest of your life! That’s the beauty of God’s grace! Because most of us need to re-start every week! God is patient with you! Praise God!