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How We Overcome Evil

Mark R. Rushdoony

Evil is so self-evident even the non-believer must acknowledge its existence, though he will try to define it in terms of his worldview. Because this is God's creation, man lives in a moral context and can only exist within the ethical limits He has placed on it. No matter how far man tries to run from God, he can still only think in ethical terms. He will often try to use extra-Biblical terminology, but he has to think in terms of good and evil.

Just two chapters of the Bible reference life before the fall (Gen.1-2). Most of that passage refers to God's creative work with the remainder establishing marriage and the family as the context of man's work of dominion. Beginning in Genesis 3 we are presented with man as a sinner; he is seen in moral terms. Throughout Scripture sin, evil, and guilt are viewed as result of man's ethical fall in Adam. This is the *problem*

set forth in God's Word; the redemptive grace of God in the atonement of Jesus is the *solution*.

Evil is obvious to man; he cannot avoid it. If, in his rebellion, he will not use God's definition of evil and look to His resolution, he will redefine it and reassign guilt in a self-righteous attempt to claim for himself some level of virtue. The categories of "good" and "evil" continue to be used, even when that terminology is avoided.

To say there is evil in the world is therefore not necessarily a point of assent to a Biblical worldview. Marxists, racists, atheists, and every sort of Bohemian will hold to "evil" and "good" by some definition. When I was a teenager in the 1960s humanists placed a great deal of emphasis on their belief in "love," "peace," and "brotherhood" but never in terms of a Christian Biblical understanding. They appropriated the

terms because they conveyed a benign, noble meaning in terms of their long-standing Christian development. The culture that generation has produced has not become more loving, peaceful, or brotherly, however. The increasing degeneracy of our times is quite evident, so much so that the devolution of our culture cannot be denied.

Moral Accountability vs. Education

Not all who see problems correctly diagnose their causes or have legitimate solutions. Remedies that are worse than the disease have a long history, particularly when it comes to what ails man and society. If people do not see our basic problems as stemming from sin, they will be putting band-aids on our moral cancer.

One false solution that has a long history of failure, particularly in the modern world, is education. Education

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can be a very valuable tool, but the modern emphasis on it is based on the Enlightenment's rejection of the Christian view of man's root problem as a moral one. The humanism of the Enlightenment saw man as primarily a rational being, not a fallen one. After Charles Darwin, man was then seen as the pinnacle of evolution. Problems were then viewed as primarily external to man, in his environment. What man needed in this scenario, presumably, was to apply his mind to control his environment.¹ A conviction that education was the answer to man's problems was promoted by early Progressives and their push for control of government education, a movement that began at the teacher-training level.

The belief in education as the solution has not been limited to the left, however. A common theme of the right has been that "if we could only educate people" things would change, or "if people really knew what was going on" they would vote differently. Such "educational" efforts have continued for generations, however, and yet have precious little to show as a result. The knowledge shared did not result in change, except in occasional, but largely inconsequential, changes in politicians.

Knowledge does not necessarily translate to change. When it does, the change is not often *to* anything resembling a Biblical view of the problem but *from* an extreme to something merely less objectionable. A shift may result, but it may be no more than cosmetic. As a teenager I noted a recurring statement by politicians and government school officials—"Yes, we have had problems, but we have addressed them and that is in the past."

If education is the key to solving man's problems, then the answer is more experts in academia and more funding for schools. What results is an oligarchy of experts certified by degrees and certificates of accreditation. A recent example of what results is Anthony Fauci's insistence that people "trust the science" really came down to his claim that "I represent science." Since Darwin, "science" has increasingly become a

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field of dogma by experts who silence those who challenge them, though the "scientific method" is supposed to require constant questioning of existing theories.

If salvation is by an accumulation of knowledge, then modern man must be in a very good place, for never have we had so much information at our disposal. If man's reason is the means of solving our problems, then we have never been in a better position to remedy them.

The Biblical Solution to Evil

If our problem is, as Scripture says, a moral one, man's violation of God's righteousness, then the only solution is its resolution in forgiveness. The Word of God clearly lays out the means of forgiveness. By grace, God pays man's penalty through the atonement of Jesus Christ, His death in our place. Those who forsake any humanistic plan of saving themselves acknowledge, by God's regenerating grace, their need for the salvation only Christ provides. They acknowledge that "...there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

Faith in Jesus Christ is not the end of the Christian gospel, however. Faith is the beginning of our entrance into the

"good news," which both Matthew and Mark called "the gospel of the kingdom" (Matt. 4:23; 9:35; 24:14 and Mk. 1:14-15).

Ethics and the Kingdom of God

The Kingdom of God was the theme of both the ministry of John the Baptist (Matt. 3:1-2) and that of Jesus (Mark 1:14-15), who spoke of it up to the night of His arrest (Luke 22:16). It is not an overstatement to say we cannot understand Christian duty without seeing our relationship to the Kingdom of God.

As the modern church withdrew from the world, it increasingly focused on the afterlife and an emphasis on man's salvation. The focus has been on the "simple gospel" and conversion, getting men through the "narrow gate" (Matt. 7:13-14). Though certainly a necessary message, this emphasis has tended to neglect the "narrow way" that leads to life (v.14). As Francis Schaeffer asked in perhaps the best-titled book of my lifetime, "How Should We Then Live?"

This question brings us to the constant references to the "Kingdom of God (or Heaven)" that are so frequent in the New Testament that our failure to see their importance is inexcusable. Those who enter at the narrow gate must do so in repentance and with faith in who Jesus is and what He accomplished at Calvary. Both repentance and faith represent a bowing of the knee, a deference to Jesus. The most common title of Jesus in Scripture is "Lord," and this cannot be separated from the Kingdom. It is a title acknowledging submission to Jesus as Lord, Master, King.

Man must acknowledge Jesus as "Lord of lords and King of kings" (Rev. 17:14) who "must reign, till he hath put all enemies under His feet" (I Cor. 15:25). His Kingdom is "over all the earth" (Zech. 14:9) and we are citizens because God's grace has "translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son" (Col. 1:13). The "simple gospel" is not wrong, but it is only part of "the gospel" because it leaves off "of the kingdom." The gospel is not merely an escape from hell; it is our regeneration "so we also

should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4). The reference to our walk refers to *how we deport ourselves* as believers. This necessitates a Christian concern about our conduct.

Kingdom Law

There is no such thing as a kingdom without a law. Every jurisdiction has a law by which it is governed and to which its citizenry is held accountable. This is where theonomy comes into play. *Theism* is an acknowledgement of God. *Theocracy* is the view that God rules over man, and *theonomy* is the law of God. The three beliefs go hand-in-hand.

My father, R. J. Rushdoony, revived the issue of theonomy with the 1973 publication of *the Institutes of Biblical Law* (I). In his introduction he made clear that theonomy was not a challenge to, or inconsistent with, justification by faith. He noted the Protestant Reformation came to a consensus on justification being of grace and received by faith alone. Theonomy is, in fact, predicated on that doctrine because it addresses the duty of the “just” and how they live by faith. What the Reformation never came to a consensus on, however, was the doctrine of sanctification, man’s walk of faith and growth in grace (i.e., how man knows the limitations of what constitutes the “narrow way” of Matthew 7:14). His conviction was that sanctification, man’s walk of faithfulness needed to be the focus of another reformation. He proposed God’s law-word to be man’s standard of faithfulness.

Overcome Evil with Good

It is not enough to identify evil, or even to decry it. We must overcome it. There are many references to overcoming in the Bible. Because Jesus has overcome the world (Jn. 16:33) and will overcome all who make war on Him (Rev. 17:14) we must not ourselves be “overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom. 12:21; also I Pet. 2:9). The apostle John reminded “young men” and even “little children” that they had overcome (I Jn. 2:13,14; 4:4). In fact, those “that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God” “have all overcome the world (I Jn.5:4-5).

Unless we are, by grace, freed to “newness of life” as a “new creature” in Christ (II Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15) we are part of the evil, the world of sin, death, and guilt. The overcoming commanded of us cannot happen without a regenerating change in us. Then we see things differently, we “think God’s thoughts after him,” and comport our ways to His will. The world is not one of neutral facts, nor are our rational faculties objective. All facts are interpreted facts, and we view them morally, in terms of either sin or grace. Though we can now only “see through a glass, darkly” (I Cor. 13:12) we can, in fact, know the revealed Word of God.

Faith and Faithfulness

When we insist on filtering God’s Word through our reason, we will constantly ask, like small children, “Why?” of God. But if God answered every such question we would, like children, rarely understand what we were told. Our response to our lack of understanding ought to be the same as what brought us to the throne of grace initially—faith in the righteousness of God. The answers we will receive in this life are typically not a rational understanding but a greater recognition of the sovereignty of God. The response of faith is always *faithfulness*. If we are *theists* and believe in God, we must believe He rules, *theocracy*, and that, because we are the citizens of the Kingdom of His Lord, we obey His law, *theonomy*. In this way we overcome sin in ourselves and stand in terms of His righteousness.

The book of Revelation is too often treated as a puzzle to be solved. I have always felt the blessing on those who “keep those things” was primarily a blessing on those who saw the “big picture” that book presents—the certain victory of the Lamb who overcomes (Rev. 17:14). As His people, we share in that victory. Note the promises in Revelation to those who “overcome”:

- Christ gives them to eat of the tree of life (2:7).
- They shall not be hurt of the second death (2:11).

- They will be given to eat of the hidden manna (2:17).
- They will be given power over the nations (2:26).
- They will be “clothed in white raiment,” their name written in the book of life and confessed by Jesus before the Father and the angels (3:5).
- They will be a pillar in the temple of God, God’s name will be on them, and they will be part of the new Jerusalem (3:12).
- They will sit with Christ on His throne (3:21).
- They will “inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (21:7).

We are called to come to Jesus in repentance and faith, but we must not stop there. Regeneration gives us a new life, one that must be directed to obedience, our faithfulness on the narrow way. The first references to the faith in Acts, before the term “Christianity” was coined, was “the way” (Acts 2:28; 9:2).

The new creation in Jesus Christ is in the world but not of it. Likewise, it must be evident in us, though it is not our work, but that of the Holy Spirit. Seeing Jesus as our fire and life insurance policy does not push back evil in us or in the world. Seeing ourselves as citizens of the Kingdom of our God and His Christ requires that we submit ourselves to His Lordship and His law-word. Anything less is, at best, a failure of our responsibilities or, at worst, treason. Godliness requires obedience and this must be a self-conscious faithfulness to our duty because we are confident in His victory. “Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth” (Rev. 19:6). 🏰

1. This is essentially a borrowing of the Biblical idea of “dominion” but in terms of humanistic man reliant on reason, not God. This led to a cult of science as the means of progress. Another later view came to see not man but “Nature” as primary and viewed man as having interfered with the evolutionary process too much. This is the thesis of environmental movement.

How to Pray - Thy Kingdom Come

R. J. Rushdoony (*Good Morning, Friends*, Vol. 3, pp. 146-149)

GA fatherless home is a broken home, one lacking its true support and authority. Likewise, a people whose lives are lived apart from God the Father are without true authority and security. A godless nation is a nation in which authority and law are broken or corrupt, because the only source of authority is denied or neglected. The nations of today are broken homes, breeding delinquency in the body politic because of their prodigal wandering from the authority of God the Father, who is alone the true sovereign of all nations. Having rejected His authority, they are subject to His judgment.

It is for this reason that the Lord's Prayer summons us to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Here is a petition that God overrule us, both in our personal and our national lives. To pray in these words sincerely is to confess that our will often fails to move in conformity to the Lord's will. Our Lord, in giving us this prayer, gave thereby a confession of sin for us to echo, and yet one of such significant direction. The focus is not on our sin, nor on our wayward will, but instead on God's Kingdom and His will. Prayer must be made for confession of sins, and thanksgiving for forgiveness is essential, but prayer cannot revolve around our life, our will, our hopes, or our planning. That God has room in His purpose for our hopes and needs is clear enough in the next petition, wherein we are asked to pray for our daily food, but to limit prayer to our lives and our will is to abuse prayer,

if it is constantly done. At times, indeed, pressing personal problems overwhelm us, and our prayer cries out in purely personal tones. This is right, and pleasing to God. But the proper perspective for the whole of our prayer life must be in terms, not of our will, but that His will be done, not in terms of our petty domain, but that His Kingdom come.

However, as Dr. James Reid has pointed out (*Hear My Prayer*, p. 330), "the Kingdom begins within ourselves. Our heart is a world in itself. God's rule must begin there." In his *Confessions*, St. Augustine candidly comments that during one period of his spiritual pilgrimage his prayer seemed to have been, "Lord, make me pure, but not yet." This kind of praying is all too common in every generation. What we want of others, we are unwilling to ask of ourselves. The character we demand of the nation, we too often refuse to manifest in our personal lives. Humility is a great virtue, and we are anxious to see it in others, but less anxious about our own lack of it. Other people should be patient and loving and thereby put less strain on our own disposition. So many people feel that it would be a wonderful world if other people were righteous so that we could be comfortably undisturbed in our sinning, or in our spiritual laziness.

This petition is directed against all these things when, by its simplicity and plainness, it overrules all persons in heaven and earth and supplants their will and their planning with God's will and God's Kingdom.

Jesus Christ established the pattern of obedience in this respect in His faithfulness to His appointed task, establishing the Kingdom and manifesting His faithfulness to God the Father. He declared, "Here I come—in the roll of the book this is written of me—I come to do thy will, O God" (Heb. 10:7, Moffatt). "Not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). The world cannot be left out of our praying, but neither can we leave out ourselves as an object of the Lord's chastening, reviving, and overruling providence. This petition has in mind the great reality that the kingdoms of this world are and shall be the Kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ.

It finds total fulfillment only at the end of history when the recreation of all things is consummated, but it finds daily fulfillment in your life and mine as the Lord comes into our hearts in power and in truth, received by us in faith and daily glorified by our trust and obedience. It finds fulfillment as the nations are brought into the light of the gospel and the joy of the Lord. To limit God's answer to the end of history is to refuse an answer and to resist the reality of His present sovereignty. Therefore, let us pray in faith, saying,

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done,
On earth as it is in heaven. 🙏