

THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

by Pastor Pete Anderson

During the latter part of the 20th century, the popular view of the nature of man changed. The Second World War was past history. A generation grew up that did not remember Korea and Vietnam. Many people came to believe in the innate goodness of man. Despite the daily news testifying again and again to man's inhumanity towards other men, people desperately wanted to believe that given the time and resources, man could solve his own problems. Many in America became convinced that we were making progress. There was a growing optimism and confidence we could solve our problems apart from God. We thought advances in technology were going to make us better. Some of you remember the book, "I'm OK, You're OK." Existential Psychology taught that people are good and if you give them the right environment, they will find the right answers within themselves. Give them unconditional positive regard and enough counseling and psychotherapy, and they will shine.

Even many Christians were seduced by the lure of positive thinking. Yes, the Bible says that we are sinners-but perhaps we are not really that bad. Christians had a tendency to be naive and deny or minimize evil in the world. Then came 9-11, a horrible wake up call for America. It said loud and clear that there is terrible evil in the world. People are not morally neutral; they do not need a minor tune-up.

The truth is that man is spiritually lost, dead in his sin. He is in rebellion against God. Look around the world: suicide bombers; India and Pakistan are ready to duke it out with nukes; in many countries, hatred is growing especially against America. Right now, a few hundred million Muslims hate you simply because you live in America and you love Jesus. The truth is that the human heart is evil and must be transformed and made new by the Lord.

Listen to the time-tested testimony of Scripture that accurately reports the truth about the world:

(Jeremiah 17:9) The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?

(Genesis 6:5) The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

(Romans 1:18-31) The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness, {19} since what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them. {20} For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse. {21} For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish

hearts were darkened. {22} Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools {23} and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. {24} Therefore God gave them over in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. {25} They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator--who is forever praised. Amen. {26} Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. {27} In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion. {28} Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. {29} They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, {30} slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; {31} they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. {32} Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

And what are the consequences of evil? Many of the consequences can be seen in the tremendous suffering that we see in Uganda. There are now two million orphans in Uganda! You can pick them up on the street corners. Some villages have only orphans because all the adults have died from AIDS. Just about every family in Uganda has lost a member due to AIDS. Further, in Sub-Saharan Africa there are 8 million people who are right on the edge between starvation and death; there is a famine and most in the world are ignoring the pain and agony of these people. While we live in luxury, these people are without hope and without food.

We had two teams in Uganda with seasoned missionaries--both teams were robbed. My team was ambushed. It was Sunday, May 19th; our group had gotten up early and ministered in various churches in Kampala. We headed out in the afternoon on a six-hour trip to Kapchorwa. After a five-hour ride, we were within two miles of our compound, happy and singing. Seventeen of us were in the van: two Ugandan pastors, four American pastors, an elder from Mississippi, and the young people in our team. One had just graduated from college a few days before. All of us were filled with excitement; we were in Africa, slowly ascending Mt. Elgon, just a few kilometers from Kenya.

We rounded a turn in the road at about 8:30 in the evening and saw boulders blocking both lanes. For a moment we thought there had been a landslide. Then almost immediately our van was surrounded. Six men came out of the bushes; their expressions revealed their intentions. The one at my window had an AK-47; another had a pistol; another had a shotgun; two had knives. They tried to open the door, but we refused. They began to make threats, "I am going to kill you." They slapped some in the face and hit others of us. Behind me was a pastor from Alabama. One of the bandits held a knife to his throat and the pastor said, "Please don't kill me; I have a wife and child at

home.” Pastor Samson behind me held the door shut and pled, “We are pastors, please let us go. Do not do this.” We surrendered our cameras, watches and money. Some in the van began to pray. Some began to cry. We all sang. Thirty minutes went by. Soon they had most of our valuables. Off to the side of the road, we began to hear sounds—like the war cries of an attacking group of Indians from an old western. The gunmen fired shots into the ground and told us to get out of there. We were happy to leave. We spent the night in a nearby compound and then high-tailed it out of there the next morning.

We found out later that the robbers had stopped and robbed six cars. There was no honor among these thieves. When they divided the loot, a fight broke out among them. Two were killed by their friends and four are now in prison, where they will stay for a long time or be hanged.

Other such challenges awaited us. Professional thieves from the Congo entered the room where I was staying and stole my camera and laptop computer. Another evening, as we went through a crowd after a crusade, someone reached into the van and, in a flash, grabbed the glasses off of the face of a young girl with us.

So if you believe in the goodness of human beings, both of our teams can testify that you are wrong and naïve. But we really only had minor inconveniences—just a small taste when compared to the daily suffering of Christians around the world.

North of Uganda is Sudan. Sudanese Christians experience slavery and torture. Muslims slip down into Southern Sudan and into Uganda. They sneak into the homes of Christians and on a regular basis they cut off their lips and ears.

In one village where we ministered for a week, we met a young boy named Herbert. Herbert looked about 12 years old, but was actually 15. He had recently run away from home. Why? Herbert lived in a family that practiced witchcraft. One day Herbert’s sister came to him and said, “I heard our father talking to one of our mothers; they are planning to cut your head off and sprinkle your blood on the four corners of the roof of our home.” Herbert ran away.

Without Christ, when people are left to the evil in their hearts, there is unspeakable horror. Not long ago, in Uganda, live rats were placed in a large pot of water. Christians were placed over the top of the pot and the water was heated so that the rats in their escape would eat through the bodies of the believers. Just five miles from where we stayed on our first trip to Uganda, rebels came down during the night, herded 80 children into a house and burned it to the ground.

Death surrounds us and the consequences of evil are all around: Take September 11, 2001 for example. Yes, 3000 people died. That is a horrible tragedy but on that very day 4000 babies died from legal abortions in America and no one seemed to notice. In Uganda, every week, someone would come to us and say, “My uncle died yesterday; my mother died this morning; my child died...” An Anglican priest told of having about seven funerals each day. I spoke with a visiting doctor, who told of ministering in a

maternity ward. A newborn died and no one made any effort to comfort the mother. Regularly pedestrians are run down and killed on the city streets—and the fine, the equivalent of a few dollars to pay for the funeral.

One night a couple of weeks ago at supper I met a man from Rwanda. He had very sad eyes and he told me about his country. Starting on April 6, 1994, 10,000 people were killed every day for 90 days. They were hacked and cut to pieces as the Hutus and the Tutsis tried to destroy each other. Dr. Krabbendam tells of being in Uganda when 10,000 bloated bodies floated down the river.

Look around the world, what do you see? You see suffering, violence and death. And what is there to do? You may be indifferent to what's going on around you or even complain, "Doesn't God care?" But our God does care and is able to transform our evil hearts.

God's Solution to the Problem of Evil is That He Uses Evil to Bring About Good. God did not bring evil into this world; He hates it more than anyone, but God Uses Evil for Good.

(Romans 8:28) "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose

(2 Corinthians 1:3-4) Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, {4} who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God.

(Proverbs 19:21) Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

(Genesis 50:20) You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

In spite of the ambush and robberies, God Defeated Evil in Uganda. We were glad to be in Uganda and lost the property and money with joy. We learned something new about the value of life and the cost of missions. Our medical clinic in Kaserem is complete and the people there are amazed that strangers would do this for their village. Arrangements have been made for the shipment of a water system to Kaserem. The churches in Kamunarugut and Kaserem are growing. Both had overflow crowds in recent weeks. We distributed numerous Bibles, equipment and clothing. Everywhere we went we saw people wearing T-shirts from Hawaii. We bought a sound system to use in crusades in the area of Kaserem, Kamunarugut and beyond. Plans are being made to start a new presbytery made up of the churches we have helped start. Our church is reaching people deeper in Africa than ever. By God's grace, we are making a difference.

We experienced the power of the Gospel in a mighty way while we were in Uganda. Everyone on our team saw people come to the Lord. In the first village where we ministered, many people were involved in witchcraft. Many had shrines beside their homes where they worshiped demons. Many lived in fear. Right before our arrival—something strange had happened. There was one home there where rocks seemed to be coming out of nowhere hitting people. Even inside the house rocks hit people but there were no holes in the roof. We saw the marks on the people—young and old. The Christians came and prayed and the rocks stopped.

Dr. Krabbendam, who has now visited Uganda more than fifty times, witnessed for Christ at the highest levels of the Ugandan government. He has been asked to be part of a “think tank” to assist those in the government. We went to Uganda with certain goals in mind; all of these and more were accomplished. I later went back to the area where the ambush had occurred and preached to 400-500 people. We met an American pastor with a large bag of medicine and Christian literature. He was looking for a place to distribute it and we were glad to take it to our new clinic! When I arrived with the medicine I had to request that people quit bowing down—they could not believe that anyone cared for them. We were unable to hold planned crusades in Kaserem and Kamunarugut, but the Ugandans held these in our absence and many people came to the Lord. Meanwhile we went to a third village and, again, God added to His church, calling people out of a life of despair and superstition.

We were so grateful that God sent that group of robbers. We later thought: thank you God for sending the “world’s dumbest robbers” They wasted so much of their time, going through my bag... “What is this?” they asked. Then I began explaining how a shaver and a CD player worked—at gunpoint. They demanded our valuables—one girl offered the bandits a roll of stickers that said on it something like, “I believe in sexual abstinence.” The last words of one bandit included, “Would you take my picture?” As we left, one of us called out, “Thank you for not killing us.” Do you see what a wonderful lesson we learned? The devil and evil men thought they were going to win, but they were totally overcome.

So how is the war over evil going to be won? It will be won with the Gospel. God Entrusts the Gospel to His Church to Overcome Evil. The Gospel gets to the heart of the problem and works from the inside.

(Romans 1:16-17) I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile. {17} For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

The Gospel Addresses Our Three Greatest Problems: a Bad Heart, Bad Record and Bad Life.

1. Bad Heart

(Genesis 6:5) The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.

(Mark 7:21-22) For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, {22} greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly.

(Romans 3:11) there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God.

(Ephesians 2:1) As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins,

2. Bad Record

(Psalms 51:4) Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge.

(Romans 3:10-18) As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; {11} there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. {12} All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one." {13} "Their throats are open graves; their tongues practice deceit." "The poison of vipers is on their lips." {14} "Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness." {15} "Their feet are swift to shed blood; {16} ruin and misery mark their ways, {17} and the way of peace they do not know." {18} "There is no fear of God before their eyes."

(Romans 3:23) for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,

(1 Corinthians 6:9-10) Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders {10} nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

3. Bad Life

(John 8:34) Jesus replied, "I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.

Paul wrote:

(Romans 6:19-21) I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. {20} When you were slaves to sin, you were free from the control of righteousness. {21} What benefit did you reap at that time from the things you are now ashamed of? Those things result in death!

(Romans 8:7-8) the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. {8} Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God.

(Romans 7:18) I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out.

In Their Place, The Gospel Offers Us a New Heart, a New Record and a New Life.

1. New Heart

God says (in Deuteronomy 5:29) Oh, that their hearts would be inclined to fear me and keep all my commands always, so that it might go well with them and their children forever!

Moses promised (in Deuteronomy 30:6) The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live.

God says of his people in the future:

(Ezekiel 11:19) I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.

(Ezekiel 36:26) I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.

2. In the place of your old sinful record, Christ offers you a New Record--His Perfect One.

(Jeremiah 23:6) In his days Judah will be saved and Israel will live in safety. This is the name by which he will be called: The LORD Our Righteousness.

(1 Corinthians 1:30) It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God--that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

(2 Corinthians 5:21) God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

3. New Life

Jesus says in (Matthew 11:28-30) "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. {29} Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. {30} For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

(Galatians 2:20) I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in

me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

(John 10:10)I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

(Galatians 5:22-23) But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, {23} gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

(2 Corinthians 5:17) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

Word of Caution: Many church attendees have never really heard the Gospel. They think that the Gospel is an invitation to accept forgiveness and eternal life without any real commitment to God. They want Jesus as Savior but not as Lord. Carnal man thinks that he can choose heaven without choosing holiness and without repentance. Almost everyone is prepared to accept heaven, but few are prepared to surrender to the Lordship of Christ and to live a life of holiness. True conversion always involves repentance and faith, turning away from sin and turning to God! Witness these comments from Uganda: "I am a Christian, but I am also a drunkard." "Our family went to church, but we also had a special time to worship demons." "I am a Christian with a sick child." - said a robber as he was removing about \$2000 from my wallet with one hand, while pointing an AK-47 at me with the other hand.

How are you to respond to evil? Non-Christian responses to the evil in this world include ignoring it and pretending it does not exist. Another common approach is to acknowledge the problem but take no ownership of it--yes, it's too bad and someone [else] ought to do something. Many of you remember the story of the Good Samaritan:

(Luke 10:30-37) In reply Jesus said: "A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he fell into the hands of robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. {31} A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. {32} So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. {33} But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. {34} He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, took him to an inn and took care of him. {35} The next day he took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper. 'Look after him,' he said, 'and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.' {36} "Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?" {37} The expert in the law replied, "The one who had mercy on him." Jesus told him, "Go and do likewise."

Many Americans have completely turned their minds away from those who are hurting, suffering and dying. Their attitude is: "Their problems are not our problems... They were going to die anyway... I am busy with my life and my stuff...." People are hard. There is

tremendous prejudice and self-centeredness around us. One person told me, "Hawaii has enough problems to keep you busy. Why do you want to go over there and help those niggers?"

Another response is to deal with the symptoms of the problem rather than the cause, trying to fix them in our own strength and abilities, without God. This is the approach of the world that does not understand the source of the problem. These people say—folks just need more education, clean water, better health care, condoms, a nice environment and their social problems will disappear.

So what is the Christian response?

Pray! Pray for these young churches and pray for the brave pastors who lead them.

(Matthew 9:37-38) Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. {38} Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field."

Sacrifice! I want to thank all of those who gave, I can think of no better investment. You helped take the greatest treasure, the Gospel, to a place where people had never heard it. Our brothers in Africa worked till midnight some evenings to get this new church building in Kamunarugut completed. I was so glad we got there before anyone else. In the main place we stayed, sometimes half of the folks there were Mormons. The Mormons are spending millions in Uganda while evangelical Christians are wasting their resources on things that will pass away.

Take Action!

- (Romans 12:9) Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.
- (Psalms 97:10) Let those who love the LORD hate evil, for he guards the lives of his faithful ones and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
- (Romans 12:21) Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Our church has made a good start, but there is so much else to do. Five years ago, I asked the Lord to let me go to Uganda for ten years. Now half of those years have passed. There have been great victories. In NE Uganda, there are about 25 new Presbyterian churches. But there is more to do and I encourage you not to be weary or slack. I met with many pastors in Uganda. In the three churches we have started in the northeast in the past two years, all the men are working for \$50.00 per month. A little bit of help goes a long way. It only took a little effort to find a home for Herbert and get him enrolled in a Christian school.

Now, more than ever, we need to commit ourselves to responding to evil with good.

(Matthew 25:31-46) "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. {32} All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. {33} He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. {34} "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. {35} For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, {36} I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' {37} "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? {38} When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? {39} When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' {40} "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' {41} "Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. {42} For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, {43} I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me.' {44} "They also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?' {45} "He will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me.' {46} "Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

Here is the Gospel:

(Romans 10:9-10) That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. {10} For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Here is A Model Prayer of Repentance and Faith in Christ:

"Lord Jesus, I know that I am a sinner. I need your forgiveness because I have demonstrated in my life that I have a bad heart, a bad record, and a life that has not pleased God. Thank you for dying on the cross for my sins. I now turn from my sinfulness and self-trust, and I place my trust in you alone for the forgiveness of my sins. I now receive you as my Savior and my Lord. I ask that you would give me a new heart, a new record and a new life. Thank you for forgiving my sins and giving me a personal relationship with God. Take control of my life. Make me the kind of person you want me to be."

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