Responding to Evil

A Sermon by Rev. Joel Christian Glenn

15 November 2026

Children's Talk: Calm in the Face of Anger

When someone is mad at you, how does that make you feel? I know that when someone is mad at me, especially if they start to yell at me, I get mad too. When people are mad it is hard to stay calm. But is that how the Lord wants us to be when someone is mad at us? He actually asks us to stay calm even when we feel like someone is attacking us.

In one story, Jesus had every reason to be angry: one of his students betrayed Him and gave Him over to a crowd of people with swords and clubs who wanted to hurt him. These people hated Jesus! But Jesus did not hate them:

> And while He was still speaking, behold, a multitude; and he who was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them and drew near to Jesus to kiss Him. But Jesus said to him, "Judas, are you betraying the Son of Man with a kiss?"
> When those around Him saw what was going to happen, they said to Him, "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" And one of them struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear.
> But Jesus answered and said, "Permit even this." And He touched his ear and healed him.
> Then Jesus said to the chief priests, captains of the temple, and the elders who had come to Him, "Have you come out, as against a robber, with swords and clubs? When I was with you daily in the temple, you did not try to seize Me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness." (Luke 22:47-53)

I imagine a lot of us would be like that man with a sword: he lashed out in anger as soon as he saw the crowd. Now I don't have a sword, but I do have a big stick. And it is especially easy to get mad when you also have a weapon in your hand. Have you ever been holding a stick, and someone got mad at you or hurt you, and immediately your stick became a weapon to hit back? It is so hard to stop that from happening!

But the Lord does not want that to happen. Jesus actually not only told his disciple not to hurt anyone, he even healed the man whose ear had been cut. When faced with a hateful group of people, Jesus remained calm and loving. We can do this too. But to do it we need to be mindful of pausing, stopping ourselves from

lashing out, and asking the Lord to help us. So next time someone makes you so mad, first, STOP. Take the time to think. Pray to the Lord. Say, “Lord, help me not respond with anger. And THEN, once you have done that, you can do what you need to do: defend yourself, use your words, tell an adult. You might even need to push someone away! But at least it will not then be from anger. Stay calm in the face of anger, and you will keep things from going from bad to worse.

Amen.

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When evil occurs, how does the Lord ask us to respond? We don't have to look far to find evil in the world, some of it truly malicious in nature, some of it merely a senseless lashing out and a blind following of a crowd. How as Christians are we to respond? The clearest teaching the Lord offers is forgiveness: one of the most astonishing things that Christianity offers is the teaching, and indeed the commandment, to forgive; and not just to forgive on occasion or the little things, but to forgive even the greatest acts of our worst enemies. Jesus Himself asked forgiveness for those who murdered Him even as they drove the nails into His hands. Are we to sit idly by while we watch evil run rampant? Are we to turn a blind eye to the evils that infest society as if they were of no importance?

I suspect that we can focus so much on forgiveness that we miss other ways of responding to evil. Many years ago I was part of a journey group. There was a woman in this group who had recently divorced. She knew that I was training to be a minister and she thought that it would be important for me to understand what it was like for someone in her position, as a strong Christian, a strong New Church person, who was also having to go through this thing that is so easy to feel ashamed of. So she offered to have tea with me and simply tell her story so that I could understand that experience a little better. We talked about many things but the one that stood out to me the most was how she had had to process forgiveness. Her husband had cheated on her and left her, and yet, as a good Christian woman, her tendency was to go right to forgiveness. Yet in her process she came across a small book called *Don't Forgive Too Soon*. Now in the popular imagination that might not sound like a very Christian message, but it was actually written from an explicitly Christian

viewpoint. And for this woman it was so important because in jumping right to forgiveness she was leaving out other important parts of the process. She realized that she needed to grieve the loss of her marriage, to mourn it as a kind of death. She needed to feel a kind of anger that pinned the blame for what happened on her husband instead of blaming herself. These were things that she had lost sight of because she was so focused on forgiveness. Now she did understand that she had to find a way to forgive her husband, and I believe that she was able to do that. But if that had been the *only* think she had done, she would have missed out on many other crucial things that she needed to work on as well.

When faced with evil, especially evil that seems to run rampant and escape from consequences, we can respond with many emotions and feelings. I won't pretend that I can distil it all down into one or two clear, nice, neat ideas. But today I will focus on just three responses, namely anger, grief, and helplessness. Within each of these there may be something worth holding on to, even as we also practice forgiveness. Yes, forgive; but do not let that obscure what is good and true from your initial response, whatever that may be or have been.

1. **Anger**

We'll start with anger: anger at those who perpetrate evil and anger at those who could prevent it but choose to not get involved. In itself anger is evil. To respond to evil with anger is to fight fire with fire. But within or alongside that anger, perhaps hidden at first, is a zeal for righteousness and indignation at injustice. There is a common yet false belief that Jesus was always meek and mild, hardly raising His voice. It is true that Jesus never acted in true anger; and yet at times He unleashed a stinging rebuke against those who would abuse others. In the Old Testament we find the amazing paradox that says,

> You shall not hate your brother in your heart. You shall surely rebuke your neighbour, and not bear sin because of him. (Leviticus 19:17)

In the same breath that the Word condemns hatred it commands rebuke. We have a responsibility to call out and confront injustice, and to do so even with fierce zeal when necessary. Call out evil for what it is and condemn it with the full force of heart when necessary.

I one time heard a story from a friend that illustrates beautifully, to me, how to zealously pursue justice from love. This is from an older gentleman, and I hope to do justice to it, although I am sure I have misremembered bits and pieces. But he and his wife worked in a prison to uplift the inmates. They noticed in their time a number of security lapses, which they brought to the attention of the prison. A report was made requiring the prison to update its practices. Yet the prison did nothing. Then one day a prisoner became uncontrollable, and in the ensuing violence the man's wife was killed. The man took the prison to court, to force them by law to implement the needed security protocols to ensure that what happened to his wife would never happen to anyone ever again. The court case dragged on and on but he was dogged in his pursuit of justice. And here is where this man's amazing grace in the pursuit of justice comes through: during the course of the court case, every morning when he woke up, he would check himself: he would examine his motives, and question whether he was acting to improve the system, or simply out of revenge against the prison officials; and he knew, that if ever the time came that he woke up and his purpose was vengeance, than at that point he would have to drop the case and walk away from it.

This story is the embodiment of the principle that charity does not mean letting people get away with evil. Charity in fact requires the opposite:

> We exercise goodwill in our dealings with our enemies and evil people by benefiting them indirectly through our warnings, corrective action, punishments, and therefore efforts to improve them.
> This could be illustrated as follows. Judges who punish wrongdoers because it is the just and legal thing to do have love for their neighbor. By so doing the judges are straightening out the wrongdoers and are caring for people in the area by preventing the wrongdoers from doing them harm. (*True Christian Religion* §407)

Forgiveness includes pursuing justice with zeal as well.

2. Grief

Grief is another important response to evil. I don't think many of us actively enjoy being sad but it is a part of responding to evil that we should not overlook. At heart grief is actually a product of love. When Jesus looked out over the city of Jerusalem, the centre of opposition to His ministry, He wept over it (Luke 19:41-44). He began each of His harshest rebukes of the Pharisees with a raw outcry of sadness: woe! Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees... (Matthew 23:13-29; *Apocalypse Revealed* §416).

Without love there would be no sadness. If Jesus did not love the victims of evil, He would not have mourned over them. And more surprising perhaps is the fact that if Jesus did not love the scribes and Pharisees, the perpetrators of evil, His sadness also would not have been so great. The greater the love the greater the grief when it is harmed. At times we hide from this grief through forgiveness; I know that I sometimes feel inclined to say, "it's ok" to someone when they ask forgiveness; but in actual fact it is ok for it *not* to be ok. It is ok to say, "I forgive you, but it still hurts, my heart still aches, I'm still not ok." If we consider the traumas that wrack our world and feel deep sadness welling within us, *that is a good thing*; if you did not love what is good in our communities then you would not mourn when that goodness is threatened. Your sadness is a sign of love, and it is worth holding onto. Forgive, but also remember that forgiveness includes mourning the loss of what might have been.

3. **Helplessness**

Lastly is helplessness. There is a kind of helplessness inherent seeing evil take place. It is easy to despair that the problems of evil are too great for me to have an impact. It's interesting we may try to use (or perhaps misuse) forgiveness to escape this feeling: on the one hand we may try to gain back a sense of control by withholding forgiveness. On the other hand we may grant forgiveness quickly as a way of escaping our feeling of being helpless: I forgive you, whatever, it's all good, let's just forget this ever happened. It's tempting to avoid having to face our own powerlessness by just giving up caring.

This won't sound very uplifting, but when we see our own powerlessness in the face of evil we are seeing something very real and true. We are indeed powerless in the face of evil. On our own we cannot oppose it or make a difference. That is painful but it is a reality that is worth accepting as a starting place. Now if we stay there it becomes an awful and dark place. But from a position of recognizing our own powerlessness we have an opportunity to acknowledge the infinite power of the Lord to make a difference, and not only to make a difference in an abstract way, but a difference through us and through our lives.

Psalm 37 gives reassurance that in spite of our apparent helplessness in the face of evil, the Lord is still in charge, and we still have power over our own choice for good or for evil:

> Do not fret because of evildoers,
> Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.
> For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
> And wither as the green herb.
> Trust in Jehovah, and do good;
> Dwell in the land, and feed on His faithfulness.
> Delight yourself also in Jehovah,
> And He shall give you the desires of your heart.
> Commit your way to Jehovah,
> Trust also in Him,

> And He shall bring it to pass.
> He shall bring forth your righteousness as the light,
> And your justice as the noonday.
> Rest in Jehovah, and wait patiently for Him;
> Do not fret because of him who prospers in his way,
> Because of the man who brings wicked schemes to pass.
> Cease from anger, and forsake wrath;
> Do not fret—it only causes harm.
> For evildoers shall be cut off;
> But those who wait on Jehovah,
> They shall inherit the earth.
> (Psalm 37:1-9)

(If you struggle with people getting away with evil, I would encourage you to go read all of Psalm 37: I have found it speaks powerfully to that mind-set.) You really might be helpless against almost all of the evil in the world; but you have power to live your life according to the righteousness of the Lord, and that power is great and miraculous.

When faced with evil, we are called to forgive. Forgive with abundance, forgive seven times seven times, forgive above and beyond what you believe you are capable of. But do not only forgive and forget the rest: forgive, yes, but do not forget to seek justice, to call out evil for what it is, to act to correct it and defend against it. Forgive, yes, but don't forget to take the time to mourn and to grieve; to let yourself feel sadness for your community and your country, to feel sadness even for those who let themselves be motivated by hatred. Forgive, yes, but don't forget that the Lord has all power, that no matter how small your effort may seem you contribute to His plan and His purpose for this world.

Amen.