

Sermon for Sunday, March 27, 1977, by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Senior Pastor
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"HOW TO BE GOOD AND ENJOY IT!" Part II

I Corinthians 10:1-13

Text: "No temptation has overtaken you that is not common to man. God is faithful and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape, that you may be able to endure it." --I Corinthians 10:13

This morning I am going to preach the sermon I meant to preach last Sunday! I wanted to talk about how to be good and enjoy it. Lots of people have the idea that being good is no fun. Actually, the reverse is the truth. Most of the spiritual, emotional, and mental difficulties that people have are a consequence of things that have gone wrong in their lives--of evil deeds they have done, of sins they have committed--and the guilt eats away at them. For example, the latest issue of the Reader's Digest has an article dealing with couples who live together without benefit of marriage. In the beginning they think it is smart or "being modern." In the beginning they think it will bring them joy and happiness. Yet, in the end they discover that instead it has brought them sorrow and disappointment. They usually end such relationships with bitterness and regret.

So, the best way to have good emotional health, to have good mental stability, to have the best spiritual life, is to live a good life--a life according to the spiritual laws of God. The person who is truly happy is the one who is living according to the best that is in him, not the worst. The person who is truly content with himself is the one who is living according to the highest and noblest that he knows, not the lowest and most base. Yet, it is precisely at this point that we run into trouble. Deep within us is that basic, instinctive, and primitive element called by St. Paul "the natural man." Freud called it the id, but it doesn't matter what name you give it. The fact is, deep within each of us is that element of human personality that is concerned only with its own satisfactions, its own needs, its own fulfillment. It is not concerned about the interests and needs of others but seeks only its own self-gratification. And there, in the unconsciousness of the mind, those instinctive elements are working away. They make us do and say and act in ways that we don't want, that we often don't understand, and which frequently we cannot control.

How shall we escape the captivity of these inner needs and drives? Last Sunday I tried to answer that question. I said that the inner man must be redeemed. The natural man must be transformed, the id must be born again so that our inner brokenness, our inner fallenness does not rule and control us. I went on to give four steps for letting God into our inner being, into the core of our personality, into the inner depths of our humanness in order to redeem it.

Today I want to take that thought one step further. Suppose you do let God's Spirit into your inner being--suppose you do let God's transforming power into your heart, your natural man. Does that mean that you will be perfect? Does that mean that you will have no more evil desires, no more bad inclinations, no more temptations? And of course the answer is no. You will always be tempted and tried. You will always have to fight to overcome those bad desires and inclinations. You will always have to struggle against the worst that is in you. But there is a difference now. And the difference is that God's Spirit, God's power is also in you. God's power is at work within you to help you in the battle. And, as the Bible promises, "he that is within you is greater than he that is in the world."

So, this morning I would like for us to think together about some ways that we can win those inner battles, some ways we can fight against the worst that is in us, indeed, to discover some ways to be good and enjoy it. There are five particular passages of scripture that deal with this specific struggle to be good and I would like to share them with you. They offer us some principles to use in our inner battles.

The first passage is our text in the bulletin this morning. There we read, "God is faithful, and he will not let you be tempted beyond your strength, but with the temptation will also provide the way of escape..." Here we are introduced to the principle of escape. You see, sometimes the only way to handle our inner temptations is to flee from their source.

Joseph used this principle when he was tempted by Potiphar's wife. You remember how the wife of Joseph's master arranged to be alone with Joseph and then made overtures to him. The Bible says that Joseph, "left his garment in her hand, and fled and got out of the house" (Genesis 39:12). Joseph got out of the danger area as quickly as possible. On the other hand, there is the story of Lot and his uncle, Abraham. They divided the area in which they lived and went their separate ways. When Abraham gave Lot the choice of which part of the land he would take, the Bible says that Lot "pitched his tent toward Sodom." He was deliberately exposing himself, his family, and all he had to the worldliness and wickedness of that notorious city. Surely he thought he and his family could resist the adverse influence of that despicable city. Unfortunately, he was wrong and it cost him dearly in the end.

Abraham, however, stayed up in the hill country of Judea. Could he have pitched his tents toward Sodom without compromising his ideals and lowering his standards? We will never know because Abraham did not take that risk. He had a way of escape. So, when your inner needs and desires threaten to lead you into disaster, the Bible tells us that God always provides a way of escape.

The second passage of scripture is in Romans 21:21. Moffatt translates it this way, "Never let evil get the better of you; get the better of evil by doing good." Here we are introduced to the principle of preoccupation. In the Old Testament, after the Jews had been in exile for many years, they were permitted to return to Jerusalem, but the city had been destroyed. Under the leadership of Nehemiah the Jews began to rebuild the city. The people in the area didn't like it that the Jews had come back and they didn't want to see Jerusalem rebuilt. So, they determined to kill Nehemiah, the leader of the Jews. They tried to set up a meeting with him in order to murder him. However, Nehemiah refused to interrupt his work of rebuilding the city of God. He answered them, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down." Four times his enemies attempted to entice him away and four times he sent back that ringing reply, "I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down."

As a child in small-town rural Mississippi, one summer my friends and I got into more trouble than usual. And the reason was that we didn't have enough to do to keep us busy. My mother soon took care of that, however, by putting my brother and me to work in a huge family garden. Believe me, when the sun is burning down on you, when sweat is running off the end of your nose, when your hands have blisters from the hoe, you are too preoccupied with doing good to get in much evil. When we complained bitterly that our friends didn't have to work in any old garden, my mother would reply in an infuriating way, "Idle hands are the devil's workshop." Now that I'm older, I have more appreciation for that than I did then! Yet, this is a principle all of us need to exercise from time to time, to "get the better of evil by doing good," the principle of preoccupation.

The third passage of scripture is from James 4:7. There we read, "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you." In the original Greek language the words are very vivid military terms. A more literal translation might be, "Put yourselves under God's command, but get in the trenches against the devil." Here we are introduced to the principle of resistance. You see, it is not always possible to avoid temptation or to be so preoccupied as to ignore its power. Sometimes we have to meet it head on!

Sometimes we have to meet it head on as Daniel did when the Bible says of him, "But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's dainties, nor with the wine he drank." Sometimes we have to meet sin head on as Jesus did in the wilderness, "Get thee hence Satan; for it is written, thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve." Sometimes we have to meet temptation in the manner that St. Paul once suggested to the Ephesian Christians when he wrote to them, "Therefore take the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand." As some poet once put it,

I want to let go,
But I will not let go!
I never will yield.
What! lay down on the field,
And surrender my shield?
No! I will not let go.
I want to let go,
But I will not let go!
Be this ever my song,
'Gainst the legions of wrong.
O God make me strong,
That I may not let go.

The fourth passage of scripture is from I John 4:4. We read, "For he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world." Here we are introduced to the principle of counterattraction. It is the principle that Dr. Chalmers in his famous sermon has called, "the expulsive power of a new affection." That is, a new affection for Jesus is able to expel from the heart old affections for things of the devil. St. Paul once put it this way, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me."

One of my favorite stories that I am sure I have told before illustrates this counterattraction. It is the ancient Greek legend of the ship Argo which set sail in search of the Golden Fleece. According to the story, the ship had to pass the southern shore of Italy where the sirens lived. They were accustomed to singing to the sailors in passing ships. Their voices were sweet in sound so that none could resist them and the ships were lured to their destruction on the rocks. However, on board the ship Argo was a singer named Orpheus. The enchantment of his voice was such that even lions and tigers would come and crouch at his feet. Every day Orpheus sang to the sailors as they went about their tasks aboard ship. When they arrived at the place of the sirens, the sea nymphs came out and sang their sweetest. But the sailors only laughed and rowed steadily on. The spell of the inferior music had been broken by a sweeter sound. How could they respond to the music of the sirens when they were accustomed to the sounds of Orpheus?

So with us. When Jesus is in our hearts and minds the attraction of evil is broken by a higher attraction. Yes, he that is in us is greater than he that is in the world.

Here then are four principles from scripture for dealing with our inner man in all of its wickness and sin--the principle of escape, the principle of preoccupation, the principle of resistance, and the principle of a counterattraction. But let me leave you with one final principle from the Bible that all of us will need in dealing with our inner being, our primitive, instinctive inner man. It is found in I John 1:9. It reads, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins..." Here we are introduced to the principle of forgiveness. You see, no matter how hard we try to avoid our sin, no matter how hard we try to control our old natures, the time will come when we will slip and fall, when we will fail. And in a moment such as that each of us will need forgiveness. When you have tried your hardest to resist your inner sin, when you have done your best to use the resources you have to avoid sin, and yet when you have still failed, God offers you one final means of dealing with your failure--he offers you forgiveness.

There is an old legend that pictures Satan appearing before the throne of God. Satan complains bitterly to God, "Why is it that you are so quick to forgive men their many sins, yet never once have you forgiven me?" To which God replies, "Because never once have you asked me for forgiveness." And that's really what it means to be a Christian--to resist our inner brokenness by all the means that God has given us; yet, when we have failed, to turn to God and confess our failure. Then we will have learned to be good and enjoy it--not because we are always successful, but because as we try our best to follow Jesus, even in our failures we are the forgiven ones.

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