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Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“DELIVER US FROM EVIL”  
Matthew 6:13**

- {George Pope Morris, “Deliver Us from Evil”}

**Deliver us from evil, Heavenly Father!  
It still besets us whereso'er we go!  
Bid the bright rays of revelation gather  
To light the darkness in our way of woe!  
Remove the sin that stains our souls – for ever!  
Our doubts dispel – our confidence restore!  
Write thy forgiveness in our hearts, and never  
Let us in vain petition for it more.**

**Release us from the sorrows that attend us!  
Our nerves are torn – at every vein we bleed!  
Almighty Parent! with thy strength befriend us!  
Else we are helpless in our time of need!  
Sustain us, Lord, with thy pure Holy Spirit –  
New vigor give to Nature's faltering frame;  
And, at life's close, permit us to inherit  
The hope that's promised in the Savior's name.**

I am with the poet on this, aren't you?

- {Mt 6:13b} **“Deliver us from... evil”** is the cry of our hearts. Beyond humankind, it is the longing of **“the creation itself”** which is **“groaning”** to **“be liberated from its bondage”** (Romans 8:21-22).

Almighty God, **“Deliver us from... evil”!** Save us from {Eph 6:16, 12} **“the evil one”** and his **“spiritual forces**

**of evil,”** that abomination of an angel who is called Satan, the devil, the Lord of Flies.

**“Deliver us from... evil”!** **Save us from** {Eph 6:12} **“rulers... authorities ... [and] powers of this dark world,”** corrupted systems of politics, economy and culture that take on lives of their own, beyond the people involved in them, and demand a degree of allegiance that is idolatrous.

**“Deliver us from... evil”!** **Save us from** {Rev 6:3-8} **“sword, famine and plague,”** from the red horse of warfare, the black horse of starvation, and the pale horse of disaster and disease that inflict Death.

More than that, **“Deliver us from”** the **“evil” within**. Merciful God, **save us from ourselves!**

**“Evil”** is a loaded word, especially when it is applied to human beings. It evokes images of extermination camps and tyrants and satanic cults. It recalls the names of Hitler, Manson, and bin Laden. It stirs up feelings of fear, anger and disgust.

I am not lumping us together with the wickedest killers in history! Brothers and sisters, when I look at you I do not see evil people. I see men and women and young people who are, by the grace of God, being {Ro 8:29} **“conformed to the image of his Son”** Jesus.

Nevertheless, there is a seed of evil embedded deep within every fallen human being – including me, including you. It might lie dormant for decades; but if it is watered and fertilized by sin that is not addressed, it begins to germinate and sprout.

Often, it does not go any further than that. God's Holy Spirit uses the Word, prayer, worship and

fellowship nip it in the bud by convicting us of sin. Yet if we resist his pruning ministry evil will take root. In time it will overtake our souls and bear strange, poisonous fruit.

{Mt 6:9} **“Father in heaven... deliver us from evil”!**

I have with me a piece from the Friday, March 4 edition of the Chicago Tribune. It is titled “Haters have a right to free speech, but who’s listening?”

The picture above the text shows a member of the Westboro Baptist Church outside a soldier’s funeral. Her signs read: SHAME; DESTRUCTION IS IMMINENT; GOD’S VIEW (the devil’s face in the crosshairs presumably represents our nation); and THANK GOD FOR DEAD SOLDIERS. Other Westboro signs have said: THANK GOD FOR 9/11; PRAY FOR MORE DEAD SOLDIERS; GOD HATES FAGS; and so on.

Evil wears a million faces, many of which appear ordinary, law-abiding, or even virtuous. Case-in-point: when the deeds of mass murderers come to light, what do we usually hear from the people on the block? ‘He was a good neighbor, quiet and polite.’

That is where this photo comes in. It exposes two elements that define and energize evil.

The first element is the Lie.

Evil needs falsehood the way roaches and mold need physical darkness. As John 3:20 states, **“All those who do evil hate the light”** (that is, the Truth). All evil participates in and perpetrates deception.

Sometimes, the Lie involves calculated deception. Joseph Goebbels, the Minister of Propaganda in the Nazi regime, said: **“If you tell a big lie and keep repeating it, people will eventually come to believe it.... the truth is**

**the greatest enemy of the State.”** Goebbels and his cronies knew exactly what they were doing.

Other times, the Lie is fabricated, swallowed, regurgitated, and acted on without awareness. What did Jesus call the Pharisees who opposed him? {Mt 15:14} **“Blind guides”** who were leading those who were blind enough to follow them right over a cliff and **“into a pit.”** Christ’s enemies genuinely believed that they were the guardians of truth.

To make matters even more complicated, the Lie is seldom a complete fabrication: it is generally a mish-mash of truth and falsehood.

That is what is happening with Westboro Baptist. Let’s break it down.

The Truth is God hates sin. The Lie is God hates people who sin. Rather, **“God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners,” “hostile to God”** and unable to **“submit to God’s law”**, **“Christ died for us”** (Ro 5:8 and 8:7).

The Truth is God labels same-sex genital activity “sin” {cf. Lev 18:22; 20:13; Ro 1:26-27; 1 Co 6:9-10}. The Lie is that uniquely homosexual sin is more sinful than uniquely heterosexual sin.

Scripture does not directly address this, so allow me to explain. Some sins are harder to repent of and recover from than others. Apostasy and idolatry are among the worst. The Lord condemns them in the harshest terms, often with figurative language. What are his preferred metaphors? Not homosexuality, but adultery (which can only involve heterosexuals), and prostitution.

The Truth is that God calls us to {Eph 4:15} “[speak] **the truth in love**” – including truths about sin and death and repentance. The Lie is that painful truths justify the callous infliction of pain with rude words and abusive taunts {Col 3:8, etc.}.

We could keep going, but you get the point.

The Lie is a core component of evil because it is utterly alien to the character and actions of Holy God. **“God...does not lie”** (Titus 1:2). What is more, **“it is impossible for God to lie”** (Hebrews 6:18).

Holy God, deliver us from the evil of lies!

The Lie is the first essential element that defines and energizes evil. The second element is Violence.

📖 Violence is the use of force to compel a person to act against their will or just to inflict pain, suffering, or destruction.

- Violence can be aimed at others or oneself.

Examples of the latter include cutting, other forms of self-mutilation, suicide, and drug abuse.

- Violence can be physical or it can be verbal, as in name calling, threats, and intimidation. God hates violence of both kinds.

I need to acknowledge that this is not always neatly cut-and-dried. There are two sticky issues that we do not have time to really explore this morning, but which I must mention for the sake of integrity:

1) God permits the limited application of some violence in particular circumstances. The quick answer is that this is a less than ideal concession to our sinful brokenness, along the lines of the Old Testament provisions for divorce. (As Jesus said, {Mt 19:8} **“Moses permitted you to divorce**

**your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning.”**)

2) God himself sometimes uses overwhelming force to accomplish his purpose. The key thing to remember here is that God always acts in perfect righteousness, wisdom and justice, while we never act in perfect righteousness, wisdom and justice – not even at our best.

These complications do not change the fact that God detests violence. Proverbs 6:16-19: **“There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a person who stirs up dissension in the community.”**

Back to Westboro Baptist: they scrupulously avoid the use of physical force. Verbal violence is another matter: they choose the words that will inflict maximum emotional distress – and they appear to delight in this.

James 3:6, 8-10 condemns verbal violence, and it also reveals why violence of any kind is a core component of evil.

**The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of one’s life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell.... It is a restless evil, full of deadly**

**poison. With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be.**

Everyone has been created in God's likeness. Physical or verbal violence against a human being is, by extension, an indirect assault upon God.

O God, deliver us from the evil of violence!

The deeds of Westboro Baptist partake of evil; yet using them as an illustration is risky. We who abhor their actions might too easily, too quickly assume that we would never participate in evil, that we could never perpetrate deception or inflict violence.

Yet {Prov 20:9} **“Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin’?”** {Jer 17:9} **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”**

Brothers and sisters, when I look at your faces, I do not see evil! We are being {Ro 8:29} **“conformed to the image of”** Jesus. Nevertheless, there is a seed of evil embedded deep within every fallen human being – including me, including you.

Let us draw near to Holy God. He is merciful and kind. He will deliver us from the evil one! He will deliver us from the rulers, authorities, and powers of this world! He will deliver us from the evil within!

Thanks be to God!