

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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## Romans 16:19b-20a “Wise Unto Goodness, Simple Concerning Evil”

Intro. This morning we will consider the subject of good and evil. We usually know evil when we see it, especially in its worse forms. Murder, violent abuse, robbery, and rape; these are clear manifestations of evil. Satan is the ultimate example of evil personified. On the other hand, goodness is seen loving acts of kindness, in good works, and in moral purity. God is the ultimate example of goodness personified (Mk. 10:18).

From the fall of Satan there has been an intense struggle between good and evil. At the present time it seems that evil is winning out. In Paul’s day evil was also ever present, and he knew it would seek control over the Roman Christians. For example, in vv.17-18 Paul warned of those who would seek to divide and destroy the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. Satan has indeed succeeded in bringing great harm to many churches.

Yet in spite of the rise of evil that we see, I have good news for you today. In our text we are assured that good will ultimately triumph over evil. Yet we do not have to wait until Jesus comes to experience victory over evil. We can learn from our text how we can experience victory even now in this life. I believe vv.19-20 are among the greatest verses in the book of Romans.

We also will learn some important lessons about our attitude towards good and evil. Obviously we understand that as Christians we should not practice evil. But less obvious is the fact that we should not even have a desire to *learn* about evil. That is an important aspect in preventing evil from having dominion over you. So let’s look into our text and see first of all:

### I. WE SHOULD GAIN WISDOM TO DO GOOD

Paul says in the last of v.19, “but I want you to be wise in what is good...” “Good” (*agathos*) is anything that is “worthy of admiration,” hence, “good.” Originally it meant “good in relation to something else, that is, what is of advantage, useful.” Then the word was transferred to the moral sphere, what is morally good.

Furthermore, we are to be “wise” in what is good. Paul is probably using “wise” in the sense of skilled, learned. The original Greek seems to suggest that we are to be wise with the result (*eis*) that goodness is practiced. In other words, true wisdom will lead you to practice what is good. In fact, by definition wisdom involves making good moral choices, and doing what is good. Wisdom leads to good conduct. James 3:13 asks, “Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.” Then he says in v.17, “But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits...”

Every day you are confronted with choices between good and evil. Since we are sinners by nature, our default position is to choose sin. We need to gain enough wisdom to learn to choose to do good instead.

Suppose you are standing & talking with a group of friends, and an acquaintance walks by. Immediately you are confronted with a choice between good & evil. You could yield to the temptation to slander them, or gossip about them. Or you could make the wise choice and do good by greeting them warmly and inviting them to join in on the conversation.

So let us then be wise both concerning what is good, and with the result that we practice goodness. One source of wisdom that will lead to goodness is the written Word of God. Psalm 119:68 says of God, “You are good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes.” We also should pray for wisdom. According to James 1:5, we can ask God to grant us wisdom, including the wisdom to do good. Then, we can be wise unto good by filling our minds with what is good. Philippians 4:8 says, “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things.”

Why does God want us to be wise in what is good? It is because what is in your mind will reflect itself in your conduct. If a man is going to avoid evil habits, our text says that he is to have the right kind of thought life. And your thought life determines your character. This is why wisdom of good is necessary. Your character becomes manifest in your conduct.

## II. WE SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIP TOWARD EVIL

Paul went on to say in the last of v.19 that we are to be “simple concerning<sup>1</sup> evil.” Likewise, Paul said in 1 Cor. 14:20, “Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature.” In regard to the things of God, we are to have a mature level of understanding. But in regard to evil, such as malice, we are to be as babes, blissfully ignorant of such things. This means that:

A. We Are to Avoid the Knowledge of Evil - There are two different Greek words translated by the same English word “simple.” In v.18b a different word (*akakos*) refers to the simple-minded person who is easily deceived; one who is gullible. But in v.19a the simplicity (*akeraios*) which is desirable is pure and unmixed (lit. meaning) innocence, like that of a child who has yet to learn the evil ways of the world.<sup>2</sup> Thus, we should not be interested in learning about evil. Yet in our modern society one of the worst faults is to be unsophisticated & unlearned about the latest trends, including what the Bible calls evil, or sinful. When someone finds out that you are ignorant of such things, they make fun of you. God is saying here that He wants us to be unsophisticated & uncontaminated concerning that which is evil.

This instruction from God’s Word includes both moral evil, and doctrinal evil. The preceding verses have in view the divisions caused by false teachers (cf. 2 Cor. 11:12-15). They come along, claiming to have some new truth that we are lacking in. They make you feel that you are missing out on something if you do not learn from them. But often such people are seeking to introduce dangerous false doctrines. We are not to seek to learn such evil. You see, the devil appeals to the mind. He will play on your curiosity. He is the father of all lies, and he will mess up your mind with error. He knows that if he messes up your mind, he will mess up your conduct.

There was a time in Israel’s history that they failed in this regard. Jer. 4:22 says, “My people are ... are wise to do evil, but to do good they have no knowledge.”

So you better watch out what you allow into your minds. We have to be careful what we read, or what we listen to, or what we watch on TV. The devil tells you that you should be open-

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<sup>1</sup> Here again, it is literally “unto” (εἰς) evil.

<sup>2</sup> The word can mean “harmless,” as in Matthew 10:16, “Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves.” Paul may be alluding to this verse. Yet even here, purity may be the main idea, for the dove is a symbol of the Holy Spirit (Mt. 3:16, etc.) The only other occurrence of the word, found in Philippians 2:15, seems to carry the literal meaning.

minded, but God tells you to be closed minded to what is evil! This means that we have no business seeking to learn about the occult and satanic rituals. You don't need to know the spells of witchcraft. You have no business going to some Hollywood movie about demon possession or the occult. You have no business as a Christian learning about the latest moral trash that is coming out of Hollywood. There are preachers today, who in the name of being relevant, frequently use illustrations from Hollywood movies that are full of filth. We Christians should not be ashamed that we can't carry on a conversation about many of the movies that are currently being shown today. Some people have learned about every form of sexual perversion. Some people know 101 ways to cheat and steal. Some people know every illegal drug on the streets of our cities. But unless you are a law enforcement officer, you have no need to learn of such things, and the Bible commands the Christian to avoid such knowledge.

The Bible makes it very clear that sex prior to marriage is wrong. It is sinful. So why do even children & Middle School students need to learn about sex in the public schools? Why are they even being taught about homosexual perversion in the public schools of California & elsewhere? We have done a great disservice to our children when we have helped to destroy the innocence that used to characterize children. Today we are raising a generation of children in America who know a lot more about evil than about the Bible. May God help us!

And you parents, you better be on guard as to what you allow into the minds of your children. If you don't control what your children watch on TV, who will? The government won't. The advertisers won't. Most children do not have enough maturity to exercise self-control.

Let me tell you why this is important. A 2004 study by the RAND Corporation and the University of California found that, for children ages 12 to 17, those who watched a lot of racy TV were twice as likely to start having sexual intercourse as those who watched very little. Some cartoons are filled with occultist themes, but a 6 year old child will not understand that they are learning about evil.

So how are you going to respond to this appeal of God's Word? Are you going to reject the appeals of the world to learn about its evil? And the next time the world makes fun of you for not knowing the evil ways of the world, you just turn away from their jeers and look into the face of God, and imagine Him smiling down on you from heaven.

Now even though we are to be simple concerning evil,

B. We Should Be Wise in Being Able to Discern Evil – I base this on the last of v.18. There we read of false teachers, who “by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.” If we are going to avoid being deceived, we must be able to discern evil. Furthermore, if you are going to do good, rather than evil, you need discernment. The hijackers who killed over 3000 people on 9/11 thought they were doing a good deed for Allah, but instead, they were doing evil. They did not discern the difference.

You should understand that both good and evil exist in the world. The knowledge of good and evil came with the entrance of sin. When the new life comes to us, we are to develop an attitude of mind that will cause us to know and discern what is evil. The Holy Spirit within the heart of the believer, if allowed to take control of the discerning faculties of our being, will teach us to discriminate between that which is good and that which is evil. Hebrews 5:14 says that the spiritual mature person is able “to discern both good and evil.” Paul said in 1 Thess. 5:21-22 that we are to “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.”

So we are to be simple toward evil but not gullible toward evil. How important it is for us to realize that sometimes evil things have a very innocent look. We must learn that often the deadliest things look the most harmless.

When Satan comes as a roaring lion, he is easiest to detect. But when he comes as an angel of light, he is the most dangerous. There are poisons which look like crystal spring water. A glass of such a poison, placed by a glass of clear water, will fool the eye. The two look exactly alike. If we are unwise, we will make decisions just based on appearances. So when you must make a choice, you must not come to a decision on the basis of appearances. How often people say, "What's the harm in this?" or "What's the harm in that?" They *see* no harm in it because they lack discernment, and are making judgments based on appearances. How many young lives have been wrecked because youth often have the idea that they must try everything once?

So how do we become discerning of evil, without learning of evil by personal experience? First, we can discern evil and avoid it by learning the Word of God. The Bible tells us what is evil & sinful, and it warns us of the consequences of evil. It is only in the written Word that we are going to find the absolute truth of that which is good, and discern that which is evil. Secondly, take the advice of older and more experienced people. Children & young people, God has given you parents & grandparents to guide you, and help you avoid evil. They have been around a lot longer than you. They not only should know the Word of God better than you, but they have made their share of mistakes, and they don't want you to repeat those mistakes. Furthermore, the Lord has raised up pastors and teachers in His church, that they may instruct us in the Word of God, & warn us of evil.

Someone has well said, "A wise man learns by the experience of others. An ordinary man learns by his own experience. A fool learns from nobody's experience."<sup>3</sup>

So we are to avoid the knowledge of evil, we are to obtain discernment to know the difference between good & evil, and furthermore:

C. We Are to Avoid the Practice of Evil - Satan continues to use the same method that he used in the Garden of Eden. He suggests that God is withholding something from you that will be fun, enjoyable, or even beneficial. He told Eve that if she would just eat the fruit, she would have the knowledge of good & evil. So he peaks your curiosity. He says, "Come on. Try it just once." He knows that usually you will do it again, and again, and again, until you are trapped! One drink of alcohol usually leads to many others. Once you begin premarital sex, you will probably be trapped into continuing it.

Someone has well said, "Sow a thought and reap an action. Sow an action and reap a habit. Sow a habit and reap a character. Sow a character and reap a destiny."

If you are curious about evil, and learn about it, you are much more likely to do it. Then you will reap the consequences. But refuse it, and determine rather to die than to give place to the devil, and there is nothing that can touch you.

If someone who hears these words knows that he has long been defeated by sin and that he had developed evil habits that dominate him, the only one way of deliverance is through Jesus Christ. And so that leads to my last point. In this text of Scripture Paul also shows that:

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<sup>3</sup> Found in <http://www.sermonillustrations.com>.

### III. WE SHOULD LEARN & APPROPRIATE OUR VICTORY OVER EVIL

Paul wrote of this victory in v.20, “And the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet shortly.” Both vv.19 & 20 are an allusion to Gen. 3:1-15. In v.15 God promised that the seed of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. I want to share 4 truths about this victory over evil we can & will have. First of all:

A. The Nature of This Victory – Our ultimate victory over evil has two aspects:

1. Satan Will Be Crushed – The word translated “crush” (*suntribo*), means “to crush, break in pieces, trample underfoot.” The KJV uses “bruise,” probably based on an allusion to Gen. 3:15.<sup>4</sup> But that is too mild of a translation. The day is coming when Satan will not be the victor over us, but rather he will be crushed under our feet.

This reminds me of the days of the Gladiator contests. They would be involved in a life and death struggle. At last one would gain the victory over the other to the point that his opponent would be under his foot as a defeated foe. Even so, we can & will have the ultimate victory over Satan some day, and he will be defeated & crushed under our feet.

What has the power of Satan become since Christ died? Barnhouse tells of a small child occupied with a little toy balloon. When it had no air in it, it was a small thing that could be hidden in the palm of the hand. When it was blown up it was a frightening thing, with a devilish face painted on the side. Suddenly it exploded and all that the child had in his hand was a messy little bit of rubber. The child attempted to stretch this out, but it had lost its power to frighten. It reminded me of what had happened to Satan when Christ died. We can thank God that Satan was effectively put to an open shame, exposed publicly. His overblown balloon burst, leaving him nothing but the messy remains of his grinning pretensions.

2. Peace Will Be Established – Satan is the ultimate cause of all the conflicts, violence, & war in the world. It is God who crushes Satan and establishes peace in contrast with conflict, discord, and division. He is, therefore, the God of peace.

B. The Basis of this Victory – How will this victory come to pass? Here again, this is an echo of Genesis 3:15. And here is an amazing thing. Men first heard the Gospel by overhearing it spoken to Satan. But in this curse upon Satan there is implied all victory and deliverance for man and the glory and the triumph of God. “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Pertinent to our study are the two facts concerning the bruising of Satan’s head and the bruising of Christ’s heel. From that point on the devil tried to kill the line of the Messiah to prevent this from happening. Genesis 3:15 foreshadows the cross, where Christ would be bruised by Satan. On the cross Christ suffered the penalty of sin, and He made possible victory over Satan & evil. The word for “bruise” used in the Garden of Eden is *shuf*, and comes from a primitive root that conveys the idea of an animal leaping on its prey, so the word took on the meaning of bruising, crushing power.

So now Adam learns that he is not to be destroyed but that somehow there is to be a warfare that will end in triumph. Adam believed the promise of deliverance; and turning to his wife, he gave her the title of Eve, mother of all living at a time when she was the mother of no one. It was then that God gave them garments made of the skins of animals. May we suggest that they could well have been the skins of lambs, for it was as the Lamb of God that the seed of the woman would be crushed, and it was from the Lamb of God that they would receive their deliverance?

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<sup>4</sup> A different Gk. word is used in the LXX, but the Hebrew word can be translated “crush.”

So from the first pages of the Bible the double bruising was announced. We come down to the prophecy of Isaiah. Here we see a prophecy that the Messiah would be bruised. In Isa. 53:5 it says, "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him: and with his stripes we are healed." The Hebrew word for "bruised" used in Isaiah is *daka*, which comes from a root meaning to be broken in pieces. The great chapter in Isaiah goes on to say, in v.10, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him.... When You make His soul an offering for sin...." Here the same terrible word for "bruise" is used. We go beyond the hatred of Satan for Christ and on to the greater hatred of God for sin. It was the love of God, incarnate in Christ, paying the debt of sin to the justice of God (Rom.3:26).

Another passage of Scripture regarding the basis of our victory over Satan is found in Colossians 2:14-15. After mentioning the cross in v.14, Paul said of Jesus in v.15, "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." When Christ died on the cross, He took from Satan everything that had been invested in him by God at his creation. He had been the prince of this world. Satan and all those who followed him in his fall were divested of all power and might against God's people, and they continue in their activities only with the waning fury of their rebellion. That is why we read in Rev. 12:11, "They overcame him (Satan) by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony." What Christ did on the cross gave us victory over Satan. That is why we do not fight *for* victory, but we fight *from* victory. So that leads to:

C. The Promise to Share in this Victory - I would expect that Paul would have written this differently. He could have said, "And the God of peace will crush Satan under the feet of Jesus' shortly." Instead, he will be crushed under *our* feet! That means we shall participate in this victory!

But this promise of victory over Satan & evil is not just for the distant future. While total & lasting victory is yet future, we can experience victory over Satan now in this life, for he is already a defeated foe. Whatever our problems and whatever the force of the battle which opposes us, we are assured of the victory. Rom. 8:37 says, "...we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."

In the life and experience of all true believers, Satan is a defeated enemy, and may be so accounted, if we take our true position by faith. That any believer is ever defeated by Satan comes solely from the fact that such a believer has not been willing to reach out and take the power that is available to him. James 4:7 promises, "Resist the devil and he will flee from you." Though Satan would like you to believe that he has the power over you, the fact is, the believer has power over Satan! Resist him, and he will flee. Wouldn't you like to have such power over someone who tries to rob you, or do you harm? Well that power, and that victory over Satan is available to every believer. This victory is not obtain by your own strength, but by virtue of the victory & strength of the Lord. Eph. 6:10 says, "Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might."

Though we can have victory over Satan & evil in this life, we often fail to appropriate the victory Christ has made possible. So I share with you the final truth about our victory. Here in our text we read about:

D. The Consummation of This Victory - Our text is a great announcement of what is to take place at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. At His return we shall be in Him when the kingdoms of this earth shall become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ. And praise God, Satan will be totally defeated. Look over at Rev. 20:1-3, 7-10 (read & expand). What a glorious

day that will be when Satan will be totally defeated, and forever removed from us, and cast in the lake of fire. Now it doesn't say who will cast Satan into the lake of fire, but I believe that Jesus Christ will have the honor of doing so. Though Satan is powerful, Jesus is the Son of God Almighty, and He will have the power to seize him, and cast him into hell, and it will not even be a good fight. Jesus will deliver the knock-out punch in the first round. And all the saints & angels of God will rejoice and praise God.

When will this take place? It will be done "shortly." This is by God's time, not ours. However, that "shortly" is getting very close, I believe. In the meantime they are to be faithful to God.

Conclusion: I have recently read again about World War II and Hitler. Hitler decided that he would conquer the world, and by his scintillating ability to speak, he actually inflamed a nation. Millions of people lacked discernment & were deceived by this evil man. Millions of people followed him into the terrible, terrible World War II. The end came for Hitler and he wound up in a bunker in Berlin where he committed suicide. Before he committed suicide he sent a wire instructing that Goring, his second in command, was to be replaced by Grand Admiral Doenitz. Doenitz wired back these words, "My Fuhrer! My loyalty to you will be unconditional." The fool didn't even know that by the time he sent these words, Hitler was already dead and defeated. He had chosen a loser and didn't even recognize it.

That is exactly what happens when people chose the devil against the Lord Jesus Christ. You have chosen a loser. The battle is all over. The prince of this world is judged. It's just a matter of time. You need to get off the losing side to the victory side. Get off the devil's side onto Jesus' side

How far have you grown? What level have you reached in spiritual development? What victories have you won? From what evils have you turned away? What good have you achieved? The difference between what you are and what you desire to be is the measure of your present opportunity. We were created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God has ordained that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:10). We were predestined to be conformed to the image of God's Son (Rom. 8:29). Go on, become wise to that which is good and leave evil behind you.

Sources: Donald Grey Barnhouse, *Expositions of Bible Doctrines Taking the Epistle to the Romans as a Point of Departure*, vol. 4, "God's Discipline" (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964); F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Hershel Hobbs, *Romans: A Verse by Verse Study* (Waco: Word Books, 1977); Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950 reprint); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); A.T. Robertson, *New Testament Word Pictures*, Vol. IV (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1931, accessed through Online Bible); Jerry Vines (notes from sermon tape of 7/14/74 entitled, "The Origin, Operation, and Overthrow of the Devil"); Kenneth S. Wuest's *Word Studies From the Greek New Testament*, Vol. 1, Romans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1955). No additional material in Corley & Vaughan, Maclaren, McBeth, McGee, & Wiersbe. Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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