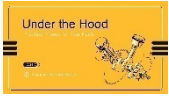


How Do We Avoid Evil?

Under the Hood #6 | August 4, 2024 | 8:00, 9:30, 11:00 AM | Steve Howell



Opening

How big was it? It was the size of a basketball. That's the information you're going to want to know soon. The size of a basketball.



Deb and I had just made a vehicle trade with my parents. Our small Toyota pickup was great, but it didn't have much space in the single-bench cabin to fit a baby carrier. And since Jacob had just been born, we needed a more family-friendly option. My parents offered to drive out to Kentucky and make a trade with us – the pickup for a Ford Taurus. The car wasn't fancy, it wasn't cool, but it was functional...even if it did smell a little weird. We took possession of "Stinky Green" (as we lovingly nicknamed it), loaded the car seat, and made the best of our new vehicle.

The Taurus worked fine, but that unpleasant smell was a constant companion on road trips to Walmart or to work. My parents had known about it, and my dad had previously tried to find the source, but to no avail. He had searched the cabin and the engine with no success. He added cleaning solutions to the vents, but they simply added new weird chemical smells on top of the already old weird smells. We just endured it...

...until the day I took it for an oil change.

I'm better about changing my own oil now, but back in the day it was easier for me to find a quick-change shop to do the work for me. So, I pulled in and asked for an oil change. In typical fashion, they came back and asked if I wanted the air filter changed. I declined, since that part was easy for me to do.

"What about the cabin air filter?"

I gave them a look of interest. "Cabin air filter?"

I remembered my dad saying that he hadn't changed that particular filter, because he just couldn't figure out how to access it on that vehicle. And since YouTube wasn't invented yet, it had remained unchanged since they had owned the car.

"Sure!" I exclaimed. If they knew how to access it, now was a great time to get it done!

They unscrewed a few pieces and opened it up. “What the...?!?” I heard. And then they started pulling stuff out. It wasn’t a filter. It was a rat’s nest! Grass, stuffing, droppings, and who knows what else. Yes, in all its years living on the farm in NW Kansas, rodents had discovered what my dad could not: a way to get into the cabin air filter. And once they were there, they built a nest.

How big was it? The size of a basketball!

It was gross. But it got cleaned out, and shockingly, Stinky Green was suddenly less stinky!

Spiritual Filters



The filters on a car - whether for the cabin, the air, the oil, or the fuel - are supposed to remove impurities that reduce efficiency or that cause harm. They should eliminate contaminants (preferably smaller than a basketball!) and help everything run as it was designed.

What about in your spiritual life? Are you filtering out contaminants that are robbing you of spiritual power? Or do you have a rat’s nest worth of filth that is affecting your faith?

In our current sermon series (“Under the Hood”) we’ve been trying to identify practical ways that we can improve as followers of Jesus. We’ve been looking at *specific, real-world* steps we can take to gain practical power in our faith.

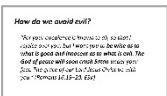
So far, we’ve addressed:

- Listening to God
- Building Unity
- Following Imperfect People
- Loving God
- Knowing Truth

For each topic, we’ve identified five actions we could take that would help us improve. Today, we’ll do the same for spiritual contaminants.

How do we avoid evil? More specifically, how do we filter out things that cause harm so you and I can pursue purity?

Before we get to the practical actions, let’s set a baseline for what we’ll discuss. Here’s our goal, out of the book of Romans:



“For your obedience is known to all, so that I rejoice over you, but I want you to be wise as to what is good and innocent as to what is evil. The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.”
(Romans 16:19–20, ESV)

Romans 16:19-20 is our baseline goal (*and if you know the song that goes with it, I apologize that it will be going through your head the entire morning!*). Remember these three parts:

1. Be excellent at what is good
2. Be innocent of evil
3. God will soon crush Satan!

Let's talk about each one a little more before we get to the practical tips.

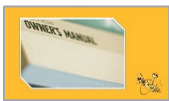


Be Excellent at What is Good

Spiritual Fitness

"...be wise as to what is good..." (Romans 16:19)

On one side of the purity coin, we must focus on pursuing good things. And the best illustration I can think of can be found in the glovebox of a different car we own.



In our Buick, we have the original owner's manual from the person who bought the car new. It was clearly an older woman, based on her handwriting in the book. Never before have I seen someone take notes in the owner's manual. I'm not talking about recording the miles when work was performed...I'm talking about instructions that are underlined and circled! This woman read the manual, and she took notes! She made sure that every "best practice" for the car was highlighted and that every scheduled maintenance was completed!

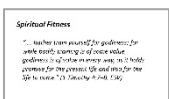
Why? She wanted to take care of the car properly.

If you do what is right, you'll have good results!



Plenty of people try to do this with their physical body. They calculate the ideal amount of nutrient and calorie needs, and they meet all the recommended exercise requirements. They try to be "fit" and make sure their body works like it should. Rather than trying to fix a problem in the ER, they try to fix the problems before they even start.

That's a great goal for your body. But it's an even better goal for your soul! The goal of the Christian must be spiritual fitness.



".... Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come." (1 Timothy 4:7-8, ESV)

Are you striving to be spiritually fit? Or are you just trying to get by with the bare minimum...or are you in need of a trip to the ER?

Singular Focus

Jesus painted a picture of the desire we *should* have for godliness and for His Kingdom. In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells two short stories that share the same truth:



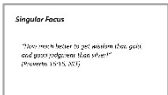
“The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

“Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it.”
(Matthew 13:44–46, ESV)

What do those stories have in common?

1. They feature an **item of great value** (a hidden treasure, a pearl).
2. They show a person who is willing to **give up everything else** for that item.

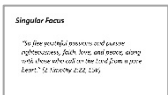
These men are singularly focused! They recognize the value of that item they found, and they know that it is better than any other possession they have. Of course, the spiritual correlation is that you and I have a spiritual treasure that is of far more worth!



“How much better to get wisdom than gold, and good judgment than silver!”
(Proverbs 16:16, NLT)

Do you believe that? Olympic athletes dedicate their entire life to pursuing a medal, because they want to be excellent. Can you dedicate your entire life to the pursuit of God? To the cultivation of a character that reflects His?

Paul advises his readers in the city of Rome to “be wise as to what is good.” They are to *know* good things, inside and out. They are to live a lifestyle that prioritizes Jesus. Paul puts it this way in a different letter:



“So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” (2 Timothy 2:22, ESV)

We need to walk in the light. We need to obey the truth. We need to pursue spiritual excellence and purity together!



Be Innocent of Evil

But, we also need to be “innocent of evil.” (Romans 16:19)

Knowing Too Much

On the other side of the purity coin, we must focus on avoiding evil things. Our task isn’t just to do the right things; it is to escape the wrong things.

“Innocence” is going to be tough, though, because ***we know too much about evil.***

In the news, you might have heard an example of states trying to help people stay “innocent of evil.”



A total of 16 states have now approved legislation requiring pornographic websites to ask their users to prove that they are over 18 years old. The following states have passed, or have agreed to pass, age restriction laws—Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, Utah and Virginia.

Each state features its own version of the age verification law, but the principle is similar across all of them.

In Kansas, which passed its law to go into effect on July 1, websites with material that is deemed "harmful to minors" on at least 25 percent of its pages have to verify a user's age with a database or age-verification technology approved by the state's Attorney General's Office.

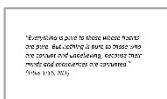
That’s a great step in the right direction to help keep kids from stumbling into (or purposefully trying to find) sexual wickedness.



But at the same time we are protecting these kids from exposure to evil, we’re also advertising the #1 movie in the world – *Deadpool vs Wolverine*. A review from Focus on the Family’s *Plugged In* website shares some of the content you can expect to see if you watch the movie:

“Deadpool & Wolverine shamelessly embraces a nonstop stream of raunchy, [crude], and sexually suggestive humor, the likes of which Disney has never seen. These jokes include references to child predators, STDs, same-sex encounters, all forms of sex and crass descriptions of human anatomical features. Over and over and over again.”¹

The same kids we’re supposedly protecting on one side are the same kids we’re targeting on another (*and, yes, I know it’s technically an R-rated film, so kids aren’t the official audience...but we both know that 13-year-old boys and younger are going to watch*).



“Everything is pure to those whose hearts are pure. But nothing is pure to those who are corrupt and unbelieving, because their minds and consciences are corrupted.” (Titus 1:15, NLT)

Our world...our church...is far too familiar with the corrupt! How than can we be “innocent” of evil?

¹ <https://www.pluggedin.com/movie-reviews/deadpool-and-wolverine-2024/>

Reclaiming Holiness

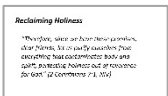
I know *you* can't undo all the evil you know. But God can and does create innocence and holiness in us again. And he does it through **His character**, not through our normal motivations.



“As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”” (1 Peter 1:14–16, NIV)

God doesn't say “be holy” because it's in the rulebook. God doesn't say “be holy” because you'll mess up His reputation if you aren't. God says to “be holy, because *I am holy*.” He shifts the motivation from *legalism* to *love*.

The more we truly love God, the more we will choose to do things in line with innocence again. We will choose to live set apart, to live differently, to live blamelessly because our relationship with Him is built on respect and reverence.



“Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness [WHY?] out of reverence for God.” (2 Corinthians 7:1, NIV)

When we love and revere God, we will choose purity over lust; we will choose silence over gossip; we will choose honesty over lies; we will choose generosity over greed; we will choose peace over violence. We will do those things instinctively, because it matters to Him and He matters to us.

This is what Christians call “sanctification” – a life that continues to grow closer to God with our heart, mind, soul, and strength. The *knowledge* we have of evil may still be intellectually present, but our hearts will gain innocence as God empowers us to ignore those old desires.



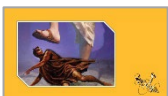
God Will Soon Crush Satan

How will we avoid evil?

On the one side, we will pursue what is good. On the other side, we won't pursue what is wrong. But Romans 16:20 reminds us of a third helpful truth:

*“The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet.”*²
(Romans 16:19–20, ESV)

Sin has a shelf life! It will go away!



Satan soon will be defeated. His future is destruction, and that is a promise of God (Revelation 20). The sins you struggle with now will not tempt you after Jesus returns!

² Huah!!!!

You will not be tempted by your biggest appetites! You will not be plagued by your biggest fears! You will not be haunted by your biggest worries! You will not be mastered by your biggest addictions!



“And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.” (1 John 2:17, ESV)

You have an eternity of purity ahead of you. So, your participation in avoiding evil now is just a warm-up for the lifestyle that you will master through Jesus in just a few short years (or decades, or days!).



Practical Ways to Avoid Evil

1. Be excellent at what is good.
2. Be innocent of evil.
3. God will soon crush Satan!

Those are the goals. Now, how do we get there?

For each topic in this series, we’ve identified five actions that could help us improve and grow in our faith. Now, let’s do the same for our spiritual filters.

How can we get rid of spiritual contaminates? How do we avoid evil?

More specifically, how do we filter out things that cause harm so you and I can pursue purity? There is no shortage of ideas, but I’ll limit it to these first five.

Are you ready?



1. Make a “Then What?” List.

You know the evil you are tempted to do. Satan can often give you very specific desires or lusts that you can barely fight back (an old flame to call up, a specific drink that would derail your sobriety, a snappy comeback that would cut to the bone). Instead of expending the energy to fight that single temptation, let it play out in your head...realistically. Make a list of what happens next (*ex: You say the insult out loud, your boss gets mad, you lose your job, you can’t pay rent, and you struggle to get a different job because of your reputation as a loose cannon*).

Scriptural Foundation: *“Temptation comes from our own desires, which entice us and drag us away. These desires give birth to sinful actions. And when sin is allowed to grow, it gives birth to death.” (James 1:14–15, NLT)*

Why it Works: When you think past the initial (assumed) pleasure of that seemingly insignificant sin, you see it in the light of day and recognize it in all its ugliness. The pull of that sin becomes less tempting when you realize the full cost – for instance, that it’s not just gaining a kiss, but it’s losing a marriage and losing custody of your kids.



2. *Pay the Swear Jar.*

You know what a “swear jar” is, right? Every time someone says a curse word, they’re supposed to put in a dollar. (I’ve even seen some that have a sliding scale depending on the word you use). Make a jar of your own and pay attention as it fills up. If you struggle with alcoholism, maybe you have a “drink jar;” or if you struggle with telling the truth, maybe you have a “liar, liar, pants on fire jar.”

Scriptural Foundation: *“How many are my iniquities and my sins? Make me know my transgression and my sin.”* (Job 13:23, ESV)

Why it Works: The jar is usually a lighthearted reminder to others that you don’t love off-color language. But it can also serve as a visual reminder of how much a different sin has a hold on you. The pace at which the jar fills may help you recognize how much this issue is impacting your life!

Alternatively: Instead of tracking your failures, you can also make the jar more positive (ex: put in a dollar for every day that you kept your temper in check).



3. *Open the Blinds.*

Take your deeds out of darkness...literally! Open the windows and conduct your business out where everything is visible. Allow people to see into your life. It might be a literal blind so others can readily see what show you are watching on TV. Or it might be a figurative open blind – a commitment to transparency (e.g. Having open communication with your spouse so that they can look at your phone anytime they ask, or so they can look at the checking account without secrets).

Scriptural Foundation: *“Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of the things that they do in secret. But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible, for anything that becomes visible is light. Therefore it says, “Awake, O sleeper, and arise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you.””* (Ephesians 5:11–14, ESV)

Why it Works: If your sin won’t stay hidden, you won’t be as likely to engage in it. Living a transparent lifestyle will provide extra accountability to help you be excellent at what is good.



4. *Share One Hour of Conversation with a Christian Friend Weekly.*

Set a standing time when you can get together with a friend on the phone, over dinner, or just hanging out in the garage watching the Royals game. Then talk about life...including your spiritual life. Talk about the joys and the struggles honestly.

Scriptural Foundation: *“He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love.”* (Ephesians 4:16, NLT)

Why it Works: The Rule of St. Augustine says, “Whenever you go out, walk together, and when you reach your destination, stay together.”³ We need examples to follow and friends to help us grow and to be an additional filter for our behavior. But that only happens when you make time. The person you sit next to in service can help to a certain degree, but most of us will only be honest about our temptations or our rebukes when they truly become “our people” in the church. Invest in becoming that person to others; allow others to be that person to you.



5. *Think Less of Yourself.*

I don't mean to think poorly of yourself; I mean don't think about yourself as much or as often. Put the focus on other people instead of worrying about your own wants.

Scriptural Foundation: “Pure and genuine religion in the sight of God the Father means caring for orphans and widows in their distress and refusing to let the world corrupt you.” (James 1:27, NLT)

Why it Works: You never lose your temper for the benefit of others. You never steal from others to help their bottom line. You never disobey your parents to make their life easier. When you think about others, you lose many of the motivations to sin in the first place. It's not that evil is less tempting – it's just that you don't have time for it! So, focus on the needs of others. Be excellent at caring for them and you'll find you're caring for yourself at the same time.

Closing



If you've been bothered by the amount of filth in your life, it's not too late to filter it out. Even if it's the size of a basketball!

You *can* do the right things; you *can* avoid the wrong things. And if you filter that wickedness out of your life, everything will work so much better for you and for the church.



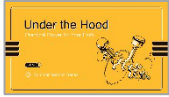
But remember the source of this change. It's not *you*. It's Jesus.

- **He** died on the cross for your sins.
- **He** gained victory of Satan.
- **He** is making you more holy.
- **He** gave the Holy Spirit to empower your change.

Don't for a second think that you can filter out the filth by yourself.

Remember, your cleansing only comes from Christ!

³ Quoted in *The Common Rule* by Justin Whitmel Earley p. 95



Prayer

Let's prayer...and as we pray, I would like to pray the words of **Philippians 1:9-11** over you this morning:

Father,

I pray that the love shown by the people of Tonganoxie Christian Church will overflow more and more.

I pray that we will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding, so that we understand what really matters.

*I pray that each person here may live **pure and blameless** lives until the day of Christ's return.*

Fill us with the fruit of our salvation—the righteous character produced in our lives by Jesus Christ—for this will bring much glory and praise to You, O God.

It is in Jesus name we pray...AMEN.

Invitation

If you need help with any of these specific, real-world actions we talked about today...

If you are struggling with temptation and evil in your life...

If you need a Savior to help you overcome the death grip that sin has in your life...

Then, we invite you to come forward during our song of invitation. Allow us to pray for you and with you as you surrender these things to Jesus.

Please come to the front and meet me while we stand and sing.

Prayer Requests

Notes

Be Excellent at What is Good (Romans 16:19)

Spiritual Fitness (1 Timothy 4:7–8)

Singular Focus (Matthew 13:44–46; Proverbs 16:16;
2 Timothy 2:22)

Be Innocent of Evil (Romans 16:19)

Knowing Too Much (Titus 1:15)

Reclaiming Holiness (1 Peter 1:14–16; 2 Corinthians 7:1)

God Will Soon Crush Satan (Romans 16:20)

(1 John 2:17)

Practical Ways to Avoid Evil

- 1. Make a “Then What?” List.** (James 1:14–15)
- 2. Pay the Swear Jar.** (Job 13:23)
- 3. Open the Blinds.** (Ephesians 5:11–14)
- 4. Share One Hour of Conversation with a Christian Friend Weekly.**
(Ephesians 4:16)
- 5. Think Less of Yourself.** (James 1:27)

Discussion Questions

Use the following questions based on today's sermon as a starting point for spiritual discussions with your family or a small group of Christian friends this week.

Fellowship—Relationship with a Purpose

- Pick a favorite movie or book or album that you enjoy. How much different would it be if all the evil was filtered out of it? Would it be as enjoyable? How does your answer reflect your own heart?

Growth—Thinking About Spiritual Matters

- How would you define “purity” when it comes to spiritual matters?
- Who are the biggest influences in your life that drive you to be spiritually pure?
- Read 1 Timothy 4:7–8. Why is cleaning up your spiritual health more important than cleaning up your physical health?
- If a friend asked for Biblical guidance on how to avoid falling to temptations, where would you have them read? Write your answers on a sticky note and put it in your wallet for future reference.
- How do the people in your daily life (family, coworkers) impact your purity? Do they encourage it or make it a challenge? Why?
- What should be our motivation for avoiding evil and pursuing good? Read 1 Peter 1:14–16.
- How could you help protect others in the church from sin?
- Which of the five “practical” steps in the sermon notes* are you most likely to use? Why did you choose that answer?
 - * *Answers to the blanks under “Practical Ways to Avoid Evil”:*
1. Then What; 2. Swear; 3. Blinds; 4: Conversation; 5: Yourself.
- Brainstorm three more actions that could improve the way you pursue purity.

Prayer – Taking Your Thoughts to God

- Ask God to cleanse the hearts and minds of our church members, and for Him to guard us against the evil messages and influences that bombard us daily.