

The Realm of Good and Evil

“Christ’s love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again” (2 Corinthians 5:14,15).

“Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is, the devil, and free those who all their lives were held in slavery” (Hebrews 2: 14,15). “[T]he Son of God appeared for this purpose: to destroy the works of the devil” (1 Jn 3:8).

In addition to the world we live in, the one we experience, the one we know thru our senses, there exists another realm. It’s invisible to us, but it’s there. It’s a spiritual realm, and the only way we can know of it is by knowing Scripture. It’s a reality we need to know about because it affects us deeply. This parallel, co-existing realm is *exceedingly* important to us. It’s a realm characterized by good or by evil.

Evil is not an abstract moral concept. It’s real, it exists. It’s a force that empowers and controls conscious, willful beings. So Satan and his vast horde of minions and demons. Good also exists. It’s the Person of God. Good is not a moral entity external to God; it’s not something that God *has*. Good, rather, is a characteristic or attribute of God. It’s His nature to be and to express good. Good is real also, it exists; except that it’s not a force, but the Person of God Himself. We can experience good by being in the presence of God or by encountering God’s goodness in His Word.

God created this physical world and made us to be embodied persons not only to live and act in this physical creation but in order to personally experience good or evil. The test God put to Adam in the Garden was to choose one or the other, good or evil. How? By obeying God, or not. There was nothing magical or intrinsically moral about that one tree in the middle of the Garden. Good is honoring God by obeying Him. Evil dishonors Him by disobeying Him. So, Adam disobeyed. And all Adam’s offspring, that is, the entire human race, is under condemnation for participating in that disobedience. All humanity has chosen to be on the side of evil. All humanity is not only controlled by, but enslaved to evil. **“The whole world lieth in the evil One”** (1 John 5:19b). We call it sin.

Sin is an overwhelming force that pervades our being and makes us odious, offensive to, and alienated from a holy God. We sin because we want to; we sin because it pleases us. We sin because we don’t desire to know or to be with God, who is only good. In perfect justice, evil demands condemnation. And the judgment that God has already decreed is to spend eternity separated from Him in a place of punishment, i.e., in hell.

Reflect deeply on this, because the world that we know, this physical realm that we now experience, is transitory. We’re in this world, in this present existence, to test us. The test is whether we choose to be on the side of evil, or on the side of good. Our response to the test determines whether we’ll spend the next existence, which is eternal, either in the presence of God or in hell.

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Good overwhelms evil. Good defeats the power of evil. God’s goodness manifests itself as love, as mercy, as forgiveness of sin, as the intent to bless those who don’t deserve it. So God himself, in love, in the Person of Jesus, humbly condescended to be embodied with a human nature and so enter this sin-infested physical world. And as a human, He did what all humanity would not do, He obeyed God, even though it meant great suffering and loss. Jesus is God, and He revealed God’s infinite goodness in real life, in real time and space. He took upon himself the sin and guilt of a condemned humanity. Jesus’ sinless life and agonizing, atoning death

on a hideous Roman cross make available to us deliverance from the power of sin and deliverance from the condemnation due to sin and from a deserved hell.

Because Jesus is deity, He rose from the dead and returned to heaven, where He enables us by His Spirit to live the rest of our lives on the side of good. Understanding who He is and what He did for us, we are grateful to Jesus, we love Him, and we identify with Him. And by obeying Jesus' commands and teachings in the Bible, we reveal that we're on the side of good. We reveal God to an indifferent world.

Jesus reveals the invisible God. He expresses God's infinite goodness and love. He is lovely beyond comprehension. We can know Him from the Scriptures, and we can love Him. And if we do, we show our gratitude and love by repenting of sin, that is, eschewing all manner of sin and evil, and choose instead to pursue the life of good as it's revealed in Scripture, regardless what sacrifices or losses we suffer as a result of being obedient to Him. Let's get this: Jesus saves us *so that* we live out God's goodness. To profess belief in Jesus without actually living the life of good that's revealed in the Bible dishonors Jesus; it heaps contempt on His atoning work; it takes the side of evil.

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Almost all Christians today suppose that, based on John 3:16, the great creational purpose of God is the redemption of fallen humanity. Other texts, however, as well as reflection on the canon as a whole, compellingly suggest that God has other more cosmic purposes, and that redemption may, in fact, be subsidiary to them. Scripture from Genesis 3:15 on reveals that one of God's great purposes in creating this world (and perhaps it's the main purpose) is the defeat of evil.

That's why at the very onset of history, that first human couple was put to a test. Yes, the failed test created the necessity for redemption, but the greater issue at that episode was vicious spiritual warfare. The serpent's wicked attack was directed not at the woman, nor even at the man, but at God. Filled with contempt for God, Satan hoped that God would, in perfect justice, necessarily annihilate these disobedient human images of Himself. But if not, Satan still would have humanity in his control to use to embarrass and taunt God. Embodying pure evil, Satan despised God. And God allowed it so that, as His great mission progressed thru history, the Son would glorify the Father by defeating all evil.

The foundational passage for salvation is the test put to Israel in Deuteronomy 30, **"I set before you this day life and good, death and evil. For I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and prosper and God will bless you . . . But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient . . . I declare to you this day that you will be destroyed . . . I set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life . . . For the Lord is your life."** Let's observe that in the wisdom of God, good, life, blessings, the love of God and obedience to Him are all tightly joined together. This reprises that test in the Garden. But it does more: It establishes the absolute necessity for anyone who desires eternal life and blessing to be obedient to God's Word and so to live the life of God's good. Jesus makes it possible for us to do it. It's how we glorify God.

Life in God's physical creation is intensely moral. There exists no neutral stance. We take the side of good by identifying with Christ Jesus and then living out His Person and doing His will. Or not.

Dear Reader: The great question we all face is, How do we respond to God's goodness? The answer is, By how we live. We're not here to live according to our own values, ideals, and desires, which are inherently evil, but according to God's goodness. There is only one way to do that and it's by obeying Christ Jesus because of love for Him. For it to be real, believing in Christ must result in a changed life, a life that radiates the beauty and goodness of the One who dwells within.