



"Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power."

—Abraham Lincoln

27-May-05

## Jedi Versus Sith

While on vacation in Southern California with my family, we were able to attend a first-day showing of *Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith*. It was entertaining in the usual George Lucas, explosive-special-effects way, and this episode's plot answered most of the lingering questions fans of the Star Wars double-trilogy had. In the film, Lucas depicts the decline and fall of young Anakin Skywalker, who becomes Darth Vader, the dreaded villain of the original Star Wars trilogy (Episodes IV through VI). His downfall takes him from being perhaps the most powerful Jedi, using the Force for good, to being the still very powerful junior member of a Sith duo, practitioners of the Dark Side.

At one point in the film, Skywalker himself explains the difference between a Jedi and a Sith. The Jedi use their powers for the good of others, while the Sith employ theirs to bring about their selfish ends. While the Jedi and Sith are not in any way Christian figures, they represent the classic difference between good and evil. Those who are good put their own desires aside to work for the betterment of others or for society, while the evil undertake schemes and stratagems to amass for themselves. As Herbert Armstrong put it so simply, this is the way of give versus the way of get - the way of [God](#) as

opposed to the way of [Satan](#) the Devil - the way of outgoing concern against the way of selfishness. It is choosing the Tree of Life in opposition to choosing the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Having strayed from the narrow, difficult, selfless path of the Jedi, Anakin takes the broad way that leads to destruction ([Matthew 7:13](#)). His hubris in thinking he could find a way to forestall death - to save his wife's life - causes him to see events through a narrow prism of selfishness, and forces him to make terrible, escalating, life-altering decisions that place him squarely on the side of evil. By the film's end, he is no longer a man but a monster - and his wife dies anyway.

Literature is full of falls from grace, men making Faustian bargains in exchange for power, wealth, victory, or some other desire of their hearts. Lately, the trend of these stories has been to redeem the fallen hero with a deathbed [repentance](#), much like the ultimate destiny of Anakin Skywalker /Darth Vader, whom his son Luke "saves" in Episode VI. On the other hand, J.R.R. Tolkien in *The Lord of the Rings* far more realistically sends a similar character, Saruman, to his doom unrepentant. Tolkien, a devout Catholic and Oxford don who was well-read in Christian and Classical literature, had a better perspective on man's heart of darkness ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)) than does George Lucas, who leans more toward the mystical Eastern philosophies, which see the human heart as ultimately good.

Nevertheless, we can learn a few true, spiritual truths from Lucas' treatment of Anakin Skywalker, particularly about probably the most dangerous attitude of all: selfish pride or selfish ambition (see [Philippians 2:3](#); [James 3:14-16](#)). This is the attitude Satan and Vader share and which blinds them both to their folly. Both start from positions of tremendous power and awesome potential but are not satisfied with what they have - both want more for themselves. Their discontent with their positions drives them to rash acts, though both probably have what they feel are valid justifications for their actions. Satan probably believed he could govern the universe just as well as God - if not better ([Isaiah 14:13-14](#)), while Vader's seemingly more complex motives boil down to the same thing: He wants to control everything around him.

Both villains meet with similar fates. The Covering Cherub is thrown down in ignominious defeat ([Ezekiel 28:16](#)) and restrained in power ([Jude 6](#)), becoming the terrible Satan, enemy of God and man. The Chosen One, prophesied to bring balance to the Force, is also cut down, hideously burned, three of his limbs severed, able to survive only through artificial means. What is more, from that time forward both wage unrelenting war on anything "good."

What lessons can we learn from this film?

1. The end does not justify the means. Just as good fruit cannot be produced from a bad tree ([Matthew 7:18](#)), good outcomes cannot result from evil deeds (see [Romans 6:1-2](#), 12-14, 21, 23).
2. "Evil company corrupts good habits" ([I Corinthians 15:33](#)). Those with whom a person frequently fellowships have great influence on his thoughts, words, and deeds. Running with a bad crowd eventually makes one bad too ([Proverbs 1:10-19](#)).
3. Power corrupts if it is not constrained by even more powerful morals and ethics ([Deuteronomy 17:14-20](#)). God is all-powerful, but in His hands it is wielded with justice, mercy, and equity because He lives by the law of [love](#) ([I John 4:8](#), 16), which is given to us in the principles of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20; Deuteronomy 5; see [Matthew 22:36-40](#)).
4. A person can fall from grace ([Matthew 3:12](#); [John 15:6](#); [Hebrews 6:4-8](#); [10:26-31](#)). There is no such thing as [eternal security](#); one's salvation is conditional - if he continues to live God's way of life (see [Colossians 1:21-23](#)). No matter what one's potential, he must be constantly vigilant to reject evil and do good, or he will stumble and perhaps fall.
5. There are no shortcuts to eternal life. There is only one way to immortality, and that is through [Jesus Christ](#) ([Acts 4:12](#); [Romans 5:21](#); [6:23](#); [I John 5:20](#)). All other ways end in death.

There are doubtless many more lessons that we can learn from this iconic movie. Though we may joke about going over to the Dark Side, for [Christians](#) the struggle against it is a reality. As Paul writes in [Romans 13:12](#): "The night is far spent, the day is at hand. Therefore let us cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armor of light."

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[The Right Use of Power](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Of all creation, man is the only creature made in God's image and given dominion over the rest of creation. When God breathed in the spirit of man (Genesis 2:7) to enable thinking, feeling, and creating, He imbued God-like characteristics, giving mankind the capability of subduing, controlling, and directing the rest of creation—a power not given to animals (Genesis 1:26, 28). With dominion comes responsibility to maintain (Genesis 2:15). The sad history of mankind shows that he has badly mismanaged his power, bringing about disease, war, and famine. Such people will be brought into account (Revelation 11:18). God's Spirit enables us to direct this power in a responsible, godly manner.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Pride, Contention, and Unity](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

The sin of pride underlies many of our other sins, and it is often the reason for the contentions we get into as brethren. John Ritenbaugh looks at the origins of pride and shows how it manifests itself in us.

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