



"The renewal of our natures is a work of great importance. It is not to be done in a day. We have not only a new house to build up, but an old one to pull down."
—George Whitefield

10-Sep-10

Evil Is Real (Part Three)

Part Two began to explore the subject of carnality. When we are first born, our nature is essentially neutral, not having been affected one way or the other by outside influences. At birth, then, we are a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate. However, because we are clothed in flesh, with all of its needs and desires, we have a tendency toward evil, toward self-satisfaction and sheer selfishness. We humans generally do not want our flesh to be denied what we feel are necessary things—and what we believe is "necessary" varies with the individual.

By the time that we begin to think rationally and logically, we already have at least one foot on the evil side because human nature has begun to pull us in that direction. For all intents and purposes, a young child is helpless, so his parents or other caregivers find themselves constantly meeting his needs from food to hygiene to entertainment as soon as he cries. As children, then, we learn to fulfill the desires of our flesh. Thus, the apostle Paul teaches in [Romans 7:14](#) that carnal human beings tend to sell out to evil.

In [Matthew 7:11](#), part of the [Sermon on the Mount](#), we receive a smack between the eyes, so to speak, from our Savior. Speaking to His disciples, Jesus says, "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him!" We might feel slightly better about being called "evil" by our Lord if He had used the general Greek word for "bad," *kakos*, here, but sadly, He did not. Of course, He uses *poneros*, suggesting active, rebellious evil, as in the kind [Satan](#) does. Jesus does not pull His punches but matter-of-factly informs us that we are fundamentally wicked and depraved. The evil He spies in us is morally corrupt and in opposition to [God](#).

Christ uses our evil nature as an example to contrast the [goodness](#) of God, who always gives good things. We are shown to be on one end of the moral spectrum as being evil—comparable to Satan, who is the quintessence of evil. At the far other end is God, who is transcendentally and eternally good. Jesus concludes that between these two extremes there is little, if any, commonality—except that every once in a while, despite being evil, we condescend to do something good for our children.

Jesus' statement dovetails with what happened in the Garden of Eden. God instructed Adam and Eve not to take of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil ([Genesis 2:16-17](#)), which represented the full range of moral choice. We know that our first parents indeed took and ate of that forbidden tree, and ever since, with the exception of [Jesus Christ](#), each individual among mankind has repeated the same process. In doing so, we have given ourselves permission to experience life through trial and error and then decide what is good and evil. Rather than teach us wisdom, as the serpent promised ([Genesis 3:5-6](#)), this course of action has fixed us on the debit side of the ledger—under the curse of sin—because our nature tends toward doing evil. As Paul declares in [Romans 3:10](#), 23, "'There is none righteous, no, not one;' . . . for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

This is not very encouraging, is it? Yet, these are the plain words of Scripture. Despite repenting and learning the truth, we Christians are a mixed bag, having a nature with a tendency towards evil and rebellion against God, but also divinely called ([John 6:44](#)), given the Holy Spirit, and presented with the challenge to move from the evil side to the good side. In addition, though God has forgiven our past sins, we still carry with us a great deal of baggage from sinful things that we have done along the way. To complete His challenge to transform from evil to good, we are charged by God to overcome these difficult obstacles.

How aware are we of the evil within? Do we acknowledge, as Paul does, that evil is still present within us? Years ago, the cartoon character Pogo said in a comic strip, "We have found the enemy, and the enemy is us." How true that is spiritually. It is primarily the evil in us that we must recognize, face, and overcome if we are to grow in the image of Jesus Christ.

Without doubt, there is evil in [the world](#). The world is composed of sinful people just like us—worse, they are unconverted, never having been offered the opportunity to be redeemed from the enslavement of [sin](#). In this way, the evils that exist in the world, being so raw and blatant, are obvious and avoidable. It is quite easy to hear the news of a murder and see it as evil, and most of us are not the murdering type, so we find it easy to avoid this form of wickedness. In the end, the evils of the world are far down the list of our concerns because we lack the wisdom and power to change them. Ultimately—and realistically—we cannot do anything about them, except perhaps to be an example of goodness in a sin-blighted world. Our best play is to keep these evils from touching or tempting us and to overcome those that remain in us.

In the same vein, we cannot change Satan and the evils he inspires. Our Savior has already defeated him, and his doom is sealed. True, he still has power to influence us to disobey God, so we are called as soldiers to "resist him, steadfast in the [faith](#)" ([1 Peter 5:9](#)). But we fight Satan, not by frontal assault, but by indomitably defending our ground ([Ephesians 6:10-13](#)), and we accomplish this by avoiding temptation, doing good as we are able, and overcoming the evils within. It comes back to recognizing and fighting internal sin.

What is our spiritual duty? Notice what Jesus says in [Mark 7:14-16](#):

When He had called all the multitude to Himself, He said to them, "Hear Me, everyone, and understand. There is nothing that enters a man from outside which can defile him; but the things which come out of him, those are the things that defile a man. If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear!"

What is Jesus trying to tell us? "Work on yourself!" He advises. The evils that we have to recognize, face down, and obliterate are *inside*. They are the defiling sins that spring from our "deceitful . . . and

desperately wicked" heart ([Jeremiah 17:9](#)). If we really want to clean up society and deny Satan victory over us, our job is to root out the evils within.

Jesus explains what His teaching means in a private discussion with His disciples:

What comes out of a man, that defiles a man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, [covetousness](#), wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a man. ([Mark 7:20-23](#))

That the sins that defile us are generated from inside is a point He wants us to acknowledge, for He mentions this fact three times in seven verses. The evils that we have been called to fight and subdue are what we conceive, nurture, and express from within—the evils that we see when we look in the mirror. Do we have ears to hear our Savior?

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[How the Human Mind Shapes What We Believe](#)

by Martin G. Collins

Martin Collins, observing that our society has determined that everyone's opinion is of equal value? regardless of how ridiculous and sinful it is, identifies 13 fallacious reasoning patterns to which we can all fall prey. These twisted thinking patterns are seen in a number of incidents recorded throughout the Bible as well as in our daily lives. As we, through the power of God's Holy Spirit and the mind of Christ, continue to grow in godly knowledge, we should learn to recognize and guard against these deceptive thought patterns (or anything else that exalts itself against the knowledge of God) displacing them with godly wisdom- pure, peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy (James 3:17), in short, taking on the divine nature of God.

From the Archives: Featured Article

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by Mike Ford

Peter describes Satan as "like a roaring lion." What made him make this comparison? Mike Ford shows that Peter's choice of predator is a very apt analogy of our Adversary.

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