

Identifying Destruction

by Pastor Marty

Several years ago, I heard a description of evil that interested me. It was a new way for Christians to answer the old question, “If God is both good and omnipotent, How can there be evil in the world?” The two facts seem contrary. Some Christians find solace in a Platonic view of God, who ignores present suffering by looking at the big picture. The end justifies the means: God allows evil in order to fulfill a bigger cosmic endgame. There is some truth in this view: God does wait for the lost to be saved because He does not want any to perish. However, God is not “unmoved” by the pain of His creation, and He never ignores evil. We must evaluate this view with the reality of a God so moved by love that He takes all that pain—past, present, and future—into Himself on the cross. However, others find that answer unsatisfying. They point out that God gave us free will when He created us—a gift He will not take away. Evil is a result of our choices, not His. There is truth in this view. Jesus defined blasphemy as ascribing evil to God, and Scripture says God could never will evil to occur. However, this view also has to be revised by the realization that God is able to intercede supernaturally in this world. God is not even remotely Deist; He is ready and willing to answer when we, the Church, pray in faith. Still, many Christians are unsatisfied with either answer, finding them both insufficient. Thus, a new one has recently come into play: evil does not actually exist. We know darkness does not exist; “dark” is a term we use to describe the absence of light. Similarly, coldness does not actually exist; “cold” is just the term we use to describe an absence of heat. In the same way, evil does not exist; “evil” is the term we use to describe an absence of good (God’s Presence).

Evil does not actually exist; evil is only an absence of good—of God’s Presence.

When I first heard this answer, I thought it had potential. Being scientifically minded, it made sense to me. If we can understand “evil” as a term that denotes the absence of good, it completely negates the issue of how evil could come into existence in a world created by a God who is perfect, good, and omnipotent. It even provides some response to the question of why God lets bad things to happen (albeit, only minimally). Overall, it really seems like a relatively good apologetic. However, there was something I knew about the nature of evil that I could not shake, and it did not quite fit in with this explanation. As I thought about it, I began to realize there was a major fallacy hidden in this explanation. Now, I’m not saying there is no truth in the statement; however, there is an implication that makes it both dangerous and harmful. The harm of false teaching or heresy is directly proportional to how much truth is tainted with a well-hidden lie. In other words, a big lie is easy to spit out, but a few drops of “Lie #5” in a truth casserole may be hard to notice.

The smaller the lie hidden in a larger truth, the harder it may be to recognize.

Before we look at the lie implicit in the premise, we need to recognize what it says that is true. In this context, there is a great deal of evil in the world, and it is primarily due to a lack of God’s Presence. Now, you may ask, “God is omnipresent, so how can there be any lack of His presence?” It comes down whether we read Bible verses in isolation or in the context of the entire Word of God. In the Old Testament, God said He searched to and fro across the earth, seeking those who would do His works. There are times when He says nobody could be found. What we see in these verses is that God intends for His works to be done through His people—not on His own. We must remember the verse,

“The earth He has given to the sons men.” We may not like it, but God will rarely trespass and impose His will on His creation. The prophets describe a time when God’s Presence will cover the earth as the waters cover the seas. They would not prophesy this for the future if it was already true of the present. Paul tells us that we are the body of Christ, His hands and feet. The feet go where their work needs to be done, and the hands do the work. This is also why it says that good works are prepared for us to do—because we, God’s people, are meant to do them. Even Jesus knew this, for he taught His disciples to pray for God’s will to be done on earth as it is in heaven. Clearly, this means His will is not automatically being done on the earth. God is waiting for us. There is an old proverb that “evil prospers when good men do nothing.” To a very large extent, evil is rampant in the world because good is not being done.

To a significant extent, evil is rampant in our world due to a scarcity of good.

Of course, I’m not saying that we can do so much good that evil is eradicated from the earth; that will only occur when Jesus returns. However, we are responsible for the choices we make, and it is self-deception to believe that our actions—as well as our inactions—have no consequences beyond our own small lives. As Christians, we complain about corruption in government, bias in the media, secularization in education, and immorality in movies. However, it would not be so if Christians *who really lived like Christians* made it a priority to fill those fields. Evil is present to the extent that Godly righteousness is absent. The painful truth is the Church left a void in numerous areas of culture for a long time, and fallen human nature has filled the empty places. Even now, as we see all the destruction taking place due to the absence of Godly voices in our society, Christians may have a tendency to run for safety instead of taking back the world. However, we have to

remember what Paul asked us: “How will they hear unless someone goes to preach to them?” It is foolish to assume God needs us when it comes to preaching the gospel but is perfectly fine on His own when it comes to the doing the gospel. A cursory reading of James tells us that we are responsible for what we do and what we do not do—and other people experience the results of both our actions and our inaction.

Others experience the consequences of the things we do and things we do not do.

We see obvious truth to the claim evil results from an absence of good. However, we must discern the fallacy in the premise as well. Although an absence of light and heat results in dark and cold, neither darkness nor coldness are tangible things: they are terms describing a state. There is no molecule of dark or cold. As heat and light are removed, “cold” and “dark” describe the result. However, evil is different. When good is removed from an area, evil will take its place, but this is neither instantaneous nor absolute. Consider a ship with a hole in it. If the ship is in space, the hole will result in the air being removed. We get “vacuum,” a term that describes the absence of air. A “nothingness” is left, but it does not have its own presence. We do not have a molecule of vacuum replace each molecule of air. The ship now becomes mostly empty. Evil may seem to work like this, but it doesn’t. Instead, let us consider a submarine. The hole in the ship leads to air being removed; however, the result is not empty space. As air is removed, the space is replaced with something real and tangible: water replaces all the space where the air was. In that case, the absence of air results in the presence of water. It works similar to a vacuum, but it brings in something very real and entirely tangible. Water replaces each molecule of air that evacuated the ship.

Evil may seem like vacuum, filling spaces left by good, but it is very real & tangible.

In the analogy of a submarine, we know there is water pressure: water does not just enter as air leaves—it forces itself in and forces air out. This is a result of physics. It will push its way into anything where there is an opening, taking up as much space as it can. Evil is like that; when there isn't something to keep it out, it will force its way in and take up as much space as possible. With nothing to stop it, it will take over anything and everything. It is in its nature. However, water does this because of gravity. It isn't because water really wants to get inside the ship. It is not alive and sentient. Evil, on the other hand, goes a step beyond our analogy of water. Evil is not just an impersonal force that fills an area when allowed. Evil has a sentient personality controlling it. The devil is actively looking for ways to penetrate any area he can. Thankfully, we know God's Presence is greater than evil. Physics tells us that darkness cannot snuff out light because darkness is not tangible. Water is tangible so it will force itself into a ship, but air pressure can keep it out. If light always overcomes darkness, and if Jesus is the light of the world, we can be sure that His Presence in us can overcome evil. However, we need to understand evil—how it works—so we can recognize its attempts to get into our boats.

We need to understand how evil works so we can quickly recognize and resist it.

Evil has a negative effect on anything it touches. Like the “nothing” in *The NeverEnding Story*, it destroys wherever it goes; like the acid blood in *Aliens*, it erodes anything it touches; it is like the slime from the *Blob*, trying to absorb anything in its path. The Bible says God created this whole world by His Spirit. John tells us His Spirit fills everything and keeps it going. If God removed every trace of His Presence from the earth, it would instantly cease to exist. When He looked on His creation, He identified it all as good. In its basic essence, evil is the destruction

of God's creation. The devil wants to un-create the world and everything within it; he wants to negate all that is true. Jesus said the devil came to steal, kill, and destroy, but He came to bring an abundant kind of life. Stealing, killing, and destroying are all ways to ruin and destroy life and creation. The intrinsic nature of evil is to negate, to annihilate, anything that reflects any aspect of who God is and what He calls good.

The nature of evil is to negate anything that reflects God and that He calls good.

One significant aspect of God's nature is truth. Truth is such an intrinsic part of Who God is that the Bible tells us it is *impossible* for God to lie. He could not lie even if He wanted to—and He could never want to because a lie says something contrary to truth. It is, in essence, negating what is real. On the other hand, Jesus called the devil the father of lies, saying he can only lie, for it is his nature. The devil can say things that *seem* true, but he cannot actually speak the truth. It is contrary to his nature. He speaks in order to deceive. There is a significant issue at stake here. Without discernment, we can't recognize lies from the truth. Think about these statements: (1) “You will not die. You will become like God, knowing good and evil.” (2) “You are Abraham. You are a father of a great multitude.” If we limit our examination of these statements to the words, we can be misled. In a way, Adam and Eve didn't immediately die, and they did know good and evil like God; however, as we all know, it was not the whole truth. On the other hand, Abram was childless when God told him to start saying he was “the father of a great multitude.” It wasn't true when he began to use what may be the father of all positive confessions. At the moment they were spoken, the serpent's words seemed technically true while God's words seemed technically false.

When first spoken, the serpent's words seemed true while God's seemed false.

Of course, there is a major difference in what seems to be true and what is true. When God “speaks of things that are not as though they were,” He is not lying; He is proclaiming His will for the future. Abraham could use that name (which for the culture was saying it was true) because God-who-cannot-lie promised it was as good as done; it was a certainty. Very few Christians, if any, have had an opportunity to physically see themselves sitting on a throne in Heaven, but Paul says we are seated with Christ, so it is true. It seems a bit confusing until we realize that when God speaks, he is telling the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Being greater than time, when God sets His Word in motion, it begins to become factual truth even before we see it. On the other hand, the devil is not a creator of anything. He is only able to mutate what God already created. He wants to be God, but he is only a creature. He desperately seeks to be worshipped, but he is a created being. He is called an “angel of light” because he will masquerade as God any chance he gets, but he is not God. The old movie, *O God, You Devil*, had it a bit right when they had George Burns play both parts: it isn’t because God and the devil look alike but because he will do everything he can to look like God. He wants to be God. However, he cannot escape his true nature—evil and lies. He is not able to speak truth or do good. Everything he does is like diet sweeteners—it costs less and tastes good but turns into poison in your body once you drink it and slowly kills you. The devil also speaks of things that are not as though they were, but he does it to tempt you into accepting lies as truth.

The devil speaks of things that aren’t as if they are so we will accept lies as truth.

There’s a big difference between a godly positive confession and denial—rejecting truth and believing a lie. Speaking in faith is not the same as ignoring or denying difficult truths—a big distinction some Christians fail to recognize.

Godly truth identifies what God sees and wills, and His Word brings it forth, re-creating things as He desires. Godly Truth has the ability to make us what we were originally intended to be. Affirming the truth is a way we help bring it forth. This is also how evil works. Evil negates truth and life. It is like a cancer, an infection, a radiation: it mutates people, making them the worst versions of themselves. It reduces life to its lower forms. As Paul said, when we worship created things instead of God, we de-evolve, becoming mutated version of ourselves. As we accept lies as truth, we give evil the ability to change us and to bring forth those things in us. We are choosing to be remade in that image.

What we choose to believe is the truth is what changes & shapes what we become.

We are made in God’s image. The image was marred by the fall. Jesus came to restore that image. As we embrace Him and His truth, we are changed (glory to glory) back into that image. However, if we embrace lies and hold to words contrary to God’s truth as being truth, we give evil the ability to remake us differently, to steal, kill, and destroy: steal what God has given, kill the eternal spark of life He has placed in each of us, and destroy what remains of His image in us. Embracing any lie or denying any truth does this, but it is especially dangerous when it relates to our inherent identities. Many of God’s people do not realize the devil begins the same way he did in Eden—by manipulating words. Horrifyingly, some who even claim to be Christian embrace his work. First, morality and truth became relative. As absolutes disappear, words describing spiritual realities about God’s image can be redefined—such as *love, holiness, marriage, friendship, male, female, gender, and sexuality*. In our denial, we “identify” based on feelings or perceptions instead of the truth. By embracing what is NOT as if it IS, we are inviting a very active spiritual force to re-make us in another image—but it is an image not of God.