

## The Nature of Evil

by Pastor Marty

I began this series describing the nature of God. We discussed how God's character is more absolute and perfect than the words we often use, and this requires us to consider what we believe. On the one hand, common terms like omnipotent and omniscient cannot be used in ways that contradict other truths, such as the fact that God cannot lie and cannot change. We can even slander His character when we quote, "God is love" if our definition of love includes a component that contradicts truth and holiness. The purpose of that newsletter was to highlight our need to evaluate our beliefs about God in light of how all His characteristics fit together. The next part of the series discussed the nature of man in relation to God. Being made in the image of God means there are certain aspects of man and woman that reflect God's nature. The abilities to lead and care, to imagine and create, and to choose and decide are all unique gifts among the earthly creation. However, we also find that mankind is different from God in some significant ways—especially the ability to change and become. Even angels, who are able to choose, cannot repent and change as we do. I ended the newsletter suggesting God made us this way so we could spend eternity growing, always becoming more as we are continually discovering more about God. We are made in His image because we are made to reflect Him. In a very real and mysterious way, our nature was designed to correspond to God's nature.

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I considered leaving this a 2-part series on the nature of God and man, but especially in light of developments around the world, in our country, and in the Church, understanding the nature of evil is something we need. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians, he had remarked that

they were not ignorant of the devil's schemes. I wonder if he would say the same to us. I think we recognize some of his tactics but miss many others—at least according to what actually gets preached in some churches today. (Especially in regards to the Church today being nearsighted; see the November 2016 newsletter). Just as we may believe things about God or human nature that turn out to be incorrect, it is possible some of the things we believe about evil might not be accurate. Understanding the general nature of "evil" can help us to evaluate what we believe.

***Understanding the general nature of evil can help us to evaluate what we believe.***

The first thing we need to realize about evil is that it is unreal. Now, I do not mean that it does not actually exist. Evil very much exists as we are able to verify just by reading the Bible or taking the time to watch the news. I'm using the term "real" in an absolute sense. We saw that God is so real and absolute that everything else is just ghostly holograms compared to Him. Every other thing in creation has a beginning, an end, or both; all other things are changing. God is Absolute Real while everything He made is real in a much more relative way. If we think about it, we can see levels of reality in creation: God is the Absolute Real that never changes and is eternal, infinite, and complete. Humans and angels are made to be eternal, but they do have beginnings, and they are not perfect. The earth, animals, and plants are more finite; they are real, but they are very temporary. As David expressed it, life on this earth is a puff of smoke compared with God. Another way we describe these concepts is by defining things on earth as natural, and things in Heaven as supernatural. The only problem with that distinction is that God is a whole level beyond the supernatural; if angels are identified as supernatural, then God

must be described as the Ultimate Real. Also, it is incorrect to consider our distinction between natural and supernatural as absolute. Initially, there were only two intended levels of reality: the Creator and the created. It is fallen human nature that sees nature and super-nature split.

***It is from our viewpoint that the natural and the supernatural have been divided.***

There is an important reason we need a clear understanding of what is real and unreal. The Bible tells us that God speaks of things that are not as if they already were. In other words, God is in the business of creating things. He did this in the beginning when He spoke the worlds into existence. He spoke of light, and light was. He spoke of life, and life came forth. As it says, He sends forth His Word to accomplish His will. Mankind, being made in God's image, also has a creative ability not only to imagine and make things but also to speak blessing or cursing and affect things on the earth. Of course, we do not have the same ability to make something out of nothing like God does, and our ability to bless and curse has some limitations. Nevertheless, it is an image, a reflection, of God's nature in us. Evil, on the other hand, does the opposite. It is in the business of destroying what God creates. It works to prevent all positive creativity, and it does this by getting us to believe its lies. It has very little power on its own and is forced to rely almost exclusively on stealing. For instance, the serpent could not do anything to Adam and Eve except tempt them; they had to willingly yield to temptation. Evil succeeds in the world today not because it is powerful in itself but because it convinces human beings to yield. While God speaks prophetically to create life and calls men and women to become what they were meant to be, evil speaks contradictorily. It calls those things that ARE as if they ARE NOT. It tempts us to reject what God made us to be so we stop becoming new creatures. Evil has no prophetic ability beyond whispering fears in our ears and

then trying to get us to agree. While God speak in possibilities, the devil speaks in probabilities.

***God speaks in faith and possibilities; the devil speaks in fear and probabilities.***

Hollywood gives us a glimpse of how the devil works today. Evil declares it is all-powerful like the Emperor and Darth Vader, who use the dark side of the force to control and destroy. It wants us to think we have to become a master to fight it. However, that isn't the truth. A more accurate depiction is what we see in the Wizard of Oz. The devil and his demons hide behind a curtain and put on a light show to get us to see them as great and powerful beings when their power is extremely limited. Granted, they can do some things, just as the Wicked Witch of the West could do some evil magic, but compared to what we can do with the Holy Spirit in us, it is all smoke and mirrors. For the most part, all the devil and his imps can do is project special effects on the movie screens of our minds and try to convince us their story is real. We have to realize that just as God cannot lie, for truth is in His nature, evil cannot tell the whole truth. It can tell half-truths or "technical" truth from a certain perspective, but any "truth" is meant to undermine what is actually real or to prevent a new reality God is bringing forth in our lives. In other words, evil is only going to (1) tell us what is NOT true to convince us it IS true or (2) tell us what IS true to prevent us from believing what God says WILL be true. In this respect, evil is unreal, the opposite of what is real. In science fiction terms, we can identify evil as anti-real, the opposite of real, like anti-matter to matter. However, unlike in the science fiction universe, truth will always win when it collides with lies. Light always overcomes darkness. Evil will try to negate what is real, but the more real a thing is, the more certain it is that it will overcome evil.

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In our modern worldview, it is foreign to think of good and evil in terms of what is real. It is easier to consider “real” as black or white, as existing or not existing. However, while such an interpretation works for many things, it leaves us handicapped when we try to describe things that are intangible and supernatural. We have to remember Lucifer’s main goal. It is to be like God and to take His place in Heaven. He failed. Since he could not do that, his next goal was to take His place in the perspective of God’s own creation. Through the sin of our first parent, he was able to take his place as the god of this world. However, It is only a temporary position. Jesus came to redeem ALL of creation. Paul makes clear that creation is waiting for US to take our rightful place. Jesus restored us all to the original position of Adam and Eve, but it is a process. We are “becoming” as we are changed “from glory to glory” to be more like Jesus. In a very significant way, every step forward in that process is making that future become real while every backward step makes it a bit less “real” in the present. However, there is another sense in which “real” has a powerful meaning. After His resurrection, we know Jesus entered the upper room even after the doors were locked. He had a glorified body. We sometimes get the idea His presence is ghostly and intangible. This is false. In actuality, He is more real than this world. He could pass through walls and locked doors not because He was ghostly but because the walls are ghostly compared to Him! Everything in our world is holographic virtual reality compared to what is in Heaven. Salvation does not just mean entering into Heaven when we die; it is starting the process of changing us from ghostly to real.

***Salvation is the process in which we begin changing from being ghostly to being real.***

God calls those things that are not as if they were in a prophetic sense. It should not be a surprise that the devil, trying to be like God, is an imposter. As such, evil also is in the habit of

calling those things that are not as though they were. However, there is a huge difference with the two approaches. When God speaks of what does not exist, He does so in a temporary sense because it ultimately does exist. It may be more accurate to think of the scripture as saying that He speaks of those things that are NOT YET as if they ALREADY WERE. As human beings made in His image, we also have some ability to do this. We can imagine a thing and then endeavor to bring it forth through invention and creativity. When the devil speaks of things that are not as if they were, it means trying to turn illusion into reality through fear and the enslavement of our wills. There is extremely little he can do without our cooperation. He is like Pitch in Rise of the Guardians; evil is nothing except a shadow that cannot survive when it encounters God’s light.

***In terms of ultimate reality, evil is a shadow that can’t survive in God’s light.***

If God is Ultimate Reality, and we are all being changed to become more “real” in Him, what about the world? When God first created the earth, He called it “good” and gave it to us. It is important to note that the Bible declares to us that God is good. If God is good, and He said His creation was good, it means something. It is not meaning that God and creation are one and the same—Pantheism. That is a false definition. God is love, but that does not mean that love is God; it means that love gains its meaning from God’s nature. Identifying something as “good” means it somehow reflects or comes from God; when He created the world, He called it good because it was as He intended it to be. In other words, it was real. We see a hierarchy of God, people, and creation. How does this relate to the devil and his imps? I have heard it taught in many circles that demons try to possess people because they desire bodies, which they do not have. It is possible, but the Bible does not tell us definitively. However, if evil hates all that is real, then it not only hates human beings made

in God's image but also anything that God calls good. This means evil even hates the plants and animals upon our planet earth because creation itself somehow reflects God's nature. Paul said God's nature is made visible in nature. Creation itself is even more real than evil. Creation itself groans because it is also under assault by evil.

***Creation itself is more real than evil, and it groans because it is also under assault.***

This brings us to the reason we need to understand the nature of evil. It wants to nullify and destroy the "realness" of creation. It does this by trying to change it from what it is made to be into something less. It seeks to kill, steal, and destroy—all descriptions of destruction or perversion of God's intentions. One of the ways it does this is by trying to destroy the "essence" of what something is. It contradicts what things are made to be in favor of something contrary. For example, if someone says the word "bird" to us, a few things immediately come to mind: feathers, flying, building a nest, and laying eggs. Even if we think of chickens, we describe them in terms of a bird that doesn't fly. We naturally associate the idea of flying with birds. It is part of what "bird" means. There are many different types of dogs, all with unique personalities, but there are certain things that fit "dog" and some other things that do not. If we saw a dog in a cage eating seeds, we would know something is wrong. Even plants are made in ways that tend to reflect their essence: a tree is tall and strong, a rose is bright with thorns, and ivy clings and climbs. Paul states that creation displays some evidence of God's nature. Some say it's because creation proves there had to be a creator. That is certainly true; however, I think it's a bit more than that. I propose the essence of all created things say something about God. The strength and majesty of a tree remind us of the strength and majesty of God. Anyone who owns a loving dog can better recognize the unconditional love of God. Scripture states that God's "invisible

attributes, eternal power, and divine nature" are visible in His creation. This is more than just poetic. There are attributes (plural) along with aspects of God's divine nature. In other words, God revealed things about Himself in creation.

***God has revealed things about Himself for us all to see in His earthly creation.***

What does all this say about evil? It tells us that evil at its core wants to change the very essence and nature of what things are intended to be. It deforms and perverts good things so it can make them "other" than they were meant to be. This helps us to identify evil when we see it. Even though this world is fallen, everything in nature still reflects aspects of God's nature by being what it was made to be. Evil wants to negate what IS and affirm what is NOT. Every thing that exists, physical or conceptual—man, woman, dog, cat, bird, tree, love, friendship, family, sex, marriage, gender, race, language—tells us something about God. Evil hates every one of these things because they are tributes to God. Its goal, therefore, is to do all it can to change our understanding so that we will no longer see God in this world. It does this by eradicating what it can, and when it can't, it will work to change what they mean to us so that we no longer see what is before us. If we began to look at everything in the world with eyes for seeing what it tells us about God, our image of God will grow drastically. Of course, we have to use discernment, recognizing that all things are fallen. This can also help us recognize the most significant reflections of God here on the earth by looking at the things our society and the god of this world try most adamantly to change and destroy—such as what it means to be man and woman, marriage and family, love and truth. As we see a radical and desperate push for things to be renamed, redefined, and re-identified, we can be certain not only that evil is involved but also that the thing being attacked is somehow rooted in a core aspect of God's divine nature.