

SIN - A NECESSARY EVIL

By Barry C. Hodson
www.bibletruthrestored.org

THE TREE OF KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

As a result of creation, Gen. 1:31 tells us that “God saw everything that He made, and behold, it was very good.” He liked what He saw; the end product of His work was very pleasing and satisfying. To a lesser degree, we who are inferior replicas of God, being made in His image, have the same experience when we have made something that pleases us. The angels were obviously impressed with God’s work on planet earth because Job 38:7 says they “shouted for joy” when they witnessed it.

The only thing that was “not good,” was that initially man was alone. But God soon rectified that and no doubt intended to from the outset. The delay was due to spiritual factors. Adam foreshadowed Christ, and Eve foreshadowed the church which came into being as a result of Jesus being put into a “deep sleep” and his side being sliced open, which is what happened to Adam in order for Eve to be produced.

So then, everything God made was very good. This included the garden which He planted for Adam and Eve, known as “paradise.” And Gen. 2:9 says that out of the ground the Lord God made to grow every tree that is pleasant in His sight and good for food. So Adam and Eve were surrounded by God’s good creation and enjoying it. There were no weeds, thistles, thorns or blight. The ground was easy to till, not causing any sweat on the brow. There was no sin, sickness, sorrow, pain, fear or death. It was utopia.

But, although God declared His creation to be good, and in spite of Adam and Eve experiencing and enjoying so much good, we read that God placed a tree of knowledge of good and evil in the midst of the garden which was also pleasant to look at and “good for food,” and as a test of faith and obedience, he told them not to eat from it. And it is stated in Gen. 2:5 that if they did eat from it, their eyes would be opened and they would be as the gods (angels) knowing good and evil. This implies that prior to sinning by eating the forbidden fruit, they did not know good and evil. In spite of experiencing and enjoying all the good of God’s very good creation, they did not know good! We can understand them not knowing evil, because none existed, but good did. In view of this, one would have expected the forbidden tree to be called the tree of evil, not good and evil, because they had already experienced good, but not evil.

So how can we make sense of someone experiencing and enjoying good but not knowing it? Well, let’s start with evil and work back to good.

The evil that resulted from eating the forbidden fruit was a sinful nature, mortality and death. (Not that it was the fruit that caused this, but the act of disobedience). Because Adam and Eve chose to sin by disobeying God’s commandment, a propensity or bias towards sin became

implanted in the human spirit. The Bible calls it “sin in the flesh,” and it resulted in the nature of man becoming “no good” instead of “very good” (Rom. 7:18). This sinful mortal nature of man produces countless evils such as immorality, idolatry, murder, lying, stealing, drunkenness, sickness, disease, pain, suffering, sorrow, conflict, war. As Jesus said: “Out of the heart proceeds evil ...” (Matt. 15:19). And as a result of experiencing such “evils,” the good that was experienced beforehand, could then be known or seen in a light as never before. You see, good and evil are relative conditions. One cannot be properly known and understood without the other. There are many things in life that we can only understand through opposites, or contrasts. For example, you could not understand what “up” means if you don’t know what “down” is. The same applies to light and darkness, hot and cold, fast and slow, loud and soft, holy and unholy etc. Each can only be understood by their opposites. A person would not really know or understand and appreciate the one without experiencing or witnessing the other.

And so it is with good and evil. One who only saw and experienced good and never evil, would not know or appreciate how good the good really was and would know nothing about evil. It is the experiencing of evil that throws good into sharp relief and reveals its goodness. The prodigal son, and many other sons and daughters since, discovered this when they ran away from a good home which they took for granted, and did not appreciate, and ended up in a bad one. Prior to leaving the good home, they may have been told: “You don’t know how good your situation is and how well off you are.” In spite of experiencing a good home, they don’t know how good it is because they have not seen or experienced the opposite. The same applies to Adam leaving the garden that had no weeds and did not cause sweat to till the ground. Until he left the weedless garden and had to sweat dealing with thistles and thorns, he would not have known and appreciated how good the previous garden was.

For good to have any meaning at all, there has to be evil - at least for a while! So it is interesting to note that there was just one tree of the knowledge of both good and evil. You might have thought that God would have created two trees - one for the knowledge of evil, which would have been forbidden, and the other for the knowledge of good which Adam would be encouraged to eat from. But there was just one tree which resulted in knowing both good and evil. Why? Because one cannot know and understand and appreciate the true nature of good without evil to compare it with. If the contrast does not exist, neither can it be known. There is therefore no other way that God can teach us how good His goodness is without the existence of evil, and it only required the violation of a prohibition notice on one tree to have this effect.

According to Isa. 45:7, God not only creates light and peace but also darkness and evil. But “evil” here refers to calamities or adversities such as flood, famine, pestilence, earthquake, storms, volcanic eruption, and war which God sometimes allows usually as a punishment for sin. In Rom. 11:22 we are told to “behold (i.e. consider) the goodness and severity of God.” Here again we have a contrast between opposites: goodness and severity, each one being meaningful due to its opposite. We can develop this a little further in relation to the character of God. If we understand things in life through opposites, we can also learn about God’s character in the same way. To do this we go to Ex. 34:6-7 which lists some of the attributes of God which He proclaimed to Moses: “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth. Keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity ...”

The first of God’s characteristics here is mercy and grace. Now, could it be possible to know and appreciate what grace and mercy means if sin did not exist and there was no need for mercy and forgiveness? Where is the good in a cup of cold water if you are not thirsty? To appreciate the shiny side of life’s coin, we need to see the rough side too, because it is only the contrast that gives either meaning. In order to know and understand God’s character, we must be aware of and witness evil as well as good. We could repeat these ideas for every one of the other attributes of God in Ex. 34. For example: How could God seem to be slow to anger without sin causing Him to get angry? Without sin, no basis exists for God’s mercy or judgement to be exercised.

The existence of sin is the basis on which all of God’s attributes are thrown in sharp relief and manifested. How could He be seen as a forgiving God if there is no sin to forgive? How could He be seen as a severe and judgmental God if there is no sin or sinner to be judged? Without the existence of sin, we could not “know” God’s character in the full sense of the word. And of course, coming back to our original premise, we would not be able to know good. In this light, good can come about as a result of evil! In a certain sense, evil can be sometimes good in disguise i.e. in the sense of Rom. 8:28: “All things (good and evil) work together for good.”

Following these thoughts through to their logical end, it is hard to resist the conclusion that God put a prohibition notice on the tree to make sin possible, because His goodness could never be known, i.e. properly understood and appreciated unless sin existed. There is no doubt that God created the basis on which sin was made possible. He created the tree of knowledge of good and evil and made it very attractive, and then gave the commandment to not eat from it. He also created the serpent more subtil

than any other creature and gave it the ability to speak, by which it deceived Eve into sinning. But this was not a case of God tempting man because it is clearly taught in the Bible that He does not do that. However He does test, and there is a difference. According to Jam. 1:14-15 temptation involves being drawn away by one's own lust, and this occurred when Eve voluntarily succumbed to the lust she allowed to dominate her own mind in response to the serpent's proposition. So, God tested, the serpent deceived, and Eve was tempted.

Such a suggestion that God made sin possible will be very challenging to some and regarded as heresy of the first order to others, because the implication is in Adam's case that God gave man a test that He knew he could (would) fail. But is this any different from giving Israel a law that He knew they couldn't and wouldn't keep in order that His grace in Christ might be manifested and abound! Rom. 5:20 actually states that God gave Israel the law so that sin might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. Someone might say: "If God's grace is magnified as a result of sin, why does He find fault? Surely it is in His interest for sin to be committed."

This calls to mind what Paul says in Rom. 9, where he points out that God hardened Pharaoh's heart, causing him to sin. As a result of this, more scope was given for God's power and glory to be magnified. Paul then says that in response to this, someone will say: "Why does God then find fault, for who can resist His will?" Paul replies by pointing out that no one has any more right to question such actions of God than a piece of clay has to question the actions of a potter. It is God's prerogative to use circumstances to harden or soften into whatever form or shape He desires, in order that the riches of His mercy and glory be manifested, and it is out of order for clay material such as man to find fault with it!

In passing it should be pointed out that when Scripture says God hardened Pharaoh's heart, it does not mean that God physically manipulated his mind and emotions and overruled his will, reducing him to a robot like state. No! It was because Pharaoh hardened his heart and refused to let Israel go free as a result of God in His mercy withdrawing the plagues, that Scripture expresses it in terms of God hardening his heart. (See Ex. 9). God knew that by withdrawing the plagues, Pharaoh would react this way and sin, and that this would give greater scope for divine power and glory to be manifested, but Pharaoh remained a free agent and had freedom of choice as to how he would react. And as Paul points out, no one has any right to find fault with God over this.

If God wanted to give a test to Adam and Eve or a law to Israel that He knew they wouldn't fail, why not give such a test or law? In view of the untold suffering, pain and death affecting billions of people during thousands of years that has resulted through one man failing the test, is

this fair if God wanted him to pass the test and could have given him one that he would have passed? Does the punishment really fit the crime or are there deeper issues involved?

Some will reply by saying: “Yes, a rebel angel used deception to sabotage God’s purpose and cause sin.” It is a commonly held belief that a rebel angel called Satan was cast out of heaven to earth by God, resulting in him inspiring rebellion. But according to the Bible, God is stronger than Satan who can only do what God permits him to do. So if he caused Adam and Eve to sin, God must have permitted it! However, the doctrine of a rebel angel is based on the misinterpretation and misapplication of Scripture, and a free booklet on the subject is available on request.

But let us be clear about this: Adam had freewill and chose to sin. God did not force him to do it. God knew he would do it but did not make him do it. God’s foreknowledge of actions and events does not force people against their will to accomplish them. He just knows that given a certain set of circumstances what the reactions will be, and can use these to magnify His grace and mercy and power. And 1 Cor. 10:13 makes it clear that God will not test anyone beyond their ability to overcome. But unfortunately this does not mean that everyone does overcome. Many fail when they have the ability to overcome and incur divine displeasure as a result. Such was the case with Adam and Eve. And looking at it objectively, the test wasn’t really that difficult. It simply involved having to abstain from eating fruit from one particular tree, while access was granted to every other tree, and God made it very clear what punishment would result as a consequence of sinning. And, while it is true that as a result of Adam’s sin God’s grace has abounded, Adam did not deliberately sin for that reason. The apostle Paul makes it clear that those who abuse and misuse the grace of God by deliberately sinning, become servants of sin, and incur the death penalty.

An even greater reason for believing that the entrance of sin into the world was predictable, is because had sin never entered, there would have been no need for a Saviour from sin. In other words, Jesus would have been unnecessary. God would not have needed to send an only begotten son to show how much He loved the world. If sin and death had not eventuated and no one died, the planet would have soon been overpopulated. History would not have as its goal or grand finale, the second coming of Christ and establishment of his glorious kingdom. Paradise would not need to be restored because it would not have been lost. Under such circumstances, man would not have a hope because he would have everything he could hope for, but not know it or appreciate it.

Now, when Adam and Eve sinned, God told them in symbolic terms that a seed of the woman would eventually conquer sin and death. This promised hope is recorded in Gen. 3:15 and is the first reference in

Scripture to the ultimate redemptive work of Christ. If we didn't know any better, it would be easy to conclude that this makes God's purpose in Christ just a reactionary or contingency "plan B." That is, because Adam messed up by sinning when God didn't want him to, God had to resort to "plan B" by having an only begotten son to sort things out.

But this cannot be the case. According to 1 Pet. 1:20 Jesus was "foreordained before the foundation of the world." God's redemptive plan in His son was planned long before Adam and Eve existed. This implies that God anticipated the existence of sin and evil from the very beginning of creation, long before He created the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Had this not been so, He would not have needed to foreordain Jesus from the foundation of the world to save the world from sin and death. So then, Jesus was not a contingency "plan B." No! He was "plan A," and this being the case, the entrance of sin into the world was necessary and predictable. In the words of Col. 1:17, Jesus "is before all things and through him all things hold together."

It is clear from Scripture that God's ultimate plan was to have an only begotten son who would be heir of all things and rule over all to His glory. However, the position of power and rule was not going to be given to him as a mere easy hand-out just because he was the son of God. An earthly father might appoint his son as manager of his business and set him up over others without requiring him to start from scratch and serve an apprenticeship and prove himself, but not Father God! "Though he (Jesus) were a son, yet learned he obedience by the things he suffered. But once perfected, he became the source of eternal salvation to all those who obey him" (Heb. 5:8-9).

Had sin not entered the world, Jesus would not have needed to learn to be obedient, because there would be no rules or laws to obey. Law was only given because of the entrance of sin, as is stated in Gal. 3:19. Obedience therefore involves refusing to obey the prompting and temptations of sin. So the obedience of Jesus which was required for him to qualify as Saviour, depended on him conquering sin, and therefore depended on the existence of sin. In other words, the existence of sin was necessary to form a basis on which Christ's sinlessness and righteousness could be manifested. Without the existence of sin and evil, the sinlessness and righteousness of Jesus could not have been manifested. "Righteousness" means the right way, which implies there is a wrong way i.e. unrighteousness, which is sin (1 Jn. 5:17). This is another example of understanding something by opposites.

Being a person of principle, integrity and character, God could not and would not honour, glorify and exalt His son and place him over men and angels, unless they could say in all honesty, truth and conviction: "Worthy is the Lamb to receive honour and glory ..." And this they are

able to do due to the fact that sin existed in the world into which he came, and he refused to be tempted by it and obey it, but obeyed God instead, even though this required dying a cruel death on a cross. “He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted him and given him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ...” (Plp. 2:7-10).

Without a doubt the suffering in the world is horrible, yet as painful as this can be, the presence of the evil caused by sin is necessary for the appreciation of God’s goodness, and the development of spiritual character in God’s children i.e. faith, hope, love, trust, obedience. According to Heb. 5:14, exercising spiritual discernment between good and evil is necessary to become spiritually mature in Christ. This would not be possible if evil did not exist! It was necessary for Jesus to experience evil and suffering and it is also necessary for us. The Bible is emphatic about this. However, coming back to what was said about learning through opposites: It’s the bad times that make the good times so good - if not in this life, certainly in the next. The joys in our life are often intensified and made more meaningful because of our trials and sorrows, which calls to mind Heb. 12:2 which states that it was because of the joy that was set before Jesus that enabled him to endure the cross.

In our trials and afflictions, we need to remember that this present time of sin and suffering will not last forever. Isa. 35:10 says: “Sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” Also Rev. 21:3-4: “God Himself ... will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” “Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy” (Ps. 126:5).

Were it not for sin and evil, there would be no sorrow, pain or suffering. But were it not for sorrow, pain and suffering we would not know and fully understand and appreciate the joy of living forever in the pain free environment of God’s eternal kingdom. We would just simply take it for granted and think nothing of it, which obviously is not what the Lord wants. So, as was stated at the beginning: everything is relative. Evil has to co-exist with good to know and understand and appreciate the goodness of God. And in addition to that, evil has to exist to test faith and obedience. An untried faith is valueless to God. It is only the faith that passes the test of trials that is of value to Him (1 Pet. 1:7). And most tests involve making a choice between good and evil. Rom. 12:21 says: “Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.” It is the application of this directive that proves love and respect for God and develops godly character. Without the existence of evil to overcome, the development of godly character would not be possible. It is our response to sin and evil

now that will determine whether or not we enjoy the goodness of God in the forever future!

* * * * *

SIN - A NECESSARY EVIL

By Barry C. Hodson
www.bibletruthrestored.org

