

***Over the last two sessions we have identified three sources of evil in the cosmos: a rebellious devil bent on destroying God's good purpose; a fallen humanity with a now darkened, futile and foolish heart; and a threatening natural environment.***

- ◆ Together, these three evils add up to what can be described for humans as a living hell.
- ◆ In this series we will experience four types of hell. This is the first.
- ◆ Even the so-called beautiful people in the first world, living in the lap of luxury in the 21<sup>st</sup> century insulated from the horrific evils being perpetuated on our fellow human beings in other parts of the world, can't escape the fact that life is hard.
- ◆ By the time each of us has experienced our allotted three score and ten, there are not too many of us who would say, "That was fun, let's do it all again!"
- ◆ But, and this is important, we need to remind ourselves, we find ourselves in this situation because we have cut ourselves off from the source of love and wisdom and chose to be our own gods and learn for ourselves the knowledge of what is good and what is evil.
- ◆ To put it in simple terms, "Life with God is heaven, life without God is hell!"
- ◆ It is now into this ominous environment man finds himself.
- ◆ But all is not lost; we have a Creator and Father who does not give up on His children easily.

***Now we are going to ask a question that is going to sound somewhat disturbing, and that is, "Are there important spiritual lessons we must and can only learn from walking the path of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?"***

- ◆ Earlier we spoke about two qualities God will not compromise with in regard to developing a holy people in His image even if it means tolerating evil for a time.
- ◆ They were "love" and "faith."
- ◆ Now we need to add a third quality to that list and that is "holiness."
- ◆ The holiness I'm talking about is not obedience to a long list of do's and don'ts as you might expect.
- ◆ Earlier we spoke of an "other-consciousness" Adam and Eve possessed before sin entered the picture but then defaulted to "self-consciousness" under the control of self-will after they sinned.
- ◆ The holiness we are talking about even transcends other-consciousness in that it is a reflection of the very character of God whose nature is an overflowing holy love towards others.
- ◆ It is this type of holy relational love that is the lifeblood of the Trinity that God ultimately hopes to share with humanity.
- ◆ The task for God is to bring fallen humanity to the point of wanting to share in this holy love willingly.
- ◆ Evil, though introduced by creaturely self-will is used by God as part of this process.
- ◆ It is a spiritual maturity that is developed on the principles of love and faith designed to bring about a holy loving community.
- ◆ This results in beings that want to live with and reflect the holy nature and character of the triune God.
- ◆ It's more an attitude of mind than a list of moral guidelines.

***Earlier we talked about the moral universe God has created, where wise choices lead to happy outcomes and bad choices lead to sad outcomes.***

- ◆ Although we think we know everything when we become teenagers, the reality is in hindsight, we have to admit we were really quite immature.
- ◆ Although our parents warned us about the dangers lurking out there in the big bad world, chances are we disregarded their advice and proceeded according to our own desires with the subsequent results.
- ◆ In other words, there is a maturity that develops as a result of experience, even if that maturity comes as a result of bad experiences.
- ◆ When we look at what transpired in the Garden of Eden, we see this same process in action.
- ◆ Generally, Christianity blames Adam and Eve for the mess mankind found it in, and as a result of their fall, we have all fallen and are suffering.
- ◆ However, before we sheet too much blame on Adam and Eve for consigning mankind to a life of sin, pain, misery and death, we need to consider another important aspect of the story.
- ◆ We need to grant them the concession they were immature and had an innocence in regard to evil.

## [IN GOD'S IMAGE – 11 – WHY THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL]

---

- ◆ We saw how God's prohibition only piqued their interest in the forbidden fruit – "You can eat any of the lollies in the confectionary aisle, but not the big delicious chocolate one in the middle."
- ◆ Also lurking in the bushes is no less than that wily devil with his beguiling words.
- ◆ But critically, Adam and Eve had no concept of what "evil" was as theirs was the first sin in this context.
- ◆ When we tell a child not to touch the hot stove, he doesn't know what the word "burn" means? They have to experience a burn before they know what it means to be burnt.
- ◆ In the same manner, Adam and Eve would not have known what it meant to experience "evil" before they actually committed evil?
- ◆ Now to give this some kind of perspective, you and I live in a world where we see and experience the consequences of evil every day, yet we still make wrong choices don't we.
- ◆ We know better, but we stuff cigarettes into our mouths, we eat too much, we drink too much, we buy too much, we watch too much, and we desire too much
- ◆ "We buy things we don't need, with money we don't have, to impress people we don't like."
- ◆ We aren't stupid, most of us know we shouldn't be doing a lot of the things we do because they are harmful to us, yet we do them anyway.
- ◆ We are simply weak and this has given rise to the saying, "You don't have to, you can't help it!"
- ◆ It appears we aren't a lot different from Adam and Eve so we should be willing to cut Adam and Eve a little slack for their immaturity and inexperience.
- ◆ In the same vein, we have to assume Adam and Eve did not completely understand the concept of death as up till that point we have to assume they had no experience with death.
- ◆ Like children, it's not until they actually burn themselves or the pet dog dies that they grasp the full significance of pain and death.

***To go back to our point about developing a holy people, Adam and Eve, because of having experienced the evil consequences of their decision, now had a maturity they did not have prior to God's advice to them not to touch the fruit.***

- ◆ In other words, they were more aware of evil and the subsequent painful consequences as a result of their sinful action in ignoring their Creator and Father.
- ◆ This newfound knowledge and maturity would hopefully influence their approach to life.
- ◆ We see the same process at work in the parable of the prodigal son.
- ◆ It was only after he had experienced the pain of life without his father, that he recognised how good he had things back home and how wise and loving his father had been.
- ◆ ***Luke 15:17 "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!"***
- ◆ He now had a maturity he did not have prior to having experienced evil and the consequences of his decisions.

***The question is, "Can we learn the qualities of a holy God without the experience of partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?"***

- ◆ As we examine this question, its important to remember God did not introduce evil, but instead uses it to further His purpose.
- ◆ Though it rose independently of God, He incorporated it into His plan.
- ◆ But it is incorporated as a result of mankind's "no" to His love.
- ◆ However the question remains, if it's God's will to create us in his image, how does He go about teaching us Godly qualities like holiness, love, grace, forgiveness, mercy, and faith?
- ◆ In order to learn these qualities, viable alternatives have to exist.
- ◆ Is it possible to learn the virtue of love without the existence of its opposite, hate?
- ◆ How does one extend grace, forgiveness and mercy unless we have been wronged in the first place?
- ◆ How does one build faith and trust unless they are tested?
- ◆ The apostle Peter connects the difficulties of life with the development of divine qualities.
- ◆ ***1 Pet 1:6-7 In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than***

*gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.*

- ◆ Life on earth with all its troubles is the crucible by which God develops his divine virtues in us so we come to resemble Him, **“of greater worth than gold.”**
  - ◆ As mentioned one of the reoccurring themes that is repeated over and over again throughout scripture is this issue of “trust.”
  - ◆ Circumstances are orchestrated by God to test this premise on His servants.
  - ◆ This theme of testing is repeated throughout scripture – Adam and Eve, Noah, Job, Abraham, the children of Israel, David, even Jesus
  - ◆ So is it possible to develop “faith” without a scenario to test it?
  - ◆ **James 1:2-4 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds.**
  - ◆ No one in their right mind would consider the difficulties of life a “joy” unless it is put in this context of allowing God to mold us into His image.
  - ◆ Now notice the progression of how the process works.
  - ◆ **V.3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.**
  - ◆ The path to spiritual maturity is littered with potholes and hurdles all carefully designed in this environment of “good” and “evil” to mould and shape us into the image of Jesus Christ (Isaiah 64:8; Romans 8:29).
  - ◆ The apostle Paul too speaks about a spiritual maturity that comes from suffering.
  - ◆ **Acts 14:21-22 They preached the gospel in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God,” they said.**
  - ◆ Christians should never doubt the spiritual maturity being developed in our lives through the hardships of life.
  - ◆ And as this verse says, it is all done in preparation for life in the kingdom of God.
  - ◆ **Romans 5:3-4 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;<sup>4</sup> perseverance, character; and character, hope.**
  - ◆ Paul like James earlier recognised the spiritual benefits that follow as a result of trials and suffering.
  - ◆ It is only in an imperfect world that God-like qualities such as compassion, mercy, forgiveness, concern and consideration along with obedience can be learned and practiced.
  - ◆ It would seem humanity has to experience evil before realising our true destiny as sons of God.
- Another reason we need to experience both good and evil is; it is used to bring us to our senses.**
- ◆ There are a number of examples used in scripture to show us how the consequences of evil are used to bring people to their senses.
  - ◆ David’s scandalous behaviour with Bathsheba, that resulted in both the death of her husband Uriah and their child.
  - ◆ David only came to his senses when confronted with his behavior by the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12:1-13).
  - ◆ Psalm 51 records his prayer of repentance after he realised the wickedness of his sin.
  - ◆ **Psalm 51:1-4 Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion. Blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. 3 For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. 4 Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight;**
  - ◆ Then, of course, this is also the story of the prodigal son.
  - ◆ It was only after he ran out of money and was reduced to eating slops with the pigs that he came to his senses.
  - ◆ **Luke 15:17-20 “When he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death!’<sup>18</sup> I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you.<sup>19</sup> I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.’<sup>20</sup> So he got up and went to his father.**
  - ◆ There are consequences to sin, and these consequences are used to bring people to their senses.

- ◆ Life has been designed so that the further one gets away from God, the more serious the consequences become with the purpose of bringing us to our senses and driving us back to God.

***But there is another spiritual benefit from this whole process of having experienced both good and evil and that is, it promotes "reconciliation."***

- ◆ Again, in the story of the prodigal son, the pain and suffering facilitated the process of reconciliation between the father and the wayward son.
- ◆ The father, despite his son's disrespectful attitude in demanding his inheritance, had left the door open for reconciliation.
- ◆ But it was only after gaining the experience of tasting of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that the son finally came to his senses, regretted his earlier actions and took steps to reconcile with his father (Luke 15:17-19).
- ◆ The father, who daily was hanging over the front fence scanning the road was delighted to see his returning son, rushed down the road to meet him, brushed aside his rehearsed apology and welcomed him back into the family.
- ◆ ***Luke 15:22-24 "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet.'<sup>23</sup> Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate.<sup>24</sup> For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'*** So they began to celebrate.
- ◆ This parable has too much of a familiar ring to it to not see it as being more than a coincidence which reflects the ongoing relationship between God and humanity and more accurately reflects God's attitude to repentant sinners than is normally portrayed.

***Reconciliation leads to a fourth spiritual benefit from having experienced both good and evil and that is the participants would be a lot more willing to acknowledge and accept the two comprehensive claims God has on His children of being their Creator and Father.***

- ◆ In other words, they will grow in faith as they now recognise God has their best interests at heart when He tries to direct their steps. After all, as their Creator did make them and as their Father, loves them.
- ◆ ***John 14:23 Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.***
- ◆ God wants nothing more than to be welcomed into our lives, but He will only respond to an invitation that acknowledges His claim on our lives.
- ◆ And really this is what repentance is all about, a recognition of our rejection of God's comprehensive claims on each of our lives and a new willingness to allow Him to come and take up residence in our lives.
- ◆ The critical moment in the story of the prodigal's return is the phrase, "When he came to himself."
- ◆ It was recognition of his rebellion against a Creator and Father who loved him.

***A fifth spiritual lesson to be learned from having experienced both good and evil is, it will help us recognise how merciful and graceful God has acted in redeeming humanity from our self-inflicted plight.***

- ◆ Despite our sinfulness in rejecting God, when we do come to that point of acknowledging Him as our Creator and Father, it demonstrates how loving and graceful God is towards his wayward children.
- ◆ ***Ephesians 2:3-5 ...Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath.<sup>4</sup> But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy,<sup>5</sup> made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.***
- ◆ The sheer magnitude of God's grace is the key to breaking humanity's stony heart.
- ◆ Despite our rebellion, God has provided the way for the two parties to be reconciled, and as we will go on to show, it comes at a great price to Him.
- ◆ As mentioned earlier, Christianity is the story of God's response to our "no"!

***We started this session talking about an additional quality to "love" and "faith" God will not compromise with in regard to developing a holy people in His image even if it means tolerating evil for a time.***

- ◆ That third quality is "holiness."
- ◆ The five important spiritual lessons we have just covered about the benefits of tasting of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, although important, should not be regarded as the full story in developing holiness in us, but rather a preparation for how God Himself is going to develop holiness in us.

## **[IN GOD'S IMAGE – 11 – WHY THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL]**

---

- ◆ 1) Maturity, 2) It brings us to our senses, 3) Reconciliation, 4) Accepting God's claim on our lives, and 5) God's gift of grace, are designed to prepare us for the next step of developing holiness in His people. It is not something He is leaving to us, as the pursuit of one's own holiness without reliance on God is to make the same mistake as Adam and Eve.
- ◆ True creatures of God recognize they are not gods and surrender their will to their Creator and Father.
- ◆ It's more a preparation of mind or an attitude that focuses on the restored relationship with our Creator and Father.
- ◆ He has something very special planned on how He is going to make us His holy people who truly reflect the holy nature and character of the triune God.