

Last time we talked 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”.
- ◆ We then looked at five important spiritual lessons humanity had to experience in preparation for how God Himself is going to develop holiness in us.
- ◆ They were: 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
- ◆ As we saw, these spiritual lessons could only come about of having tasted of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- ◆ These lessons are designed to prepare us for the next step of developing holiness in His people.
- ◆ Holiness is not something God is leaving up to us. The pursuit of one’s own holiness without reliance on God would lead to us making 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.

So far as mentioned we have looked at five spiritual lessons that are the result of humanity having experienced both good and evil represented by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

- ◆ But there is one more very important lesson we need to examine
- ◆ When we evaluate the progression of events in the Garden, a prohibition not to eat of the tree, the serpent allowed to speak to the woman, and a naiveté about evil and death on the part of Adam and Eve, which together lead them into sin, can we draw any other conclusion other than, *was this the outcome God expected?*
- ◆ And if it was, then the follow-up question is, “Is it possible for man to rise to his destiny of become ‘in the image of God’ without first partaking of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil?”
- ◆ So far there has not been a very good track record of God’s created beings saying, “yes” to Him.
- ◆ So the question is, “Is there a better chance of man saying ‘yes’ to God before or after experiencing evil?”
- ◆ This is an important question as up to this point, Satan and one-third of the angels have rejected God’s overtures of love, allowing self-interest and a lust for power to drive their decisions.
- ◆ Circumstances could not have been better for them to say “yes” to God.
- ◆ They were experiencing heaven, they were sharing in the life and love of God and yet they said “no” to Him.
- ◆ As mentioned before, this would have been an enormous affront to God.
- ◆ And perhaps, this is the reason why there is no hope of redemption for Satan and his demons as they made their choice after having experienced the love and majesty of God within the framework of the heavenly realm.
- ◆ Now in the garden, we see Adam and Eve also saying “no” to God, not in heaven, but nevertheless, in a “very good” environment.
- ◆ And perhaps we can speculate this is the reason why there is the need for this four-dimensional physical universe as this way; God can maintain an arm’s length relationship between Himself and humanity, so there is the possibility of redemption.
- ◆ The presence of the tree of life in the garden would seem to support this scenario and why they were denied access to it after they sinned.
- ◆ They were ejected from the garden so they would not be in the same state of judgment as Satan and the demons who had experienced firsthand the life and love of God.

But this scenario raises a very important question regarding “The Judgment.”

- ◆ Traditional Christianity since Augustine has maintained there is no hope of redemption for humanity post mortem.
- ◆ In this scenario, one has to accept the gift of salvation in this life; otherwise it is hell for all eternity.
- ◆ This includes those billions who have never even heard of Jesus Christ nor been offered the opportunity to respond to God’s invitation of grace (John 3:16).

- ◆ This position was further reinforced during the Reformation, particularly by the followers of the Reformer, John Calvin.
- ◆ The problem with this view is that all we have just covered about the important spiritual lessons of humanity having lived through all the pain and suffering associated with the tree of knowledge count for nothing, to say nothing on how this reflects on a loving and benevolent God who supposedly consigns billions to an eternal hell just because of the timing and place of their birth.
- ◆ This does not sound consistent with a God who has gone to extraordinary lengths to create this environment with the goal of creating man in His image for all this pain, suffering and death humanity has suffered down through the ages to count for nothing.
- ◆ Fortunately, the story does not end this way. Humanity's experience of tasting of the tree of knowledge will not be wasted and all will be offered the gift of grace (John 12:32).
- ◆ As we will see, God Himself is willing to go through a whole lot more pain, suffering and death to make an additional claim on our lives and in doing so implicate all humanity, past, present and future in the process.

So what are we suggesting?

- ◆ It was Irenaeus, one of the early church fathers who first argued evil, suffering and death was an inevitable and necessary component to the development of spiritual maturity in the human race.
- ◆ This process of suffering as a result of the evil in the world helps in turning us to God as the deeper we get into despair the more attractive the offer of redemption becomes.
- ◆ The prodigal son was much more receptive to his father's love but only after experiencing for himself the consequences of evil.
- ◆ The same could be said for Israel's exodus out of Egypt.
- ◆ Would they have been as receptive to God's offer of deliverance had they not been in such dire straits?
- ◆ At the end of history when God raises the dead, humanity, having passed through this evil journey (hell), would have learned by experience what evil truly is and how merciful God is in redeeming us from it (His offer of grace).
- ◆ Like the prodigal son, they would be in a much more receptive position to accept God's offer of a life of loving dependence with the Father after experiencing evil.
- ◆ It is only through this process that humans become fit for the destiny that God intends which is union and communion with the divine.
- ◆ What I would like to suggest is that this scenario we see in the garden is God's plan "A" and Christ's redemptive work is part of plan "A" and not Plan "B" as is usually suggested because God had to come up with a contingent plan "B" as a result of the sin of Adam and Eve.
- ◆ After all, scripture is clear, Christ was slain from the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8), the devil is allowed to play his part in producing the evil aspects of this carefully orchestrated environment of "good" and "evil" (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2), and the weeds were allowed to grow with the wheat in the parable of the tares (Matthew 13:24-29).
- ◆ And we have that intriguing verse in Romans 11 that suggests this to be the case.
- ◆ **Romans 11:32 For God has bound everyone over to disobedience so that he may have mercy on them all.**
- ◆ It seems the path of evil is a necessary part of God's purpose of raising fallen humanity to his destiny of becoming "in the image of God."

There is one final proof humanity has to experience evil as part of God's purpose and that is the example of the process Jesus Himself had to go through in order to attain "glory."

- ◆ Even Jesus as the first man genuinely in God's image had to experience the full gamut of the human experience, including all the scenarios we have just discussed.
- ◆ Paul, in Philippians, speaks about this process Jesus was willing to subject Himself to in order to become the first human truly in God's image.
- ◆ ***Philippians 2:5-11 In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; 7 rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross!***
- ◆ Even Jesus Christ had to experience "humility" before achieving "greatness."

- ◆ It was only after experiencing humility, the humility of the manger, the humility of rejection, and the humility of the cross that He was raised up to greatness.
 - ◆ ***V.9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***
 - ◆ If our Lord and Saviour had to go through this process to become the first man truly in God's image, why should we expect anything different (John 15:20-21)?
 - ◆ It would be the height of human arrogance to think we could achieve the level of God's holiness on our own steam.
 - ◆ ***Romans 8:17 Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.***
 - ◆ The path to glory is paved with suffering, for both Jesus and His co-heirs.
 - ◆ The apostle Peter echoes the same sentiment.
 - ◆ ***1 Peter 4:12-13 Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. ¹³ But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed.***
- But the suffering Jesus willingly subjected Himself to had deeper implications for humanity than simply becoming the first human in God's image.***
- ◆ This goes back to the subject of developing holiness as part of the process of creating beings in His image.
 - ◆ As we have seen and witnessed in our own lives, humanity is totally incapable of ascending to the lofty heights of God's holiness, God elects to do for us what we cannot possibly do for ourselves and takes on this responsibility on our behalf.
 - ◆ This is getting ahead of the story, but it's important to understand the principle of *representation* in that God the Father applies all that Jesus Christ achieved in His life, death, resurrection and ascension to each and every human being.
 - ◆ By demonstrating His willingness to go through this process and by his perfect obedience, He qualified to be the perfect representative, or High Priest for sinful mankind in our relationship with God (Hebrews 4:8-9).
 - ◆ He becomes our High Priest acting on our behalf in relation to reconciling humanity to God and God to humanity.
 - ◆ ***Hebrews 4:14-15 Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. ¹⁵ For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin.***
 - ◆ This section of scripture demonstrates how Jesus as man, went through the same process as we are going through, and although subject to the same temptations we experience, He maintained his righteousness, not failing even once.
 - ◆ We all recognise Christ died for our sins as our sacrificial representative, but this verse demonstrates how Christ also becomes our representative in regard to holiness.
 - ◆ It is Christ's holiness in the face of repeated temptation that is now attributed to us.
 - ◆ ***2 Corinthians 5:19, that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation... 21 God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***
 - ◆ Christ was able to remain faithful even through the ordeal of the cross because He placed His complete and utter dependence on His heavenly Father
 - ◆ ***Hebrews 5:7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.***
 - ◆ In other words, in contrast to Adam and Eve, Jesus recognised the comprehensive claims God had on His life and submitted to His Father's will.
 - ◆ ***John 14:30-31 I will not say much more to you, for the prince of this world is coming. He has no hold over me, ³¹ but he comes so that the world may learn that I love the Father and do exactly what my Father has commanded me***

- ◆ It was His love for, and His obedience to His Father that gave Him the strength to resist the human temptations of the flesh and the devil.
 - ◆ We will come back to both the subject of *representation* and *holiness* in a later session.
- However, at this point we should pause to acknowledge Jesus' willingness to submit Himself to the same process we have to go through in order to make it possible for us to realise God's purpose for us.**
- ◆ Jesus willingly joins us in our humanity in order to free us from the evil we have brought on ourselves because of our sinful rebellion and failure to recognise our Creator and Father.
 - ◆ Although He bears no moral responsibility for our sinful choices, out of His love and mercy towards His children, He nevertheless chooses to accept responsibility for them.
 - ◆ There is no risk to which God permitted humans to be subjected to that He Himself was not willing to bear, even death on the cross.
 - ◆ God in Jesus willingly and lovingly accepted the full consequences of our rebellion.
 - ◆ **Hebrews 12:2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.**
 - ◆ However by accepting the full consequences of our rebellion, Jesus adds another comprehensive claim on each of our lives, that of "Savior."
 - ◆ Whether we realise it or not, all humanity has been implicated in the life and death of Jesus Christ as He both lived and paid the death penalty for every last one of us (John 3:16-17).
 - ◆ The one who deserved it the least of all suffered the effects of rejected love the most, so He could share glory with us (Isaiah 53:1-12).

When all this is taken into consideration, the spiritual lessons, the role of Jesus Christ, it would seem the path of evil is a necessary part of God's purpose of raising man to his destiny of becoming "in the image of God."

- ◆ It is as if God is allowing this period of testing of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil to inoculate us against sin and evil, so that when the time is right, we will respond positively to His invitation to realise our God-given destiny of joining Him in eternity.
- ◆ Just as an inoculation is necessary to build resistance to a disease, so God is using a necessary suffering and evil now to produce a better outcome for us in the future.
- ◆ In the end, what we can know is the evil, suffering, and death we suffer now will all make sense, there will be a justification for all the suffering that has occurred.
- ◆ However, that knowledge may not happen until the judgment, but waiting there will be One who is both the righteous Judge but also the Saviour of the world (1 John 4:14).
- ◆ Until then, we will need to trust the wisdom, knowledge, and love of our Creator and heavenly Father as He works out His purpose to create human beings in His image.
- ◆ **Romans 11:33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!**