

Have We Substituted Good for God?

Good and evil. We all know the difference, don't we? Aren't we born into this world with an inherent knowledge of what is right and wrong?

I've often heard people say human beings are inherently good. We hear someone say "he's a good man" or "she's a good woman," and we accept the evaluation at face value. The vulnerable let down their guard and embrace every statement or action from those proclaimed to be good.

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But are these assessments always accurate? Could we ever fall into the delusional state of calling good evil or evil good? Surely not. The distinction is too obvious. Right?

Consider the following story. Many centuries ago, a wealthy young leader approached Jesus with a question: What must I do to gain eternal life? This leader was an honest man and a model citizen. When he came to Jesus, he honored Him with the greeting "Good Teacher."

The man's question was one Jesus could certainly answer. However, before Jesus acknowledged his inquiry, He countered, "Why do you call Me good? No one is good, except God alone" (Mark 10:18).

Wait a minute. Why would Jesus correct a man who called Him good? He is good! I'd like to propose an answer to that question: Man's standard of good is different from God's.

Here's how Scripture puts it: "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12).

There is a way that seems right. It seems good, wise, beneficial and so forth. Yet the warning is clear: What seems good may actually be detrimental, harmful and nonproductive—the way of death.

Knowing Good from Evil

This is why Hebrews 5:14 says we need discernment to know the difference between good and evil. It's why King Solomon prayed, "Give Your servant therefore an understanding heart ... that I may discern between good and bad" (1 Kin. 3:9).

This isn't the way most of us naturally think, myself included. Years ago, I was puzzling over this issue when God said something that transformed my perspective. "Son, it wasn't the evil side of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that Eve was drawn to," He said. "It was the good side."

I opened my Bible to Genesis 3 to confirm what I'd heard. Sure enough, I read:

"When the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasing to the eyes and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she gave to her husband with her, and he ate" (Gen. 3:6).

I saw the words good, pleasant and desirable and my jaw dropped. I heard God say, "There is a 'good' that is not of Me. It is not submitted to Me."

God proceeded to show me how most "good" people, especially Christian people, are not drawn to blatantly evil behavior. Instead, they're drawn to things that seem good but are contrary to His wisdom. That's what happened to Eve.

This brings me to another nagging question, one I've wrestled with for years. Just how did the enemy get Eve to turn on God?

It's important to ask this question, for Paul states, "But I fear that somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve through his trickery, so your minds might be led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ" (2 Cor. 11:3).

Think about it. Eve lived in a perfect environment. She enjoyed total peace and abundant provision. Best of all, she lived in harmony with her Creator. So how did Satan do it?

You can find the full account of the story in Genesis 3:1-6. But let me give you two big takeaways. First, the enemy directed the woman's attention away from all the things God had given and got her focus on the one thing He had forbidden. Satan said to the woman, "Has God said, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?" (Gen. 3:1).

Thousands of known fruit trees exist in the world. My guess is that every one was represented in the garden. Eve could have eaten from any of the trees, but after Satan's question, she couldn't get her eyes off the only one that was forbidden.

It's no different today. God has freely given each of us so many gifts—every blessing heaven offers (Eph. 1:3). However, our enemy seeks to cover up God's generosity, so we only see what is "withheld." We forget that when God restrains us, it's because He knows what's best for us.

Satan's Strategy

That brings us to the second aspect of Satan's strategy. He called God's character into question. Then the serpent said to the woman, "You surely will not die! For God knows that on the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil" (Gen. 3:4-5).

Eve saw that the tree was good, pleasant and would make her wise. At Satan's words, her thoughts began to go down a new road. If this strategy was successful in a perfect environment, how much easier is the enemy's task today?

It's for this reason we're strongly warned by the apostle James: "Do not err, my beloved brothers. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no change or shadow of turning" (James 1:16-17).

Here's the gist of what he's saying—and don't take this next statement lightly. It doesn't matter how good something looks, how happy it makes you, how much fun it is, how rich and successful it will help you become, how deeply spiritual it appears, how sensible it seems or how popular or accepted it is.

If something is contrary to the will of God, it will ultimately bring sorrow to your life. Great news: God isn't trying to hide His best from us. He promises that those who seek will find. The key to discovering His perfect will is found in Romans 12:2: "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."

We cannot discern what is truly good for our lives without first having our minds renewed. To walk in the fullness of God's good plan for us, we have to turn away from the wisdom of this world and let our minds be shaped by His Word.

If we live by what human reasoning calls good, we can easily be swayed from God's wisdom, confusing good and bad. But if we rely on God's inspired Word to set our standard, we will be unshakeable.

Whose standard of good guides your life: man's or God's? I encourage you to ground yourself in the perspective of heaven. Get in God's presence, study His Word and ask His Spirit to lead you along the way of life!

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