

**6 Week Sermon Series**: Recognizing the Line Between Good and Evil

**Sermon 1:** The Struggle Between Good and Evil

**Date**: August 14, 2016

**Scripture**: Genesis 2:15-17; 3:6-7

**Things I’d like to remember from today’s sermon:**

**Daily Study Guide**

**MONDAY August 15, 2016 Genesis 2:9, 15-17, 3:1-14 *The Beginning of the Struggle***

The Bible first mentioned “evil” in the Hebrew creation story, which said that in the midst of God’s perfect garden stood the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. God’s gift of moral freedom means each of us has such a “tree” within us, the choice to know good or evil. In the creation story (and in our lives), choosing to know evil produced evil results—shame, conflict and pain.

• As you examine how the Hebrew storytellers depicted the process by which we humans convince ourselves that becoming familiar with evil is actually a good thing, think of times when have you “heard” in your own thoughts something like the serpent’s voice in Genesis 3. Do you find yourself feeling that “I want what I want when I want it” in ways that trump God’s inner voice drawing you to want what God wants?

• How did Genesis 3 portray God’s response to Adam and Eve as they skulked among the trees, trying to hide from God? How did their shame response (garments of fig leaves?) and finger-pointing capture the way evil distorts and spoils relationships? How does this story show that when you’re not perfect, God will not shun you by withdrawing love, but will forgive and restore you?

**Prayer**: Lord God, thank you that while I was yet a sinner, Christ died for me! Psalm 23 said, “Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life.” Thank you for calling me by name, for coming in search of me to save me. Amen.

**TUESDAY August 16, 2016 2 Kings 17:9-17, Amos 5:12-15 *Evil - all that opposes God’s good purpose***

Amos was a prophet who pleaded with the people of the northern kingdom of Israel to turn back to God. 2 Kings described the kingdom’s fall, not in military or political terms, but in terms of the people’s moral choices. “Evil” in the Scriptures never existed on its own. It was defined by its opposition to God’s good purpose-“evil” is all that departs from the divine design for a worthwhile, fully human life.

• “Seek good and not evil … hate evil, love good”-pretty simple, right? If only! In day-to-day life, what most fills your thoughts and grips your heart? In what ways do you open your heart and mind regularly to let God (not other sources) define what “good” is? When you recognize emotional blocks to loving “good” (past hurts, debilitating thought patterns, etc.), are you willing to deal with those bravely and openly, with a counselor’s help if needed?

• 2 Kings comes from a different, long ago culture, so it’s easy for us to see that Israel fell to shocking depths-“They burned their sons and daughters alive” (verse 17). But they didn’t start there. Notice how the passage leads us through some of Israel’s steps on the way to human sacrifice. Review your own life trajectory. One way is to look at the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22-23). Are you finding more of God’s fruit in yourself this January than in past years?

**Prayer**: Lord, you spoke through Amos to Israel long ago, and through all of Scripture to us today. Transform my “self” so that more and more I naturally seek and choose you-good, not evil. Amen.

**WEDNESDAY August 17, 2016 John 1:1-5, 1 John 1:1-10** Jesus: God’s light in the darkness of evil The Bible writers often pictured the tension between good and evil as the difference between light and darkness. But when the apostle John wrote, he was able to put it in more specific terms. Jesus, he said—the Lord he had seen and heard—was the light who broke into the world’s darkness, and the darkness couldn’t put it out. Jesus was the one who could deliver us from the darkness we find within ourselves.

• John very deliberately connected his gospel and his letter to the story of Creation. The word “beginning” is right at the start of both documents, along with the statement that “Everything came into being through the Word” (John 1:3). In what ways have you experienced God’s creative power opening new possibilities in your life?

• John knew we have a penchant for fooling ourselves: “If we claim, ‘We don’t have any sin,’ we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Are there areas of life where you are ignoring a God-given inner conviction that you need to face an issue honestly? Talk with God about it now. How can dealing directly with those issues open you to the freeing experience John described: “he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from everything we’ve done wrong” (verse 9)?

**Prayer**: Lord Jesus, thank you for doing your work of new creation in my life. Be light in my darkness, and give me the honesty to let you renew all the parts of me that still need your cleansing touch. Amen.

**THURSDAY August 18, 2016 Matthew 6:9-13, 15:10-20** ***“Deliver us from evil”***

The prophet Isaiah said the process pictured in Genesis 3 went on: that some people called good evil and evil good (Isaiah 5:20). Jesus found such people even in his day’s religious circles: people who denounced outward ritual violations, while harboring hatred, slander and bitterness in their hearts. His prayer for deliverance from the evil one was a prayer that God would keep the inner springs of behavior pure.

• Pharisees in Jesus' day didn’t know about germs, but had intricate washing rites meant to keep small demons from clinging to their hands, making food ritually unclean. While busily plotting how best to destroy Jesus (Matthew 12:14), they criticized his disciples for not strictly following the washing customs. Like them, we’d often rather look “good” than be good. Are you able to be “real” and ask a fellow Christian to pray with you about a spiritual or personal struggle of yours?

• Reflect on the connection between the first part of the Lord’s Prayer and its closing petition. What would life here be like if God’s will were “done on earth as it’s done in heaven” (Matthew 6:10)? As you live into God’s kingdom more and more, what are you asking God to do in you to free you to live more fully in Jesus’ light?

**Prayer**: Father in heaven, may your will be done in me more and more as it is in heaven. Lead me, Lord, and day by day empower me to erode my ties to earth and strengthen my ties to you. Amen.

**FRIDAY August 19, 2016 Romans 7:14-25** ***Our Struggle with Sin and Our Hope in Christ***

Paul told the Romans, with plainspoken honesty, about how he experienced the line between good and evil cutting through his own heart. Gritting his teeth and resolving to do better, he said, didn’t produce the good results he sought. It was only as he put his trust in Jesus' grace and power that he found, day by day, God’s grace freeing him from evil’s power in his life.

• Paul’s statement that evil comes from “sin that lives in me” (verse 17) was not an effort to duck responsibility for his actions. It was a vivid way of describing a nearly universal human experience: the sense of a war within our self, of two contending principles of action. When have you found yourself determined to change a hurtful pattern, and yet powerfully drawn back to it again?

• Paul’s picture of our inner struggles was not unique. The Roman philosopher Seneca wrote of “our helplessness in necessary things.” But Paul’s discussion did not end with despair. “Who will deliver me from this dead corpse? Thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (verse 24-25) When have you experienced Christ’s power, not wiping out the struggle, but empowering you to more and more come out on the right side of it?

**Prayer**: O God, I identify with Paul’s words: “When I want to do what is good, evil is right there with me.” Thank you for your presence and power through Jesus Christ, which guides my resolve to choose your way more and more. Amen.

**SATURDAY August 20,2016 Ephesians 5:6-11, Psalm 34:13-16** ***“Live your life as children of light”*** Because the line between good and evil cuts through each of our hearts, each of us daily chooses our life's direction. Ephesians 5:9 says, “Light produces fruit that consists of every sort of goodness, justice, and truth.” To live as a child of light is not to choose a gloomy, self-condemning kind of existence. It’s to set out on an adventure with God, exploring and internalizing “every sort of goodness, justice and truth.” As you do that, you are truly choosing good, and living in the light Jesus Christ brought to the world.

• At the end of his life story, All Is Grace, Brennan Manning wrote, “My hope, as always, is to point to the God too good to be true … My message, unchanged for more than fifty years, is this: God loves you unconditionally, as you are and not as you should be, because nobody is as they should be … My life is a witness to … a grace that is the pleasure of the Father, fleshed out in the carpenter Messiah, Jesus the Christ, who left His Father’s side not for heaven’s sake but for our sakes … Grace is sufficient even though we huff and puff with all our might to try to find something or someone it cannot cover. Grace is enough. He is enough. Jesus is enough.” How will you build your life around that hope-filled, life-changing truth this week, this month, this year?

**Prayer**: Lord Jesus, you invite me into the great adventure of living as a child of your light. The psalmist wrote that you listen to my cries for help. So help me say “yes” to your invitation, today and every day. Amen.