

## The Reality of Evil

**N**O CHRISTIAN NEED be ashamed of affirming that the doctrine of human depravity gives the only true explanation for human sorrow and folly. In recent years such a conviction has been forced upon many who once declined to have anything to do with religion. For example, the well-known philosopher, C.E.M. Joad, wrote a book called *God and Evil*, in which he set forth a change of mind as regards his former agnosticism:

Evil is not merely a bi-product created of unfavourable circumstances. It is too widespread and too deep-seated to admit of any such explanation; so widespread, so deep-seated that one can only conclude that

what the religions have always taught is true, and

*In Part One Dr. Ford reminded us there is such a thing as right and wrong. A cause and effect relationship operates throughout the whole universe, because God, the Creator, is moral. Humans are slow to learn this truth because they are fallen. Only righteousness works in a permanent sense.*

WHY  
DO  
WE  
NEVER LEARN?

PART II

by Desmond Ford

that evil is endemic to the heart of man.

I am claiming no credit for this conclusion. On the contrary, it is ground for humiliation to have come to it so late. (p. 24)

Centuries ago David Clarkson, one of the Puritans, had this to say as he preached on Psalm 51:5:

The end of the ministry of the Gospel is to bring sinners unto Christ. Their way to this end lies through the sense of their misery without Christ. The ingredients of this misery are our sinfulness, original and actual; the wrath of God, whereto sin has exposed us; and our impotency to free ourselves either from sin or wrath.<sup>1</sup>

## The Bible and Human Evil

The Bible is a wonderfully concentrated book. It refuses to be diverted from its one topic of man's need of salvation and the remedy. Therefore the sin of man is emphasized on every page. We read of "the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb 12:1); "the old man, which is corrupt" (Eph 4:22); "the carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom 8:7); "sin that dwelleth in me" (Rom 7:17); "the body of sin" (Rom 6:6); "the plague of...[the] heart" (1 Ki 8:38); "Foolishness is bound in the heart" (Pr 22:15); "the stony heart" (Ez 11:19); "the evil treasure [of the heart]" (Mt 12:35); and "the poison of asps" (Rom 3:13).

We all know that sin always seems attractive, otherwise we would not be caught. It is like the butter that Jael brought to Sisera "in a lordly dish" (Judges 5:25). This is why sexual sin, in particular, is so attractive. It is associated with youth and beauty. However, could we see sin as it really is, we would behold a black and misshapen monster. Scripture compares it to the greatest deformities and the most filthy and repelling objects to be found in this world (see 2 Pe 2:22; Rom 7:24; Is 1:5,6; Php 3:8).

In his book *Peace with God*, Dr. Billy Graham gave a marvelous summary of sin and its results:

All mental disorders, all sicknesses, all destruction, all wars find their root in sin. It causes madness in the brain, and poison in the heart. It is described in the Bible as a dread and prostrating disease that

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*"...in every act we side either with or against God."*

demands a radical cure. It is a tornado on the loose. It is a volcano gone wild. It is a madman broken loose from the asylum. It is a gangster on the prowl. It is a roaring lion seeking its prey. It is a streak of lightning heading toward the earth. It is a guillotine cutting off the head. It is a deadly cancer eating its way into the souls of men. It is a raging torrent that sweeps everything before it.

Because of sin every stream with human crime is stained, every breeze is morally corrupted, every day's light is blackened, every life's cup tainted with the bitter, every life's roadway made dangerous with pitfalls, every life's voyage made perilous with treacherous shoals. Sin—destructive of all happiness, darkening the understanding, searing the conscience, withering everything, causing all tears of sorrow and all pangs of agony, promising velvet and giving a shroud, promising liberty and giving bondage, promising nectar and giving gall, promising silk and giving the shirt of sackcloth. (pp. 85-86)

### **Misunderstanding the Nature of Evil**

It's because we do not understand the seriousness and the depths of our sinful nature that we never learn without special help from God. We are inclined to think of sins done occasionally, whereas the biblical teaching is that everything we do is imbued with sin because of our sinful nature. Similarly, too often when we think of sins, we are thinking of outrageous acts rather than selfishness and pride which taints all. Let us never forget that there were very good men in the group that drove Christ to his death. Look at the faces of the men around the cross. They tell us things about ourselves. Those men still live in our society today, in our churches, in our homes. There at the cross were Pharisees who were rigorous and self-righteous. There also were relaxed and casual Sadducees. In the background of the Calvary scene you may see the treacherous Judas, blasphemous and denying Peter, the vacillating Pilate, seared Herod. But you see there also the conforming soldiers and the acquiescent mob. Are we not all there?

### **No Neutrality**

An English writer reminds us that: Fundamentally there is only one sin—rebellion of the human will against the will of God. Insofar as my own will is rebellious, it is in tune with every act of murder, rape, or oppression committed this day in the world. My private acts of selfishness committed today, trivial though they may seem to me, nevertheless range me on the side of those whose more sensational deeds of cruelty or lust publicly advertise the rebellion of the human will. They bring me into a deep, sympathetic alliance with the murderer, the swindler, and the debauchee. I too like them am in rebellion. I too like them am serving the self; a little more cautiously and subtly perhaps; being rather more sensitive than they to the earthly cost of extravagance in such matters—but what heed does God pay to that added touch of worldly caution and subtlety? He looks down today upon a human race engaged in obedience or disobedience. There is no third alternative, no discreet maintainings of silence between the praising or blaspheming throngs. In every act we praise or we blaspheme.<sup>2</sup>

Stunning is it not, to realize that in every act we either praise or we blaspheme? That in every act we side either with or against God. There is no neutrality, we are all the day choosing between Christ and Barabbas, between God and the devil.

### **The Real Enemy**

If a besieged company in a fortress were ever looking over the parapet to the east, expecting devastation from that quarter, would they not have been grateful to someone wiser who pointed out that their real enemy was coming from another point of the compass? Should not we be grateful to God that he has told us again, and again, and again, that our real enemy is not what we think it is? It is not our poverty or straightened circumstances. It is not the evil of other people. It is not the cruelties of nature or any one of a thousand things which we blame. Our real evil is within. Dwight L. Moody was right when he declared that he had had more trouble with himself than any other man he had ever met.



*All that we do that is good is but an echo of God's good.*



### A Menagerie of Evil

There is no part of man's nature but has come under the dominion of sin. In his sin man is compared to 1) an adder for his venom (Ps 58:4); 2) an ass for his stubbornness (Job 11:12); 3) a bear for his cruelty (Dan 7:5); 4) a canker worm for destructiveness (Joel 2:25); 5) a dog for uncleanness (Pr 26:11); 6) a dragon for desolateness (Job 30:29); 7) a fox for his cunning (Lk 13:32); 8) a leopard for fierceness (Dan 7:6); 9) a lion for ravening (Ps 22:13); 10) a moth for frailty (Job 27:18); 11) a sheep for stupidity (Is 53:6); 12) a spider's web for flimsiness (Is 59:5); 13) a sow for her filthiness (2 Pe 2:22); 14) a viper for his poison (Mt 23:33); and, 15) a wolf for his voraciousness (Jn 10:12).

May we say again what was said earlier? Moral truth is self-authenticating. Even in the darkest hour when we seem to be doubting everything, one thing remains certain. Even if there were no God and no heaven and no hell, we are internally convinced that it remains better to be generous than selfish, chaste than licentious, true than false, brave than a coward. But the question is, how is it to be done?

### How Can We Be Good?

When Professor Joad became convinced of the error of his intellectual ways, he wrote a book to the world making his confession and urging men to find true religion as the only remedy for evil. He pointed out that the teachers of religion varied in a number of ways, but that through their teachings ran a number of threads that were fairly clear and consistent. He suggested that religious teachers were agreed on the necessity of these things—to be kind, gentle, compassionate and just; not to be self-seeking; to discipline, even in some cases to suppress the bodily passions; not to set over much stock on the things of this world; to respect the rights of others, treating them as not less important than oneself; to love them so far as one can, and to love and fear God. Then he added these words:

But the way of life which the religions enjoin cannot be lived without assistance. . . . Because men are by nature sinful, we cannot always resist temptation; we cannot, therefore, lead the life which

the religious enjoin, unless God helps us to do so. If, however, we pray to Him for help it will be given. Thus it is only through the assistance of Divine Grace, as it is called, that man can succeed in living aright.<sup>3</sup>

### The New Testament Tells How

The question of the "how" that Joad has addressed is answered clearly by the New Testament. It tells us there is no other way than the way of the expulsive power of a *new affection*. So Paul could write in 2 Corinthians 5:14,15, RSV, "For the love of Christ controls us, because we are convinced that one has died for all; therefore all have died. And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised." Every great life has been under the constraint of some mastering principle or influence. As Spurgeon once pointed out, a man who is everything by turns, and nothing long, is a nobody; and a man who wastes his life on whims and fancies, pleasures and pleasures, never achieves anything. Such a person flits over the surface of life and leaves no more trace than a bird upon the sky. But a man becomes great (even for mischief) when he becomes concentrated. Just as horses must be harnessed and steam must be confined, so the energies of man are powerful when motivated by something greater than anything within him.

### The Cross Alone Our Motive

Not the life of Christ, not the teachings of Christ, but his sacrificial death alone provides the motivation that we need. It offers a fulcrum and a lever that can heave our lives up to the heights. This is the only way we can get out of ourselves. It is of no use to try and whip ourselves up to certain religious emotions in order to discharge certain duties. Only when faith is used as an eye to focus upon Christ on the terrible tree, and the hand to lay hold of him as a personal redeemer, shall we become united with the very power of the heavenly throne itself. If we want ice to melt, we put it out in the sunshine, and if we want a mirror to gleam, we do not spend all our time in polishing it, but

*To know  
that we are  
loved,  
despite what  
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to love  
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despite  
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of the  
patience of  
God towards  
us inspires  
us to be  
patient with  
the rest of  
our kind.*

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rather we carry it where it can catch the sun's rays and flash them back in glory. Scripture says, "We love him because he first loved us" (1 Jn 4:19). All that we do that is good is but an echo of God's good.

To contemplate Calvary and to recognize our part in it is to find in God a new center. To understand the meaning of that event is to find self displaced. We can no longer live to ourselves, says the apostle (Rom 14:7; 2 Cor 5:15). To know that we are loved, despite what we are, inclines us to love others despite what they are. To see the evidence of the patience of God towards us inspires us to be patient with the rest of our kind. To catch a glimpse of the hope of Paradise offered to a penitent thief arouses in us an undying hope which can transcend "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." To behold Christ's willing subjection to his crucifixion energizes us in a way that nothing else can.

#### **Our Only Problem—Solved!**

Your only problem and my only problem is the sin problem—the sin

problem that leads us to love the things that could destroy us and to hate the things that could save us. But "whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:21). Shall we not call on God repeatedly to give us an understanding of those hours in which he bared his heart of love to the universe? Call upon him until he reveals that we, too, died on that cross, and that we are now Christ's; and the only life that we have is the one he has given us. Then we will confess that we are not our own, for we were bought with a price. Then it will be true as we behold heaven's wondrous grace that "sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace" (Rom 6:14). Henceforth we shall live no longer for ourselves but for him who for our sake died and was raised again. There is no other way to right living, to health of body and soul. □

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1. Cited by Arthur W. Pink in *Man's Total Depravity*, p. 10.
  2. H. Blamires, *The Will and the Way*, pp. 60,63.
  3. *God and Evil*, p. 12.
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