

Evil May Not Be What You Think It Is



Evil, not personal sin, is the single greatest threat and challenge to our spiritual lives. What makes evil so dangerous is that it is extremely deceptive and seductive. Evil is a false way of thinking that is a result of socio-economic-politico influences--e.g., social temptations to be like others, economic temptations to put money above virtue and God, and political temptations of power.

Lest one thinks that all one needs to do is to read the Bible (Bible-onlyism) to avoid negative influences of culture, I would suggest a careful study of the evil perpetrated by those who were zealously serious about Bible study—e.g., antebellum Southern Christian slaveholders, the Christian Right (the 1970s), the modern Word of Faith movement, and various prosperity movements. All of these groups included many who were very serious about Bible study only to be overcome by the evil of their culture.

The only way to break out of the influence of one's Dasein (enculturation) from which he interprets the Bible is philosophical realism with its universal, objective, and unchanging hermeneutics of abstraction of direct reality (e.g., human nature and morality), the law of identity, and the law of non-contradiction. And the only way to break out of false "spiritual" priorities is to make the universal principle and core of the spiritual life "loving God with all of one's heart, soul, and mind, and loving others as oneself"—to miss this is to miss the whole point

of the spiritual life. The spiritual life is all about loving God and sacrificially loving others –it is the point of every verse in the Bible (Matt. 22:37-40; 1 John 3:16).

To illustrate how easily one can be misled consider the term “antichrist.” While most people think that this term found in the Book of Revelation, it is not. As a matter of fact, the term “antichrist” comes from the epistles of First and Second John. Moreover, in these epistles, it does not refer to some great evil Person in the future. It refers to those who were once part of local Christian churches (1 John 2:18, 22; 4:3; 2 John 1:7). In other words, in the Bible "antichrist" is used of those who called themselves Christians. Interesting.

Consider history. Consider the original five fundamental principles of the cultural movement of the Christian Right that grew up in the late 1970s.

1. America is a Christian nation. A traditional reading of the Bible should rule over every sphere of culture.
2. White, native-born Protestants—and a few others who agree with them—should be in charge of that culture, at least in America.
3. The ideal family is the heterosexual nuclear family, where sex is bound within marriage and the wife submits to her husband’s authority.
4. The free market is the only Christian way to do business.
5. It’s America’s duty to defend these values around the world

You can’t get much more Bible-oriented than the Christian Right. Yet consider the evil of the first two tenets. Where are those tenets in the Bible? They're not! In fact, the first principle undermines itself. What an example of how a culture can hijack and distort true Christianity.

In all fairness, it should be pointed out that the Christian Right is not synonymous with today’s conservative Christians and evangelicals. Rightly so, many Christians who identify themselves as evangelical or conservative have dissented from some of the above views. By the way, I am a conservative Christian—a conservative who did not realize how many areas of my own Christian faith and views of reality were the result of being hijacked by an enculturated form Christianity.

I believe that one of the most powerful ways that Satan distorts the thinking of Christians is by keeping them from a knowledge of history and from developing their thinking according to universal principles of philosophical realism. Without a solid understanding of history and grounding in Realism, the believer will always fashion a view of Christianity and life that best fits what he likes from the type of Christianity that is offered at the time.

Let us renew our efforts to follow the Truth no matter where it leads us. Only the Truth can set us free from the evil of false thinking. As Christians, we have the benefit of the ministry of the Holy Spirit to enlighten our intellects and to ennoble our wills for the Good. Because Christ dwells in us, we have the power for goodness in us. May we reject the socio-economic-politico temptations of the world. May we Christians reject those things in our past that so dishonor Christ and Christianity. May we rise above all of the political rancor today and show the beauty of Christ's love and grace.

Love truly is the root, hinge, and fruit of any and all virtue. Without love we are nothing:

1 Corinthians 13:2 And if I have the gift of prophecy, and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but do not have love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, 5 does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, 6 does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; 7 bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 13 But now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love

What about those who hate us? Are we to love them too? What did Jesus say?

Matthew 5:44 "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, 45 "that you may be sons of your Father in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust. 46 "For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? 47 "And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so? 48 "Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

Romans 12:21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Overcoming evil is always about Truth and Love. To undermine either of these is to allow evil to grow and fester in the soul. We must face the Truth no matter the consequences. We must be people who want to know the truth no matter where it leads. We must love Truth to overcome evil. Truth is far more important than our enculturated penchants.

In His Matchless Grace,

Pastor Don Hargrove