

ELECTION TIME¹

The Story of How Evil Began, and How It Will End

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When a baby begins to grow up it isn't long until he learns that some things are good and other things are bad. Water feels good, but fire feels bad. Milk tastes good, but lemon tastes sour. Soon he learns that some people are good and others are bad. Some he learns to love, and others he fears. In every nation there are good citizens, and there are also crooks and criminals. It doesn't take us long to discover that there is something evil in the universe.

Before we begin our search in the Bible to find where evil came from, we need to understand clearly where good has come from. The apostle James says, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights" (James 1:17). The first statement of the Bible says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. . . . And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Then God said, 'Let there be light;' and there was light" (Gen. 1:1-3). God is the Creator of light and joy. And the Holy Spirit was the agent.

Is the world's Creator a personal Being?

On the sixth day, "God said, 'Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness' (verse 26). Since there is only one God, why does He say "Our"? The Gospel of John gives an answer: "In the

beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . . All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. . ." (John 1:1, 3, 14). The "Word" is clearly Christ; and He also was an agent in creation. God "created all things through Jesus Christ" (Eph. 3:9).

God is One, but there are three Persons: God the Father, Christ the Word of God, and the Holy Spirit of God.

Many have wondered why the Gospel of John calls Christ "the Word." A friend may entertain a loving thought about you that he is thinking to himself, hidden deep in his mind. By looking at him (or her) you could never guess what that thought is. To make you know what he is thinking he must open his mouth and speak. The spoken word expresses his hidden thoughts.

In the same way we cannot understand what God is like, what His hidden thoughts may be. God is Spirit, and we are mere flesh. But Christ has come to reveal to us what was hidden from us of the thought and character of God. He is God's thought translated into human flesh and character, "God with us" (Matt. 1:23).

Likewise at the creation of the world, God had a beautiful plan in mind. Christ expressed those thoughts in words during the six days He spoke everything into existence. That is why He is called "the Word." It was the Spirit of God that moved and performed the act of creating. And when the marvelous creation was finished it was all "good."

¹ John 1:1-3. 71, 559.

There is no evidence that He created anything evil. Because God is good it would not be possible for Him to create anything bad or negative.

Where did evil come from?

Did God make a mistake? Did a good God make a bad devil?

Let us take a look at what is a familiar sight everywhere—a car that has been in an accident and is a twisted, ruined mass of useless steel. It should be bright, shiny, with a perfect shape. But this is a very bad one; in fact, nobody wants it. It has been wrecked.

Who made this to be a bad car?

You begin looking about in the wreck and you find a little nameplate which says, “General Motors, Cadillac Division.” Are they the maker of this bad car? No, you say, the factory made a perfect, beautiful new one; they could not make a wreck like this. Somebody else took this perfect car and drove it into a tree or a bridge.

Scripture says that God created a beautiful and perfect angel whose name was Lucifer. “You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, till iniquity was found in you” (Eze. 28:15). As is true of all his created beings, God gave Lucifer freedom to choose for himself which way he would go. Lucifer chose to become the devil, or Satan. He made himself into the devil. It was he who invented evil.

Jesus said to some people of his day, “You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because

there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it” (John 8:44). If Satan himself is the “father” of lies, it is clear that God is no more responsible for lies or evil than is General Motors for creating the wreck we were considering.

Someone will ask, “Why didn’t God prevent his beautiful angel Lucifer from ruining himself like this and becoming the devil and Satan?” You are a parent, and you have a real live baby, and a life-size doll. No one can know what the baby will grow up to become someday. He may become a good person and bring joy to his parents, or he may become a criminal and bring them sorrow. The baby is given freedom of choice to become the person he wants to be.

On the other hand, there is no danger that the doll will ever do anything bad. It will never say a disrespectful word nor ever rebel. If it has a little tape machine inside, it may say, “I love you, I love you, I love you.” You set the doll on a chair and it will remain there forever, apparently obedient.

But what mother or father would exchange their live baby for such a doll?

Parents are prepared to accept the risk of their child bringing them joy or sorrow, laughter or tears. They would not adopt a doll; and neither would God create an angel who did not have freedom of choice. The only kind of service God wants from everyone is that which is free and spontaneous.

When Lucifer began to cherish evil thoughts in his heart, God still loved him and tried to help him. The Bible says of Lucifer: “You were the seal of

perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty. . . . You were the anointed cherub who covers; I established you; you were on the holy mountain of God; you walked back and forth in the midst of the fiery stones. . . . Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty, you corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor” (Eze. 28:12, 14, 17).

If Lucifer had repented, he could have humbled himself and confessed his wrong. But he became proud and stubborn. He invented a totally new idea that had never been known in God's great creation—the idea of self-love, that is, loving oneself instead of others. Every thought became of how he could enrich himself, lift himself above others. This new idea was the result of pride. It was the first sin ever committed.

In order to understand clearly what sin is, we must understand how it began. Isaiah tells us how sin had its beginning in the heart of Lucifer while he was still an angel in heaven: “How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! . . . For you have said in your heart: ‘I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’” (Isa. 14:12-14).

This love of “I” was the first sin ever committed. We recognize something very familiar when we read about this, for this is also the natural idea that all of us have been born with, in our own hearts. Lucifer's idea has spread throughout the world! This is the essence of “sin.” And this principle of self-love

finally led to the murder of the Son of God, as an oak tree is in the acorn.

Lucifer refused to repent. Finally, his seed of sin took root and grew until it blossomed into open rebellion against God. If he wanted to be “like the most High,” he must somehow usurp the highest place for himself. His hatred became so terrible that he was willing even to murder God so he could have his own way.

It may sound strange, but all this happened in heaven itself. Lucifer declared war against God: “And war broke out in heaven: Michael [that is, Christ] and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil, and Satan” (Rev. 12:7-9).

Someone may ask, Why did God cast him out of heaven? The reason is. that only one-third of the angels of heaven chose to go along with him in his rebellion, while two-thirds remained loyal (verse 4). The first democracy existed in heaven long ago. The majority won the day, and cast out the rebellion. It was not that God unilaterally, on His own, cast Satan out of heaven. The loyal angels would not tolerate his presence there.

The one-third who rebelled with Satan are still living today, working with him in his efforts to deceive the people that dwell on the earth. They are the evil spirits which can work miracles. It is good for us to know who they are and where they came from. “They are the spirits of demons, performing

signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty” (Rev. 16:14). As soon as one knows the truth about these evil spirits, he need no longer be afraid of them.

Why didn't God kill the devil and his angels?

God had the power to do so at the beginning, but He saw that it was wise not to kill Satan. If the president or prime minister of a nation should be accused by one of his highest cabinet ministers and all the citizens have heard the serious charges. Then one day this high cabinet officer is found mysteriously murdered. Two things would be apparent: (1) the president or prime minister had committed the murder, and (2) the reason he did so was because the accusations were true.

If God had destroyed Satan in the beginning, all of the loyal angels would have become terribly afraid, gathering in little groups and asking the awful question, “Why?” None of them at that time could have understood what sin is, or what it would eventually do; deep doubt and resentment would have grown in their hearts, and God would have had no way to clear up the mystery. Fear would have ruled the entire universe.

If one had never seen a lion or known what a man-eater can do, he might think that a little cub would be a nice pet for his children to play with. It seems such a harmless and playful pet. Only when it is a full-grown vicious beast does one realize what a cruel and dangerous animal it is. So it was with sin in heaven. God knew exactly what it was; He knew what it would lead to. But no one else, not even the

angels, could know the truth. In order to satisfy everyone so that sin would never rise up again to cause sorrow to His people, God had to be patient and let it “grow up” for all to see what it is. There was nothing God could do except to let Satan develop his ideas fully, so that everyone might see what kind of a “god” Satan would prove to be if he took over the throne of the universe.

Where did Satan go?

The Bible implies that Satan could roam throughout God's universe to the various worlds that God had created, knocking on the door of each one, as it were, saying, “Let me in. I have more wisdom than God has, and I will bring you more happiness than you now have! Join me in my campaign!” But the beings on other worlds refused to believe him.

Finally he came to this world that God had created, and tempted our first parents, Adam and Eve. They were the noblest beings of God's creation, “made . . . a little lower than the angels, and . . . crowned . . . with glory and honor” (Ps. 8:5). God had created them in His own image, after His likeness, wise and beautiful. God had entrusted to them the rulership of this planet. He gave our first parents complete freedom from the beginning, to choose whatever way they wanted to go. They could remain loyal to Him, as two-thirds of the angels did, or they could rebel as Satan and his followers had done.

When someone does something wrong, he likes to have someone else share his guilt. The popular proverb says, “Misery loves company.” Satan was

consumed with that same desire. He tried to persuade Adam and Eve to join him. He made it appear to them that if they remained loyal to God, they would lose something that only he could give them. He promised them that if they would dare to rebel against God they would learn “the knowledge of good and evil.” He implied that God had lied to them when He told them that they should “surely die” in the day they ate of the forbidden tree.

Assuming the form of a beautiful creature, Satan said to them, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in 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). Before Eve performed any outward act of disobedience, she chose in her heart to disbelieve God. She and Adam could never have disobeyed unless they first of all they made that choice. And they could never have believed Satan’s lie until first of all they disbelieved the truth that God had spoken. That is what sin is. The root of all sin is to think that God is a liar and to mistrust Him!

We are sorry to say, that is how Adam and Eve chose to feel about God. They joined the rebellion against Him. Then and there Adam sold out his possession and his rulership to Satan, and transferred to him his position of “ruler of this world” (John 14:30).

Oh, how Satan boasted of his conquest! Now he had a kingdom all his own! As “ruler of this world” he would demonstrate that his idea of loving self was a better idea than God’s principle of self-giving. Audacious as it may seem, Satan hoped that he would be so successful that he could convince the

entire universe to vote for him to take the place of God.

But what followed? In just a short time, something awful happened—a murder! Adam and Eve and their children, having yielded to Satan, began more and more to see things as he saw them, and to have his spirit. Adam’s two sons had a quarrel: “And it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose against Abel his brother and killed him” (Gen. 4:8). Their grief-stricken parents had never before seen a dead person. When they saw the blood spilled on the ground and picked up the lifeless form of their son, they sensed how the acorn of their sin was beginning to grow into the oak of world disaster. They cried out, “Is this what sin is going to bring on the earth?” Oh, how they must have wept!

Soon there were more and more people on earth who caught the same idea that Satan was teaching. Every thought was “I, I, I”. The wickedness of man became so great that “the earth was filled with violence” (Gen. 6:11). God was forced to permit a flood to destroy that wicked generation, and He began again with eight survivors.

Satan was still “the ruler of this world” and could therefore attend the great parliament of heaven to taunt and accuse God and the loyal angels. But pain, tears, sickness, sorrow, and death became common on earth. More and more people cried out for deliverance from Satan’s tyranny of sin. What could God do? Satan had conquered this world and was its “ruler,” by permission of Adam. In fact, most of the people on earth continued to “vote” for Satan

to be their ruler. God must do something very special. His plan took Satan by surprise.

God “invaded” this world in a way that Satan could not complain of. He sent his only Son as a human being “in the likeness of sinful flesh,” “born of a woman, born under the law” (Rom. 8:3; Gal. 4:4). Christ must enter the corporate stream of our fallen humanity and become one of us. He must suffer with us all the pain and torture that Satan could inflict upon Him. Satan’s charge was that sin was more powerful than God’s love—no one in human flesh could resist the power of sin. This, he said, was proof that he was stronger than God. Christ came to prove that Satan was wrong. He endured temptation as a human being, taking our place. Satan could not complain, because the test was fair and straightforward.

The angels of heaven watched as Baby Jesus was born in a stable at Bethlehem, and grew up. They still were not certain what Satan would do, or whether even Christ could conquer sin “in the likeness of sinful flesh.” Satan had won his kingdom by telling a lie. Now God said, “We will have a demonstration—let Satan do what he will; the whole world and the universe can see the results!”

The angels watched in amazement as Satan’s first move was to try to kill Jesus while He was still a baby in Bethlehem. Christ had to seek refuge on the continent of Africa from the wrath of King Herod. Then Satan stirred up the rulers of the Jewish nation to hate and reject the One who had come to save them. Angels watched Satan telling lies to Christ in an effort to deceive Him, too. They

watched Satan invite Christ to kneel down and worship him, and they saw Christ refuse to accept Satan’s principle of self-seeking. They were horrified when they saw Satan stir up the people to crucify the innocent Son of God. “So this is what Lucifer has become! Why, here is the Son of God, who has only loved the people, and Satan is killing Him cruelly! Now we see that there is nothing good left in Satan!”

Thus when Satan crucified Christ upon the cross, he defeated himself, uprooting himself entirely from the sympathy and favor of the heavenly universe. Now the “lion cub” had grown up fully and all could see his true character.

When the Father gave His Son, Christ also gave Himself. The price that Jesus paid was not merely a brief time spent as a visiting diplomat to this earth after which He returned to His former abode; rather He gave Himself to be one of us, with us, forever. He will always retain His humanity. Again, the price He paid was not a few days or hours of physical or spiritual agony to be endured with the prospect in view of relief and restoration; He actually went to hell in order to save us. He consented to die the equivalent of the “second death” which means, as one author puts it, “goodbye to life forever.” He had to “taste death for everyone,” so that we might not have to taste its bitterness (Heb. 2:9). “Christ has paid us our wages, even His own blood and suffering.”²

² *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 330.

Today Satan is a defeated foe. Does he have the power to harm us? Could a lion that is chained up securely do harm to you? He may be ever so cruel and bloodthirsty, but he cannot harm a hair of your head so long as you refuse to go near him. Jesus assures us, "Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." "Now the ruler of this world [Satan] will be cast out" (John 16:33, 12:31). The one who believes the Word of God need no longer fear Satan. He need no longer fear any curse of a Black Magic enemy. No spell "cast" upon him can harm him. "If God is for us, who can be against us? . . . Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? . . . We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (Rom. 8:31, 35, 37).

The lion in the cage may hate you, may even roar at you, but he can no longer harm you without your consent. Jesus says, "You will be hated by all for My name's sake. But not a hair of your head shall be lost" (Luke 21:17, 18).

Now, you and I are still standing as it were before that "tree of knowledge of good and evil." Satan still tempts us to doubt God's Word, to mistrust Him, and to yield ourselves to the control of sin.

What choice will you make?

The whole world watches intently as nations go to the polls to elect their new government leaders. An even more important "election" is taking place now. If you accept Satan's lies and align yourself on his side, you are in fact casting your "vote" for him. The choice you make will determine where you will stand, not only now, but in the final day of judgment. It is impossible for him to have control

over you unless you choose to surrender to it. Christ has already set you free to choose for yourself, you are no longer a slave to Satan. But if, after being set free, you deliberately turn again to choose sin, you make the choice that will position you firmly on the side of Satan in this great battle against God.

In fact, this great battle between Satan and God is being fought all over again in miniature in your heart and mine. The struggle is still on, and you are important, for your "vote" will decide the issue not only for yourself but also for others who will be influenced by you. Wouldn't it be a terrible thing to stand at last before the Judgment of God as a rebel and enemy of the Christ who demonstrated His love and righteousness at the cross?

Far more than our individual salvation is involved. The final success of God's great plan of salvation is at stake. Your "vote" is important.