

Whatever Became Of Evil?

Series: If It Feels Good, Do It ! (?)

by Ron R. Ritchie

In our study of the Book of Judges we discovered last week that God had appointed Joshua to take his army into the land to exterminate the Canaanite people because their sin was "full" (Gen. 15: 16), i.e., they had come to the point where there was no more room for repentance. They had so rejected God that he, with his ability to understand beyond time and space, could see that they would never repent. He had given them 400 years from the days of Abraham up until the time of Joshua to repent, but they refused all his offers.

So Joshua went into the land and conquered it, and in the process defeated some 31 kings. Towards the end of a long and victorious life he gathered the elders of the nation of Israel and asked them, "Will you serve the gods of Egypt, will you serve the gods that are in our land now called Canaan, or will you serve the God who led us out of Egypt? As for me and my house, we've made a choice and our choice is that we will serve the God who led us out of Egypt, the only true and living God." And they said, "Joshua, we're with you, and we will make the same choice. We will follow you." (Joshua 24:14-15)

Joshua died, and we discovered that the Lord appeared to the nation and asked, "Now who is going to go into the land and attack the remaining pockets of resistance and fully possess the land?" The Israelites agreed with the Lord that they should go and wipe out these pockets, but after a few skirmishes they decided that the enemy was a little too tough. They decided to invite these enemies into their tents, have supper with them and give them jobs. This was a direct violation of God's whole purpose for the land of Israel, for the nation of Israel, and for the people of Canaan.

In chapter 2:15 the spiritual downfall of the Israelites is recorded. We found out that Israel not only agreed to live with the enemy, but they became involved in their idolatrous practices, they exchanged their daughters in marriage with them, and they make contracts with them, another direct violation of Deuteronomy, Numbers, and Joshua 23. They were living a life style of disobedience.

Today I would like to address the question, "Whatever became of evil?" Turn to Judges 2:6-10 and you will see the contrast between the days of Judges and the days of Joshua. These verses really belong in Joshua 24, but Samuel, the author, puts them here just to show us this contrast.

Another Generation

When Joshua had dismissed the people, the sons of Israel went each to his inheritance to possess the land. And the people served the Lord all the days of Joshua, and all the days of the elders who survived Joshua, who had seen all the great work of the Lord which He had done for Israel. Then Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of the Lord, died at the age of one hundred and ten. And they buried him in the territory of his inheritance in Timnath-heres, in the his country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gassh. And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers: and there arose another generation after them who did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel.

The first thing we need to see is that the generation that lived with Joshua served the Lord because they had walked with him, they had known him, they had experienced his presence, and they had experienced victory through his power. And so when Joshua offered them a choice, the choice was as clear for them as it was for Joshua: "We have been living with a living God. We shall stay with that living God."

The second thing that we need to see is that there is a problem, and the problem is that now there is another generation, a generation that did not know the Lord or his works. Let me show you how this works out on a

personal basis. I have 45 years of life behind me, and of those years the first 23 were wasted, at least from my perspective. Then I came to know God, I began to serve him because he worked with me and I saw the fruit of his labor within my life. I tasted of the Lord and he tasted good. I have tasted of him through the years and he continues to taste good.

But there is another generation in my household called "Ron" and "Rodd," a whole generation that does not have all those years of experience. They have not seen what I have seen; they have not gone through the difficulties I have gone through. They have not had some of the blessings that I have had because it is not yet their turn. They have not seen the Lord at work as I have, and they have not tasted of him as I have.

Let me tell you of a struggle I had this week. My son Ron just turned 16. In High School he took the Driver's Ed. course and did very well in the written work. He then went and drove the car that the school provided. Then he came home, and asked if he could drive my Datsun 260 "Z". I thought of my generation and his generation and how many years were between the two and I was a little nervous about that, but eventually he got into the car and I must say he did very well. Then he also drove his mother's car.

Finally the time came for him to go to the D.M.V. to apply for his license. I went with him to the department and told him, "I'll take you in. I did all this before when I was 16, I know how to do it, so let me help you." Ron said, "Sure. I think I ought to stand over here." I said, "Fine, let me go over here and just check." Sure enough, just as I suspected from my great years of experience, he was in the wrong line.

Then we had to get the car and get in the green lane. (He knew where the green lane was but I showed it to him anyway.) We discovered that the inspectors were checking lights. I got out to check them and found one light blown in front. "Let's hope he doesn't come to the front," I thought. (He didn't.) Then we found out he didn't have the registration with us. So I went back into the building and discovered that it was OK as long as you had the green tag.

I asked Ron, "Do you want to have some prayer?" He said, "Sure." So we prayed, but suddenly I looked up and the examiner was there. I get out of the car and he gets in, and they drive away--without me! (I'm sure my son was very relieved!)

I was pacing back and forth and I started to pray, "Oh, Lord if I could drive for him, if I could just get in there. . . I've had all these years of experience--if I could just get in and take his place . . . I know the questions he is going to ask, and 1, if, Oh. . . " I felt this tightness in my stomach. They had been gone a long time so I just knew he'd hit a truck. We'd have to get the tow car and then we'd have to call his mother. But suddenly he drove in with a big smile on his face. The examiner had a smile also so I'm thinking, "I bet Ron bombed it. The examiner is smiling because he's a nice guy, that's all." I looked, but it was hard to do so--you don't want your son to fail. "Gosh," I thought, "they're getting out of the car. What are they saying?" My son got out and gave me the "thumbs up" sign. He passed! Without me!

I think there is a spiritual principle here:

Faith in Jesus Christ cannot be inherited.
It must be personally experienced.

God has no grandchildren, only sons and daughters who have a direct relationship with him. I have walked with God these many years but now it is my sons' generation's choice to either walk with him or to reject him. It's on their shoulders, not mine. I am to present everything I can about Jesus Christ. I am to live a life that will reflect his character. I'm to walk among them as a man of integrity, mercy, grace, love and discipline but I can never transfer my personal relationship to Jesus Christ to my sons.

Evil In The Sight Of God

Unfortunately, in this case in the Book of Judges, another generation after Joshua "did not know the Lord, nor yet the work which He had done for Israel." So look at what happens. Verses 2: 11-3: 7 are a summary of the whole book. This section will show us an example of God's righteousness, his holiness, his mercy and his

grace. It will also illustrate that: "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes." That is the key to the book, and it is the key to our lives. Whenever we live a life without a "king" ("The King," "Jesus Christ The King"), we do everything that we think is right in our own sight, therefore, there is no evil.

Then the sons of Israel did evil In the sight of the Lord, and served the Baals, and they forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed themselves down to them; thus they provoked the Lord to anger. So they forsook the Lord and served Baal and the Astartes.

There is a great deal of difference between evil in the sight of God and evil in the sight of man. We have to learn to see life and all of its implications from God's perspective, not from man's perspective, in order to function and survive in reality.

It is interesting to me that when Jesus Christ confronted the Pharisees they thought they had everything down pat. When Jesus came among these religious teachers who were the leaders of the nation of Israel and said to them, "You've heard it said 'Thou shall not commit murder,' but I say to you that he who hates his brother shall be brought before the court. " And they said, "What? Where does it say that?" And he said, "You have heard it said that, 'If you commit adultery, this is sin,' but I tell you that he who lusts after a woman has already committed adultery in his heart." They said, "Where does it say that?" Jesus continued, "You have heard it said, 'Love your neighbors and hate your enemies,' but I say to you love your enemies and do good to them who persecute you, for thus you will be like the Father in heaven." When God walks among us the difference between good and evil is very clear.

Cindy Hunt is a pornographic queen in San Francisco. She has starred in "Hustler" magazine as well as various pornographic movies. According to the "San Francisco Chronicle," a group of Christians showed up at a premiere of one of her movies with signs telling Cindy that she was hated by God. She responded by saying, "God is not angry with me. I love him and he loves me. I'm a Christian." The tragedy is that she believes she's right, but if God were to show up in her heart, if God would come to her through someone who is walking in the Spirit, she would be able to see immediately the difference between good and evil and she might acknowledge her sin and come to know him.

There were two problems with the Israelites here in the Book of Judges. The first was that they "served the Baals." The Baals were the gods of the Canaanites representing the sun and moon, the gods of nature. Baal provided oil and wine and wheat, and at the great ceremonies at harvest time the Canaanites would involve themselves in all forms of sexual immorality--immorality with animals and male and female prostitution. When things went bad with their crops they would take the first-born child and offer sacrifice by throwing it into the flames. (This is called "passing through the fire" in Deuteronomy.) They would cut themselves and moan and bow down before Baal in order to appease him. They lived in constant fear; they lived without mercy or grace. And Israel was attracted to that. Isn't that amazing?

Second, they "forsook the Lord." God had an infinite love for them because Israel was his "wife." His wife was to represent him on earth among all the nations; his character was to flow through her so that all the nations would be attracted to Israel and experience salvation as Israel had experienced it. So Israel provoked God to jealousy, not as you and I become jealous with spite, frustration and hate. God became jealous because he wanted to preserve a precious vessel, his "wife," because Israel had committed spiritual adultery. The Israelites didn't think it was evil because there was no one in this new generation to explain the difference between good and evil, so they forsook God and turned to the Baals.

It is interesting to me that in the Psalm 106 and in Leviticus 16, where we are told that they offered their children to the flames to appease the gods, it says they offered their children "to the demons." We would interpret that as "flame," but when God tells the story he calls it what it is. He pulls back the curtain of eternity and he says that demons were influencing all of that. Now we are into the spiritual warfare aspect.

The principle here is:

To know Jesus Christ is to be able to discern evil.

To know Jesus Christ is to have the ability to understand evil and to avoid it because it gets you in its grip. It will consume you. How are we going to know the difference between good and evil? We have to know Jesus Christ. That is how we are set free.

Israel Disciplined

Verses 14 and 15 go on to teach us about discipline:

And the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He gave them into the hands of plunderers who plundered them; and He sold them into the hands of their enemies around them, so that they could no longer stand before their enemies. Wherever they went, the hand of the Lord was against them for evil, as the Lord had spoken and as the Lord had sworn to them, so that they were severely distressed.

The first thing the Lord did was to deliver them into the hands of plunderers. The very people they were to eliminate were allowed to come into their camps and steal everything. Then we read that God "sold" them into the hands of their enemies. The people who were once their slaves were now their masters. Everywhere they turned to get out of these problems, God turned against them because of evil. God moved in and created situations so that they said, "What's going on? Everything we touch is falling apart." He did this because he promised them in the law, in Deuteronomy, that this would happen if they disobeyed him. Moses had explained it all to them and then Joshua came along and explained the whole thing again (Joshua 24). So they had two very clear warnings.

There is a principle that comes from Hebrews 12 that says, "He disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness." Discipline brings us into line with God's character. Now it is hard for us to believe that we are not in line with his character. If we analyzed our lives we'd say, "Yes, I'm lining up with what God is like. There's a few areas off center but nothing we need to talk about." But God says, "You are not a 'little' off. You are way off. "

Hebrews says, "All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness." So God was disciplining his "wife" Israel because that discipline accomplished two things (1) it brought them back in line with his holiness; and (2) it produced the "peaceful fruit of righteousness." The result of this discipline was that Israel was "severely distressed." The principle is:

To know Jesus Christ is to know that he will deal with our disobedience out of a heart of love.

The Judges, 2:16-19

Then the Lord raised up judges who delivered them from the hands of those who plundered them. And yet they did not listen to their judges, for they played the harlot after other gods and bowed themselves down to them. They turned aside quickly from the way in which their fathers had walked in obeying the commandments of the Lord; they did not do as their fathers. And when the Lord raised up judges for them, the Lord was with the judge and delivered them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge; for the Lord was moved to pity by their groaning because of those who oppressed and afflicted them. But it came about when the judge died, that they would turn back and act more corruptly than their fathers, in following other gods to serve them and bow down to them; they did not abandon their practices or their stubborn ways.

God raised up saviors, deliverers to bring them out of this dilemma. He didn't reward their iniquity by adding iniquity, he moved in with grace and love and mercy by raising up judges. He empowered them to deliver the people from their enemies because he was "moved by pity."

So how did this new generation react? Well, they didn't listen or obey the judges, in fact they continued to commit spiritual adultery--they did not walk as their fathers walked. They "quickly" turned back to Baal worship. That was how they responded to God's love and mercy. They also acted "more corruptly than their fathers." They followed, served, bowed down and worshiped these gods. They didn't "abandon their practices" and they didn't abandon their stubbornness "No, I'm going to go back to Baal. I want to live with their ways. I want the world and then I want ? little bit of Jehovah." But God never offered "a little bit of Jehovah." They were trying to live in both worlds; they became confused and didn't know the difference between good and evil. The principle here is,

To know Jesus Christ is to have experienced his grace and his mercy.

Once we have experienced his grace and mercy we should respond in love to him with a desire to serve him because he saved us from destruction.

So God in his love and mercy put Israel to a test.

The Test, 20-23

So the anger of the Lord burned against Israel, and He said, "Because this nation has transgressed My covenant which I commanded their fathers, and has not listened to my voice, I also will no longer drive out before them any of the nation which Joshua left when he died, in order to test Israel by them, whether they will keep the way of the Lord to walk in it as their fathers did, or not." So the Lord allowed those nations to remain, not driving them out quickly; and He did not give them into the hand of Joshua.

They had broken the covenant, they had broken a "marriage" relationship with God. Romans 1 says, "God gave them over because they no longer thanked him but they created images and worshiped birds and crawling things." "God gave them over." As he was reaching out to them they pulled away, so God said, "All right. If that's what you want I'll let you have it. If you want the world, take it. I'm not going to forsake you, but go ahead. "

I once worked with a boy who kept rebelling against his father. His father called me and said, "Ron, what am I going to do with him? I tell him to stay home and he crawls out the window. He comes home, but takes the car and runs away." I said, "Let him go. He'll be back--if you let him go." "What do you mean?" he said. I told him, "Look, get him an apartment because you love him--you don't want to just throw him to the wolves. I know where I can get him a job." So the father went and got him an apartment and a job. The boy left, slamming the door on his way out.

But when he called me one night after three weeks in his apartment, having done everything that he wanted to do in the world, he said, "Ron, do you think that you could talk my father into letting me come home? I've been living out here by myself, and it sure is lonely. I have to be very honest: I just hate spaghetti and meat balls! That's the only thing I know how to cook; I've been eating it for three weeks! I just hate it out here. I hate the loneliness and I'd just like to come home." So I drove over, picked him up and brought him back. His father said to him, "If you are going to live in this house, then this is the covenant we need to make." The son agreed. Now not every story turns out this way, but Bill finished high school the next year, went to Bible College in Los Angeles, and is now in the ministry there. God had said, "All right, Bill, go ahead and do it." We never forsook Bill, we knew exactly where he was, but we let him go and God brought him back.

The idea of testing the nation was to bring them to a point of repentance, to see whether they would keep God's ways. He is constantly seeking to test us, because

To know Jesus Christ is to know he will test us in order to purify us.

That's why he tests us; not because he hates us--he wants to purify us. He wants us to stop putting our confidence in the flesh. He wants to wash away the world's philosophy from our minds. He wants us to come to him and ask him to take over our lives and express his life through us to his honor and glory.

Now the Lord brings in the test.

The Testing Nations, 3:1-7

Now these are the nations which the Lord left, to test Israel by them (that is, all who had not experienced any of the wars of Canaan; only in order that the generations of the sons of Israel might be taught war, those who had not experienced it formerly. These nations are: the five lords of the Philistines and all the Canaanites and the Sidonians and the Hivites who lived in Mount Lebanon, from Mount Basi-hermon as far as Lebohamath. And they were for testing Israel, to find out if they would obey the commandments of the Lord, which He had commanded their fathers through Moses. And the sons of Israel lived among the Canaanites the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; and they took their daughters for themselves as wives, and gave their own daughters to their sons, and served their gods. And the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and forgot the Lord their God, and served the Baals and the Asheroth.

Four nations were left to purify Israel. The first was "the five lords of the Philistines." The Philistines were sea people who worshiped a fish god, Dragon, and they had a form of godliness but no power--they offered Israel "false religion." Second, the Canaanites who lived behind walled cities which the Israelites had never experienced since Egypt--they offered Israel false security. Third, the Sidonians, philosophers and astrologers, offered the Israelites a false philosophy. Finally, the Hivites, were like the United Nations--they gathered strength by making alliances with many nations around, thus they offered Israel a false strength.

Yet God in his wisdom allowed all this to happen to purify Israel and to show them that with this false religion, with this false security, with this false philosophy and with this false strength they could not escape from their captivity on their own. They could not overthrow their enemies and they couldn't get rid of this evil on their own. Despite the fact that they decided to rebel against God and tried to face life without him, they were going to discover that they were caught, that God was going to move in in mercy and grace and set them free. But he was going to set them free based on his power, his strength, his mercy, his grace.

And there is our last principle,

To know Jesus Christ is to know that only his power can deliver and keep us from evil.

To review the principles:

1. Faith in Jesus Christ can't be inherited, it must be personally experienced.
2. To know Jesus Christ is to understand and discern evil.
3. To know Jesus Christ is to know that he will deal with us in our disobedience.
4. To know Jesus Christ is to have experienced his grace and his mercy.
5. To know Jesus Christ is to know that he will test us in order to purify us.
6. To know Jesus Christ is to know that only his power can deliver us from evil.

Whatever became of evil? Nothing! It's all around us, but the world has sought to redefine it. The world says to us, "It's not homosexuality; it's 'Gay Pride' week." The world says to us, "It's not stealing from your company; they owe it to you anyway--you just have to get it a little ahead of time. " The world says to us, "It is not lying; you just have to cover your bases until you can get the material for the people who ask for it. "

Where is evil? It is all around us, and only God within our lives will enable us to see it and call it for what it is. "Evil in the sight of God. " Do not get your definition of evil from men. We have all found ourselves redefining it, but God never redefined it--it has always been the same to him. It will remain the same until he comes again.

Evil is anything that is contrary to God's will. You cannot know God's will unless you know God. To know God is to know his will and to know his will is to know evil. To know God is to know his will and to know his will is also to know good. He wants us to walk on this earth like his Son who walked on this earth in perfect obedience to his Father's will. Do you want to walk like his Son? Then you must know the Father. Do you want to be set free in this life so that you can walk as wise men and women? Then you must know the Son, for the Son will set you free, free from "the world, the flesh and the devil," free to discern the difference between good and evil.

Our Heavenly Father, thank you very much for this time. We need to depend on you, Heavenly Father, for direction. We need to depend on you for courage this week. We need to depend on you for all the power and insight and discernment that we don't have. Would you teach us the difference, Lord, between good and evil? Would you teach us how to choose good so that we might put down evil? Would you teach us and give us the courage to be like your Son Jesus Christ in an evil society? In Jesus' name, Amen.

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