

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

By: Bob Stewart
CHAPTER ONE

Recently we have suffered the tragedy of shootings at a Connecticut elementary school where 20 little children and 6 adults were killed. Then there was the mass shooting in Aurora, CO., and in a shopping mall in Oregon, a street corner in Chicago. Around the world in Scotland 16 children were gunned down in 1996, 35 people in Tasmania in the same year, and we will never forget Columbine. Then, we are still recovering from the devastation of hurricane Sandy while Haiti, Japan, Indonesia, China and other places are recovering from terrible natural disasters. We will not soon forget 9/11 or where we were when Kennedy was shot for those of us who were there. We won't soon forget. On December 7th we lowered our flags to half staff for the 70th time in remembrance of the "Day of Infamy." Worse, much of the world wants to deny the holocaust ever happened. And we could go on until we come to Cain slaying Abel with the beginning of human evil. I heard one person recently deny evil even exists and that what we call evil is simply a manifestation of the human survival instinct. You can figure out that this one puts us on the same level as animals and is a reflection of evolution. It is one way of avoiding the issue.

Human evil, natural disaster. Many people rightly ask the question, "Where is God?" Millions, because God does not prevent these terrible disasters, have walked away from any belief in Him at all. Others try and find some answer that they can live with or tell others something to try and make God not look guilty. Most, if not all, of these answers are wrong.

It is a fact that most of those who reject God, the Gospel, the Bible, Jesus and any attempt to persuade them to belief in God and Christ do so because of questions and objections like, "How can a loving and caring God permit the horrifying evil in the world as well as terrible natural disasters that maim, kill, and destroy people and all they have worked for and sit back and do nothing?" "If God has the power to prevent or reverse all the evil in the world and does not do so, then He is as guilty as the evil itself. Therefore, He must be the source of evil!" "How can a so-called good God watch a little child being tortured, raped, and butchered and do nothing to stop it?" "How can you believe in a God like this?" "You are a fool!" And so on. Well, are they right? If not why not? If so, as many Christians believe, why would you have faith in a God like this? What is the difference between this God and Satan?

The church has answers, some of which you have already thought of but these answers actually support those who reject God and Jesus. This is because believers themselves, without directly saying so, often express that God IS evil, the source of evil and is a horrifying tyrant whose main goal seems to be to inflict pain, despair, hurt and death upon the world all the time. I hear it in the adult Sunday School Class nearly every week. I just heard this week, "God is trying my patience." "God is testing me." And recently, "God took my loved one from me". "God is really throwing heavy stuff my way." And questions like, "Why is God doing this to me?" "Why doesn't God do something about this?" And so on. I have heard from Christians and from respected Christian teachers inane statements like, "God is doing (or did) this for a higher purpose." "God is trying to get people to repent." (It's hard to get dead people to repent, by the way.) "He took your loved one because God picks the best flowers first".

I have spoken about these things before. In the Job study some years ago I spent months on this.¹ But most persist in their belief that God does these evil things for some "good" purpose. Yes, God can take evil and bring good out of it for His children, but is He the source of the evil as so many believe, even in the church? If not, what answers accurately reflect actual Biblical teaching? Stay tuned.

¹ Available on my website, www.bibleclassroom.com

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CHAPTER TWO

In the movie, "The Best Exotic Marigold Hotel", the young proprietor has a favorite aphorism, "Everything will be alright in the end, so if it's not alright, it is not yet the end." That's not bad theology. Similarly, in debating the "millennium" I stand with those who are "pan-millennialists." That is, I believe everything will pan-out alright in the end. Meanwhile, in awaiting the end, things, as we have seen, can go horribly bad. In the past century alone, we have had to endure the horror of two world wars, one of which saw the mass slaughter of millions of Jews (and also a significant number of Christians), the Korean war, Viet Nam, The Mid East debacle and the slaughter of more millions under Stalin, Khrushchev, Pol-Pot, Idi Amin, Mao, Noriega, Arafat, Castro, Khadafy, Sadaam Hussein, Hugo Chavez, Assan, Ahmadinejad, and the list goes on. We, as believers, live in two worlds. In one, mankind rules under the authority of Satan, in the other - entered through faith in Christ - we stand solidly in the Kingdom of God. In the meantime, while here, we are supposed to be God's light to the world illuminating the blessings of the Kingdom while there is still time. Here is what is weird to me:

Unfortunately, most Christians inadvertently attribute the source of evil in this world to God (see the last issue). Sometimes you hear more about this than of His light and truth and love. Aren't these contradictory? Why then do Christians insist on painting God as the source of evil? The Scripture does not. One would rightly conclude that it is unnecessary to point out that God is not evil nor the source of evil. Unfortunately, so many have been influenced to the subtle position that He is, that thankfully, there are a few verses attesting to the fact that He isn't. Here is what the scripture says:

Psalm 5:4: "For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil dwells with You."

Proverbs 15:26: "Evil plans are an abomination to the LORD, But pleasant words are pure."

Habakkuk 1:13: "*Your* eyes are too pure to approve evil, And You cannot look on wickedness *with favor.*"

James 1:13-14: 13: "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone." (The word "tempt" and "test" are the same word in the N.T. so one can legitimately substitute "test" here as well) 14: "But each one is tempted (or tested) when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust." (We'll address the objections to this in an upcoming issue. People love to object to James!)

I John 1:5: "This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all."

We could add the many verses attributing to God "holiness", "righteousness", "purity", "glory", "light", "truth", "love" and so on but that is unnecessary - I would hope.

Yet Christians persist in claiming God, "did", "allowed", "did not prevent", or "afflicted", "tested" "someone" or "me" with some horrifying devastation or evil. "HE DID IT!" Is what is said by His own children His Son died to save. This is proof of God's love Romans 5:8 says, not His vituperation. I can understand these statements because most Christians have no other foundation on which to understand the big questions about evil and God's role in the midst of it. That is why we will explore all of it.

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CHAPTER THREE

In the opening chapter of a novel I recently read, a devout Christian woman has been beaten to death by her unbelieving second husband in front of her young son. Out of grief in losing her first husband, she had succumbed to the advances of a man who turned out to be a drunken abuser. But, she had spoken of the importance of Christ's love and love for one another to her son all his life, but after this event he turned his back on the "weak and useless Jesus" who did not answer his prayers and spare his mother's life.

Though a fictional account, there is no doubt that similar experiences have caused many to question or even turn their backs on God and Christ. Yet, in our last issue, we saw ample scripture to underscore that God is not the source of evil. But why doesn't He step in and stop these kinds of evil from happening? There are many facets to the answer to this question. Though simplified, here are some aspects of this reality.

1. Gave man dominion. In Genesis 1 and 2, Man was given unconditional rulership over the world. He was free to do as he wished with it without interference from God. Man had also been given the free will to do so and the choice as to how to live his life.
2. Man then rejected God's sovereignty and provision and disobeyed Him succumbing to a deception. He was not prevented from disobeying, but given opportunity to choose according to the dictates of his heart and mind.
3. Both man's relationship to God and as well as the stability of the creation itself was effected by man's excluding God out of his dominion.
4. Man gave his dominion over to Satan by submitting to his lies. Satan is now the ruler of this world as the New Testament points out.
5. God never rescinded His word in gifting man with dominion over the creation. Man is free to do as he wishes, even commit acts of evil. If God were to interfere, He would be guilty of lying to man as well as thwarting man's free will. Plus, man's rebellion against God's preventative control would intensify realizing man has no real choice or purpose in the creation.
6. The scripture always lays evil at the foot of man. We live with the historic evidence of what a world becomes without God. Only those of faith and love bring a buffer and a light of hope to this disaster. Those who are lost are in desperate need of the good news. It is a life or death issue and we who are in Christ are to be the life and light bringers.
7. So God has not abandoned mankind, nor violated man's free will, and will not do so. In Christ, as He promised from the beginning, God has provided a way to return to Him and paradise.

This is, of course, a simplification of the matter, but one that most Christians don't grasp. WE are the problem and we live in a world of our (mankind's) own making. This is why a relationship with God through faith in Jesus is so critical for us and our families. We never know when tragedy will strike.

Thinkers throughout history have pondered where, if at all, the Deity is in all of this. Some, like Jefferson, Franklin, Einstein were loath to dismiss God as the atheists do but, due to simple observation of evil in the world, relegated Him to a place of having created everything and just let it go uncaringly. I understand the position, but the coming of Jesus makes it clear that while mankind still exercises his "dominion", even delegating it away to the Evil One, God has not abandoned us at all. We still have the power of choice as to whom we will serve and in who we will trust. God is not the source of evil, He is the source of hope and truth and love. We will look at the role of the "Evil One" next time.

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CHAPTER FOUR

In his early years Albert Einstein was an avowed pacifist. He, along with other German scientists before WWI counseled the leaders of nearby nations not to arm themselves in the face of German aggression claiming that this would remove the German's taste for aggression and conquest. Thus, peace would be ensured they thought. Well, you know how well that worked out.

After WWI (called, "The War to End all Wars") it took Germany years to rebuild and during that time the National Socialist Party began to offer solutions to bringing Germany out of its own depression and then the world wide depression hit them again. Finally, The National Socialist Party (NAZI) was elected to restore the former "glory" of the nation. A few years later, after seeing the handwriting on the wall, it wasn't long before Einstein (a Jew) left Germany never to return. He took up residence near Princeton University where he spent his remaining years.

During WWI and afterward, Einstein altered his views on pacifism considerably and realized that unless nations armed themselves for defense, they would be like sheep before the slaughter. Personally, he hated evil and war but recognized that there would always be those who chose to inflict their power on others. The Germans were finally defeated, but not until millions of Jews and others had been slaughtered. The United States dropped two atomic bombs on Japan bringing devastation and destruction to hundreds of thousands but bringing the War to an end. When asked in 1947 if he thought there would ever be a lasting peace Einstein answered, "No, as long as there will be man, there will be war." The photo snapped at that moment pictures Einstein at his saddest.

Had he simply thought about the story of Cain and Abel for a moment, he might have rethought his pacifistic state. But Einstein was not a Biblically grounded Jew. Yet he had a deep sense of the existence of the divine which developed more and more as he produced his theoretical physics. Many scientists today have also been awed at their own findings and been led to the sense of the divine personality.

Einstein did not have a problem reconciling human evil and natural catastrophe with the existence of God. Why? Because he did not see God as a personal God, but as a divine creator of an astounding and ordered universe. This allowed him not to attribute evil to God while at the same time seeing man as its source. However, we know God to be very concerned about us in a personal way. So it is more difficult for us to understand how a personal God of love could just let evil and catastrophe run rampant. My response to that can be found in the last issue.

The second matter is even more complex in some ways. What was God's purpose in creating Satan, and what role does he play in all this? Satan is usually the candidate upon whom blame is heaped for all the evil in the world. (Too often, God is candidate "number one" as I have revealed in earlier issues, but hopefully I will hear less of "What awful thing God has inflicted in my life" for a while). Well, neither God or Satan is the source of evil. Let's at least be clear about that. Just think about it. Other than lying, manipulating the truth, or attempting to instill thoughts in people stimulating in them temptation to "evil," (or disobedience to God) what exactly has Satan done that is, in itself, something we would call "evil" or "disastrous" that man hasn't exceeded by a million fold? So why Satan? Some argue that God would have to be evil to conceive of evil or create Satan. In other words, the creation of Satan proves an evil streak in God. Others claim that Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 prove that Satan was created good but fell as a result of an evil choice. (Neither passage, regardless of the theological arguments many propose, apply to Satan at all.) And even if they did, going along with the arguments above, how could a good God create any beings that could make evil choices? Well there are many other arguments and we will continue this in the next issue.

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CHAPTER FIVE

We left off last month with, "The second matter is even more complex in some ways. What was God's purpose in creating Satan, and what role does he play in all this? Satan is usually the candidate upon whom blame is heaped for all the evil in the world. (Too often, God is candidate "number one" as I have revealed in earlier issues, but hopefully I will hear less of "What awful thing God has inflicted in my life," for a while). Well, neither God or Satan is the source of evil. Let's at least be clear about that. Just think about it. Other than lying, manipulating the truth, or attempting to instill thoughts in people stimulating in them temptation to "evil," (or disobedience to God) what exactly has Satan done that is, in itself, something we would call "evil" or "disastrous" that man hasn't exceeded by a million fold? So why Satan? This is complex. We have to take a piece at a time.

Well, there is no specific passage that says, "I the Lord created Satan because..." But he was created by God and he was created as an adversary, deceiver and accuser of mankind and that is what his name means. The word "devil" means essentially the same thing. So we have many questions to consider. Among them are:

1. What was the purpose for which God created Satan? Answer: Well, to present deception, lies, accusations, and blame to man about himself and about God, attempting to set man against God and man against man. This is what he does, so this must be what he was made to do. (Again, the Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 chapters do not refer to Satan as much as they are pressed to do so.)
2. Why did God make him to do these things? This speaks to the power of man and all that involves versus the power of God and all that involves and how God is perceived by man. The power of man (given to him by God) is quite formidable. Let's list a few of these powers. A. Dominion over all that is on the earth. B. As such he has the power to choose his own destiny and how he will manage that dominion. C. The power to decide what he will or won't believe and act on it. D. The power to regard and honor God and respond to Him or to disregard and dishonor God elevating self in His place. These are but a few.

Please allow me to note that the power of choice is the greatest power in creation apart from the power of the creation itself. For example, one man's decision to exercise his ambition and become a political leader can result in the benefit or destruction of millions of others. Just one man and one decision.

Man is displayed to us right off as one who makes choices. He names the animals. He doesn't find a suitable companion among them. He finds the woman suitable and gives her a name. He states her relationship to him and links her destiny with his. Together they freely exercise their dependence on or independence from God. All of this is quite a familiar situation these days and that is why those chapters in the book of Genesis are not just an historical account of how things got the way they are, but are an account of the way things still are. However, better to blame the past than to recognize the present reality in a mirror, still a tendency as we see in Genesis 3:10-13.

Now Satan. He presents options contrary to God's will and does so in a clever and manipulative fashion that appears quite logical – even truthful - at first glance. Does he coerce or force choices? No. But his actions test the heart, motive and inner core of people. Their choices determine what they believe and whom they honor, in other words who and what they have faith in. "Without faith it is impossible to please God." In making choices in disobedience to God, their own hearts are revealed to themselves. Now the issue is; what will be their response to God and to God's offer of mercy in light of this truth brought about by a liar. (See Luke 18:9-14) Perhaps to blame God or others? React and attack in anger out of fear? Or fall before God and plead, "Oh God be merciful to me a sinner?" We will see some interesting things about all this as we continue.

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CHAPTER SIX

When someone chooses to seek his own will contrary to God's will it is called "sin" in the Bible. This self-willfulness when contrary to God's will, is the root and cause of evil.¹ Outside of Christ, the results (or consequences) of sin are terrible. Total and complete alienation from God and His provision. An atmosphere of evil within the human community and a constant battle to keep it in check. Uncontrollable chaos in the creation. Disease, pain, tragedy, hopelessness, despair and a life with no purpose except to fulfill one's own selfish desires. Death and destruction for the human soul. And finally, eternal damnation.

Let me propose this. When a person chooses to satisfy his or her own personal desires at another's expense or in disobedience to God, they will inevitably not only be left empty, but will actually bring condemnation or even devastation on themselves. I wish young people would get this.

Satan causes none of this. His role is simply to present the lie as being the truth and seek to have people believe it so they will destroy themselves and each other. Everything the first paragraph states are the clear consequences of dismissing God from the human environment and heart. God Himself has made clear the consequences of disobedience from the start. But man, in seeking power and pleasure for himself seems to always be looking for the greener grass on the other side of the fence. Never satisfied, he soon tires of this grass and moves on to the next field.

Paul says it this way,

"But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." II Timothy 3:1-7

Man chooses poorly. Why? Is it Satan's fault? No. All he does is to appeal to their own ungodly desires and make the practice of ungodliness look appealing and without negative consequences. He shows how to justify sin and cause one to think he will stand before God without judgment because of one's own works and life. This is called human pride.

¹ "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Genesis 6:5 "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing." James 3:16 "Therefore the LORD heard and was full of wrath; And a fire was kindled against Jacob And anger also mounted against Israel, Because they did not believe in God And did not trust in His salvation." Psalm 78:21-22." And without faith it is impossible to please *Him*, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and *that* He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Hebrews 11:6

3.² How does Satan influence people to distrust God? Principally through people who teach and write his lies while denying God and teach the superiority of human thinking and poo-poo any negative consequences that might be pointed out by those who are wiser. He convinces people that God Himself is the source of evil (Genesis 3:1-5), something he still does even through the voices of respected teachers.

But let's be clear. One cannot be deceived unless one chooses to ignore or abandon the truth. If you hold fast to the truth, deception is not possible. However, one must know without a doubt what the basic truths of God actually are. One could point to the Bible and say that is the truth. But there are thousands of conflicting ideas about how to interpret or understand the Bible and many of them are in conflict with each other. But, bottom line, God is not the source of evil. Blaming God for evil is falling right into the trap of lies Satan so eloquently sets. God is, however, the source of grace, mercy and salvation for those who would believe the truth.

We will continue to answer the questions about why God created Satan to do what he does.

² See: Question 1. and 2. last issue.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

Recently, I was discussing this issue with a woman in Ireland who had mentioned how disturbing it is to see the evil go on in the world and, in passing, she mentioned the name of the Lord. I asked her if she understood why God did not prevent evil in the world. She immediately noted that our destiny is based upon our free will and that God would not interfere with it so that we would love and serve Him from a willing heart and not from a forced or contrived manipulation. Evil is the consequence of choice, but not the will of God. His will is to provide mercy, grace and salvation for all who would turn away from evil and to Him in faith. Thus we can trust in His love and have confidence in Him at all times.

Well, well...and that from a Catholic. Would that we all could see this clearly. I wonder about why the church doesn't teach more about this wonderful truth. Jesus, the apostles and John the seer in Revelation make it crystal clear that people will choose between serving the powers of evil and deception for their own benefit or choose to serve the Lord and others in His name even if it means being stripped of benefit. Eternity awaits the decision.

God's creation of Satan is quite simple. He is the instrument (and primarily uses people) to enlighten the real condition of a person's heart and faith...especially to oneself...if he is not blinded. This began, of course, in the garden. "God hath said, but I have a better idea that will exalt you and give you pleasure and power." In this regard, for example, people flock to the deceptive and false teachings of the prosperity preachers and the name it and claim it preachers because the messages speak of benefit to one's self. Quite a contrast to Jesus, who said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. Whoever does not carry his own cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. And he who does not take his cross and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Bonhoeffer noted, "When Jesus calls a man to come and follow Him He bids him come and die." Well, Bonhoeffer had experienced the full weight of Nazi atrocities and wrote this not long before he was hanged.

We westerners love to bask in escapist theologies, prosperity futures, seek health, comfort, convenience, retirement, nice material goods, a fine education, plenty on the table, and so on. Nothing particularly wrong in that, although, frankly, it results in a rather shallow faith. But some relatively small crisis occurs and we wonder why "God did this to us." People who have suffered greatly under tyranny for their faith and remained true to God wonder at our callous and shallow view of the Almighty and the high exalted view of self not to mention an anemic faith that has never been really challenged. Exactly what the enemy teaches and we have bought into a lot of it. Since the garden, Satan's tactics have remained consistent. Even with Jesus, Satan "...led Him up and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time. And the devil said to Him, I will give you all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish. Therefore if you worship before me, it shall all be yours." Luke 4:5-7 He appealed to Jesus' self interest. Jesus had none and said "No." The rest of us said, "Yes." By the way, we were the ones who handed over the domain and all its glory to Satan in the first place so we could be like God. Now look at the mess we are in. Don't quite get why so many blame God, do you? There are those who are of God's family, believe God and would never turn away or question Him because they have abandoned their own worthiness in favor of trust in Christ and Christ alone. God created Satan to demonstrate that disobedience to God is the ultimate self destructive path. We ought to begin to figure that out sooner or later.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

In a recent video conference with Mike Noland (our missionary to Tanzania with his wife Tracy) he was listing all the opposition they were facing while trying to do a simple work for the Lord. Among them were people from other "Christian" churches trying to get the tribal people to dismantle the work Mike and Tracy are doing and even paying them to destroy what the mission is accomplishing using any means necessary. They were cautioned that while visiting the villages not to accept any food or beverage as it might contain poison. Then there are the tribal witch doctors, tribal community leaders and members, those who spread lies and untrue rumors about them or the work they are doing. There is corruption in every political and governmental office. Not to mention vandals, thieves, and the like. Then they constantly struggle with challenges like disease, particularly Malaria, dysentery, Typhoid, contaminated food and water, sleeplessness. Tracy has had Malaria attacks at least five times as far as we know and Mike has been ill and weak many times also. Strange cultural traditions and mannerisms, religious superstition, demonism, and all sorts of things to stand in their way or try to block them from bringing the good news to the people are plentiful.

Yet Mike and Tracy see each challenge as an opportunity...a way to bring the truth and love of God to those who are lost and hurting. Not once has there been a complaint or a question as to why God is doing this to them.

The problem of evil is the problem people have freely created, most with gusto. Notice how rejection of God goes right along with this drive for evil, and notice also that those who reject God also blame Him for the mess they are in. Talk about an irrational contradiction. That's like saying-after one hits themselves on the thumb with a sledge hammer- "This is the fault of the manufacturer of this sledge hammer." Oh yeah, we do that all the time. I forgot, sorry. That's why we need the government to take care of us like a mommy. And of course, if we don't get our way, we blame the government. Aren't you glad that others are there to blame for the mess we find ourselves in? A little sarcasm there. We seem to be told from every corner that we are all victims of someone else's meddling in our lives. You know, that sounds an awful lot like Satan's core message. Do you believe this? I mentioned last time that, "disobedience to God is the ultimate self destructive path. We ought to begin to figure that out sooner or later." But our life style, and the way we are raised, is to do what we want and point the finger at someone else when it doesn't work out. Then we complain that the lawyers get all the money. Yeah, this is all God's fault. (You might note a little more sarcasm here and there – my gift to you...no charge...and no offense to our lawyer friends.)

The mission of the Lord is to bring the lost and broken back to Him. But one has to first recognize he is lost and broken. If you are not sure, ask your spouse or your kids. I will never forget the morning I asked a group if there was one here who had never sinned, please stand up. A man stood up. Immediately his wife yelled, "Sit down Edmund." He sat down. We all need that word but need to kneel down in the manner of those in tears who have said, "Oh God be merciful to me a sinner." Then the road back to the love and comfort of God's presence can begin.

The world is a place of brokenness but also a place of incredible pride. Often it takes our pride being broken and us being brought to the place where we realize that we have no power or resource to solve the problems. It is then and often only then that one might cry out to God. Sometimes it takes quite a blow to bring us to that point. Some might call that evil. Another, something God can use to bring His loving mercy and grace into a broken life and give him a new hope – like Joseph and his brothers found out. In Genesis 45:4-5 we read, "Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'Please come closer to me.' And they came closer. And he said, 'I am your brother Joseph, whom you sold into Egypt. 5: Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life.'" Then in Genesis 50:20 he says, "As for you, you meant evil against me, *but* God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive." This is not a license to commit evil, but a demonstration of God's power, love and mercy as Romans 8:28 promises.

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

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CHAPTER NINE
Satan

Well, an unpleasant subject, for sure. But in a study on the problem of evil, he must be included. He is known by a variety of names and attributes; Satan, The Devil, The Evil One, The Serpent, The Dragon, The Accuser, The Adversary, The Tempter, The Enemy and more. The once popular name "Lucifer" is not Biblical, nor is the term "Fallen Angel."

His exact nature, that is the "stuff" of his composition, is not expressed. He might be an "angel" of sorts but he is never called that. He does have his hoards of "angels" according to Revelation 12:7, but we must take into consideration that Revelation is a book of Apocalyptic literature, symbolism, and imagery - as well as that the basic meaning of "angel" is "messenger." In fact the Greek for "gospel" is from the root words "good and angel" - good message, good news. Some insist that Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28 tell Satan's story, but a close look at those passages and the context will see that imagery is used to describe earthly rulers, as tempting as it is to apply them to Satan.

Satan is a created being. He has been the same since the beginning. Jesus noted, "You are of *your* father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own *nature*, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (John 8:44)

When one boils Satan's role down to the essence, he is found not to primarily cause catastrophe, but to use catastrophe as a means to proclaim that it is all, "God's fault". His role is to present to people the option of turning from trust and faith in God to trusting and believing something else. He does this through his false teaches, false prophets, religious and philosophical arguments, "intellectual" treatises and books contrary to the Lord, media and the like. In turn, we have mimicked his accusation that it is all someone's else's fault.

Bottom line his arguments will press a person to follow one path or another and in so doing reveal where a person's heart really is both to the person and to the Lord. I remember years ago a couple who sought divorce and sought their church's approval and support for the action. The church could not in all good conscience counsel divorce but instead encouraged the couple to engage in Christian counseling. But the couple left the church and sought out a congregation who had no problem with divorce, or much else for that matter. Their goal was to get their own way. Sounds a little like Adam and Eve doesn't it? They sought for their own way rather than God's way, and would rather take the easy road of being deceived than follow the harder road of faithfulness to God and each other. Jesus said,

"Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. Matthew 7:13-15.

But the other side of the coin is that those who are Spirit minded will spot the attempted deception immediately and be strengthened in their resolve to resist the Devil, flee from him and serve the Lord with even more fervor. (I Corinthians 2)

Throughout the centuries the well known adage "Know Thyself" has been attributed to many philosophers, including Socrates, Plato, Pythagoras and many more. To know oneself is to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of one's own character. The Bible has similar counsel. "Test yourselves *to see* if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test? (II Corinthians 13:5)

The Psalmist wrote,

Search me, O God, and know my heart; Try me and know my anxious thoughts; And see if there be any hurtful way in me, And lead me in the everlasting way. (139:23-24)

Sure, we will find strengths and weaknesses. But the enemy will try to exploit the weaknesses and bring discouragement and condemnation. But the grace of the Lord is more than sufficient to cover them all. To Paul the Lord said, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

Paul's counsel as follows is wise,

"Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of *it* yet (righteousness); but one thing *I do*: forgetting what *lies* behind and reaching forward to what *lies* ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." (Philippians 3:13-14)

UNDERSTANDING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

By: Bob Stewart

CHAPTER TEN

Satan's defeat

In this last article about the problem of evil let me say that Satan seems almost a personification of mankind's own prideful self centeredness and determination to walk a path independently of God. As one brother said, "We have met the enemy and it is us." Most of us would agree that the chief battle in walking with God, even as a believer, is with ourselves. If nothing else, a true view of ourselves would cause us to cast ourselves upon the mercy of God, and indeed that is the solution. We are invited to do so.

"Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you. Be of sober *spirit*, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in *your* faith, knowing that the same experiences of suffering are being accomplished by your brethren who are in the world. After you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect, confirm, strengthen *and* establish you. To Him *be* dominion forever and ever. Amen. (I Peter 5:6-11)

Perhaps through the gracious and life giving work of God in our lives we will feel motivated to tell others. But this is Satan's world. God gave it to us and, falling for Satan's deceiving lies, we gave our dominion to him. Now that we are God's in Christ, we give it back to God (Acts 26:18). We will start over. One day a new heaven and a new earth and a new paradise will be our home. But when this comes to pass those who are the citizens will know the Lord, know they are redeemed with the precious blood of the Lamb, and not make the same error. We will have the knowledge of good and evil and not be swayed by the great deceiver.

In summary, the problem of evil is laid at the feet of man, not at the feet God or Satan. "Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." Some discount free will. Those that do so also discount Ecclesiastes 7:29 "Behold, I have found only this, that God made men upright, but they have sought out many devices." "Devises" is a translation that comes from a word with a broad meaning including "deceptions," "cunning methods," and "clever instruments of war and death" to name a few.

It is man, not Satan or God who is the source of evil. But God will even use our evil for good - if at all possible - because He loves us. The story of Joseph and his brothers is proof of that. He used our propensity to murder those we find in conflict with us to redeem us and ironically used Satan's deception with Judas to help bring about the redeeming act. He uses our evil to bring us to our knees in repentance and shame and floods the repentant with mercy and love. The apostle Paul's life and conversion is one evidence of that.

Statements like, "God took my loved one;" "God did this or that to me;" "God caused this disaster;" "God could have prevented this evil but didn't;" are all inaccurate and reflect Satan's deceptions. Do not be lulled into this kind of thinking. The world, its mess and chaotic natural catastrophes are a direct result of man's rejection of God from the beginning. The cause of evil is seen in Genesis, chapter 3 and it is still prevalent. It is not just a story of long ago, but our story. Then, immediately, we have murder in chapter 4. The fully responsible party is mankind. The foolishness of shutting

God out of one's life is still happening by people who think they are wiser and smarter than God. The results are disastrous. God gave man the dominion and power of choice over the world. He never rescinded it. Man, in turn, submitted himself to the wiles of the Devil with gusto. Then people wonder why God "did this to them." Still, in spite of our sin and corruption, His role is that of redeemer, savior, Loving Father, and Lord when we come to Him and are restored through faith in Christ. He has provided for us for eternity even before we were created and now we ought to be thankful for His grace, mercy and provision in the midst of the mess mankind has made, not resentful and angry accusing God of things we are ultimately responsible for. In so doing we parrot Satan himself, the accuser and adversary of God and His people. No, in everything (not for everything) we are to give thanks. "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." I Thessalonians 5:16-18