

Lesson 11 Lecture
Psalms 1, 10, 14, 36, 37, 52, 73; Proverbs 29

Welcome to Lesson 11 – When Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate and told him His purpose for coming into the world – to testify to the truth, Pilate snorted and asked “What is truth”? In today’s times, you can hear the world asking “What is Good and Evil”? Well, just as Jesus testified to the truth, God testifies to the truth that there is good and evil. It’s not a “gray area” or “relative” – good and evil is definable, at least it is to the God of the Bible and to those who trust in His Word. I’m going to begin with two core truths about good and evil – this may seem basic, but I have a purpose for emphasizing this.

1. God is Good – “So He said to him, “Why do you call Me good? No one *is* good but One, *that is*, God.” - Matthew 19:17a
2. Satan is Evil: “Satan, who leads the whole world astray.” - Revelation 12:9

As we review today’s lesson, please keep these two foundational truths in the back of your mind. I believe it will lead us to some key conclusions

What is “good”? God is good, so the basis of determining what is good would be to ask the question, “Is it pleasing to God?” To define the good or the goodness, or the evil or wickedness, of someone or something it should be presented before the LORD, as we know Him through His Word, and He will reveal the answer. Following this logic, evil must be viewed as something that is not pleasing to God. God confirms this concept in Proverbs 15:3 as he claims His watchful eye over what is good and evil. God is not mocked – He knows the truth.

As I prepared for this lesson, I found myself asking some core questions about good and evil, and the first one was “Where did evil come from?” We’ve got to go to the beginning of the Bible, and we find something very curious in Genesis 2:9, “And the LORD God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground—trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” Why would God plant a tree that needed a warning of consequences?

The issue of choice brings up the issue of free will. We have the freedom to make certain decisions in our lives, and I don’t think a single human being will have a problem with this component of God’s design for His creation. However, when we get into the issue of being accountable for our choices, people don’t like that part. The truth of the matter is free will and accountability are inseparable. Look at how God demonstrates it in Genesis 2:15-17, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. And the LORD God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.”

So, God gives Adam the freedom to choose; He specifically tells him of the ONE thing he shouldn’t do; and He tells him that he will be accountable for making the wrong choice and tells him the consequences. There is no “wiggle” room when it comes to free will and accountability in the eyes of the LORD. So now enters Satan, and he makes the following claim to Eve in Genesis 3:5, “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” Now we remember that Satan is evil, and one of his primary weapons of evil is lying. Jesus confirms this in John 8:44, “He [the devil] was a

murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies.”

By being like God, Satan’s claim was they would know the difference between good and evil. Before the fall, Adam & Eve only knew good – that being God. The truth of Satan’s statement is he wanted man to know evil. The lie changes from that point forward - Satan’s motivation was to move us away from *God’s* knowledge of good and evil and develop *our own understanding* of good and evil which has become more and more relative throughout history. The lack of clarity of what is good and evil creates the gray area to which Satan operates. There’s no “line to cross”. That’s why we need the cross to re-draw the line.

Genesis 3:22: And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.” Why was God concerned about this? If they ate from the tree of life, then their sinful state would be permanent. The Garden of Eden is a type of heaven, and sin and evil cannot exist in heaven. God must protect the integrity of His character, and one of the core facets of His character is holiness. Out of holiness comes goodness. As a result, He must establish His goodness above that of anything evil. C.S. Lewis rightly stated, “If the universe is not governed by an absolute goodness, then all our efforts are in the long run hopeless.”

J. Vernon McGee suggests the theme of Psalm 1 is two men, two ways, two destinies. It talks about the blessed man, and he is described in three ways. In verses 1-2, we learn about the Practice of the Blessed Man. The three progressive stages of what the blessed, or happy man *does not do*:

1. “who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked” – he associates with the ungodly
2. “stand in the way of sinners” – he gets in with sinners
3. “sit in the seat of mockers.” – he joins with the scornful

You can see the regression, deterioration, and degeneration in this verse – each step involving a choice. In summary, the stages begin with:

- The *choice* to compromise which leads to sin
- The *choice* to sin which leads to shame
- The *consequences* of shame leads to moving away from God

What the blessed, or happy man *does do*, “his delight is in the law of the LORD and on his law he meditates day and night” – he finds joy in the Word of God. Again, J. Vernon McGee makes this great statement regarding our Christian walk, “God has no plan or program by which you are to grow and develop as a believer apart from His Word.”

The second description of the blessed man is the Power of the Blessed Man in verse 3. Where does the blessed man get his power? “He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.” The streams of water, I believe, is a metaphor for the Word of God. This is proven in Isaiah 55:10-11, “As the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and flourish, so that it yields seed for the sower and bread for the eater, so is my word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”

The third component of the blessed man is his permanency. Notice the insecurity of the wicked. “Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore, the wicked will not stand in the judgment, ^{[[]]}nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” Charles Spurgeon said, “The righteous carves his name upon the rock, but the wicked writes his remembrance in the sand.”

In Psalm 10, we get a comparison of the character of the wicked (verses 2-14) and the character of God (verses 15-18).

Wicked Man: “God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees.”

God: “But you, O God, do see trouble and grief; you consider it to take it in hand.”

Wicked Man: “Why does he say to himself, “He won't call me to account”?”

God: “[God] call him to account for his wickedness that would not be found out.”

The wicked man is often viewed as the atheist. Atheists claim to not believe in God often because they hate the idea of Him. The folly of this position is there must be something there to fuel their hate.

For Psalm 14, the theme is the depravity of man in the last days. The fool says in his heart, “There is no God.” They are corrupt, their deeds are vile; there is no one who does good.

The Fool Hall of Fame

- Balaam
- Delilah
- Nabal (actually means “fool”)
- Saul

Their qualifications for being in the Hall of Fame included being adversaries to God’s chosen leaders or chose their own desires over those of God’s.

The following are all taken from Scripture when referring to what a fool is:

- Resentful;
- Spreads slander; Lips are perverse; consumed by his own lips;
- Finds pleasure in evil conduct; walks in the darkness; His way seems right to him;
- Easily annoyed; hotheaded and reckless; quick to quarrel
- Spurns his father’s discipline;
- Feeds on folly; speaks folly;
- Finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions;
- Exalts himself;
- Lacks sense and shows everyone how stupid he is;
- Comes to ruin

While I read excerpts from Romans 1:22-31, please listen and compare to what you see up here on the screen. “Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator—who is forever praised. Amen. Furthermore, since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless.” See any comparison between the qualifications of a fool and what’s in these verses? There is a conclusion to this comparison in Romans 1:18, “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.” The lie is that there is no judgment for the unbeliever, or fool. We may not be seeing this wrath, but this Scripture tells us it IS happening.

For Psalm 36, the theme is a picture of wickedness vs. a picture of God. Take a look at the below for a contrast of the Wicked and God:

<u>Wicked</u>	<u>God</u>
No fear of God	Love reaches to the heavens
Flatters himself	Faithfulness reaches to the skies
His words are wicked and deceitful	Righteousness like the mighty mountains
Isn’t wise	Justice is like the great deep
Doesn’t do good	Preserves both man and beast
Plots evil	Unfailing love
Commits to sinful works	Provides refuge
Doesn’t reject what is wrong	Abundant refreshment
	Fountain of life
	He is the light

This is why Satan doesn’t want people reading God’s Word – he doesn’t want us to uncover his lie that good and evil is just relative. The truth is there is no gray area – there IS a defining difference, and God repeatedly points it out.

Moving into Psalm 37, we find an acrostic written by King David. There are 40 verses in Psalm 37, so each two verses begin with successive letters in the Hebrew alphabet. It’s a promise of future blessing to the remnant of Israel. Verse 1 provides the first promise, “Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong.” This isn’t the first time David makes a comment about the apparent prosperity of the wicked. God did promise material blessings to the nation of Israel. He did not do so for us – what did He promise us? Ephesians 1:3: “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every *spiritual* blessing in Christ.”

What are those spiritual blessings?

- Predestined to be adopted as His sons through Jesus Christ
- He freely gave us grace

- Redemption through His blood
- Forgiveness of sins
- Made known to us the mystery of His will
- Gave us the Holy Spirit

The greatest spiritual blessing is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit:

- John 14:16: “And I [Jesus] will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever.”
- John 14:26: “But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”
- Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Our homework outlines the antidotes to envy, resentment, and fretting in regards to evil doers. Trusting, waiting, and committing to the LORD are things all of us as followers of Christ should be striving for. The fact of the matter is, though, we don’t do this because we try to do it on our own. God knows we can’t, so out of His grace, He has blessed us with the Holy Spirit to give us the power to trust, wait, and commit to God.

Psalm 52 is an instructional Psalm from King David. Commentators suggest this is a description of the Anti-Christ:

- Boasts of evil
- He is mighty
- A disgrace in God’s eyes
- Tongue plots destruction
- Practices deceit
- Loves evil rather than good
- Speaks falsehood rather than truth

In the face of such extreme evil, King David, who had the Holy Spirit, makes this great statement of faith in verse 8b, “I trust in God’s unfailing love for ever and ever.”

Psalm 73 is written by Asaph – the theme is perplexity of prosperity. Asaph is struggling with the prosperity of the wicked. He goes through 3 rounds of progressive observations – the first being an initial review of their circumstances:

- No struggles
- Healthy and strong
- Free from burdens common to man
- Not plagued by human ills

His second observation is that because of their circumstances, it entitles them to certain behaviors:

- Pride is their necklace
- Clothe themselves with violence

- Callous hearts produce iniquity
- Evil conceits of their minds know no limits
- Scoff, and speak with malice
- Threaten oppression
- Mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth

His third observation of the wicked is that because of their circumstances and despite their bad behaviors, they get to live the “good life” - it is for those who don’t believe in God and trust in themselves and their wealth.

- Drink up waters of abundance
- Mock God by asking, “How can God know? Does the Most High have knowledge?”
- Carefree
- Increase their wealth

As a result of these observations, Asaph ends up:

- Questioning the purpose of his faithfulness to God
- Pointing out his problems
- Attempting to understand this disconnect, and it becomes oppressive

Anyone felt like that? I have. It is hard to watch the news and see the celebrities live lives of glamour, get paid absurd amounts of money, and get away with their sinful ways over and over without asking God, “What gives”? If we’re asking this question, whom do you think is behind this line of thinking? It is NOT God. He entered the sanctuary of God and understood not only his final destiny (“You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory”), but also the wicked’s final destiny (“How suddenly are they destroyed, completely swept away by terrors!”) Asaph then remembers where his hope is – it is with God which is where the truth is. He then remembers where everything ends - in the presence of God – the almighty judge of good and evil.

Our homework does a great job of showing the stark contrasts of the wicked vs. the righteous, so other than again pointing out that there is a clear difference between good and evil, I’m not going to go over it again. I do want to point out a key issue in Verse 1, “A man who remains stiff-necked after many rebukes will suddenly be destroyed—without remedy.” There is a point where one’s wickedness will be judged, and it will be too late for repentance or forgiveness – that is what is meant by “without remedy”. It’s very important to note the words “after many rebukes”. God does not delight in seeing people perish, and He will send rebukes, or messages, in an attempt to get the evil doer’s attention. This is proven in 2 Peter 3:9: “The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.”

However, Jesus Himself said this twice in Luke 13, “But unless you repent, you too will all perish.” As I mentioned earlier, while preparing this lecture some questions came to mind – the first one was “Where did evil come from?” Another question was, “Can Good & Evil coexist?” – In a word, no. 1 Corinthians 10:21: “You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord’s table and the table of demons.” Only because of the grace of God through Jesus Christ, good and evil are forced to coexist – for

now. But it is not easy as Paul points out in Romans 7:18-19, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but *how* to perform what is good I do not find. For the good that I will *to do*, I do not do; but the evil I will not *to do*, that I practice.”

There is a specific warning to those who try to intermingle good and evil in Isaiah 5:20a, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness.”

Another question that came to mind was, “What is the purpose of good”? As usual, God has answers:

- Matthew 5:16: Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.
- Romans 2:4: Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?
- Ephesians 2:10: For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them.

In summary – the purpose of good is to glorify God, lead people to repentance, which makes us new creations in Christ who will then glorify God. That’s the real circle of life.

So, if there is a purpose to good, could there be a purpose to evil? Let’s go back to the story of Joseph, one of the 12 sons of Jacob. His brothers are jealous of their father’s favoritism of Joseph as well as offended by his dreams which predict him being a ruler over them, so they sell him into slavery. He goes through roughly 20 years of trials but is ultimately raised to Pharaoh’s second in command. He then meets up with his brothers whom have come to Egypt looking for food. At first, they don’t recognize him, but once they do, they become very afraid because their evil has caught up with them, and now they are afraid he is going to retaliate for their wicked ways. But Joseph knew God, and he saw the process the way God saw it and said in Genesis 50:20, “But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive.”

The story of Jesus isn’t much different as noted in Mark 8:31, “He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.” As a result of the evil committed against Jesus, His death and resurrection made it possible for you and me to be reconciled to God by our faith in His Son. So, the conclusion is that while God does not initiate evil, He will allow it to help Him serve a good purpose. It may not seem like it at the time, but that is what faith is all about. Hebrews 11:1 offers some insight into faith, “Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”

We hope for the good even though we can’t see it at the time. At the beginning of this lecture, I made two simple, but important truths – God is good and Satan is evil. While this is admittedly basic, I think it’s worth reviewing the Scriptures to see how they support these truths. First, let’s look at what is said about Satan’s character. The following are phrases and words that are associated with Satan:

- A murderer
- There is no truth in him
- He is a liar and the father of it

- Snare of the devil
- Wiles of the devil
- Tempts
- Masquerades
- Outwits

As we read these, you can hear the evil strategy that is weaved into each of them. The end game of the strategy is to cause separation between God and his creation. Only a fool couldn't see that. Speaking of fools, or atheists, if they don't believe in God, then they probably don't believe in Satan. But he doesn't care, because he's accomplished his mission – to eliminate the truth of God. Without a plum line to define good and evil, you can see how the world has decided that everything is relative.

Now let's look at God's character as it pertains to goodness:

- Exodus 34:6: "And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth,"
- Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope."
- 1 John 1:5: "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all."

While I was preparing the lesson, I need to confess that I found myself developing a bad attitude towards evil people, and the LORD revealed to me that I was starting to take on some of their characteristics. He then brought me to Isaiah 55:7, "Let the wicked forsake his way, And the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, For He will abundantly pardon."

Jesus came to save the world, not to condemn it – so what should our response to these people be? Matthew 5:44: "But I tell you to love your enemies; and pray for those who persecute you." Remember what the FIRST thing Jesus said to His Father while he was hanging on the cross? "Father forgive them, for they know not what they do." When we see the evil in people, it is too easy to take a position of indignation, disgust, or even revilement. But that is our own sinful nature's response. I'm not saying that we shouldn't have some righteous indignation for evil – we should. However, as God's agents of change, we need to try to look upon the non-believer as God does – a lost sheep with a desire for reconciliation to Him. Prior to confessing Christ as our Savior and being covered by the blood of Jesus, we were no different than the evil ones we now look down upon. We were saved by grace, so the least we can do is offer the same grace to those who don't possess the glorious inheritance we do. If we will try, love will conquer all.

Between the reading, homework, and this lecture, there should be little doubt there is good and evil, and it is definable. The Bible uses light and darkness to symbolize good and evil as well as the presence of God vs. the presence of Satan. For those of us who know the Light, it is hard to understand why all people don't want to be in the light. Jesus said in John 3:19, "This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil." Having only become a Christian 12 years ago, I can understand the hesitancy to choose the Light. A true encounter with the living God is the most revealing

experience one can go through – there is no fooling God – He sees it all. What people don't understand is that it is the heart of God to reconcile them to Him – that is why Jesus was sent – to save the world.

So, what should we conclude about today's lesson as it pertains to our lives in this darkening world? Romans 12:21: "Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good." This may seem impossible at times, but remember what John said in 1 John 4:4, "You are of God, little children, and have overcome them [evil spirits], because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. God is good, His Spirit is in us, and He is greater than any evil – He has always prevailed, and He always will. Let's pray.