

Calling Evil Good

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Introduction.

- A. There may never have been a time in history when conspiracy theories were as popular as they are today in the US. It seems like everybody sees evil plots behind every tree. The conspiracy theories about who shot JFK have been returned to the limelight by some questions about whether the Zapruder film was doctored. *The Da Vinci Code*, the bestselling novel of our time, is centered around the idea that the Bible is the product of a Catholic conspiracy 1700 years ago. Even politics today seems like it's all about conspiracy.
- B. As Christians, when we examine the moral and cultural landscape around us, we have an easy time seeing conspiracies against us too. It seems like our faith is being attacked in every imaginable way. Scientists call us ignorant because we choose to believe in God rather than the theory of evolution. Popular entertainment overflows with words, images, and storylines that are purely evil, that appear designed to corrupt our minds and especially the minds of our young people. And these things are only the tip of the iceberg.
- C. When we consider all of these things and decide that they're not just coincidence, we're exactly right. There is a conspiracy against us, and all of these things are the work of a single mastermind. This chief conspirator hates us passionately, his power reaches to every corner of the globe, and he will not rest until we are completely destroyed. His name is Satan, and he has been the enemy of righteousness since the beginning.
- D. This is the conspiracy and the conspirator we're up against, and if we were by ourselves, our struggle would be hopeless. However, God gives us hope, both through His presence in our lives and through His word. The Bible tells us how to defeat this conspiracy of evil, and our victory must begin with understanding what we're fighting against. That's the thing about Satan: he's very good at what he does, but he's not very original. God's word from thousands of years ago describes the same things we fight against today.
- E. Isaiah 5:18-21 outlines one of the main tools that the devil has always used: calling evil good. It makes complete sense that Satan would do this. Generally speaking, people are rational. We try to get the things that we think will make us happy and avoid the things we think will make us unhappy. Satan wants us to do the opposite. He wants us to do things that will make us miserable, so he fools us into thinking that they're actually good for us. Let's study this Isaiah text this evening, so that we can learn to recognize four times when Satan does this in our lives, when he tries to deceive us by calling evil good.

I. Lying to Promote Sin.

- A. The first way Satan does this is by lying to promote sin. This is what Isaiah describes in Isaiah 5:18, when he pronounces a curse against those who drag iniquity with the cords of falsehood. We see Satan himself doing this in the very beginning, in Genesis 3:4-5. God has commanded the woman not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and He warns her that she will die if she does. Satan tells her the opposite. Instead of suffering, if she eats the fruit, it will be good for her. She won't die; she'll be like God.
- B. This happens all the time, both in the world around us and within us. Whenever one person entices another into sin, he lies to get him there. The teenage boy wants to get his girlfriend into bed, so he tells her that he loves her and that it will be great and that nothing bad will happen. The executive wants his accountant to help him cook the books, so he tells him about all the money they'll make and how they'll never get caught.
- C. However, the most significant lies that promote sin are the ones we tell ourselves, especially about God's word. Far too much of the time, we know what the Bible says, but we weasel with it and twist it until we get to do what we want. We know that a movie is filled with bad words and immoral conduct, but it got good reviews, so we go see it anyway and claim we won't be affected. We know that drinking is an evil activity that leads to more evil, but we want to drink, so we tell ourselves it's only a sin when we get drunk. We know that gossip is a cancer that can destroy our church, but it's fun to speak evil of our brothers and sisters, so we tell ourselves that it isn't really gossip if we're telling the truth. Our lies become the gateway for our sin.
- D. Paul describes the only solution for this problem in 2 Corinthians 4:2. We need to renounce hiding things from others and ourselves. We need to be straightforward about the things we encounter in our life, rather than trying to weasel ourselves or someone else into doing what we know deep down is wrong. Above all, we need to tell the truth about God's word. Our attitude cannot be, "How close can I get to the line without sinning?" or "How can I move the line so that what I want to do isn't sin anymore?" It must be "What can I do to please God?" If we live in this way, our honesty will commend us both to men and to the Almighty.

II. Denying God's Judgment.

- A. In addition to lying to promote sin, those who call evil good also deny the judgment of God. These are the kind of people Isaiah quotes in Isaiah 5:19. They essentially stick their tongues out at God. They dare Him to come and punish them. They deny by their actions that God will bring His justice against the evil at all.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 diagnoses the problem. It describes people who will believe that they can get away with defying God's law unless they see constant, unmistakable signs of judgment around them all the time.

- B. In our day and time, this denial of judgment takes two main forms.
 - 1. First, it appears in those who reject the existence of God entirely. Amazingly enough, many of these people are those who are most familiar with God's creation: scientists and the like. Just like the scoffers of Isaiah's day, they will only believe in what they can see, and unless they can see it, they will not accept even the possibility of its existence. That's the theory of evolution in a nutshell.
 - 2. Second, though, many around us deny the judgment of God by refusing to accept that it applies to them. This is the I'm-OK-you're-OK school of religious thought. These people will say that they believe in God, but their God bears no resemblance to the God of the Bible. Instead of being a holy God who hates sin, their God is a pushover who will not judge the wicked. These people say that, sure, God will condemn some people to hell, but those will only be the people who are really bad by human standards. Then, God is going to accept everybody else, with their ordinary everyday evil lives, with a shrug and a smile.
- C. Both of these philosophies overlook two eternal truths: Judgment is coming, and it will be dreadful. Look at the rhetorical question Peter asks in 1 Peter 4:18. God's own people are only saved with difficulty. It took nothing less than the Son of God being executed like a common criminal to redeem us, and the fact that God chose to pay such a ghastly price tells us how seriously He takes sin. If God takes our sins so seriously, Peter's asking us, is He really going to greet the sins of everyone else, the people who didn't even want to serve Him, with a shrug and a smile? Judgment is coming, and we must not deny it.

III. Portraying Sin as Desirable.

- A. Beyond lying to promote sin and denying God's judgment, those who call evil good also love to portray sin as desirable. In fact, this is the title thought of the lesson. People like this, as described in Isaiah 5:20, love to take what is wrong and call it right, while they take what is right and call it wrong.
- B. Examples of this abound. Indeed, to the careful observer, it appears as though Satan has so thoroughly corrupted our entertainment that it twists every vice imaginable into a virtue, and vice versa.
 - 1. This is readily apparent in the sexual realm. There is nothing new in this. Consider Solomon's words in Proverbs 5:3-5. Exactly the same thing goes on today. Let me ask you: is there anything on the radio, on TV, or in the movies that is presented as so wholesome and good as sexual sin? All of the tragedies, all of the disasters caused by sexual immorality are ignored in favor of an image of sexual perfection that can only be found in sin. Pop culture tells the unmarried that unless they fornicate with all the abandon of a star on *Sex and the City*, they might as well be dead. And for those of us who are married, it whispers in our ears that we should spice up our "love" lives by committing adultery. Evil has become good.
 - 2. A whole host of other sins has undergone a similar transformation. Just look at drinking as it is presented in liquor ads on TV. If everything we knew about drinking came from those ads, we would believe that everyone who drinks is as good-looking as a soap-opera star and has an amazing life. They spend all their time at wild parties, surrounded by equally gorgeous members of the opposite sex, except when they're sitting down at the dock bonding with Dad while having a beer. I think we need some truth-in-advertising laws about drinking. For every ad I see like that, I want to see ten about the wino who spends the winter huddled on a heating grate, clutching a bottle of the cheapest rotgut money can buy. I want to see fifty about the loser who beats the daylights out of his wife and kids every two weeks because he's drunk out of his mind. Of course, it will never happen. There's too much money in turning evil into good.
- C. We could talk about example after example of this, everything from the glorification of the so-called homosexual-rights movement to the mockery of God's plan for the family. All of these things have horrible consequences, both for the sinner and for society, but all of these earthly tragedies aren't even the real point. James gives us the real point in James 1:14-15. Sin kills. Without the intervention of God Himself, sin kills every time and forever. Sin is not wise. Sin is not desirable. Sin is not good. Sin is death.

IV. Trusting in Self, not in God.

- A. Ultimately, though, all of these three things are symptoms of the same disease: trusting in self and not in God. These are the people described in Isaiah 5:20, those who are wise in their own eyes, who think they know what they're doing. They're willing to lie about sin because they think they know what's best for them. They're willing to deny judgment because they think they're too smart for the Bible. They're willing to believe that sin is desirable because that's how it looks to them. Paul gives us a God's-eye view on these people in Romans 1:21-22. They think they're so wise, but they're really just fools.
- B. The fact is, none of us are smart enough to run our own lives. We'll make a mess of things here, and we'll separate ourselves eternally from God. Proverbs 3:5-6 gives us the solution to the problem. We need to reject our own understanding and just trust in God. We need to turn away from the lies that surround us and listen only to His truth. If we do, He will make our paths straight forever.

Conclusion. If you need God's help in your life, come to Him now.