

I. Set Up

A. Welcome, Guests,

B. We have a second week in the Planted series. Today's topic is evil. Even a casual reading of the Bible makes it clear that we have an enemy, that part of what Jesus is doing is confronting it. And that we are called to do the same.

C. In Romans 12:21, the Apostle Paul tells us that we are not to be overcome by evil, but to overcome evil with good. Mike is going to start us in Genesis 3 and frame up what we are up against and how we should respond.

D. Right now

II. Introduction

A. From time to time, the Rodney King question pops up.

B. You may remember King, a 47-year-old-African American whose violent arrest was captured on video. The officers who subdued him were charged with excessive force but later acquitted. The announcement of the nonguilt verdict sparked the '92 riots in Los Angeles.

C. Do you remember his question? At a press conference after the riots, King pleaded, "Can we just get along?"

D. Why can't we just get along? What is wrong with us? Why is there so much violence? Why are history books and newspapers filled with reports of rape, war and murder instead of acts of love and generosity? Why do banks need vaults and doors need locks? Why aren't we better than we are?

E. If you listen to what people say today, you hear blame being directed at society, bad parenting, alcohol, bad bosses, addictions, the left or the right. When you try to go one level deeper than that – to peel back the reasons society is unhealthy or parents do a bad job – when you try to uncover the reasons for addictions or bad bosses - you run into a variety of theories.

1. Atheistic materialists – like Nietzsche – argue that we are framing the question wrong. We need to stop worrying about things like that and start thinking about survival and power.

2. Marxists, who historically have also embraced a form of atheism, argue that our problem is caused by a society that holds people back. Their particular beef are wealthy capitalists who oppress the poor.

3. Jean Jacques Rousseau – the 18th century Swiss philosopher – said people were good but were corrupted by cities.

4. Freud held that our problems come from challenges balancing our id, ego and super ego. He went on to blame the church for much of this, because it creates a false narrative about God and guilt.

5. Modernists – those who embrace Enlightenment thinking¹ - argue that people are inherently good and that with a little bit more time things will work out. We are not up against moral issues, just educational ones.^{2, 3, 4, 5.}

6. Postmodern thinkers tend to dismiss Utopian ideals brought about by science and reason. They also bypass discussions about the perfectibility of humankind.⁶ Instead, there is a very different discussion, in which most moral absolutes are rejected and what is talked about is the need for ultimate self-expression. What we are after is an environment which we are free to be who we are. Debates about truth have been replaced by agreements that “your truth” and “my truth” might be different, and that’s OK, as long as you do not suggest that your truth is better. It is as if, having grown tired of poor test scores, we’ve decided to say that every answer is right.⁷

F. The Bible looks at all that is broken and wrong and blames two culprits: sin and evil. It argues that we face all manner of adversity because we are broken – bent, fallen, curved back in on ourselves – and also because we are engaged in a battle with an enemy. In fact, what the Bible teaches is that we are living in enemy-occupied territory.

III. This is week two of Planted – an occasional topical series in which we are looking at the foundational truths that should shape our World View. Last week we looked at faith. Today I want to take a hard look at evil.

IV. Mike, do you really believe in evil? Yes.

A. I realize that sophisticated, educated, cultured people are not supposed to. In fact, some of you might think, “Woodruff, really? Wow, the Middle Ages called and they want their worldview back. Most people stop believing in the guy in the red suit with the pointy tail and pitchfork about the same time they stop believing in the guy in a red suit who comes down your chimney in December.”

B. Belief in evil fell out of favor about one hundred years ago. But it keeps popping back up. Sometimes world events – like the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide, lead people to say what happened was not just bad it was evil.

C. Sometimes because an author or a psychiatrist, like Karl Jung, will come along, saying that they have met people who are not just disturbed, but who are evil, and they endorse it. Back in the 90s, Scott Peck – the Harvard trained psychiatrist who had made a splash with his book *The Road Less Traveled* – came out with two books – *The People of the Lie* and *Glimpses of the Devil*, in which he argued for evil.

1. For a brief while after 9-11 people spoke about evil. But not for long. Among the cultural elite, we went back to the view that evil was nothing more than the result of bad parenting or bad social order. It was a glitch of some sort because people are inherently good. And so when George Bush gave his State of the Union address in 2002, he was derided for using the word evil five times.

2. Today, the idea of evil as a supernatural force, and certainly the idea of personal evil - is out of style. You are allowed to call certain political opponents evil. But you mean something different by it that what the Bible suggests.

D. I do not like believing in evil. But I was persuaded after realizing:

1. That Jesus's life didn't make much sense if you edited out all of the references to evil. After all, He started his public ministry with a forty day fast in preparation to face-down the devil; throughout his ministry he was fighting evil – sometimes casting out demons - and He taught the disciples to pray to deliver us from evil.

2. I also realized the evidence for evil was pretty overwhelming.⁸ The world is not just filled with bad things – with broken families, cold hearts, failing neighborhoods and sick children. It is also riddled unthinkable things, like Auschwitz, My Lai, Jonestown and sexual trafficking – things that strike me as not just bad or broken, but evil.

3. And a third reason I believe in evil is because there have been a few times when I have felt what I would describe as the presence of evil. Cold. Dark. Bad.

E. Of course part of having this discussion involves defining evil – and definitions are all over the map.

1. If you look at Hollywood you see one group of directors who portray evil in movies filled with Zombies or named *The Dawn of the Attack of the Flesh-Eating Mutant Aliens*. While another portrays evil with movies like *Hotel Rwanda* or *The Pianist*.

2. There are cartoonish portrayals of evil – either the impish red demon with a forked tail and pitchfork, sitting on your shoulder encouraging you to engage in junior high pranks, or the mischievous, moustache twirling villain.

3. When preachers rail against the devil you have to wait to find out if they are going to be referencing Halloween and Ouija boards, Frank Peretti novels or Dante's Inferno.

F. Let me start by noting that the Bible's view of evil that is not simplistic or reductionistic. It doesn't make the typical liberal mistake of underestimating cosmic evil, nor does it make the typical conservative mistake of finding Satan under every rock. Instead it describes a broken world in which we face: biological problems, sociological problems, psychological problems, moral problems and spiritual problems.

G. It doesn't answer every question,⁹ but it gives us more information than we choose to pay attention to, mostly because we do not like what we are told.

V. Let's start with some basics.

A. Genesis 1 and 2 describe a world that works.¹⁰ The on-going refrain is, "and God saw what He made and it was good." But then, in Genesis 3, evil walks on to the stage and things unravel. Genesis 3: reads:

1. Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"

2. ²The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"

3. ⁴"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. ⁵"For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

B. The question crying out for an answer is: Where did Satan come from? And the answer is, we are not told much.

C. Ezekiel 28 we hear a report about how he was a glorious angel who fell to pride. We are told about an interaction between God and Satan in the book of Job. Isaiah 14 gives us a bit more information.

D. There are also some New Testament data points.

1. We have the Temptation of Christ in the wilderness and several accounts of Jesus casting out demons.

2. Both Peter and Paul offer specific warnings about evil in general, and about our adversary in general – who is called everything from Satan and Beelzebub – which means Lord of the Flies – to the Father of Lies, the evil one, the prince of the power of the air and the ruler of this world.

3. We also get some commentary about the "great dragon – that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan – who is thrown down to the earth – in the book of Revelation.

4. There are a few other data points,¹¹ but likely not as much as you might think.

E. However, from these passages we have there is enough to make a handful of helpful observations. Let me start by defining evil, and then I will share seven things we need to know about it and four things we need to do.

VI. We start with a definition. What is evil? Well, other than saying it is very hard to define, there are a couple of things to note:

A. First, evil is broken good:

1. Philosophical discussions of evil generally start by dividing evil into two categories: natural evil (e.g., natural disasters, diseases and birth defects); and moral evil (e.g., human action that results in pain and suffering for others, such as genocide, war, cruelty and abuse). Beyond that, what follows is often very dense and very dark. But among the things we hear is that evil is broken good.

2. Augustine wrote at some length about this,¹² as did C.S. Lewis. In fact, it was his writing here that made him world famous, in part because he presented it so cleverly.

3. In *The Screwtape Letters*, Lewis stages a series of letters from a senior demon, named Screwtape, to his young nephew, named Wormwood on the art of being of demon. One of the letters makes the point that evil is broken good. In it, the senior demon writes to his understudy and saying:

a) “Never forget that when we are dealing with any pleasure in its healthy and normal and satisfying form, we are, in a sense, on the Enemy’s ground. I know we have won many a soul through pleasure. All the same, it is His invention, not ours. He made the pleasures: all our research so far has not enabled us to produce one. All we can do is to encourage the humans to take the pleasures which our Enemy has produced, at times, or in ways, or in degrees, which He has forbidden.”

4. The forces of darkness cannot create anything new or novel. Its only power is to destroy. As a result, evil is never more than broken good backed by a powerful ad campaign.

B. The second defining thing we need to understand is that evil is often the way spiritual being living in rebellion to God are referenced. The Bible not only recognizes evil as a power, it describes a dark spiritual-underworld staffed by an army of fallen angels.¹³

VII. Seven things we need to understand about evil

A. Evil is boring and banal.

1. Not quite sixty years ago, Hannah Arendt wrote about the trial of one of the Nazi masterminds, Adolph Eichmann, and in her book, she coined the phrase “the banality of evil.”

2. Arendt was a German philosopher who sat through the whole trial, reporting on the Holocaust at a time when few details were known. Her comments are controversial for several reasons, but it is known most for her claim that evil is banal, by which she meant, it’s boring.

3. Simone Weil – another Jewish writer whose thinking was shaped by the Holocaust – made the same point. He wrote: Imaginary evil is romantic and varied, full of charm; imaginary good is tiresome and flat. Real evil, however, is dreary, monotonous, and barren.”

4. In her book, Arendt was shocked to find Eichmann a small-minded, thoughtless bureaucrat who hardly realized what he had done. There were no special or grand qualities about him. He wasn't motivated by any grand plan or even by hatred of the Jews. He was just trying to advance his career.¹⁴

5. You may have noticed that novelists have a hard time developing interesting characters that are good. Herman Melville tried with Billy Budd. C.S. Lewis seems to have pulled it off with Aslan – the “good but not tame” lion in The Chronicles of Narnia. But few are able to pull it off.¹⁵ Most characters who are supposed to be totally good come off as flat, naïve and goody-goody. Think the characters in the movie Pleasantville. In contrast, evil is believed to be dashing, sinister and complex. And evil people are dark geniuses who are fascinating people.

B. Evil is Deceptive:

1. Because no one would sign up for something broken over something vibrant, the Father of Lies lies. Evil is advertised as an exciting, alluring and frequently a sexy form of freedom. But it is ultimately miserable and entirely monotonous.

2. Evil appears better than it is, and as part of that, it often delivers on its promises for a while – the early hits of a drug deliver an intoxicating high; extramarital sex is often passionate and fun; a lie may get us out of a jam. But evil always fails us in the end. Broken and limited things can never ultimately satisfy a heart designed for God and good.

3. If we could see the end from the beginning – and if our willpower was strong – we'd never choose evil over good. Sin is always ultimately stupid and self-destructive. It costs us more and takes us farther than we initially expect.

4. Evil is ultimately miserable and entirely monotonous.¹⁶

5. We need to realize that God loves us, and he withholds nothing good from us. What he tries to steer us away from, are things that do not work.

6. Recently we were watching some videos of when are boys were days, weeks, months and a few years old. My first take is, wow was that exhausting. My second was to marvel at all the time we would spend redirecting them away from the stairs or the street, All the time we spent trying to get them to stop eating sand and to eat a cracker instead.

C. Evil is Progressive:

1. Because evil is nothing more than broken good – which means it does not ultimately satisfy – it pulls us deeper and deeper into trouble. Like an addiction, sin requires more and more of us, while giving less in return, until pretty soon it is taking everything and giving nothing.

2. Those who fall into trouble, often do so slowly. In Romans 1 Paul shows the progression of trouble that starts with “refusing to glorify God or give him thanks,” (1:21) and ends with God giving them over to a depraved mind and allowing them to be “filled with every kind of wickedness.” (1:28f) .

D. Evil is Nuanced:

1. Evil is complicated in part because it’s nuanced – everything around us – starting with our own heart – is a mix of good and evil. This makes evil harder to recognize.

2. We are often unprepared for the complexities and vagaries of evil:

E. Evil is Different Than Being Wrong.

1. There are people who I am convinced are wrong, but they are not necessarily evil, just mistaken. The ACLU comes to mind. I line up against most of the things they line up for. But some of the people I have interacted with I think are simply mistaken. They mean well and are trying to help.

2. We need to be very careful not to conflate disagreement with someone with the assertion that they are wicked. Just because someone disagrees with a stance we have taken does not mean they are evil, and it certainly does not justify being nasty back to them. We are to love our enemies.

F. Evil is Common – it is Every day.

1. It can be hard to see evil in our own heart. This is one of the reasons we may have blind spots. But we should grow in this ability.

2. C.S. Lewis said that writing *The Screwtape Letters* did not take much effort. Dostoevsky said when he needed to find examples of evil for *The Brothers Karamazov*, he just used read the paper. When Chesterton wrote the *Father Brown* mysteries, he had Father Brown solve all of the murders by simply looking in his own heart.

3. Because of the evil in our own heart, it is hard to see our evil nature.

G. Evil is Limited:

1. The devil is God's "equal-but-opposite,"¹⁷ nor is the outcome of the rebellion up for grabs. Though Satan and his troops are more powerful than we are, they are finite creatures who cannot stand against God. His plans are not in any way thwarted by evil. It does not shape (or misshape him) in any way.¹⁸ Evil does not threaten his love or power, nor does it force him to suffer. However, He has chosen not to be untouched by evil and the suffering it causes. He chooses to suffer on our behalf.

2. Back in the 60s, a comic named Flip Wilson started claiming, "The devil made me do it." And it caught on. It might work as a laugh line, but practically speaking, it is unlikely, because the devil is not an omnipresent being. He can only be in one place at a time, and chances are small that you have caught his attention. Might we be misled by a demon? Yes. That is a possibility. However even there some caution is needed. The Bible spends relatively little time discussing demonic activity or coaching us in the tactics of spiritual warfare, and far more time instructing us to pursue holiness.¹⁹ Our fallen nature means that we are more than capable of making a mess of things all by ourselves. As C.S. Lewis stated in *The Screwtape Letters*, his biting satire of spiritual warfare, "There are two equal and opposite errors into which the human race can fall about the devils (demons). One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them."

3. It is popular to say, "the devil made me do it." That is doubtful. God is omnipresent, Satan is not.²⁰

H. Evil is outmatched by Christ:

1. It is important to note that Jesus wins. It is costly and therefore hard – unthinkable. But it is not hard because of Satan's power relative to Christ's power.

2. As we read through the Gospel we see that when Jesus was confronted by evil he didn't tolerate it. Ever. He doesn't turn away. He doesn't stall. He doesn't act embarrassed or surprised, He just deals with it. He faces evil spirits, commanding them in a no-nonsense manner.

3. His interactions – exorcisms – do not take long. He doesn't have to pray for days or enter into a great struggle. As one writer noted, if Jesus had starred in *The Exorcist*, it would have been a short movie. Jesus enters the room. Says come out. Roll credits.

4. It's worth noting that he doesn't use special formulas or chant long spells. He doesn't sprinkle holy water or wield a crucifix. He just ordered evil to obey.

5. And it's also worth noting that the demons are all frightened of him. They cower in his presence. They are subject to his every word.

6. and it is important to note that evil is not overcome by our good intentions.

I. Evil will fail.

1. It's not just that wrongly constituted, broken things likely to fail over time, evil has been mortally wounded by Christ. But that doesn't mean they immediately go away. Much like the skirmishes that continued in the South Pacific months after Japan's surrender, the fighting between those following Christ and the forces of evil goes on. Indeed, we are warned to be on our guard for our enemy prowls about like a roaring lion.

2. One Day God Will Destroy All Evil: As we noted on Day 7, one day God will put an end to evil and usher in his perfect kingdom.

3. The outcome is decided. Jesus has won. We do not "fight for victory but from victory."²¹

4. .

VIII. There is more that probably should be noted:

A. Such as the fact that Evil that thinks it is good is especially problematic. Which should give us pause. Evil in the name of faith or God can be real trouble.

B. Or the fact that evil can leverage great good for great evil.

1. It turns out that the greater the potential for Good in something – or someone – the greater the potential for harm.

2. The greater potential something has for good, the greater potential the broken version has for harm. Like fire – which can help us stay warm and cook our food or burn down everything we own - sex and money have big upsides and big downsides.

C. But I want to move on to some next steps. So now what?

1. Understanding evil is a start. There are things we need to know about it in order to move forward well.

2. We know that we need to avoid the two most common errors – to disbelieve in evil or to believe a demon lies under every rock.²² How are we to think about evil? How does it change our day?

IX. Four things to do:

A. Expect Evil: In I Peter 4:12 we are told to "not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you"

1. This means we stay alert as to the attacks that may come our way.

2. I think this means we stand strong in the face of it. We bear it. And even find ways to thank God in the face of it. Not for evil. But we can still find reasons to give thanks to God in the face of it. It can certainly refine us.

3. The first point, is: Expect it.

B. Play Defense:

1. We cannot read the Bible without being aware of how few people's lives end well. We need to play defense. This starts with hating evil. In Romans 12:9 we are told to "Let our love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good."

2. This includes, avoiding It. Years ago, I took on a consulting project with a police department, and that meant I spend some time riding with officers to better understand their job. One of the things I remember most was one young officer, being frustrated at how hardened his own heart was becoming, because he was not only arresting the same people over and over. He was helping foolish people over and over.

a) A lot of trouble can be avoided by choosing to not walk down dark alleys at 2 AM. Likewise, a lot of trouble can be avoided by steering clear of dark things – which includes everything from ? to seances and Ouija boards. Some of this is nothing but people trying to make a buck. But some may be and you do not want to be around it.

3. Consider the defensive thinking behind much of the Armor of God – which Paul advocates in ??

C. Third: We need to Play offense. This means a few things.

1. First, we need to expose evil. That is the directive of Ephesians 5:11: Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them"

2. It also means we must seek to counter it with good. Romans 12:21 calls on us to overcome evil with good. (Romans 12:21)

3. Even a casual reading of the New Testament makes it clear that we need not spend our time running around fretting about attacks by demons. We are not told to focus there, we are told to focus on doing good. Excelling in truth. Pursuing righteousness and peace. Studying the Word of God.

D. We should worry most about our own heart

1. The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? The Prophet Jeremiah

2. No man's really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be; till he's realized exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talking about "criminals" as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away; till he's got rid of all the dirty self-deception of talking about low types and deficient skulls; till he's squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat. G.K. Chesterton

3. I do not know what the heart of a rascal may be, but I know what is in the heart of an honest man, and it is horrible. Rousseau.

4. As Pogo Possum said, "We have met the enemy and they are us." Not always true. But it often is.

E. Put on the Armor of God.

X. Closing Prayer

XI. Additional Resources

A. Dante's Inferno

B. The Screwtape Letters

XII. Going Deeper

A. Earlier I mentioned that not all questions about evil can be answered. The classic example is "The Problem of Evil." Which was famously framed by ?, who said: If God is both all powerful and all good, then evil should not exist?

B. There is a branch of theology dedicated to exploring this question and a few related ones²³ – such as, where did evil come from? At some point you may want to wrestle with this. For now, let me leave you with two thoughts related to the Problem of Evil:

C. The problem of evil is a problem for everyone. Atheists often ask Christians to explain the existence of evil in a world where a good, loving and all-powerful God exists. The problem of evil is a strong but not unanswerable argument against our faith in an omnipotent and benevolent God; but, this "problem" is an even stronger argument against atheism and our post-Christian culture.

D. Those who reject the idea of God and any ultimate code of morality, in favor of individuals following their own inner thoughts and feelings, are unable even to call evil, evil! Timothy Keller points out how those who argue against the existence of God because of the existence of "evil" are in a quagmire:

1. On what basis do you say to someone, “What you have done is evil,” if their feelings differ from yours? We can call this a conundrum because the very basis for disbelief in God – a certainty about evil and the moral obligation not to commit it – dissolves if there truly is no God. The ground on which you make your objection vanishes under your feet. So not only does the argument against God from evil not succeed, but it actually has a “boomerang effect” on the users. Because it shows you that you are assuming something that can’t exist unless God does.

E. One of the more famous victims of the boomerang effect was C.S. Lewis. He concluded that the awareness of moral evil in the world was actually an argument for the existence of God, not against it (Walking With God Through Pain and Suffering, Timothy Keller, p. 104).

F. “If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn’t stopped evil and suffering in the world, then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can’t know. Indeed you can’t have it both ways.”—Tim Keller

G. Jesus is with Us: Eastern world denies evil, ?. Jesus shows up and sufferers.

H. *Beyond Our Headlights*

1. Earlier I mentioned that questions about sin lead to questions about evil, and that not all questions about evil can be answered. The three that we are unable to answer – at least on this side of the grave – are as follows: Where did evil come from? If everything was good, why were Adam and Eve – and Satan before them – tempted? And, if God is both all powerful and all good, then why does he allow evil to exist?

2. There is an entire branch of theology that explores these mysteries.²⁴ We are not going to wade very deeply into that pond at the moment, but several key points do need to be made.

3. God is not the author of evil. The Bible tells us that God is just and holy. It further notes that: all that he made was good; he cannot sin; nor is he to be blamed for sin.²⁵ Indeed, in the Book of James we are told that he cannot even desire to do anything wrong. Therefore, although we cannot say exactly how evil came into existence, we can state that God did not cause it.

4. God currently allows some evil to exist. While we state that God is not evil, does not do evil nor did he cause evil, we must also maintain that he does allow it. In light of God's providential control of all things, if evil exists it is only because the All Powerful One has ordained it.²⁶

5. God will eventually put an end to evil. Finally, we must also state that God will right all wrongs. He has promised that one day he will throw the devil and his troops into hell and make all things right. But that will be at the end of the age. At the moment his loving patience stays his hand.

6. As noted earlier, our headlights do not shine deeply enough into this mystery to provide answers to every question. Perhaps God allows evil because it leads to his greater glory. Perhaps we cannot truly love God without some – albeit limited – freedoms, which are in turn abused and lead to evil.²⁷ We do not know. When it comes to these kinds of questions we cannot say more than the Bible says. This may be frustrating, but hopefully not surprising. Some of the ways of an infinite God lie beyond the comprehension of finite creatures. God would not be God if we could always understand him.

XIII. Closing Prayer

A. O Lord God, destroy and root out whatever the Adversary plants in me, that with my sins destroyed you may sow understanding and good work in my mouth and heart; so that in act and in truth I may serve only you and know how to fulfill the commandments of Christ and to seek yourself.

B. Give me memory, give me love, give me chastity, give me faith, give me all things which you know belong to the profit of my soul.

C. O Lord, work good in me, and provide me with what you know that I need.
Amen. (Columbanus – 550-615)

XIV. Resources

- A. Book about Spiritual Warfare among missionaries
- B. The Screwtape Letters.

¹ The Enlightenment mindset embraces some of the Greek philosophy (e.g., Socrates, who held that, “to know good is to do good” and taught that no one knowingly does wrong.) The Bible teaches that even when the right choice is known our will to do the right thing is often weak. It is also important to note that the idea of “salvation via education” assumes that what we are taught by others is good and true, when that is clearly not always the case. Of course, at many universities there is little agreement about what good is or if there is any such thing as truth. We should not forget that many of the highest-ranking officers in Nazi Germany – the very ones advocating the holocaust – were those with the highest level of education.

This view – which had a lot of acceptance in the US at the end of the 19th and earliest parts of the 20th centuries – has faded a bit. Many believed that “every day and in every way, things were getting better.” And they also thought that science was going to fix everything. The promise was that paradise was just around the corner. But paradise is not what arrived. Instead of Utopia, the 20th century brought two World Wars, three holocausts and thousands of weapons of mass destruction. Wonderful advances were made - especially in agriculture and medicine – but scientific breakthroughs not only increased the grain harvest, they led to bigger bombs.

² In his essay, “The Real Meaning of Evil,” Lance Morrow (Time, Feb. 24, 2003, p. 74) noted that “children of the Enlightenment sometimes have an inadequate understanding of the possibilities of the “Endarkment.””

³ It is hard to overstate just how much optimism was in the air at the end of the 19th and during the beginning of the 20th centuries. I’ll note only two data points: 1) Julian Huxley announced that humanism would soon “solve all of the problems mankind is facing,” and 2) Algernon Charles Swinburne enlisted a choir to sing his *Hymn to Man*, which proclaimed, “Glory to Man in the highest! For Man is the master of things.”

⁴ The century that was to be marked by harmony and love saw 100 million people killed in wars, a second 100 million killed by their own governments and as many as 100 million more killed in other acts of violence. (Os Guinness, *Living with our Deepest Differences When The Differences are Absolute*, The John Jay Institute, 2007, page 5.)

⁵ The term Holocaust is often reserved for the Nazi’s effort to wipe out the Jews in the 1940s, but we might also use it to refer to Stalin’s death camps or the situation the Cambodians faced under the Khmer Rouge in the 1970s.

⁶ New York Times columnist David Brooks recently noted that “the belief in the natural human goodness” has almost disappeared. In a Feb. 18th column Brooks noted that the view most often associated with Jean-Jacques Rousseau – i.e., that “‘everything is good as it leaves the hands of the Author of things: everything degenerates in the hands of man’ – has faded. Parents and educators are not likely to allow children to ‘be liberated to follow their natural instincts’ any longer, instead they coach, supervise and instruct every element of their life. Self-discipline has become as important as self-esteem. We are disciplined so that they might learn right and wrong.” (*Human Nature Redux*, New York Times, Feb. 18, 2007)

⁷ In his 1973 book, *Whatever Happened to Sin*, psychologist Dr. Karl Menninger chronicled the United States slide into moral confusion. He began with our founders who - he believed - structured our government’s

checks and balances around a realistic view of evil. From there he notes how evil slid from being “sin” defined theologically, to being a “crime” defined legally, to being a “sickness” defined only in psychological categories. The late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan noted a similar descent. His famous phrase, “defining deviancy down,” was based on the idea that what was “deviant” fifty years ago is today just par for the course.” One is also reminded of Dostoyevsky’s famous line in *The Brothers Karamazov*. If God is dead, and there is no future life, then “nothing would be immoral any longer, everything would be permitted.” (For more on this see Ken Meyers, *Time for Truth*, page 28.)

⁸ William Peter Blatty, who wrote and produced *The Exorcist*, said, As far as God goes, I’m a non-believer. But when it comes to the Devil – well, that’s something else. The Devil keeps advertising; the Devil does lots of commercials.

⁹ We know that all goodness flows from God’s inherent character, and evil results from refusing to submit to his authority. The problem of evil’s existence is a stickier issue, causing debate among theologians and philosophers.

¹⁰ *The world we find in Genesis 1 and 2* is not perfect. Some *it is* untamed, and so we see God giving us the assignment (what we call the Cultural Mandate). But there is a Garden that is perfect and there is no sin or shame.

¹¹ Jude 1:6 says, “The angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper dwelling, he has kept in eternal chains under gloomy darkness until the judgment of the great day.” **And** 2 Peter 2:4 says, “God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.”

¹² It is not a thing or a substance. It is not a created reality. Rather it is a negation or an action that fails to meet a standard of goodness. Philosophers define it as a negation or a privation of the good, both of which depend upon a prior understanding of good. As Augustine said, “evil is parasitic.” It depends upon good for its very definition. J.P. Moreland notes that evil is not a physical thing. Rather, “It is a lack of goodness. It is goodness spoiled. You can have good without evil, but you cannot have evil without good.” Or, as Greg Koukl writes, “Human freedom was used in such a way as to diminish goodness in the world, and that diminution, that lack of goodness, that is what we call evil.” / John Piper has a slightly different take. Without explicitly disagreeing with Augustine, he uses Jeremiah 2:13 to argue that core essence of evil is preferring anything over God (such as a broken cistern).

¹³ The two core Old Testament passages about Satan are Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. They point both to dual realities – that is, to historical people (the King of Tyre in Ezek. and the King of Babylon in Isaiah) and to Satan as well.

¹⁴ See Michael Massing’s NYT article, Trial and Error, Oct. 17, 2004.

¹⁵ Literary critics have long noted the difference between Milton’s two great poems: *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. The first is better – more colorful and gripping. The latter is at times bland and lifeless. The general agreement is that it’s easier to write about hell than heaven.

¹⁶ One of the problems with our broken nature is that we get things exactly backwards. Many view evil as exciting and good as boring (think about the movie *Pleasantville*). Just the opposite is true.

¹⁷ The idea that there are two powerful beings – one good and one evil – locked in an eternal struggle is called dualism. (The popular expression can be found in Tom and Jerry cartoons, where a six inch “good angel” sits on one shoulder and his counterpart – complete with red tights and a pitch fork – sits on the other. Each lobby for their way.) Dualism has the advantage of absolving the good god from being the cause of sin, but this viewpoint does not line up with Scripture.

¹⁸ See Michael Llyod, *Café Theology*, p. 112.

¹⁹ In his systematic theology, Wayne Grudem develops this point at some length. There he writes: For example, in I Corinthians, when there is a problem of “dissension” Paul does not tell the church to rebuke a spirit of dissension, but simply urges them to “agree” and “be united in the same mind and the same judgment” (I Cor. 1:10). When there is a problem of incest, he does not tell the Corinthians to rebuke a spirit of incest, but tells them that they ought to be outraged and that they should exercise church discipline until the offender repents. (I Cor. 5:1-5). These examples could be duplicated many times in the other New Testament epistles. (Grudem, p. 177f).

²⁰ The devil is not an omnipresent being. He can only be in one place at a time, and chances are small that you have caught his attention. Might we be misled by a demon? Perhaps, however even there some caution is needed. The preponderance of biblical texts suggest that it’s our own brokenness – especially pride – that is our chief problem.

²¹ This quote is from Chip Ingram, *The Invisible War*, Baker Books, 2006.

²² In *The Screwtape Letters*, C.S. Lewis’s biting satire of spiritual warfare, he voices the following insight via Screwtape, a “senior demon:”

There are two equal and opposite errors into which the human race can fall about the devils (demons). One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

²³ The field of theology that studies “the problem of evil” is referred to as theodicy – from the Greek word for God (*theos*) and the Greek term for justification (*dikaios*). (Theodicy is an effort to justify God for the existence of evil). Efforts to answer these questions run the gamut from: denying that evil exists (i.e., evil is an illusion); proclaiming that God is above evil and good; explaining that God is limited (Rabbi Kushner’s book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*); declaring that evil is an outcome of free will, which is necessary in order for love to be love; and stating that God made evil for good purposes. None of these are ultimately satisfying. Like the Trinity, the reasons for evil lie a bit beyond our comprehension.

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²⁵ Biblical theologians reject the idea that, because God is the cause of all things, he must be the cause of evil – an idea labeled causal monism - because this view does not line up with a God who “is light; in him there is no darkness at all.” (I John 1:5). See also Deut. 32:4 and James 1:13.

²⁶ We must never say that evil is good

²⁷ The theological statement – *corruptio optimae pessima est* – is true, “the worst things come about through the corruption of the best.” Those things that have the possibility for great good or joy (e.g. money, sex, power, etc.) have the possibility for great harm. Though originally the highest of the angels Satan, after his fall, becomes the most formidable and implacable enemy of righteousness. A brilliant mind can be used to plan social reforms or plot international crimes. “Human good and human evil are not at opposite ends of the spectrum, but are frighteningly near one another, often a mere hair’s breadth apart. C.S. Lewis pointed out that the great sinners, with their indomitable wills and endless energy, were made of the very same stuff of which

the great saints were made. The greater one's potential for good, the greater the potential for evil.”
McClymond, p. 9.