

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

In this essay I shall attempt to answer the very important question of why a good God would permit evil to exist and why evil serves a good purpose. My sources of information are derived from the Christian Scriptures, particularly the words of Jesus and the Apostle Paul, and the Near Death Experience (NDE). I have read and studied both extensively, and I believe both to be reliable sources of spiritual truth.

According to the creation account in Genesis, God was pleased with what He created and said that it was good. Man was placed in the midst of the Garden and told not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, knowing full well that man could not help himself and would inevitably eat from the tree. The presumption was that by doing so, man would become like God.

So, man starts out in innocence, which should not be confused with righteousness. We all start out in this life as babies, with no knowledge of good or evil. We are neither good nor bad. As a matter of fact, we have no personal identity at all. It is only through our interactions with others over time that we develop our self-identity and learn the difference between good and evil. We learn about good and evil from two different perspectives, from the delivery and receiving ends. We learn to do good unto others and we experience the good that others do unto us. We do evil to others and we experience the evil that others do to us. In varying degrees we become good and bad people. None of us is entirely good, and no one is entirely bad. We are a mixture of both.

It is our choice to become as good or evil as we want. What we learn from Jesus and from the Near Death Experience is that a balance must be maintained and there is no avoiding this. The New Testament refers to this as the law of sowing and reaping. The love and kindness that you sow is returned to you in equal measure. Likewise with the evil that you sow. In the NDE experience, during the life review, we again experience good and evil from two different perspectives. During the life review the roles are reversed, and we experience the good that we did from the perspective of those who were on the receiving end of our good deeds. The same is true of the evil we did. We experience the feelings of those who were victimized by our evil deeds. I can only imagine how wonderful this experience would be for someone like Mother Theresa and how excruciatingly painful this might be for someone like Hitler.

In addition to the law of sowing and reaping, another kind of balance is also achieved in our experience of good and evil. If we experience nothing but good, we become a bit one-dimensional, and are not able to fully appreciate what it is like to be loved and forgiven by a gracious God and other sympathetic human beings. As the Apostle Paul once said, "where sin increases, grace abounds all the more" (Rom. 5:20). We also miss out on the comfort and joy of being helped by the kindness of a caring friend or stranger.

So, both good and evil serve a good purpose. The more extreme the experience, the more extreme the result. The marathon runner was once asked why he endured such pain and suffering. He replied, "because it feels so good when I stop." It's completely up to us how much

good or evil we do in this world. Before deciding just how good or evil we would be, we would be wise to consider the consequences.

One final word. The Law of Grace does not trump the Law of Sowing and Reaping. During the NDE life review, God dispenses nothing but love and forgiveness. We are the ones who judge ourselves. During our earthly walk, God loves us and forgives us and helps us right the wrongs in our lives. But He does not in any way interfere with the learning process of sowing and reaping. He does not remove the consequences, but He does endure those consequences right along with us. He is familiar with our pain and suffering and He also shares our love and joy. He is with us through it all. As a matter of fact, we are the very means by which God Himself experiences both good and evil.