I, Phase 2, Session 10. Objectives - Romans 12:9-21

1. Prove that we are new creatures and that, as a result, our behavior should correspond to our new identity.
2 Corinthians 5:17-21
1 Corinthians 6:19-20

2. Demonstrate that we have been called to love all people regardless of their social rank, including our enemies.
James 2:1-9
Matthew 5:21-26,38-48
Romans 12:17-21
Proverbs 25:21-22

3. Explain that the most important cause of disappointment and danger to us is the good of the world, not the evil, because it is easy to discern.
Galatians 5:14
Romans 12:21
Genesis 3:6 (good, pleasant, desirable)

II. Email to participants before session 10

During our next session, we will discuss Romans 12:9-21. The following verses are provided to give context to our review. Also, revisit our conversation regarding distinguishing good from evil.

V9-13
V9
1 Corinthians 13:4-8
Philippians 4:8-9
Galatians 6:9-10
V10-11
Philippians 2:1-4
Isaiah 6:8
Galatians 6:1-5
V12-13
1 Thessalonians 5:16-18
John 16:33
James 1:2-5

Galatians 6:10

V14-16
V14-15
Ephesians 4:29
Matthew 5:4,7,10
V16
James 2:1-9
Proverbs 3:5

V17-19
Deuteronomy 32:35-36
Matthew 5:9

V20-21
Proverbs 25:21-22
Matthew 5:43-48, 38-42, 21-26
Psalm 19:14

Who is my neighbor?
Luke 10:25-37
Leviticus 19:33-34

Who is my brother?
Matthew 12:46-50
Luke 8:19-21
Mark 3:31-35

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III. Email to participants after Session

Per our conversation, these are my comments about distinguishing good from evil.

When I read Hebrews 5:14 and Romans12:21, I understand that those verses are really talking about the distinction between eating from (or relying on) the tree of life (good) and eating from (or relying on) the tree of knowledge of good and evil (evil) - Genesis 2:9. The eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil means reliance on the world instead of God. This is why eating from this tree is evil Scriptures such as Deuteronomy 8:3, Luke 4:4, John 4:34 and John 6:48-58 point us in that direction. Eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil means reliance in the world system. It is relying, consuming, acquiring or depending on the world system, not on God.

I would very much appreciate your comments on this page that I wrote about distinguishing good from evil, using Hebrews 5:14 and Romans 12:21 as reference:

Hebrews 5:14 "*But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*." (Hebrews 5:14 NKJV)

Romans 12:21 " *Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good*. (Romans 12:21NKJV)

Distinguishing Good from Evil

God didn't want us to eat from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, because He wanted us to always rely on Him, not on the creation, and not on ourselves. He didn't want us to know good and evil through disobedience. He didn't want us to rely on the creation but to rely on Him. He didn't want us to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which would amount to knowing good and evil in disobedience, for it would bring us death. The Lord's command in Genesis 2:17 implies that eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil is evil and brings death. The tree itself wasn't evil because all God created was good (Genesis 1:31). What was evil was to eat from it, to rely on it.
"*but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die*." (Genesis 2:17NIV)

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 <u>the tree of life</u> and eat, and live forever*." (Genesis 3:22 NIV)

God didn't create evil, nor is He the author of evil. He does no evil. Since evil is contrary to His very character, He is actually incapable of evil. Evil is, in fact, the absolute

absence or rejection of God. We know that the creation is separate from the Creator; we are not pantheists. Thus, the creation which is separate from God opened up the possibility, when combined with free will, for Lucifer, and man to choose the creation (including themselves) over the Creator. This flawed choice is what created evil. God didn't create evil. Lucifer created evil because he was the first to rebel from God. "*And He said to them, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven."* (Luke10:18). From that point on, evil existed, so the angels who followed Lucifer and fell were simply choosing evil. Man had the opportunity to chose God or nature, and he chose nature. Man chose himself. Man chose evil. Adam and Eve were also choosing a pre-existing evil, but the fall of man gave way to evil on earth; man was the enabler. Since we were given dominion over the earth, evil couldn't have happened on earth without our consent. In that sense, man created evil on earth, because there was no evil in the world until man chose to bring it here. Man created evil on earth. Man could have chosen to honor God by obeying Him. Instead, by disobeying God, man chose the creation over the Creator. The will of man and the will of Lucifer created evil. Evil on earth was created by the fall of man and the actions of the devil.

Lucifer (or any other angel) wasn't given dominion over anything, including earth. His power was tied to God's commands. He wasn't given any power apart from God. Unlike man, Lucifer was not given dominion over anything. He had to take that from man and from whom God had created in His image and had granted him power over the earth.

When reading Hebrews 5:14, what I understand is that when we mature, we are able to make the distinction between eating from the tree of life (good) and eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (evil). It is important for us to remember that everything the Lord created was very good, even the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 1:31).

It means that we are able to distinguish between what is coming from the will of God (tree of life) and what is coming from the world system (tree of knowledge of good and evil), not what is "good" and evil in the world. By the same token, from Romans 12:21, you can only defeat evil with the good that comes from God (the tree of life), not with the good of the world. When we try to apply the good of the world to defeat evil, we just make evil bigger. Remember that "*The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law*" (1 Corinthians 15:56) and that *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse*; (see Galatians 3:10-14). Good and evil are opposite forces in the world system, which is the tree of knowledge of good and evil. God has no opposite (John 1:4-5; Galatians 5:23).
The evil in the world is easy to recognize. What is most difficult to discern is the "good"

of the world and to distinguish it from the good of God. Here is where deceit is more likely to occur. Satan was appealing to, and enticing, Eve to acquire the good of the world: self reliance, independence and knowledge.

In reviewing Genesis 3:6, we see very clearly that the deceit came from the good of the world, since Eve saw that the tree was “good for food”, “pleasant to the eyes” and “desirable to make one wise.”

Genesis 3:6 “*So when the woman saw that the tree was**good for food**, that it was **pleasant to the eyes**, and a tree **desirable to make one wise**, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate*.”

Good, pleasant and desirable: “*For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world*.” 1 John 2:16

Dealing with the good of the world is where we are more exposed to being deceived. Psalm 127:1 provides appropriate guidance to us: "*Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.*” Psalm 127:1 NIV

Mark 10:18 NKJV (also Luke 18:19) “*So Jesus said to him,* “*Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God*.”

Hebrews 5:14 “*But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil*.” (Hebrews 5:14 NKJV)

Romans 12:21 “*Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.*” (Romans 12:21NKJV)

John 1:4-5 “*In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it*.” (John 1:4, 5 NKJV)

Galatians 5:22-23 “ *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law*.” (Galatians 5:22, 23 NKJV)

We know that Jesus came to save the lost (Luke 19:10) and to give us life, a life to be lived abundantly (John 10:10). We wish that everyone would be saved, for He so loved

the world that He sent His Son to die for us (John 3:16-17). Within the good of the world are good people who are kind, loving, honest and law abiding but who don't believe in Jesus. I was one of them. When we see good people in the world, the "wisdom" of our minds may prompt us to believe that their goodness is enough for salvation. I was one of those who thought that. In my "wisdom", I told my wife that, if there is a God, He would know that I am a good guy and would certainly give me a pass! She replied, “Your goodness won’t do anything to save you.” In those words, she was preaching the gospel to me; my goodness would have made no difference.

The good of the world and the good people in the world who are not believers are exactly the sources of deception for us. If someone is evil, it is relatively easy to spot. The deception comes when all appear to be good/"godly". At least one major denomination has been deceived into believing that anyone can be saved without Jesus. In the good of the world lies the greatest source of deception. When we read the verses below we may think that there is no love in them, only condemnation. However, there is nothing but love in them, for everyone must be told the truth that the only way to our Father in Heaven is through Jesus Christ our Lord (John 14:6).

This is what Jesus says about those who don't believe in Him: Jesus said to them, “*If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me. Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.* ***You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do****. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it. But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me. Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me? He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God*.” (John 8:42-47 NKJV). Jesus also said that "*He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad*." (Matthew 12:30 NKJV).

We also know that the will of the Father is for everyone to be saved, as stated in 2 Peter 3:9 "*The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*". (2 Peter 3:9 NKJV). As coworkers with Him on this earth in making disciples of the peoples of the world, we are commanded to preach Christ, in love, to all people -- whom He greatly loves.

The tree of knowledge of good and evil is the world system, whose Prince is the devil.

We are in the world, but we are not of this world says the Lord Jesus in John 15:18-25. The world system, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, is evil; it is the absence of God (Psalm 127:1; John 15:5).

Let's take one more look at Genesis 2:17:
"*but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die*." (Genesis 2:17NIV)

This verse alone tells us that eating from this tree, the whole tree, brings evil; it brings death. We are to eat now from the tree of life(John 6:53-56), and though we are aware of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, we don't eat from it, for "*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world*." (John17:16). Eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil brings death. This is what Paul is talking about in Romans 8:5-8 *For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God*.

Why did God put the tree of knowledge of good and evil in the garden?

The tree had to be in the garden because it represents the creation. This is why Adam and Eve were asked to care for it, which means to take care of the creation, over which they were given dominion. However, the Lord told them not to eat from it, which means that they were not to rely on the creation, because they will surely die.

Once they ate from it, their eyes opened and they knew that they were naked (Genesis 3:10-11). This caused them to lose their identity in God; they lost their godly clothing (Matthew 22:1-11, Revelation 7:14). That is the meaning of their spiritual death; they were separated from God. They had become sons of the devil, to whom they had given or transferred the dominion over the earth that the Lord had given to them (Genesis 1:26-28). **That loss of identity, of course, didn't mean that they couldn't hear from God. They responded to the call of the Lord, as did Cain and everyone else to whom the Lord spoke**. Please read Genesis 4:7, Jeremiah 29:13, Jeremiah 26:13, Romans 1:18-21.

Could we have been created better than we were?

No, the way in which they were created is the best possible way in which they could

have been created, as the Lord said in Genesis 1:31. Since they were a creature with free will, they were free to make the choice to rely on the Creator or to rely on the creation. They made their choice for the creation (Romans 1:25). We must remember, however, that there is no love without free will.

Man had to experience the separation from God and freely ask for a Redeemer. God has always pursued man, and His desire, His will, was that man would love Him (John 3:16;14:15). The purpose of creation was love! The grace of salvation, however, required the free will decision to believe in Him, to rely on Him (John 3:16). Once we believe in Him, we are justified; that is the moment in which the Lord puts a new spirit in us (Ezekiel 36:26). When we have a new spirit, we are again clothed with our identity in the Lord and no longer of the devil. Once our new spirit is in us, perfectly clean, we receive the Holy Spirit. It is only when we receive the Holy Spirit that we can declare that Jesus is Lord (1 Corinthians 12:3); this is the moment in which we are born again. This is the moment in which the restoration of man is greater than the damage of the fall (Romans 5:15-17). Adam and Eve walked with God; we walk with God **within** us. The Lord knew that the heart of man is weak (1 John 3:19-21). but now, through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit for Whom we freely asked, we are given the strength not to satisfy the desires of the flesh (Galatians 5:16, Ezekiel 36:27). We have already been given the **spirit** of adoption (Romans 8:15), but we eagerly wait for the actual adoption, which is the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:23). At that time, there will no longer be any sin.

If we had been created with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, there would not have been a fall, but there would not have been free will either. In other words, there would not have been love. That perfection (the absence of sin) had to come to us in response to our freely made request to the Lord for a Savior. This free will choice implies the presence of love.

One of the implications of this to discipleship, is that we must fight evil with the good of God, rather than the good of the world (the tree of knowledge of good and evil). We bring that to which we apply the good of God, to the kingdom of God. This is when we shine the light on the darkness of the world and turn it to light.

In Christ,

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