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Calling Good Evil and Evil Good

"*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter*" (Isaiah 5:20).

The preceding scripture is but one of six verses in the fifth chapter of Isaiah which begins with the word *"woe,"* a word which expresses the extreme displeasure of God upon the persons so described. In this chapter he pronounced a *"woe"* upon those "*who join house to house"* (v. 6), or who pursued the course of greed or avarice. He pronounced a "*woe*" upon those "*who rise early in the morning that they may follow intoxicating drink"* (11), people who, instead of arising early in the morning to pursue worthy occupations were instead rising early to "*follow intoxicating drink*." He pronounced a "*woe*" upon those *"who draw iniquity with cords of vanity*" (v. 18), or to those enslaved to sin. He pronounced a "*woe*" upon *"those who are wise in their own eyes"* (v. 21), or upon those who were self-deceived. And he pronounced a *"woe"* upon "*men mighty at drinking wine,"* to men who were "*valiant for mixing intoxicating drink*," to those *"who justify the wicked for a bribe, and take away justice from the righteous men*" (v. 22-23), or to those who were highly involved in perverting justice. Though Isaiah labored as a prophet in the "*days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah, kings of Judah"* (Isa. 1:1), the wickedness described in the verses following the "woes" just cited is painfully similar to the wickedness which characteries much of modern society. But this should not be too surprising in view of the fact that "*there is nothing new under the sun"* (Eccl. 1:9).

Having just cited each of the woes mentioned in the fifth chapter of Isaiah, we shall now focus our attention upon the *"woe"* cited in verses 20; namely, the "*woe"* pronounced upon those "*who call evil good and good evil; who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter*."

In Isaiah's day there were those who "*called evil good, and good evil!*" It seems strange that the people so described were unable to make moral distinctions, people who actually confused those distinctions by calling "*evil good, and good evil!"* In this article, we shall cite some examples of those who are guilty of calling "*evil good, and good evil*," but first, we stress the fact that the very existence of "*good*" and "*evil"* necessarily infers the existence of an **absolute standard** by which one thing may be called "*good*" and its opposite may be called *"evil*."

And this brings us to the Person of **God,** our Creator (Gen. 1:1), and in Whose "*image"* we were created (Gen. 1:27). Absolute goodness is inherent in the very Person of God. Consider some of the moral qualities of God. God is "**holy**" (Lev. 11:44; Isa. 6:1-6), so we must be holy (I Pet. 1:15). God is **good**; in fact, the psalmist said "*O taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the man that trusteth in him"* (Ps. 34:8). Because God is good, then "*every good and perfect gift*" comes from God (Jas. 1:17); in fact, "*the goodness of God*" is what leads people to repentance (Rom. 2:4). God is **righteous**. Mindful of His righteousness, Abraham interceded with God on behalf of his nephew, Lot, asking, "*shall not the Judge of all the earth do right*" (Gen. 18:25). Because God is righteous, it took nothing less than the blood of Jesus Christ to atone for our sins (Rom. 3:25,26). God is "***light***, *and in him is no darkness at all*" I John 1:5); hence, we are commanded to "*walk in the light*," and by so doing "*we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin"* (I John 7). "***God is love***" (I John 4:8), and because of the greatness of His love, He "*gave His only begotten Son, that*

whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). God is **merciful!** The Psalmist praised God, saying, "*thou, O Lord, art a God full of compassion, and gracious, longsuffering, and plenteous in mercy and truth*" (Psalm 86:15). God is not only merciful; he is "*rich in mercy*," even as His love is "*great*" (Eph. 2:4). God is a God of **grace**, providing us with blessings we could never earn or deserve. Hence, Paul referred to the "*exceeding riches of His grace in his kindness toward us through Jesus Christ*" (Eph. 2:7*).* "*God is faithful*" (I Cor. 10:13), meaning that He honors His promises. Cf. I Cor 1:9; I John 1:9). God "*is longsuffering*" (I Pet. 3:9), which means that He is patient with us, giving us opportunity to correct the things amiss in our lives. Cf. 2 Pet. 3:15.

More, much more, could be said about the moral and spiritual attributes of God, but suffice it to say that He possesses all these attributes to the infinite degree. And He is the standard to which we should strive to live up to as we live our lives here on planet earth. Because **He** is holy, **we** must be "*holy*" (I Pet. 1:16). Because **God** is "*perfect*" **we** should strive to "*be perfect*" even as our "*Father in heaven is perfect*" (Matt. 5:48), Because **God** is "*light*" **we** must "*walk in the light as He is in the light*" (I John 1:7), striving at all times to be "*the light of the world*" (Matt. 14).

Hence, with regards to what is "*good,*" it is evident that infinite goodness resides in the very Person of God, and the opposite of "*good*" is necessarily "*evil.*" Moreover, inasmuch as the **Bible** is "*the word of God*" (Heb. 4::12), then the Bible sets forth not only the character qualities of God, but also the character qualities of those who are His children, and of those who long for His approval. Anything that contradicts the character of God, and anything which violates the word of God is necessarily "*evil!*" Hence to "*call evil good and good evil*" (Isa. 5:20) is offensive to the infinite holiness of the very Person of God! Tragically, however, this is a common practice in today's world.

Examples of Calling
Evil Good and Good Evil

1. According to the Bible (God's word), "*He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly*" (Prov. 13:24). But according to so many in modern society parents who spank their children are guilty of "child abuse," and if they do it publicly, the civil authorities might very well take the child from the parents! What God calls "*love*," many today call it "child abuse."

2. God condemns fornication and adultery in the strongest of terms (I Cor. 6:9-10; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8). However, in modern society fornication is regarded as an "expression of love," and who can criticize love?

God condemns alcoholism in both the Old and New Testaments (Prov. 20:1; 23:29-35; Hab. 2:15; Gal. 5:19-21; Rev. 21:8), but many think nothing of it, declaring that the drinker is just being social, friendly, and is often "the life of the party."

God condemns the shedding of "*innocent blood*" (Prov. 6:17), and no blood is more "*innocent*" than that of an unborn child (Ezek. 18:20; Matt. 19:14). However, in today's world abortion has been legalized and instead of it being called "**murder**" (which is what abortion is), it is called "**a woman's right to choose**." In fact, in 2019 some anti-abortionists were trying to pass a "pro-life bill," and Stacy Abrams, a failed gubernatorial candidate from Georgia called it "abominable and evil," and "bad for morality and our humanity."

God condemns homosexual conduct as "*an abomination*" (Lev. 20:13), but many in our society call it simply "an alternate life style," and label those who openly oppose homosexual conduct as being guilty of using "hate speech."

The Bible condemns the use of profanity and the use of corrupt speech (Eph. 4:29; Col. 3:8), yet many people's "*throat is an open tomb*," their mouth is "*full of cursing and bitterness*" (Rom. 3:13,14), but are often complimented for their ability to use such "colorful speech!"?

Conclusion: If you eliminate God and His word from the equation, then it is a case of "anything goes," everything is ok, and nothing is evil. Consider the example of those described in Rom. 1:20-32. Formerly they "*knew God*," but they did not "glorify" God; they professed themselves to "*be wise*" while becoming "*fools*," so God "*gave them up to uncleanness,*" and their conduct went from bad to worse. Sadly, however, many today are trying to eliminate God, saying we were not created but we evolved, and therefore may be guided by the philosophy of "situation ethics," meaning that everything is fine, and nothing is inherently evil. Multitudes have embraced the philosophy of Moral Relativism, meaning that there are no absolute standards to which we must conform. Our culture has largely embraced this philosophy; consequently moral chaos reigns supreme and moral principles have been turned upside down. The solution to this problem is to turn back to **the Bible** and turn back **to God**, or else suffer the tragic consequences which inevitably comes to those who sow to the flesh while refusing to repent. Consider   ye   well!

—B.Witherington

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