

Article of the Month

March, 2022

***Sin? Righteousness? Evil? Good?***

These words have various meanings in various minds. But because their meanings are important due to their Biblical concepts, it will be helpful to discuss them. Some of them, like "sin," sound "religious." Words like "good," of course, can and are used by people everywhere -- even if they are atheists.

GOOD

"Good," for all practical purposes, is a reference to something with beneficial results. Its opposite is "bad" -- because "bad" things have results which are not beneficial. "Good" is a term which the Bible, strangely, uses in a relative sense. When someone called Jesus "good," his reply was, "Why do you call ME good. Only God is good." (Matthew 19:17) That, of course, is the extreme! Jesus was perfect, and WAS, therefore, good! But Jesus' point was that ALL GOOD comes from one source -- from the Creator. God DEFINES what "good" is, because He foresees the results. Understanding that God is the Definer of Good helps us to place thankfulness where it belongs. It also tells us where to look in order to find out what IS good. THAT was Jesus' point.

God, Himself, uses "good" in the very first chapter of Genesis. He refers to the work of the creative epochs as "good." But, when He comments on the work of the sixth creative period -- mankind -- He goes to the superlative. He calls it "very good." So, God is, early in the Bible, showing the relative nature of the word "good." If something can be "very good," there is, obviously, a "good" which is less than "very." But ALL good is still beneficial. It works, in the end, toward a desired beneficial outcome.

Humans, being imperfect, cannot work perfect good. But they CAN work good -- things that will benefit themselves and others. Thus Jesus can place different groups of humans in different resurrections because some have in this life worked "good," and some have worked "evil." (John 5:29)

SIN

We're looking at this word next because it has a very specialized meaning. It is, by common consent, something which is NOT GOOD! It is a word which is virtually meaningless unless it is connected to the Bible's narrative. It IS a religious word. Sin is the breaking of God's law. Of course, not all humans have been or are under God's law. Adam was. And he was perfect so that his willful violation of that law WAS sin, and it brought a just penalty from God.

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Israel was under God's Law Covenant. Because they were imperfect, they COULDN'T obey the law perfectly. But their honest attempts to do so brought blessings. Their violations of it brought punishments. It was these intentional violations that were considered particularly sinful.

However, sin can also be "de-facto." It is there simply BECAUSE it violates God's rules, but not necessarily practiced intentionally. Thus, in Romans 5:14, that great majority of mankind who have not been under the Jewish Law are said to "sin" -- BUT "NOT AFTER THE SIMILITUDE" of Adam's sin. What does this mean? It means that Adam's sin was deserving of a death sentence because he was deliberate in his action against law even though his perfection made him capable of NOT sinning. Thus, the world of mankind, not under a law, sins due to incapability and, therefore, is not being punished for its individual sins. Nevertheless, the world is the recipient of Adam's punishment (death) by inheritance. Adam had no life rights to pass down to his offspring.

God's "Church" -- His called-out and spirit-begotten saints of the Gospel Age -- are considered by God as NOT SINNING (I John 3:6 & 5:18). However, these people yet dwell in their fleshly organisms which cannot help but sin. God is dealing with their by-faith THOUGHT PROCESSES, not with their human incapacities. Thus God covers their humanity with "a robe of righteousness" (Isaiah 61:10) so that He can deal with their New Creatures (II Corinthians 5:17) without having to attribute their flesh's unwilling sins to them. Their "New Creatures" consist of transformed minds. (Romans 12:2)

## EVIL

Evil is not really the opposite of good -- although it is NOT good! It is a more serious word than "bad." It has the specialized meaning of the RESULTS OF SIN. Evil is not just "bad," but it is something resulting directly from intentional sin. The word implies this intentional element. Evil is, thus, more of a mentally-instigated force, not just a bad action. "Bad," on the other hand, is just anything which is the opposite of good. Consequently, a "good man" can and does do "bad" things because of his imperfection. But a "good man" does not do "evil." He doesn't PLOT to do bad; an evil man does.

Consequently, when we say that God permits evil, we are acknowledging that He allows man to plan bad things. And this "evil" is a result coming out of Adam's WILLFUL SIN. Man's fallen condition is a stimulus to his plotting against others. We call this "selfishness" as it is applied to our daily lives. Clearly, this "evil" results in "bad" things. And "bad" things happen just because of imperfection. But "evil" things happen because of willfulness.

Doing evil WILL have consequences to the character and, therefore, be a hindrance in the resurrection process when it begins for most of mankind. This is why Jesus warned the Pharisees that they were (ultimately) in danger of gehenna -- the symbol for "second death" during the Kingdom. Jesus wanted them to know the seriousness of their willfulness in their evil plotting.

## RIGHTEOUSNESS

In the Bible, at least, this word is related to perfection. Nevertheless, it can be and is used to represent a character trait present in those who are not perfect. It is very much a word which is related to character rather than to flawless actions. The Bible specifies that "There is none righteous, no not one!" (Romans 3:10) This proves that true and actual righteousness REQUIRES perfection. But, much like the word "good," a fallen human can be of a mental or character disposition of being "righteous" as opposed to being "bad" or "evil."

The great Abraham was one of those who was among us all who are not righteous. But Paul argues that Abraham's FAITH was counted unto him AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. (Romans 4:3) This is one reason why Jesus could divide people into varying kinds of resurrections based on whether or not they had "done good." If an imperfect person wills to do good, it is frequently because his faith has built his character to the point where the person's natural inclination is righteousness (which REQUIRES doing good to the extent of our abilities). And God COUNTS faith as righteousness so that He can deal with a person who is yet in a state of imperfection. He calls this "imputed" righteousness the "Robe of Righteousness" -- a COVERING for our imperfections. (Isaiah 61:10)

Eventually, of course, all of restored humanity will ACTUALLY be righteous -- no coverings needed! That, indeed, is the object of the Divine Plan for mankind. Meanwhile, "faith righteousness" has provided for a "*better resurrection*" for the faithful ancients who are listed by the Apostle Paul in Hebrews 11. It has also provided for a "*first resurrection*" (or a "*resurrection of life*") for the faithful disciples of the Gospel Age. (Revelation 20:6) The remainder of mankind will have a "*resurrection by judgments*" ( -- the actually Greek meaning; John 5:28, 29). Their judgment success will be based on their attaining actual perfection and righteousness over the entire period of centuries when Christ will mediate a New Covenant for them.

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