

## GOOD AND EVIL

Week #6 of a series on "Unity's Foundational Teachings"

Wednesday, Feb. 28, 2024

Rev. Richard Rogers

Today I want to talk about good and evil. My wife said as I was leaving the house today, *"Really? You're going to talk about good and evil?"* She said, *"Really?"* I said, *"Yeah; I'm excited!"*

How many of you were raised in a religious household that taught you to want good and fear evil? How many of you were taught to really be afraid that that evil's chasing you, and it's going to catch you. And it's going to get you, and you're going to be in trouble? Anybody? And so many of us come from that kind of a mindset. So when we talk about good and evil, that can be kind of an interesting discussion.

You know, if we go back to some of the, earliest forms of religion on this planet, there was an understanding in those really early forms of religion that Earth was the battleground for good and evil. And they had good gods and bad gods. And those gods were fighting it out, and we were the instruments -- we were the pawns. We were the place where this war between good and evil was taking shape.

And, you know, sometimes when some of us were growing up, we had little cartoons that would have little good angels and little bad angels on our shoulder. And they'd be whispering in our ear; this is what good angels whisper and this is what bad angels whisper. And this idea of the struggle between good and evil and that we're kind of just a victim in it. You know, it kind of depends on who's whispering in your ear. Kind of depends on, *"Well, it wasn't my fault. Like, you know, the devil made me do it."* Right? [Laughs] And so we've had this conversation going on for a very long time.

So I want to change the conversation a little bit. Because that's what I do. I want to change the conversation a little bit. And I want to ask you the question: Do you think that you're more attracted to good or to evil?

When you were single, were you attracted to the bad boy or the bad girl? Or were you attracted to the good boy and the good girl? And you don't have to raise your hand, because I could probably guess for most of you! [Congregants laugh] And I'd probably be able to tell whoever you were attracted more or, *"No; I had to date the good boy"* or *"No; I never dated the good boy. I only dated the bad boy."* Right?

And I want you to look at that. Because we have this belief that says, *"Oh no, I just want good!"* Right? *"I'm just -- I'm all about the good."* But if we tell ourselves the truth, we have to kind of admit to ourselves there's something kind of attractive about evil. Like, we kind of lean that way a little bit. We kind of ... we want a little bit of it, but not too much of it. We want a little ... Because it just brings us a little bit more, you know ... It's a little bit more like jalapenos, right? [Congregants laugh] It just kind of spices it up a little bit, you know? We don't want something that kind of blows up the whole house, but we do want a little heat!

So my question for you tonight is: How much evil can you tolerate and still think it's a good idea? How much spice do you like?

So when you hear a story, right? Are you attracted to the stories that are stories about revenge or the stories about forgiveness? Now, you know, when we look at the U.S. cinema, we love the story of the hero being victimized and getting the revenge ... and wiping out whoever it was that victimized our her. And at the end of the movie, his shirt is half ripped off and he's got a bazooka on one arm and a band of bullets around the other. And he's just annihilated everyone around him. And we love that!

Now, if the hero would have just said, "Well, I forgive you," it would have been a five-minute movie. [Congregants laugh] And how many of us would pay \$15 to watch somebody be victimized and then forgive, and then go home? [Congregants laugh] You wouldn't even be halfway through your bucket of popcorn.

Like, we want to see a little revenge. We want to see a little bit of violence. We're attracted to stories that scare us, sometimes more than stories that inspire us. And I think that we have to own that.

Like, if you're driving along and there's an accident, do you look? Now, you don't have to tell me if you look, but I want you to just know if you want to look. There's a crash at NASCAR; do you stand up to get a better view? And I don't have any judgment about it. You get to create your life any way you want!

We've been so indoctrinated that there's this moral teaching that we're only supposed to do the good. And I want to do it from a higher point of view. I want to ask you straight up: Does your fascination with evil bless you? Is it making your life more interesting or more difficult?

Like, if there's somebody who is always making a bad choice, what is your relationship with that person in your life? Like, if I see a movie and the guy is consistently making bad choices, I walk out. I find that so traumatizing, that I cannot watch somebody make one bad choice after another. I don't find that entertainment; I find that painful. Like, I could go watch my own family, for instance, if I wanted to watch that, right? I got aunts and uncles and people that ... that's not entertainment to me; that's painful. Are you attracted to people that are angry or people that are joyful?

And I want us to really begin to take an honest look, because what I believe to be true is -- as a spiritual being -- that there are infinite possibilities for about an infinite amount of good. And there's almost an infinite amount of negativity surrounding us all the time.

So if there's an infinite amount of goodness all around us and a whole lot of evil negativity around us, as well, what decides what shows up into our life? Is it the angel on our shoulder? Or do we actually attract that to us?

You know, the week that I talked about God, I said that God is good and only good. But the real question here is: Are you choosing that? Are you choosing to live in a life that is good? Or do you need a certain level of drama, pain, weirdness to keep it real?

And I want you to begin to see that we actually -- in this world that we live in -- we actually are surrounded by all possibilities. And you get to decide what you're attracted to. And what you're attracted to, you actually make room for in your life. And you get to decide whatever it is. And you get to stay in that vibration, that experience, that consciousness, until we make another choice. But if we don't realize that, at some level, it's our choice, we feel victimized by evil. We feel victimized by darkness or pain or sadness or anything that we have actually invited into our experience.

And, again, without any judgment: What is your tolerance for good and for evil? How much do you allow both of those into your life? And can you see maybe a possibility of making a new choice? Living in a bigger life?

The thing that's so amazing to me is that, because each one of us kind of vibrates at our own level, we're all doing that right next to each other. So you could walk by somebody who has a higher tolerance for evil than you do, and they're in their evil experience, right? And you just walk by them, and you're in your little goodness experience. And you guys don't even connect, because you're actually not operating from the same field, from the same paradigm, from the same experience.

But you find somebody and you connect with the people that vibrate at your level of consciousness. And you're just drawn to each other.

And one of the things I want you to see tonight is: it's designed like that. Because you have free will -- because you were created in the image and likeness of God -- you actually have to decide how close, how great, how wonderful your life is going to be, or how much a piece of work it's going to be. You get to decide! And as you choose, it is done unto you.

And if you want greater goodness, there's infinitely more goodness. If you want... more pain or drama or suffering, there is infinite more pain and drama and suffering! And that it's all here in three-dimensional form. And the moment you open to whatever that is -- the moment you decide -- you actually move in that direction.

So the question then becomes: What do you want? What are you attracted to?

Genesis. I'm going back old school! Genesis 2 and 3. Genesis, beginning with Verse 15: *"And God took man and put him in the garden of Eden. And he said, 'Till it and keep it.' And the Lord God commanded man saying, 'You may freely eat of every tree in the garden, but the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat. For the day you eat it, you shall die.'"*

Is that clear? Everybody, right? Clear! I think it's clear, right?

Now, when they eat from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, do they die? No; it says they don't. It says their eyes become open and they become aware. So in this first level, when man is placed in the garden, he is at some level unconscious. Everything he needs is provided for him in the garden. But he's unaware; he's unconscious. And it's not until he takes a bite of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that it says his eyes are open and he begins to see.

Now, you think, "Well, was that a good move or a bad move?" It was an evolutionary step forward. There was a time in your and my spiritual journey where we were unconscious; where we were making choices and we didn't see the ramification of those choices. And our eyes were as if they were closed.

But when we actually take our next step into conscious awareness, we actually see that there's a connection between what I choose, how I act, what I say, what I do, that my consciousness actually attracts the level of life that I'm attracted to ... that I bring into me.

Now, Chapter 3: *"Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals that the Lord had made. And he said to woman, 'Did God really say that you must not eat any of the tree in the garden?' And the woman said, said to the serpent, 'We may eat fruit from any of the trees in the garden, but God said we must not eat from the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, and we must not touch it or we will die.'*

*'You will certainly not die,' the serpent says to the woman, 'for God knows that when you eat, your eyes will be open, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'* When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took it and she ate it. And she also gave it to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then both her eyes were open and they realized that they were naked. So they sewed fig leaves together to cover themselves."

Right? So when they step into this knowledge of good and evil, what's the first thing that happens? Once you begin to know the difference between good and evil, what's the first experience they had? What do we call that? They knew that they were naked and they were what? Embarrassed. They were ashamed, right?

So with the knowledge of good and evil comes the consciousness to know when you're making a good decision and when you're making a bad decision. And that's not a moralistic thing. That simply says: Does this work for me? Am I making decisions in my life that work for me? It's not a moralistic thing; it's: Does this make sense? Does this work for you?

*“And then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And they hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. And the Lord called to the man, “Where are you?”*

Might have been a deeper voice.

[Deeply] *“Where are you?”* Right? Alright.

*“And he answered to him saying, ‘I heard you in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid.’”*

At that moment, God knows the jig’s up.

*“He said, ‘Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?’ And the man said ...”*

He throws his wife under the bus instantly; he's such a man. [Congregants laugh]

*“The man said, ‘The woman put it here with me. She gave me some of the fruit of the tree and I ate it.’ And then the Lord said to the woman, ‘Is this what you've done?’ And then the woman throws the serpent underneath the bus and says, ‘The serpent deceived me and I ate it.’”*

Right? So here they are; they've stepped into conscious awareness. They realize for the first time that the choices they make have an impact on their life. They experience the consequences of making a choice and having a reaction to that choice. That is an evolutionary step. That is a transformative step.

When you actually see that I created my reality by the choices that I make and that there's a payback -- there's a blowback -- that either blesses me or it burns me, that is an evolutionary step forward.

So this week, what I want us to really look at is that you're surrounded in goodness and evil. *“Richard, don't say that; it'll scare ‘em!”* But what you're attracting into you is by choice. God is infinite goodness. But in the world that we live in, you can go to some pretty dark, ugly, scary places. But you actually have to choose that. You actually have to decide that that's interesting for you; that your soul wants to experience some of that stuff; to really know the darkest and the scariest aspects of life.

Some of us have been there. Some of us have made choices to see an aspect of life that was ugly. Do you have to stay at that level of life because you chose it once? No. But it still exists! It's still available; that you could choose it again if you had the idea that, *“Maybe I don't have enough ugliness in my life; I want to choose some really dark, ugly, scary things”* and I could go down that path one more time.

Or you could decide that, *“Really, once was enough; that I'm really just far more interested in levels of good that are greater than I've known before. Higher, finer, more wonderful, more loving, more abundant, more peaceful, more calm. Less drama; I'm much more interested in that. I'm going to choose that!”*

Okay; and then it's done on to you! But everything exists at this level for you to decide. Everything is available to you at this level, and the question -- because you have free will -- is: Where are you going to go? Are you curious about the dark side? Do you want to know more pain in your life? Have you not suffered enough? Because if you haven't suffered enough, there are levels of hell that I'm sure you might enjoy exploring. Or there's levels of heaven that are so amazing they will blow you away. And you decide.

So the question becomes: What are you attracted to? What interests you? Do you need a little bit more spicy, painful stuff? Or are you interested in exploring the ecstasy of God? Would you be interested in knowing how absolutely fabulous life could be? Because it's all available! It's all right here. I could take

you for a walk and we could find some really scary things. Or we could take a walk and find the ecstasy of God. **And what we need to see is, over and over again, it's a choice.**

Marcus Aurelius ... [Laughs] I don't know why I picked him. I picked him, here we go: *"Life is neither good or evil, but life is the place for good and evil."*

John Bradshaw said it this way: *"I define a good person as someone who is fully conscious of their own limitations. They know their strengths, but they also know their shadow. They know their weaknesses. In other words, they understand that there is no good without bad. Good and evil really are one, but we have broken them into our own conscious understanding."*

See, what I want us to see today is that it's all available. **It is all available! And we actually get to choose what we want to experience in our lives. And as we choose, it is done on to us.**

So how do we create greater goodness in our life? First one is by **taking complete responsibility for our choices**. And I want you to look at everything in your life and say to yourself, *"I chose this."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I chose this."*

Now, for every choice you make, was it a conscious choice? No! Like, your soul is making choices that you have no idea. But at some level every experience is a choice that our soul has made for its highest good. It wasn't a conscious choice, but it was a choice.

*"I chose this."*

One more time together: [with congregation] *"I chose this."*

And the moment we can own it, we are no longer a victim. The moment we can own it, we can make a new choice.

Two: **If I chose once, I can choose again**. And if I can choose again, I can ask the Holy Spirit to lead me into a higher, greater, more abundant, more loving, more powerful experience. That I can ask God for help in making greater choices than I've ever made before. And the moment I ask God for help, the infinite wisdom and power of God comes to my aid and helps me move to a higher direction. Two: I can choose again.

Three: **I can forgive myself** [laughs] for all my interesting choices. [Congregation laughs] Right? Does everybody have, like, a really good choice that you still scratch your head over? Like, it looked so good in the manual, right? He smelled so good, right? He ... You know, whatever it was for you. There are those interesting choices.

*"I forgive myself for every limited choice."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I forgive myself for every limited choice."*

Four: I'm going to invite you to **be in relationship with people who are choosing higher levels of good**. Scientific evidence shows that, when people witness generosity, they become more generous. Scientific studies show that, in the presence of joyful people, we actually become more joyful.

You know, one of the oldest ideas is, *"Birds of the feather flock together."* If you want to live in greater goodness, surround yourself with people who are living at that level or higher. I want them to be your prayer partners; I want them to be your friends; I want them to be the people you hang out with. I want you to surround yourself with people that are living at the level of life that you want to be living at. Because they will inspire you! They will teach you; they will awaken you! That when we actually change the people that we hang out with, it actually changes us ... because it shows us a new possibility.

Now, do you have to dump all your old friends? For me, it's more of a gradual process, right?  
[Congregants laugh] It's like: It's no longer fun to hang out with that person who constantly makes bad choices. It's no longer fun to watch a friend just slowly destroy their life. It's more fun to watch somebody create the life that they hoped for and dreamed of, and are moving in a direction that they are intentionally creating a better life over and over again.

**Today, I want you to see that the infinite is all around you and you get to decide. You get to choose it.** You get to decide: Are you ready for a higher level of life? Are you ready for more love and joy and peace and abundance than you've ever known before? Choose it! Is it no longer as fun for you to be in pain and suffering and scary moments and painful moments? Make a new choice!

Today there's no limit to the amount of good that God has for us. But we have a role in that. We have to decide.

*"I choose the goodness of God."*

Will you say that with me? [with congregation] *"I choose the goodness of God."*

*"I choose higher and higher levels of goodness."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I choose higher and higher levels of goodness."*

*"I am ready for a greater life."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I am ready for a greater life."*

Will you pray with me?

I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. That there is but one Presence and one Power. And that Power loves us, and It's created everything for us. Today we ask for the wisdom and the strength to choose good and only good. To align our mind and heart with good and only good. That we can let go of yesterday's drama and claim a higher, finer life than ever before. And so it is. Amen.

**Copyright 2024 Unity of Phoenix Spiritual Center/Rev. Richard Rogers**