

Grace

By Peter Walker, 10/21/15

Every good thing has a counterfeit. It is important to see this, and say this at the start of this reflection. The counterfeit of grace is license; of law-abiding, legalism; of true confidence, arrogance; of true humility, false humility. Every box of every 'rational' or 'seen' criteria to man could be checked for both the true and the false. For this reason, the devil himself can 'masquerade' as an 'angel of light' (II Corinthians 11:14). Evil – as it appears to mankind through mankind's faculties – can dress up and look like holiness.

So what truly differentiates good from evil? Well, not the appearance of a thing. We must remember that '*God is spirit*'; and not only is God spirit, but God wants his '*worshippers to worship in spirit and truth*' (John 4:24). What other ways can one worship? Well, there must be other ways to worship, if God specifies that the '*kind*' of worshippers he seeks are the ones – i.e. not the others – that worship '*in spirit and truth.*'

And God's word is only 'God's' – or holy and true – when breathed through the spirit of God, and a spirit of faith. For this reason the devil can quote Psalm 91 to Jesus, and it is not the 'Word of God' that the devil is quoting, it is very much the word of the devil. Why? Because what he is saying – whether from scripture or his own machinations – has a motive crawling with evil, ultimately seeking that the holy Christ worship the devil himself (see Matthew 4:1-11). When Jesus responds to this 'word' and this situation, he quotes Deuteronomy 8:3, and that scripture is indeed the word of God, because it is the written word spoken in faith, and in step with the Father and spirit (John 5:19, Galatians 5:25, Hebrews 11:6).

Jesus said that his words were '*spirit*' (John 6:63) and we are told the '*Lord is spirit*' (II Corinthians 3:17). We are told that we know Jesus is true and in us by the Spirit (Romans 8:16; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14). We are told that we 'see' because God's light has calibrated our eyes (Psalm 36:9; Matthew 6:23; II Corinthians 4:6). We can and often do rely on our heart's report, but cannot always (I John 3:20). We can and often do rely on the actions of people and outcomes of places, but we cannot always do this (Joshua 9). So we see that the reality of God, this physical place and space that we enjoy because of God's 'creating', is intrinsically dependent on and part of God's

spirit and his spirit world. Our lives are on display to heavenly bodies (Ephesians 3:10), our wrestle not with what we see (Ephesians 6:12), and our understanding not by what we can understand (I Corinthians 2:13).

The opening paragraphs above are a ‘workout’, a necessary warm-up, a sincere focus on the truth of our reality that we lose sight of easily, even daily. When we really see the role and reality of ‘spirit’ in God’s word, Jesus’ life, and God’s way of living, we can almost discern a ‘split’ reality – but not separate. You will remember Elijah opening the eyes of his servant to see an army around them, that the servant otherwise could not see with his ‘physical’ eyes. (2 Kings 6) The army was truly there, and engaged in the bigger picture of what was going on. But this spirit army was not discernible with physical eyes. Real, pure, engaged, true, but unseen. For this reason Paul admonishes us, *‘So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but what is unseen, for what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.’* (II Corinthians 4:18).

Another important factor in seeing what is true, is to not slip into boxes of ‘understanding’ that are rational – even ‘plausible’ (Colossians 2:4) – but limited, not in the full, flowing spirit of the Spirit (John 3:8). I find it remarkable that in 66 books written over thousands of years (i.e. the bible), we cannot peg down clear understanding of what it means for God to ‘ordain’ things in our lives, or ‘determine’ outcomes, or ‘will’ things. The only way we could go through so many authors, genres, books and years with the same God, same cohesive, mind-blowing stories and fulfilled prophecies, and not be able to peg a ‘reasoned’ or ‘waterproof’ theology on how God works and wills – is if God willed it this way!

I love how Paul, in the middle of his densely theological writing, breaks into song, *‘Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments and his paths beyond tracing out! Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?....’* (Romans 11:33-36. I often pair this with Isaiah 55:9). God wants us to add to our love, *‘knowledge and depth of insight’* (Philippians 1:9), but he does not want that pursuit to take us to another tree of knowledge (Gen 3:5-6). It was also pursuit of ‘knowing’ that unplugged life from earth and brought death and destruction on us all. Let our pursuit of knowing God through Jesus Christ not take us back on to that road of ‘pride knowledge’ that destroys! For this reason, Christ’s knowledge is different, laced in and through humility. It is

‘spirit knowing’. Jesus made sure that Nicodemus was clear, in knowing the ‘truest truth’, i.e. Jesus Christ, he would be blown like the wind (John 8:3), not held in high academic regard. Paul saw that he had to walk upstream for the truest of knowledge and purest of vision, considering his scholarly accolades as *‘rubbish’* in comparison. (Philippians 3:7) Jesus bombarded us with admonishment to be like the child to really know (Matthew 18:3,10; Mark 9:42; Mark 10:14-15). The poor in the eyes of this world (academically, financially, intellectually?), are *‘rich in faith’* as an act of preference of God (James 2:5). Moses’ deepest moments and experiences of ‘knowing God’ he could not record, because they were off the page and in the form of light on his face (Ex 33:18), and Moses knew this and sought this. As did Paul (Phil 3:10-14). Jesus made sure we were clear that the greatest commandment of God was about love – not knowledge – of God and of others. The Word of God – truest of knowledge and knowing – is with God, and has become flesh (John 1:14), and needs no more insight. He wrote the story, walked the story, spilt his blood, purchased us with it (Rev 5:9), poured out his spirit and now wants us to worship in spirit (John 4:24).

Again, reinforcing the last section as a spring-board to the next, I want to note 2 things: First, I want to note 2 key scriptures regarding *knowledge of scripture*. Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for thinking that their knowledge of scripture was good in itself, saying that despite their immense knowledge of scripture, they *‘refused to come to him, to have life’* (John 5:39-40). It is not what you know, but who you know! And actually, when all is said and done (‘cause you might forget one day who you know!), it is ‘who knows you’ (II Timothy 2:19). The other scripture on this point, however, is to the Sadducees, when Jesus admonished them in not knowing enough scripture – together with the power of God (Matthew 22:29). It is indeed essential to know scripture. Jesus himself leaned on it to refute the devil (Matthew 4:1-11), and to elucidate his own life and power to others (Luke 20:17-18). Jesus quoted the scriptures a lot, as did Paul and the other apostles in making the gospel known. But it is essential to know it *‘together with the power of God’*. Paul refers to Timothy knowing the scriptures *‘from infancy’* as a value, because it made him *‘wise for salvation’*; but how? Paul says, *‘through faith in Jesus Christ.’* (II Timothy 3:15). We know the scriptures, to know Jesus, and to *‘worship in spirit and truth’* (John 4:24).

Secondly, I love how God renders impossible watertight theologies about Himself and his ways. The only sure thing standing any child can see, any

blind man touch: Jesus Christ. For example, II Samuel 24:1 tells us that God turned David's heart, whereas I Chronicles 21:1 tells us this was the devil. You can sit around for millennia talking about the 'chicken and the egg' in this, or fall into Blake's pride-trap of 'marrying heaven and hell' to resolve this. Or we can see and say that God is holy and good and in him there is no darkness (I John 1:5), and the relationship between dark and light and pre- and post- is far beyond us – per Isaiah 55:9 and Romans 11:33-36; and we can move on to know nothing but Christ, and all other things in that spirit (I Cor 2:2; II Cor 10:3-5). Chesterton said, *'The riddles of God are more satisfying than the solutions of man.'*¹ We should not be worried by the 'riddle zone', but on the contrary delighted in it. The riddle nature is God's way of obscuring the unimportant and opening doors to 'spirit'. The riddle zone lets us park pride and soar in spirit.

The title of this essay is 'Grace', and the previous paragraphs lead me to the vision I have on this critical truth of God.

Before the 'Fall', Adam and Eve had been warned of the 'tree of the knowledge of good and evil.' (Genesis 2:17) This is intriguing. Did 'good' and 'evil' feature before they ate of the fruit? Was there 'evil' as we understand it, at work, but they just did not have 'knowledge' of it? And if not, was there 'good' as we understand it, at work, but they just did not have 'knowledge' of it? I think regarding the former (evil), we tend to think it was not present at all, but mostly we would agree with the latter regarding 'goodness'. I would like to posit that neither 'goodness' nor 'evil' as we understand them, were at work in the Garden of Eden. I think 'goodness' as we tend to think of it – and as it tends to enslave us as does evil – came through the door of the 'fruit' as did evil. We have a very small-minded notion of 'goodness', and it tends to be on the same pole – but on an opposite end – of evil. Maybe very, very far away, but on a continuum in our minds, or in the same space or terms or universe. We can take any degree of goodness, and shave it here and there, or shade it here and there, and take it to the dark zone.

I think Eden was not a place of 'goodness' (as we understand it), but of 'holiness', as we only know in part, through Jesus Christ. Holiness is truth that can be expressed somewhat in terms of 'goodness', but only

¹ *'Introduction To The Book Of Job'*, GK Chesterton, 1916

metaphorically, in the same way it can be expressed in terms of 'evil' (like 'completely opposite', for example), but only 'in part'. (I Corinthians 13:9,12; I John 3:2) Why Blake is incorrect in marrying heaven and hell, is for the same reason it is incorrect to define them in terms of opposites. Heaven does not need hell for its definition. Eden did not need death to be enjoyed or exist as Eden. The door to 'choice', to a much lesser level of doing life and spirit (i.e. that of knowing 'good' and 'evil'), was an option to Adam and Eve as a complete 'other' existence, a moral code and system different to God's system. A system of knowing a thing called 'good' and 'evil', that do exist together, and only exist together.

For this reason, our 'good' works cannot save (Ephesians 2:8-9). Not because they are not 'good' (in the sense that Barnabbas was 'good', Acts 11:24), and not because of one blip of badness. The reason our good works cannot save, is because none of our goodness in this 'other world' we have chosen to live in, is 'good' the way we would like to think. None of our goodness is holy. Our good and evil are a system of doing life, maybe pointing in different directions at different moments as best we can, but none are of the substance of the 'actions' of Adam and Eve before they came to 'know'. In choosing knowledge of good and evil, Adam and Eve chose to live in another universe of truth.

I could go on and on about what truth is not, but choose rather to jump back into what truth is. I can only again point to the fact that Jesus' words are not 'fact', they are spirit and life. (John 6:63) I hope you can hear this not even as I attempt to mean it, but beyond even that, maybe as he means it. Spirit is not definable, and it is God's humbling way to keep the letter of this world's law from binding us. The law was for the 'increase of sin', not to liberate. (Romans 5:20) Jesus, in utilizing the spoken and even the written word for 'spirit' freedoms, certainly incommodes our sense of pride and 'knowing', but also disarms the devil from binding us up in knowledge and understanding, even of good and evil.

When we look at Paul's instructions on eating food sacrificed to idols², we see that there is a discussion completely separate to 'right and wrong'. It has everything to do with 'faith'. Right and wrong are now subjects of faith and Christ, and variables of love and spirit. This is exhilarating. It is terrifying. How am I going to judge my neighbor? How am I going to be able to prove I

² I Corinthians 8; I Corinthians 10:23-33; Romans 14; I Timothy 4:4

am right? How am I going to be able to proof against my neighbor judging me? I might be wrong! I might be seen as wrong when I am right! I might judge someone as right when they are wrong! I might judge someone as wrong when they are right!

Do you see where our fear really comes from? We are addicted to our system of knowing. We are far less concerned with 'being'. Remember, however, that Jesus, together with God, names Himself primarily as 'being' (Exodus 3:14; John 8:58), before the law is given (or before a sense of good and bad is in writing). Simply, that *'I am the One'*. Know this. What 'I AM' truly is will come to you bit by bit, now and forevermore. For this reason Paul can have a clear conscience when he does not even know if he is innocent (I Corinthians 4:3-4).

And from the beginning of time, God competes with our sense of 'good' and 'evil'. He tested Abraham by asking him to do what only pagans did: sacrifice his son on an altar. Human sacrifice. (Gen 22; Leviticus 18:21). This is dark and confusing. It was a requirement to do something that had a face of darkest evil, but because it came from the request of a Holy God, Abraham had a choice to make. Did he believe and walk in this darkness – a holy darkness – that none would ever believe or understand, or did he flat out refuse to do something that people would misunderstand and judge him for, something he knew was 'holy' and 'good' because it came from a holy and good God, but would always have a look, a history of evil?

God tested Peter, lowering before him the face of darkness and evil, a sheet of unclean animals, specifically commanded against in the holy scriptures, and telling him to kill and eat. (Acts 10; Leviticus 11:3). A violent and unscriptural command, even pushing Peter to limits, saying not to call unclean what God called clean. But in the bible God had called them unclean. Why such a test, putting a fresh vision of God above and beyond even a literal scripture? Why did God not just cut to the chase and tell him it was time to take the good news to the Gentiles?

How can a prostitute who lies be considered righteous? (James 2:25) How can David constantly lie to and deceive Achish, marry 2 wives, slaughter villages and be a man after God's heart, on God's ordained road to be made King? (I Samuel) How can Jesus 'eat and drink', and even mislead his brothers intentionally? (Matthew 11:16-19; John 7:8-10). It is because Holiness – a system completely separate to what we are capable of

understanding through our glimpses of ‘goodness’ and ‘evil’ – operates in a spirit that has never been touched by evil, never infused with the enemies system of ‘knowing good and evil’. Holiness stands alone, and it is the author of Grace.

So for the purest form of knowing Christ’s words, we must know them in ‘*spirit and truth*’. (John 6:63) To know freedom in and through Grace – which came through Jesus Christ (John 1:17) - we must know it apart from the Law (of sin), which came through Moses. Grace is not the odd ‘exception’ to the rule of the law, it is a wind, a spirit from heaven, that stands apart from the Law, preceded the Law, never needed nor will need the Law. It is the wind, the spirit that blows back to and through mankind because the blood of Jesus opened back up the door to Eden, that had been closed and guarded. In and through Christ, ‘the door’ (John 10:9), we can soar in true freedom and grace that is best experienced and expressed by light on the face (Ex 33:18; Ex 34:19)

‘... knowledge puffs up while love builds up. Those who think they know something do not yet know as they ought to know. But whoever loves God is known by God.’

I Corinthians 8:1-3

Postscript:

In 1993 I was in Spain for a volunteer year with a Christian Mission. I was 18 years old. There was a very Godly woman named Mercedes, a pioneer, missionary woman from Mexico who had been in the region on her own for years before the mission built a team around her. I remember one evening I was approached with a mission task, to assist a refugee family in getting a bus ride to another country. I made all the necessary phone calls in Spanish with them and for them. We hit a snare. I had to say they had a certain residency card in order to close a deal on their tickets. They did not have this card or status. This card would never be required to be seen, but without my attestation we could not close on the tickets. I had a conscience dilemma. I paused the call, spoke earnestly with Mercedes about this issue. I remember her gentle face, and her spirit-filled conviction, simply saying, ‘I think it’s OK, let’s go ahead and do it to help them go forward.’ I felt a wind of truth and freedom blow through me. Yes, it was correct. I knew it in my

spirit, even wanted it to be true. It was true! What was my rule, my precedent? Well, a spirit-filled woman who said it was so. She had light on her face, walked with the Lord, and knew the Lord's voice (John 10:27). I am ever grateful to God's ways, and those who have the courage to know him beyond the letter, and walk with him despite my judgement of them. They are the ones setting many free!