

# “ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY” (1)

*A Meditation on Genesis 6:5-8*

In Numbers 22 we see that the Moabites were in great dread of the Israelites, and feared them to such an extent that they fully expected Israel to devour them. Hence the people of Moab cried out to their leaders to do something about their enemy. “So Balak the son of Zippor, who was king of Moab at that time, sent messengers to Balaam the son of Beor at Pethor...saying, ‘Behold, a people has come out of Egypt. They cover the face of the earth, and they are dwelling opposite me. Come now, curse this people for me. Perhaps I shall be able to defeat them and drive them from the land, for I know that he whom you bless is blessed, and he whom you curse is cursed’” (vv. 4-6).

Balaam obviously had an international reputation for being a mighty prophet, since those he blessed were indeed blessed, and those he cursed were likewise cursed. But while Balaam appears to be following God, we know that he was really a corrupt prophet, who wanted the money Balak offered him to curse Israel. Second Peter 2:15 says, speaking of false prophets, “Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray. They have followed the way of Balaam, the son of Beor, who loved gain from wrongdoing” (see also Jude 11).

Three times Balaam is called upon to curse Israel, but each time he blessed them instead to the chagrin of Balak. While Balaam is a greedy prophet, he can’t go against the Almighty, so he has no choice but to bless Israel. To make matters worse—from Balak’s perspective—the third time Balaam blessed Israel, he then went on to curse Moab.

However, Balaam wants the money, so he devises a scheme to bring about Israel’s demise—which is really brilliant, in a demented sort of way. This is reading between the lines a bit, but most commentators agree with this interpretation: Balaam advises Balak to have the Moabites intermarry with the Israelites, which will result in the Israelites bowing down before their gods, which in turn will result in the LORD Himself no longer blessing Israel, but instead judging them. Revelation 2:14 intimates this: “But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality.”

Sure enough, “While Israel lived in Shittim, the people began to whore with the daughters of Moab. These invited the people to the sacrifices of their gods, and the people ate and bowed down to their gods. So Israel yoked himself to Baal of Peor. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (Num. 25:1-3), meaning specifically that a plague broke out against Israel killing 24,000 (vs. 9).

As Christians in the 21<sup>st</sup> century I think we need to reconsider the implications and applications of being united with the ungodly. Scripture couldn’t be any clearer: “Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. For what partnership has righteousness with lawlessness? Or what fellowship has light with darkness? What accord has Christ with Belial? Or what portion does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols?...Therefore go out from their midst, and be separate from them, says the Lord” (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

Balaam’s devious scheme wasn’t novel, Satan brought about the corruption of the *whole world* during the days of Noah by having the sons of God intermarry with the ungodly daughters of man (Gen. 6:2). Consequently, God’s patience has run out, and the flood will destroy everybody, except Noah and his family within 120 years. God’s had it, to state it bluntly, and He has numbered man’s days, because He “saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth” (vs. 5a).

Let’s all ask together, “How great was it?” So great “that every intention of the thoughts of his heart was *only evil continually*” (vs. 5b). His heart wasn’t evil *some* of the time, or *a lot* of the time, or *most* of the time, but *all* of the time. This is where man goes when God leaves his sin unchecked. This is what mature, full-grown sin looks like—“only evil continually.”

Genesis 6:5 doesn’t mention any *external* sin, rather it goes to the core of man’s condition by directing us to his heart. This shouldn’t surprise us, “for as he thinketh in his heart, so is he” (Pro. 23:7a). Once we peer into a man’s heart, we know who he is, regardless of what image he may try to portray on Sunday morning. Jesus was able to look past the Pharisees’ religious charade and see their hearts. “You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34).

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## “ONLY EVIL CONTINUALLY” (2)

*A Meditation on Genesis 6:5-8*

Try to imagine a world in which men and women think and dream “only evil continually.” What would result from such a corrupt heart? We know that violence was one result; in fact “the earth was filled with violence” (Gen. 6:11). This violence began when Cain kill-ed Abel, and then it gradually increased generation by generation, until the 7<sup>th</sup> generation when Lamech celebrated his murderous brutality with poetry (4:23-24). Maybe his poetry was even put to music and be-came a hit song. Inconceivable? In 1992 Ice-T’s *Cop Killer* was a hit:

I got my twelve gauge sawed off.  
I got my headlights turned off.  
I’m ‘bout to bust some shots off.

Cop killer, better you than me.  
Cop killer, f\*\*\* police brutality!  
Cop killer, I know your family’s grievin’ (f\*\*\* ‘em)  
Cop killer, but tonight we get even.

Dennis R. Martin (Former President, National Association of Chiefs of Police) said that the *Cop Killer* song has been implicated in at least two shooting incidents and has inflamed racial tensions in cities across the country. We have Ice-T to thank.

Incidentally, it seems that prior to the flood there was no police force or human government to curb sin or crime. Only after the flood in Genesis 9:5-6 was capital punishment introduced as the beginning of human government. So, once again I’d like to ask you to use your imagination, and picture a world of rampant anarchy, riotous violence and non-stop crime without any police force or National Guard to call in for support.

Some time ago, this story came out of Norwich, England (AP): A thief stole a woman’s purse from her home while she was outside holding her dying son, who had been hit by a car, a neighbor said. This is the world of Noah’s day. But let’s bring this into our day. Are we any better? Apart from Christ and his grace, all we do is sin; every intention of the thoughts of *our* hearts is only evil continually. Do you think this is an exaggeration? Consider this scenario that we like to use at our church to get the point across. It’s designed to illustrate the doctrine of total depravity from Isaiah 64:6, “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our *righteous* acts are like a polluted garment,” which is just another way of saying, “every intention of the thoughts of his heart was *only evil continually*.” Here’s the scenario we paint in the form of a question: If an unbeliever helps an elderly lady cross the street because she is struggling to do so on her own, maybe due to heavy grocery bags, does he sin? Was that seemingly kind and considerate righteous act a sin? It was, and he should repent.

Jonathan Edwards helps us to see why unbelievers do nothing but sin, even when they are performing “righteous acts.” He wrote, “Whatever may be done or suffered (referring to 1 Cor. 13:3: “If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing”), if there be no sincerity in the heart (no love), it is all but an offering to some idol...there is nothing...really offered to God, and therefore it will follow, that it is offered to some other being, or object, or end; and whatever that may be, it is what the Scriptures call an idol. In all such offerings, something [other than the true God is] worshipped; and whatever it is, be it self, or our fellow-men, or the world, *that* is allowed to usurp the place that should be given to God, and to receive the offerings that should be made to him. And how absurd to suppose we can make up for withholding from God that which is his due, by offering something to our idol! It is as absurd as it is to suppose that the wife can make up for her [lack] of love to her husband, by giving that affection which is due to him to another man who is a stranger; or that she can make up for her [lack] of faithfulness to him, by the guilt of adultery” (Jonathan Edwards, *Charity and Its Fruits*, p. 59-60).

“Wow!” was my initial thought when I first read this many years ago now. But it still strikes me with force. I don’t think it could be spelled out any clearer: Whatever isn’t done for God and His glory is done for another, and is therefore idolatry and spiritual adultery, and it is most certainly not worship that is pleasing or acceptable to God. So, since the unbeliever didn’t help the elderly lady cross the street as an offering for God, it was done for his own reputation or some other idol. Consequently, repentance is the right response for his sin.

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