

Blessings and curses: Chapter 3 "The bad"

Can you think of anything more beautiful than a rose? My daughter said, "Yeah, but they do have thorns." That is so true. The bad in this world is subjective. What is truly bad? I watched a sitcom from Italy and there was soft porn in it. That would never happen on basic cable in North America (although we are heading there fast). What was bad in the past is not really bad anymore. Beautiful things such as a rose look good, but the thorns they bare are the bad side. Our mentality has changed; that beautiful rose now has thorns we can live with.

In many ways I blame the organized church for this perception mess. Their view and opinion on sin varies so much more than the rest of the world. I think that's why people call them hypocrites. My biggest problem with the organized church is the definition of sin. One church promotes the gay lifestyle while another condemns it. It's a sin to drink beer but not a sin for wine (Biblical you know). We are commanded to save the world from sin, but what sin? Different church, different sins, seems hypocritical.

This is not another church bashing rant. I think the church is a good place that God created. Churches do a wonderful job helping people. It's the interpretation and implementation of doctrine and theology that kills us. The reason you look at church strangely is because of those words. We think "hypocrite" because of the differences in interpretation of what is good and bad.

Generally speaking, each Christian, in each church, is living for God, and they truly believe they are on a good path. Even cult members simply want to find peace with God. God says to be holy and deal with sin. Well, that's fine if you know what the rules are. Comedian Louis CK said, **"God is setting us up to fail with sin. It is unfair to ask for holiness but make unholy creatures. We're doomed to fail."** If that is true, then were all screwed.

Psalm 24:3-4 **"Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord and who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to**

what is false, and does not swear deceitfully." By those standards, yes, we are still screwed. Look further at these verses:

Romans 3:10 As it is written, "**There is no one righteous, not even one.**"

Ecclesiastics 7:20: "**Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.**

1 John 1:8: "**If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**"

Well if you're not Christian then you're probably thinking about tuning me out. I'm not here to read about the Bible blah blah. The reason I am quoting scripture is because that is where the word 'sin' originated. We don't mention sin in our daily conversation but we know the word. It's a church thing. Many people roll their eyes because sin within the church circles is so hypocritical. Christians cheat, kill, mock, lie, and abuse in the name of Christ Jesus. It's not the church itself half as much as the people in it. This word sin is also associated with the bad. Church is supposed to be a safe place for the good.

The crazy part is God. If He promotes all the good in the world, then why is His church corrupt? I believe its because even Christians are a part of everyone. Those verses above say so straight out of God's word. I said in the last chapter that God made everything "very good." Then why do very good things do very bad things? Louis CK and most of the population in history are asking the same questions. Why is there good and bad if God is holy?

I have a Pastor friend who is focused on getting the message out on gossip. This is a double edge sword within the church that is killing the Christian institution. One is that

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gossip is bad. Using bad information to talk about others is not good for any community. The second is church leadership protection. Church leaders have built up gossip walls of protection. The leaders can do no wrong from behind those walls. They stand up and say "talking about our bad behavior is a sin because it's gossip." The organized church can never be reformed or fixed because the gossip walls are the foundation they stand on.

J Vernon McGee was in church ministry for over 40 years. His radio program (through the Bible) has a flavor for talking about what's wrong inside the church. The problem is that, as a pastor, J V M does not blame pastors half as much as the congregations within for the problems they have. God made the church to promote the good in this world. The leaders have built gossip walls to protect the bad. They believe everything they do is sanctioned by God. Hence, the church in the last century has done more harm than good, and has become irrelevant in this world by appearing bad.

I have talked to hundreds of people, and the reason they don't come to church is because of this mentality. Church represents the goodness of God. They are to feed the poor, care for the sick, and help the lame. What happens when they steal from the coffers, abuse children, and bash the world around them? People begin to call them hypocrites. Part of the problem is that we are told to never bash the church at all costs. Even church leaders, within their hearts, believe they are without fault because God is good, and they are the people of God.

I touched on the church leadership because they control the tempo. A bad conductor ruins the band. A bad director wrecks the picture. Somewhere along the way, church leadership absolved themselves from bad leadership. They think church runs smoothly though good congregations. Admission that maybe bad direction is creating a

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hypocritical church would be a healing scenario. The trouble is, these leaders are saying, "It isn't my fault." Better direction in church, movies, and in a concert might be sweet music to our ears.

I wish the church knew their role. They are supposed to represent all that is good in this world. Often, their bad actions are all we have or see. It's not funny that two pastors recently posted articles blaming the congregation of bad behavior. Rule of thumb is that after three years leadership causes all the problems they have. Bad pastoral leadership thrives because their mirror is always facing the audience rather than towards themselves. It's sad really, but we have been conditioned about what is good and bad through the lives of the church.

There are other reasons we have bad in this world. Maybe it's society's fault, too. Why do bad things happen to seemingly good people? Where was God? Maybe the real answer is that we equally tell the church to stay out of family, government, and community. We want God to do our bidding just like Santa Claus. Maybe people think that if God is too involved bad things begin to happen. It's interesting we associate the bad with God and absolve ourselves from fault. Maybe we think God is bad because the actions of church patrons have been horribly bad at times.

There are people who believe the bad in this world comes from religion. There have certainly been enough bad religious acts, such as the Paris bombings and 9/11. People say Christians are violent but they often quote things that happened 1000 years ago like the Spanish inquisition. Tell me recent incidents where Christians killed people in the name of God. I think we associate Christian bad behaviour and Islam bad

behaviour in the same light. Religion is plainly bad. One French writer said after the Paris terror attacks, "We don't need more prayer; we don't need more religion."

A ton of bad in this world comes from religion, but it really comes from motive. Bad people use good things to do bad stuff. A good gun brings home food or protects us from bad people. A good gun can kill good people through bad behaviour with bad motives. Religion is only bad because we see bad people using it to defend their motives. Religion and guns don't make people bad. Money does not make a gambler.

Our view of the bad in this world is what influences us. We have seen many people killed with guns, so guns are deemed bad. Terrible things have come out of church so we think all Christians are hypocrites. Money is the root of all evil because money causes so many problems. I believe we need money or a barter system, because either way, nothing is free. Money can be helpful. We need guns or at least a big stick because evil is not going away, and it does not play fair. Guns can be helpful.

Our perception about good things (that seem bad) is real. We have seen what they can do. Connecting the bad in this world, to things, is a bad way to live. God did make everything "very good." I have read articles about questioning if small amounts of poison are beneficial to our health. One side says yes because it builds the immune system. The second side says any amount of poison is bad. People bent on ridding us of oil will drive what? Perception and reality are deadly partners.

Joseph in the Bible says to his brothers, "**What God meant for good you used for evil.**" His words are that dance between perception and reality. I touch fire so its bad. She gets pregnant as a teen so sex is bad. Our interaction with stuff gains an opinion on those very things. My wife loved Coke (the drink silly). She read an article about a serial

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killer named Richard Chase. He put body parts in a Coke bottle, and she has not touched Coke since. I got a hangover on gin in my teens. The smell of gin still makes me sick, 30 years later.

Is gin bad? Is Coke terrible? Do rapist's ruin sex? Okay, now do hypocrites ruin the church? Inside us there are strings to be pulled. I know many people will say Coke is not bad for you so long as you don't drink too much. Alcohol is okay in moderation. Yet, the religious string is yanked differently. It's somehow personal with the God thing. Why do atheists argue about God? Why argue over stuff you truly believe does not exist? What do you gain if you win? They might say a better world because they have eradicated hypocrites.

I think God gets no slack because God claims He is holy and good. Why does He let his so called children run amuck? Why do bad things happen if He is in control? So many Christians have answers but the questions remain. Read this chorus from Depeche Mode's song, "Blasphemous Rumours." **"I don't want to start any blasphemous rumors, but I think that God's got a sick sense of humor, and when I die I expect to find Him laughing."** That is the real way people look at God and His church. I suppose the church should take this quote in Spiderman to heart: "With great power comes great responsibility."

The way I view the bad is all about perception. To say one is perfect is okay as long as the proof is in the pudding. To see something fail time after time might be a sign things are bad. The flip side is how we view things. The Jackson Five sang **"One bad apple doesn't spoil the whole bunch girl."** I know my wife is not the biggest fan of Lionsgate movies. Should she avoid all the movies they make in the future? Maybe it's

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about flavor or taste. I hate things that taste like grape but I love grape pop. I had a lot of grape Dimetapp for my ears when I was young and it left a bad taste in my mouth. Just because things have looked or tasted bad does not mean they are.

People make things bad in this world, for the most part. I will admit that "God made" versus "man made" is subjective. God made horses so they're safe to ride, right? Man made cars and people die. I love cars but prefer a greener way to drive. Horses take a long time to get anywhere. Leaders in church perceive that the congregation has bad apples in the pews. The congregation knows the pastorate has bad apples right from the bottom to the top of the barrel. Perception is everything.

At *Canada Post* I have seen bad managers run amuck and hurt the lives of many employees. They have also ruined a good business. Tortured employees do a terrible job and the vicious circle goes around and around. The customer thinks the company and employees are bad. The manager believes he needs new workers. The workers know what the problem is: bad leadership giving bad direction. *Canada Post* leadership refuse to look in the mirror. It believes it is losing money because of changing technology. People are loyal to good things and they hate bad things.

Letter mail has dropped because of bad business practices. The fact management can't admit that is the crux of the problem. Giving and attendance is failing within churches. The leadership thinks it's a giving problem, however it's a leadership and heartship problem. The heart perceives what it wants to, but the heart also knows a bad thing when it sees it. Companies fear bad PR because fear makes us honest. There is no cheating if you fear. You can try, but fear of getting caught is the worst.

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Many years ago Bree-x Minerals declared they found a huge amount of gold in the ground. Their stock rose quickly to record heights. There was fear within the company of getting caught because the reports were false. I wonder if the most damage was done by the cheaters selling their stock days before the truth finally came to light. If nobody bailed, then maybe the company would have survived. Bad motives and bad intentions do create bad perceptions. I think blessings and curses struggle from a bad perception.

We perceive that a blessing is good. When a person gains millions from a lottery it's a good day. The divorce and hatred that sometimes happens, a year later, might make you think differently. How many young boys joyfully join the great National Football League (NFL), yet we continue to hear stories of drugs, gangs, and abuse? Most of the boys are good, but a few become far worse than they were in the beginning. Is it because of fame and money? It's a good day being drafted, but a bad day when the walls come crumbling down.

To treat a blessing as only good is bad PR. I was told years ago that if "someone wants to leave then let them go, but if they come back, its forever." I based my happiness on that statement. My high school sweetheart wanted out of the relationship, but when she came back a few years later I clung to that principle. Years later that hope and anticipation ended in a nasty divorce. I thought when she returned it was a blessing. It became a curse when she left.

The problem was my perception. I believed it was a good thing. I believed it so much that I would do anything to make it a good thing. Sometimes bad things are just bad. During the Second World War the British Prime Minister Chamberlain tried to

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negotiate with Hitler before the war. Over 2.3 billion people died during that war. They knew Hitler was bad but they tried to do the nice thing and negotiate. Killing Hitler early might have saved lives. You can't negotiate with bad things. They are perceived to be evil because they do evil things.

The bad is honestly bad. I find that if I know in my gut it's usually true. How often are we blindsided saying, "I didn't see that coming." Not too often because it does not happen often. Usually it is what it is. Murphy's Law is popular because it is true most of the time. Fine then, a blessing is usually good, fair enough, but I feel we should treat blessings the same as curses. A curse is bad because things went wrong, yet how often do good things come from a disaster? A lot.

Like I said in the last chapter, failing can be beneficial. I have read several stories of guys losing it all and becoming millionaires again. The difference between us and them is perception. To the millionaire the curse of losing it all is an opportunity to gain it all back. Basically they never get too high or low. I would go further and say they treat blessings and curses the same. They are both opportunities to learn something new. How many failures of Edison brought him closer to discovering the light bulb: 10,000.

After 9/11 we have seen a shift in security. Is that security a hindrance or a blessing? Theoretically we are safer in the air than ever before. People had to die to achieve that safety. I think the Middle East is an interesting test case for blessings and curses. On one hand, the USA saw an opportunity after 9/11 to unite the world against terrorism. On the other hand, it exposed some of their foreign policy motives.

This is the same for the Taliban, al-Qaida, and Isis. These Islamic sects saw 9/11 as a blessing to gain supporters. Some of the Middle East rulers in that day supported

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these groups. Today, many of those leaders have been tossed from power. The US and those dictators thought it was wise to work with bad organizations. Today, they have certainly seen the fruits of that labour. We are at war with bad men funded by our past leaders. What was meant for good has turned out badly.

To view God as either a blessing or curse is your downfall. Your expectations will fall short. Sure, God might bless you with a child, but He may allow that same child to die of cancer. God answered my prayer with a curse. I prayed that God would fix my marriage. My divorce did fix my marriage but not the way I wanted. That prayer damaged me and my children forever. However, they and I are smarter because of it. We try harder but allow less abuse than before. We have learned to love more and hate bad behaviour. We have witnessed what passiveness can do to a relationship.

Not calling out your Pastor's bad behaviour will bring curses on your church. It's not an "if" but a when scenario. Challenging your boss to be better might get you fired but it might get a better boss too. Letting bad leadership run amuck is running amuck. Challenging my spouse has made her a better person. She expects me to listen and participate in the leadership of this marriage. Sometimes, as a guy, I don't want to, but it has grown me as a man to have her challenge me. A spirited domestic dispute can be good more than bad.

Curses are considered bad mainly because they are blessings left unattended. It's saying what started out so good went so wrong. It would be so easy for you to think I hate churches or *Canada Post*. Both these institutions are dear to me and I want them to do well. However, I will not put up with their bad behaviour. In the Bible, King David acted badly. He was chosen to be King by God. However, chickens do come to roost. He is a

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blessing as a King. Unattended, he ran amuck killing his friend and cheating in adultery. His other friend, Johnathan remained quiet. Yet, Nathan the Prophet in 2 Samuel 12 confronted David (at the risk of his own life). David wrote some of his best Psalms after his confession and guilt.

I don't want people to gain curses to be better people. Still, curses do grow us. What we call bad is not always bad. I prayed years ago for God to humble me. Don't do that, as it is a stupid thing to do. God did humble me about ten rungs lower than I was willing to go. David says in Psalm 139:8, **"If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there."** David found out that God is within blessings and curses. David knew that God is the redeemer and judge. Job realized that curses and blessings bring revelation. I suspect David and Job looked at life with respect after their curse.

We know the bad in this world, and in the same way we can tell what is good also. Sometimes we are fooled, but for the most part, it is what it is. I said to my wife the other day, "It is usually how it is (isn't it)." I know a good thing when I see it. My wife's discernment needs to be trusted. Second guessing things is a bad idea. James Roszko was a bad man who had been known to police. For years they let him run amuck in Mayerthorpe, Alberta. On March 3, 2005 he killed four police officers on his farm. The bad was known but a twisted sense of peace hoped for the best. It is what it is most of the time.

I always thank the Lord for cold weather and snow. Many have said that I am nuts. I embrace what has been given to me, and do my best with it. There is a game called Paper Boy. The kid rides his bike down the street delivering papers. The goal is to hit the

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door of each house you pass. Along the way there are loose tires, dogs, kids, and thieves that hinder my job. I get more points by hitting those hindrances rather than avoiding them. It's not the best scenario but it's what we have been given.

Blessings are great. They come in small ways most of the time, which we usually don't see. God does work in hidden and mysterious ways. Curses are bad. Yet, they seem worse because they tend to bring us into the open. Lies and deceit come from trying to hide a curse. I feel that curses are blessings in disguise. A diamond in the rough. Fine, call it the cup half full thing if you want. Curses can be great too.

I will end with a quote from the great prophet Rafiki from the Lion King movie. Simba was afraid to confront his past. He refused to go back and fix things. Then this scene happened:

Simba: Yeah. Looks like the winds are changing.

Rafiki: Ahhh. Change is good.

Simba: Yeah, but it's not easy. I know what I have to do. But going back means I'll have to face my past. I've been running from it for so long.

{Rafiki whacks Simba on the head with his staff.}

Simba: Oww! Jeez-- What was that for?

Rafiki: It doesn't matter; it's in the past! {laughs}

Simba: {Rubbing head} Yeah, but it still hurts.

Rafiki: Oh yes, the past can hurt. But the way I see it, you can either run from it, or learn from it.

Are you learning from blessings and curses? When things hurt do you run from them or learn from them? Once bitten twice shy could be changed to once bitten twice as

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fast. Rafiki swung his staff a second time and Simba, with new found speed, ducked and took the staff from the monkey. Alanis Morsette said, "You choke, you learn."

Unfortunately, that is a hard lesson to swallow, but it is usually how we learn to eat better. Plus, we learn to use fire better after we touch it. I suppose it's about respecting the power of blessings and curses.

Blessings butter our bread. Curses seem to pee in our cornflakes, and trust me, I hate pee in my cornflakes. Curses are painful and they appear bad. The problem is Satan is called the Angel of Light. He appears to be good. Curses seem to be dark and yucky. God talks a lot about light. John 3:20 says, "**Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.**" Why do you think Adam and Eve initially hid from God?

Sometimes blessings can be a curse in disguise, so don't embrace them as if you won the lottery. Curses begin with bad intentions. Our motives are not always the best. In a way, we breed curses from our own desires. Be a believer in the good. Choose to embrace curses as blessings in disguise. Matthew 6:34 says, "**Therefore, do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Let the day's own trouble be sufficient for the day.**" A blessing is only a blessing if you believe it is. A curse is only bad if you believe it is.

Santa and God say, "Be good for goodness sake." If you're a Christian, you've held to a higher goodness standard. If you want to be called "of God" then that's the way people see you. Act badly and you make God look bad. If you're a parent, then parent in good ways. Act badly and your children will act badly. Unfortunately, parents determine

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our bad behaviour by training our discernment much of the time. If it's wrong, then don't do it. Do you want to be known for the good or bad in your life?

Enough said about the bad. Let's move on towards the line between sin. That grey area between the good and bad, darkness and light, or blessings and curses.