

The Knowledge of Good and Evil (the simplicity of Love)

Jim Marjoram © 15 February 2013

A little of my personal story to start with.

I was brought up in a very average middle class family in Sydney. The usual struggles and fun. Not perfect but I knew I was loved and safe. I was also gay. I knew I was different from quite young but couldn't understand exactly how until puberty hit and I found that guys were who I was naturally attracted to and I simply had no desire what so ever towards girls.

This caused a lot of stress and shame, even though I actually had no concept of "homosexuality" as such. No one ever talked about it so how was I to know?

I was also a dreamer, a thinker, a musician and was fascinated with everything supernatural and scientific. Life was an amazing mystery waiting to be explored.

When I was 15 I was desperate for some way of piecing everything together and understanding why I wasn't attracted to girls, and one night, completely unexpected, I had a huge spiritual experience. It's hard to explain beyond being overwhelmed with God's presence - love and peace to the point where it was so cathartic that it changed my life forever.

I turned to the church, simply because it seemed like the only option. I had an extremely minimal Anglican upbringing, and we never went to church as a spiritual/religious exercise. I was learning pipe organ from the age of 10 though, and of course I sat through many boring services just to get the experience of playing.

So anyway, I grabbed the bible and read it nonstop, cover to cover. I absorbed it, and the prayer books, and started listening to the sermons. I loved talking about it and how amazing God was, and assumed everyone else in my church youth group had the same understanding as me!

Inevitably I discovered that it was wrong to be a christian and be homosexual. The bible said so and that was that. So I prayed and prayed for it to "go away". I started to look for more radical "cures" and went to a "deliverance" ministry to get the demons cast out. I persisted for a few weeks and went along with the whole thing, but nothing actually changed, strangely enough!

I then had some prayer counselling which supposedly got to the deeper spiritual and psychological causes, but yeah/nah. So I ended up marrying this really lovely girl, who was a great friend, thinking that would fix everything, and we'd have a family and live happily ever after. Yeah/nah. We managed to last 3 years and I have a wonderful daughter, but I put the

poor woman through hell. Amazingly we are still friends, which says a lot more about her than me!

I then drifted into Pentecostalism to find a deeper more powerful spirituality that would enable me to overcome my evil desires. I became a worship leader, home group leader and dived into the whole lifestyle boots and all, even street witnessing in Kings Cross. Of course I ended up "falling" from grace, besotted with my first true love (a guy of course), but they had no idea what to do about it - and it turned out that years later they discovered the head pastor (Frank Houston, father of Hillsong's Brian Houston) had been having it off with the young boys since the 70s. Yeah/nah.

So anyway, I decided to get married again! Really stupid, I know, but I was convinced it would work this time and my dream of a happy family would come true. She'd had lesbian relationships so we knew basically what we were up against, but of course we had no idea of just how hard it would be. We had lots of counselling, all sorts of whacky Christian ministries, and finally got involved with Living Waters reparative therapy group in Aus and then over here. We were involved with them off and on for about 15 years, as worship leaders, participants and leaders.

Never once did we admit that it wasn't working. Sure there was some good insights gleaned from the teachings and they were beautiful, sincere and loving people, but I never became one tiny bit straight.

Eventually my wife became sick with cancer in 2009. I nursed her for nearly 2 years before she died after which I had something of a meltdown. Our son had to watch his mum die as we kept hanging out for miraculous healing. We read all the books, heard countless preachers on every aspect of healing imaginable. Went to conferences with the best international healing ministries and lost count of the number of people who prayed and prophesied over her. It was horrific on soo many levels, and it wasn't until after she died I could even attempt to process any of it.

I had to come to terms with the fact that I lived my entire adult life with depression and suicidality, struggling with the cognitive dissonance of being gay in a belief system that said I couldn't be gay.

My fundamental spirituality was based on my experience as a 15 year old, and I'd spent the rest of my life thinking that fundamentalist Pentecostalism (in one form or another) was the only genuine expression of that experience.

So I then spent 12 months unravelling my faith, and coming to terms with my sexuality. I began to take small steps to embrace my real identity and over the last 3 years have become very active in the LGBT community as a spiritual voice for those silently suffering in churches and religion.

So now how does that all relate to my topic on the knowledge of good and evil and the simplicity of love"? I'm glad you asked.

Part of the unravelling process required me to take a radical look at the bible. I started to look at the original languages, the cultures, social norms, historical context etc, as best I could without my Christian paradigm. I saw of course, that all the scriptures about sexuality were completely misinterpreted (that's a huge discussion in itself!). If only I'd known that from day one...

But it didn't stop there and wasn't long before I began to see all the flaws in my belief system. It became clear (to me at least) that humans have an insatiable assumption that we need holy texts - irrefutable words of wisdom that define our meaning in relation to God and the universe. Writings that set out moral and ethical codes, rules and rituals, that are necessary for humanity to survive. But the biggest problem is that we also assume humans are essentially flawed and need saving from our inherent brokenness.

This is quite understandable as we all wrestle with the horrors we inflict on each other on a daily basis - even down to our own petty squabbles. It seems as if we really are inherently evil.

(This is a huge subject of course and countless books have been written about it already)

Most religions (especially christianity) are complex systems built on those assumptions. However, what if we are actually perfect, exactly as we should be, but all that is missing is our realisation of it? This is a concept that has always been around in some form but rarely embraced because of the apparent contradictions in what we experience. After all, despite our best efforts we all take offence and argue and fight, blaming each other for all our problems. It's not a good look, so we have invented religious systems that build on this paradigm to create a way of hope for a better life.

Now every single person knows what love is. It's inherent in our nature as humans. We may not understand it fully or even experienced it in any meaningful way, but the deep longing for unconditional love is absolutely universal. In fact, it's the only aspect of spirituality that truly is universal.

Deep down, we all know that the only thing that brings real change towards life and wholeness, is love.

So here's my point (finally). The bible story about the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" that Adam and Eve ate from, expresses the basis of the problem - we keep choosing to look at everything in terms of right and wrong instead of love.

The story says that the only thing that would cause them to die was embracing the desire to know good from evil! Even Paul in the New Testament, hinted at it often with statements like "everything is permissible but not everything is beneficial". We keep thinking that the most important thing we can do is determine right from wrong – sin from righteousness. We think that justice is only defined in terms of good and bad, so we spend most of our time making judgements. We are obsessed with having the knowledge of good and evil. Our entire civilisation is built on this! We want clear cut lines that say “this is right but that is wrong”. Our legal system is nothing more than countless lines drawn to define if something is good or bad.

But if we look to the story of Jesus, we see something very subtle and easily overlooked in his words to the disciples after the “last supper” dialog. He simply said, in possibly his most powerful words, “I’m giving you a NEW command – love each other the same way I love you”.

Up to that point he’d supported the principles of the law and 10 commandments, and had reduced them down to two – love God and love each other. But what he did here is ditch the “thou shalt” mentality entirely and institute something new.

Love each other just like I love you. He turned it completely around. The onus was no longer on us to “love God” first and foremost. He took that out of the whole equation. The disciples had seen the depth of his love for humanity, and that’s exactly what he put to them. Love humanity, just like I do.

Stunningly simple, and bypasses all concepts of laws and rules. Up to that point he’d been pointing out that living by the law was completely unattainable, and he constantly upped the ante with things like “you know you shouldn’t have it off with another woman, but I’m telling you - if you even look sideways at a woman you may as well have had sex with her”. He did this heaps and upset a lot of people! But then he turned it all around with that one final “new” command. It was a command for unconditional love.

So, lets look at this a little closer. The people we all most admire and respect as examples of life and faith, are those who live from that place of unconditional love. They don't judge, they simply love. Like Mother Teresa, the Dali Lama – those types we just stand in awe of. They don’t preach doctrines and rules, morals and ethics – they just love unconditionally and completely.

Here’s the crunch though. We don't need any holy writings for this. Its already who we are. As little children we don’t judge, we simply “are” and enjoy life based on the level of love we receive. Sure, there are heaps of ancient and modern writings that are incredibly profound and have so much to offer. But I’m talking about revering these writings to the point of

holiness. It's called bibliolatry (the worship of the writings themselves instead of the deeper message), and most religions are guilty of it.

When Jesus said to be like children, he wasn't talking about obeying your parents or being submissive - he was talking about a simplicity of life and faith - a returning to that wonderful reliance on love and love alone and the joy and peace that brings to ourselves and everyone around us.

Christianity in particular calls us to "repent" - a word that is loaded with guilt, shame, penance and punishment. But the original word in context with the greek language and culture literally means to just change your mind. That's it!! Just change our minds about who we are. Look at a baby! It has no concept of right or wrong, good or evil. It's just a little love receptor, a love sponge, which gives as much as it receives. So we "repent" of our craving for the "knowledge of good and evil" and return to that state of innocence. A love sponge!

This has to be practical as well, and sure enough, we will still act in unloving ways as we gradually learn our true identity, but all we have to do is be responsible for any mess we make. That's all there is to it! That may be difficult and may require extreme measures to amend for those actions. But the point is, there is no sense of punishment for wrong doing, or reward for doing good. It's a simple matter of being responsible for all we are and do from a place of love.

Its living loved. Everything else is a distraction and a returning to that tree.

We think we need endless books and sacred writings of wisdom that talk of how and what to do to be good people - but we already are good people - we have just been convinced that we aren't by choosing to judge what's right and wrong instead of living loved.

We will keep hurting each other, misunderstanding and fighting, but as we begin to see what love looks like and embrace it for ourselves, we'll change. The whole point of love is in embracing imperfection. If we were all perfect there would be no need for love!

How does this look in daily life? Every decision we make should begin with the premise that "I am loved - I am inhabited by love - I am love incarnate". Will this decision, this action, thought or word come from love and bring love? What will be its fruit? It may be a very hard decision, but if it's done with integrity and honesty, then we can ask no more. Because love covers "sin", and we all know that sin is simply "missing the mark". Yes, it's another one of those loaded words that religion has escalated to the ultimate judgement. But again, the original languages and context reveal it to be a simple "missing the mark" like an arrow missing the target.

So after all this - what is love? Most of the western world knows 1 Cor 13 and it could be said to be the universal standard that depicts pure unconditional love.

"This love of which I speak is slow to lose patience—it looks for a way of being constructive. It is not possessive: it is neither anxious to impress nor does it cherish inflated ideas of its own importance. Love has good manners and does not pursue selfish advantage. It is not touchy. It does not keep account of evil or gloat over the wickedness of other people. On the contrary, it is glad with all good men when truth prevails. Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, no fading of its hope; it can outlast anything. It is, in fact, the one thing that still stands when all else has fallen."

Of all holy writings, this is probably the one that hits the depth of every soul. Even if we have never experienced this kind of love, we all crave it. The lack of it is the cause of all our woes, from war to mental illness.

To "live loved" requires us to abandon the desire for the knowledge of good and evil, and extend the same level of compassion and empathy we desire for ourselves. Then we will begin to see God in us and everyone one else.

Its a massive paradigm shift, but millions over the centuries (throughout all history I guess) have discovered that this really is the narrow road - it's the real "gospel" (good news), and the only thing that brings real freedom and the "fruit of the spirit". It's taking responsibility for who we really are.