

1: THE LIGHT (GOOD) VS. THE DARKNESS (EVIL)

Like beauty, good or evil often lies in the eye of the beholder. What some of us see as good, others see as evil. And, what some view as evil, others view as good. Whatever we decide, in terms of what we believe is good vs. evil or right vs. wrong, will determine our ultimate behavior and the consequences thereof.

We are driven by the need to be right. Our identity, our very sense of being, is inextricably tied to what we believe to be true. If we are deemed to be wrong, then what does that say about our intelligence, our values, our moral compass, or our own self-worth? What happens to our self-esteem if we end up on the wrong side of an issue or, more importantly, on the wrong side of history?

It is 2024 and Vladimir Putin is the President of Russia. This, once respected, leader of his country has watched his worldwide approval ratings plummet over the past decade. According to a Pew Research Poll (2022), his unfavorable ratings have reached a record high of 70% outside of his own country. The poll also reveals that 90% of the countries polled have “no confidence that he will do the right thing” and 78% have “no confidence in him at all.”

One only needs to look at the totality of the destruction in Ukraine and the loss of property, infrastructure, and human lives, in the current conflict initiated by Putin, to conclude that his actions are not in the best interests of mankind. These actions could be considered evil by any reasonable standard.

Oddly enough, since the onset of this tragedy, Putin’s favorable rating in Russia has jumped to 90%, according to Statista.com, at the time of the writing of this book. What some people see as evil others see as good!

In 1939, Hitler’s approval ratings were as high as 90% in Germany. They remained near that level until the end of WW2! “One person’s passion is another person’s poison.”

Throughout the history of the world, we have been plagued by ruthless dictators in nondemocratic countries and societies. Even in (so-called) democracies, sociopathic megalomaniacs have risen to power. Their addiction to pure power, wealth and absolute control has instilled within them a perverted intent to turn the light (good) into darkness (evil).

Beyond our own personal opinions of who or what is evil, based on our unique criteria, there are blatant, unquestionable examples of evil that we can (most of us) agree on: murder, wars, rape, genocide, violence against children, distribution of drugs, torture, manipulating others, lying for our own benefit, stealing, and many other examples.

During the early years of my life, the United States had been viewed as a benevolent benefactor of the poorer countries in the world. Our history of providing foreign aid and financial support to underdeveloped nations remains unsurpassed, to this very day.

Over the course of time, I watched in awe as many of the countries that we were trying to help started to resent us. They began to look at our providing aid as a means of our trying to

control them. "Send us money, but don't tell us what to do" became the order of the day. "You can help us, but you can't own us!" What was once appreciation and gratitude had turned into ambivalence and mistrust.

While our involvement in conflicts in the Middle east, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere in the world, may have been an attempt to protect sovereign nations from outside aggression (as well as thwart the spread of Communism, totalitarianism, and terrorism), the presence of our military, coupled with the destruction and loss of life brought about by conflicts with our perceived enemies, inevitably led to many countries, and many of their people, labeling us as evil. "No good deed goes unpunished!"

Even within our own country, the finger-pointing, blame, vilification of others and the labeling of those we disagree with as "evil" is at a level that we have never experienced before. It is no longer the issues that we may disagree on that prompt our vindictive rhetoric, it is the battle between who is right and who is wrong that prevents us from working together to find common ground. As I have often said, "We can be right, wrong, or successful. Once we abandon the emotional need to be right vs. wrong, then success will follow."

Good Leaders vs. Evil Leaders

We are now living in the most unprecedented time in our Nation's history. In fact, "unprecedented" has become one of the most widely used words in the English language today.

Our country has become totally polarized to the extent that bipartisanship is truly a thing of the past. There is no uniting force to heal our social wounds and to help us resolve our differences. Instead, we continue to grow further and further apart.

The divisiveness, lack of unity and negative social and political discourse that we are experiencing today are not the result of the Left vs. the Right. They are not the result of Democrats vs. Republicans. They are not the result of liberals vs. conservatives. They are not the result of ethnic conflict. They are not the result of immigrants vs. natural born citizens of the United States of America, and they are not the result of MAGA vs. Never-Trumpers!

While all these things are pieces of the entire puzzle, the real cause of the social turmoil and rancor that we are immersed in today is a direct result of a leadership void fueled by blame and finger pointing, with, so-called, leaders (throughout the world) claiming the higher ground when it comes to "good vs. evil."

Our country and many of our leaders are not blameless when it comes to labeling others as evil or bad. Many times, we have been right in our assessments and sometimes we have been wrong. Overall, our track record has been pretty good, which is why we have been recognized as the bastion of democracy and freedom around the world for such a long period of time. Unfortunately, that image is now becoming tarnished, both at home and abroad.

Perhaps it would help to take a step back and look at what some of the characteristics of good vs. evil leaders (and people) are, as reflected in their attitudes, beliefs, and behavior. If we can define those characteristics, then we would at least have a template which could help us to come to a more objective, open-minded conclusion as to what constitutes "good vs. evil" when it comes to our own country's leaders and leaders around the world.

Some of the main characteristics of good leaders reflect the values of kindness, compassion, fairness, integrity, honor, respect, diplomacy, politeness, spirituality, inclusiveness, empathy, morality, commitment to the rule of law, and a genuine concern for the wellbeing of those that are being led ... above and beyond their own self interests. Good leaders would never abandon these values for money or political standing. Good leaders are focused on the truth. Good leaders lead by example.

Some of the main characteristics of evil leaders are completely opposite of the values that are embraced by good leaders. Evil leaders are mean-spirited, self-centered, rude, bigoted, untrustworthy, spirituality bankrupt, immoral, callous, and have a complete disregard for the rule of law. Evil leaders make decisions based on what is in their best self-interest instead of the interests of their country or the people they are leading. Evil leaders believe that values (along with everything else in life) are for sale, providing that the transaction can achieve the desired economic, personal, or political outcome that they are seeking. Evil leaders rely on deception,

manipulation, and falsehoods as a way of life. Evil leaders are driven by greed, power, and control. Like good leaders, evil leaders also lead by example.

Now, armed with what the differences between good leaders and evil leaders are, we can apply our template to the current leaders at all levels of our government. We can also apply these characteristics to our country's leaders in the past, or to current leaders around the world. Like a report card, not everyone will get an "A+" and not everyone will get an "F." That having been said, the chances are pretty good that the template will give us enough insight to determine which leaders are basically "good" and which are basically "evil." Just pick a leader (or leaders) and honestly apply the template criteria to determine what category they fall in.

The optimistic news is that wherever evil has existed over the course of time, good has ultimately prevailed. The pessimistic news is that the challenge of continuing to defeat evil has become increasingly more difficult in recent years.

The evil practice of selling out our values has become a disturbing trend in our country today. Some of our evil leaders turn a blind eye to prejudice, bigotry, misogyny, lying and even murder in the name of seeking higher favorability ratings, with the empty promise of future prosperity for those whom they are deceiving. Their consistent goal is to maintain power, control, and to remain in office, even at the expense of the will of the people that they are responsible for and accountable to.

What we seem to fail to realize is that all the things that are being sought after, or promised, are cyclical (more jobs, a prosperous stock market, political control, judicial control, good economic statistics, lower inflation, higher wages, strong foreign relations). Like the tides, they become high and then they become low. No one person in the history of the world could ever successfully turn around the economy of the United States singlehandedly, let alone in a short period of time.

Our economy is not like a speedboat. It does not have the ability to turn on a dime. It is more like the world's largest ocean-going freighter. It needs to turn the rudder in a different direction long before the new route is achieved and long before the actual destination is arrived at. And (more often than not) by the time the ship is totally on its new course we must begin

turning the rudder again to account for changes in the current, wind, and other outside factors that have occurred since we set our sights on our original destination.

The point here is that our economy, the stock market, financial indicators, more jobs, and lower taxes are always temporary. "Good values" will last in perpetuity. Over the long haul it is those values that spawn "good leaders" who will help to keep us on the right course.

Good is symbolized by a faith in God or a Higher Power, depending upon our own unique set of religious beliefs. Evil is symbolized by Satan whose primary objective is to convert the good people in our world to his side of the ledger ... the evil side. If Satan cannot win us over directly then he will try to distract us, to keep us from advancing the causes of goodness and righteousness in our society and in our lives. These distractions come in the form of evil soldiers that take up Satan's cause by spreading hate, anger, division, fear, strife, and conflict whenever and wherever they can.

Our country was built on a foundation of "good," not "evil." Our predecessors crossed an ocean in small ships, heading towards an unknown destination, at great risk to themselves, to flee tyranny and to build a way of life that would provide freedom, liberty, and new opportunities for themselves (and for all who would follow them and aspire to achieve those same goals in the future). Our nation was built on a foundation of "good values" that have lasted for hundreds of years. Now is not the time to trade in those values in the name of power or fleeting personal and political opportunism.

We, as a country and as individuals, need to hold onto our core values and to choose "good over evil" no matter how tempting it might be to do otherwise. Our rudder is our ability to elect those who will steer our ship through any storm and keep us on the right course moving forward. What we want and what we need are "good leaders," not "evil leaders." The choice is ours and ours alone.

*A Native American elder once described his own inner struggles in this manner: "Inside of me there two dogs. One of the dogs is mean and evil. The other dog is good. The mean dog fights the good dog all the time." When asked which dog wins, he reflected for a moment and replied, "The one I feed the most." - **unknown***