

**Two Whys and a Where**  
**(or, the Virginia Tech massacre and the nature of evil)**

*...the good man brings good things out of the good stored up in him, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in him.* (Matthew 12: 35, NIV)

The Parable of the Weeds, Matthew 13: 24 - 30

*As he (a man) thinketh in his heart, so is he.* (Proverbs 23:7, KJV, parenthesis mine)

So, it's happened again. Someone has taken a gun or two, walked into a crowded area and taken out his frustrations, past baggage and fears – real or imagined – on a bunch of innocent people who (in all likelihood) never did anything to him. And the usual thing occurs in the aftermath; people on both sides of the debate over the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution take up positions we've all heard before, and people argue over how we can make public institutions, schools, etc. more secure.

Maybe a few brave souls will try to probe into how Cho Seung-Hui turned out the way he did; some of these will be psychiatrists or psychologists, some will look more from a sociological aspect, and some will search the Scriptures, hoping to find the answer that never really gets answered to anyone's satisfaction... *Why?*

I'm not a psychiatrist or a sociologist – and even if I were, I know far too little about Cho to approach the Virginia Tech massacre from those standpoints. I'm sure that more will be revealed about Cho as experts in those fields dig up more about him over the coming weeks and months. But with what little has already been released, I believe we can learn a few things about the nature of our own minds and how they can be turned to good or to evil.

To start with, we must keep a few things in mind. First, God is still in control of everything, but we don't always understand everything He does or His reasons for doing them... simply because He's God and we're not. Second, The principle of free will still applies; even though people have the option of choosing evil, God still leaves us with that choice. God does not want robots, but people who come to Him to give their lives *willingly*. Love from a robot – a machine – is not love at all. This is something that is preached over and over again, yet we still need to be reminded of it from time to time.

The third thing, and one that is obscured in today's culture, is that evil is not a "created" thing. The modern view of evil is the "ying/yang" image, that evil is the reverse of good, the "dark side of the force." The implication from this view is that God and Satan (the author of evil) are opposites, yet somehow equals. Nothing could be further from the truth. This view gives Satan far more credit than he deserves, for he is also a created being. As such, he cannot create anything in the sense that God can.

God does not deal in evil, nor give or send evil. Evil is instead a deformation, a twisting, a perversion of the good that God has created. Two of the words frequently used in the Scriptures that are translated as *evil* into modern English are **ra** (Hebrew) and **poneros** (Greek). **Ra** means "to spoil," or "to make good-for-nothing," while **poneros** refers to essential character indicating degeneracy from original virtue. Satan can only spoil or break down what God has created. Satan's most effective work is on the individual scale, through twisting a person's thoughts or attitudes. Yes, evil sometimes

works on a massive scale, such as with the Nazis, but often this is the culmination of the work of one or two people.

The fourth thing is that it's frightfully easy to store up junk – people do it all the time in terms of material things, hence the need for the self-storage industry and the popularity of television shows like *Antiques Roadshow* or *Cash in the Attic*. We store up junk spiritually, as well; old bad habits, thought patterns or emotional triggers and sins. In most cases, since we don't realize we are acquiring these things, we don't know how to get rid of them... not without help, anyway.

In reading the one-act plays Cho had written, we see a very angry young man. In what little we already know about him we find a person whose family brought him to the United States only to be ridiculed, ostracized, scorned for even opening his mouth. This happens to a lot of people; in this observation, I do not wish to use this as an excuse for Cho's actions, because many (I will even dare to say *most*) people grow up being ridiculed for one thing or another, especially as children. People eventually grow out of these things and leave them behind as they mature, but somehow Cho's thought patterns were bent to the point where he concluded the world did not want him. This conclusion I believe turned him bitter and angry, which has a nasty tendency to ferment in people's minds until they act upon their beliefs in one form or another. People can store up all kinds of junk in their heads, and then permit (by neglect) Satan to organize what's there until minor incidents or seemingly insignificant events are presented as a vast conspiracy against us to deny us the happiness we have decided is owed us as a birthright.

Is Cho responsible for acting out on his fears and twisted fantasies? Yes, because God still honors the free will He gave us from the beginning. When, in the video sent to NBC News, Cho speaks of multiple opportunities to stop him from carrying out this act, he ultimately condemns himself, for even those who let their past twist their thinking usually stop short of outright murder to make themselves feel better. But the ultimate source of the massacre is Satan himself, since it was he who set into motion the events leading up to the shooting by turning Cho's thoughts to a path that would lead to this end.

That first *Why?* brings us to the second *Why?* in this puzzle; Why didn't God stop Cho? Why does God simply not take "evil" people out of this life, send them off to their punishment, and leave only the "good?" *Why does God allow evil to exist at all?* This, of course, is the puzzle everybody grapples with at one point or another, and far greater minds than mine have been stymied by the dilemma. God does not even answer the question *directly* in His Word: In the book of the prophet Habakkuk, where the question is directly put to Him, God only promises (Habakkuk 2) that the wicked will be dealt with in His Way and at His discretion. In Luke 13: 2 – 5, Jesus responds to a similar question with "**But unless you repent, you too will all perish.**" Or, in other words, *Deal with your own sins and leave the sins of others to My Father.*

But in the Word we have a number of instances where God *does* deal with evil, usually on a widespread or national scale; Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis, the Canaanites in Exodus through Joshua (and beyond), even Israel herself and her addiction to idolatry and the evils that accompany it, not to mention the nations God used to punish Israel for her sins. While only the rash or the foolish will attempt to claim they have figured God out completely, from these incidents we can get something of an idea – however imperfect or incomplete – of why God deals with evil the way He does.

1. *The Parable of the Weeds*: From this (and the similar Parable of the Fishnet later in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter of Luke), we see a delay of dealing with evil until the “end of the age” when God’s judgment seat is brought out. Unlike plants, people can change, and God gives ample opportunity for change to take place. Free will is still in force, and God will give people time to realize their need to change (or repent) from their ways and seek Him out for help to do so, since we cannot successfully change by ourselves.
2. From this same parable (and elsewhere in the Bible), we see that the measures God uses for dealing with evil on a large scale can harm or bring suffering or affliction to the good people – or, rather, the subjects of the Kingdom – even with Divine provision made for their sake. While God graciously gave Lot and his family opportunity to escape the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, they still had to be uprooted from the cities so that God could carry out His judgment, and lived for a time afterward in a cave. Noah and his family were spared by God for their righteousness before Him, yet their lives were severely disrupted – first in having to build the ark and gather up the animals to be spared, second by having to see the wiping out of all life during the flood (while I have no evidence for this, it wouldn’t surprise me to learn that there were lots of “floaters” that the ark bumped into during its voyage). The lives of Rahab and her family were spared in the fall of Jericho (Joshua 2 & 6) for her acknowledgement of Israel’s God and an act of righteousness in protecting the spies, yet they still had to deal with “the new sheriff in town,” as it were, and the loss of everybody else they ever knew. And surely there were people who were righteous and kept the Law of Moses, shunning the Baals and all the other fake gods during the period of Israel’s apostasy, yet who suffered during the sieges by Israel’s enemies and the famines sent by God while Israel remained in the land, or who (like Daniel and his friends) were packed off to Babylon during the exile. When God does not act directly on the large scale, the governments He establishes are charged with doing so; as these are run by people they will, of course, be imperfect and mistakes happen or malice or bribery are factors playing into the picture. Even on the smaller (or individual) scale each life is interconnected, whether you like it or not, and only God can manipulate circumstances in a manner that benefits who He pleases and gives Him glory and yet still satisfies His desire to see people repent and turn from their ways. Remember Ezekiel 18:23? “Do I take any pleasure in the death of the wicked? declares the Sovereign Lord. Rather, am I not pleased when they turn from their ways and live?”
3. In most cases, our desire to see evil neutralized or destroyed is motivated not by a sense of righteousness (Isaiah 64: 6 says ours is like filthy rags, remember?) but by vengeance. One reason why God reserves vengeance for Himself is because only He can dispense it with pure motives and true justice. And since we all have our enemies or people who have a bone to pick with us about *our* behavior from time to time – even if we repented of it long ago – sometimes people just don’t forgive. Who could stand if God’s power to “weed out” the wicked were based on *our* concept of justice?

Cho Seung-Hui has gone to his eternal reward, whatever it is. God did not intervene in Cho's carrying out of his murderous and suicidal plan the same as God did not take us out in the midst of *our* sins until we realized we have to change course or we will destroy ourselves. Cho, unfortunately, never realized this and his self-absorption (instigated by Satan but followed through by Cho) ultimately cost the lives of 32 of his classmates. Which brings me to the question that occurs to me more frequently as similar incidents like this take place, and the third "W" word in this situation: *Where* was the church? Where were the hands and feet – or the ears or heart – of our Savior while Cho was becoming, what one classmate described as the loneliest man he ever saw? Was there no one who could listen to this man or try to reach out to him? Would it have made a difference in this case? Maybe, maybe not; until Jesus returns there will always be people who will not take Him up on His offer of repentance and salvation and insist on going their own way. The final chapter for the massacre at Virginia Tech is far from being written. We will be learning more in the weeks and years to come, and there will be new information; hopefully, some of this will shed light on the role of believers in the life of Cho. But we as His church can and should take a lesson from this incident and remember that while God may not always intervene directly to halt evil... we as His Body on Earth can. In fact, it's one of the reasons why we are left here as His Body in the first case.

God can (and will, if we let Him) reorganize our storage, if you will – take out the old attitudes and sins with their trigger mechanisms and put our heads in the order He wanted for them all along. The answer to at least one of the *Whys?* is that God definitely wants to and does bring a halt or an end to evil people. But direct revelation, completely out of left field and unexpected on our part, is pretty rare these days. God usually makes His moves through others, and someone's got to make the connection. Which means, the focus is back on us as His church... who am *I* acquainted with that God wants to work with through me?