

# "HEAR YE HIM"

## A Devotional Series For Radio

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Evan A. Fry, Radio Minister  
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The Sermon: OPPOSITION IN ALL THINGS

Scripture: Book of Mormon, II Nephi 1:81-93.

For it must needs be, that there is an opposition in all things. If not so .. righteousness could not be brought to pass; neither wickedness; neither holiness nor misery; neither good nor bad. Wherefore, all things must needs be a compound in one; Wherefore, if it should be one body, it must needs remain as dead, having no life, neither death nor corruption, nor incorruption, happiness nor misery, neither sense nor insensibility. Wherefore, it must needs have been created for a thing of nought; Wherefore, there would have been no purpose in the end of its creation. Wherefore this thing must needs destroy the wisdom of God, and his eternal purposes; and also the power, and the mercy, and the justice of God. And if ye shall say there is no law, ye shall also say there is no sin. And if ye shall say there is no sin, ye shall also say there is no righteousness. And if there be no righteousness, there be no happiness. And if these things are not, there is no God. And if there is no God, we are not, neither the earth, for there could have been no creation of things, neither to act nor to be acted upon; wherefore all things must have vanished away.

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It must needs be that there is an opposition in all things.

One of the oldest of all philosophical problems -- one which has been discussed by philosophers since the dawn of recorded history, is the problem of evil. What is evil? Where did it come from? How did it originate? Was it created, and if so, did God create it? If God did not create it, then did some other god of equal or inferior rank, create evil because of his enmity for the God of good? If God is good, if in him there is no evil at all, then how could he be the creator of evil men, and angels who rebelled against him? These and many other related questions are all a part of this tremendously complicated but highly important problem.

Can you imagine a body that was neither live nor dead? If it were neither live nor dead, what would it be? Can you imagine a man who was neither good nor bad, neither loving nor hateful, neither honest nor dishonest, neither stupid nor wise, neither clean nor filthy, neither tall nor short, neither fat nor lean? Perhaps you will say that he could be just average, or half-way between these two extremes. But even so you are admitting that we need both extremes, or both ends of the scale even to conclude that he is half way between. For example, we judge a man's moral character by his position on some sort of scale of good and bad. Let us represent this scale by an ordi-

nary thirty-six inch yardstick, with absolute "bad" at the left hand end, and absolute "good" at the right hand end. The relative "badness" or "goodness" of any man would therefore fall somewhere along this scale of values. But suppose we take away the "bad" end of the yardstick and deny that there is any such thing as "bad" or "evil." If you take away one end of a yardstick, you have no more yardstick -- but only a fixed point. If there is no evil, no direction is indicated in which men may move away from the absolute point we call "good," and therefore there is no standard of comparison. Then every man must be as good as every other man, and all must be absolutely good. Of course that concept is a practical and logical absurdity.

We measure the thing we call cold by the absence of heat. If there were no bottom to a thermometer, there could be no top either. There could be only one point representing the absolute of our concept of "hot," or in other words, the hottest possible hot; and with only that one point how could we measure temperature? It is the possibility of cold that gives us a workable concept of "hot," and vice versa. It is the possibility of sin and evil that gives us a workable concept of what righteousness is. Our concepts of lean and fat, tall and short, rich and poor, sweet and sour, black and white, up

and down, in or out, are all predicated upon the existence of opposites. Even when dealing in averages that are half-way between, we still must have these opposites to give the average any meaning. "It must needs be that there is an opposition in all things."

How do men become good? By choosing good, of their own free will. There are only two possible ways in which man can choose. First, he may choose between absolute opposites. Second, he may choose between degrees that are measured on a scale; but as we have seen, the scale, to have any meaning at all, must have opposite ends. There can be choice only as there are two alternatives between which to choose. Therefore, if there is no evil, there is no choice; if there is no choice, there is no moral goodness, and man cannot be good. He can be only innocent, ignorant, neutral, helpless to act -- a puppet to be acted upon instead of a man to choose and act for himself according to the agency which God has given him.

All law bears witness to the need for opposition in all things. Law is usually written either to condemn an act of sin or to compel some act of virtue. The law forbids and condemns murder because there is a difference between life and death. If there were no difference, if life and death were all the same thing, there could be no such thing as murder. Each virtue has its opposite vice. If not, then virtue ceases to be virtue, because there is nothing with which to contrast it. There must needs be opposition in all things. If no suffering and punishment stand at the opposite end of the scale from joy and happiness, then there is no need for us to watch the morality of our actions at all; for there is no such thing as morality or goodness or righteousness.

When God completed his work of creation, he looked upon all he had made and pronounced it good. Yet the man whom God has pronounced good chose to sin; he fell and became evil. Does that mean that God created evil? No! But in the very nature of things, if he was going to create men or angels capable of choosing goodness, righteousness, and happiness, they

would also have to be capable to choosing badness, wickedness, and misery. Agency is impossible without opposition in all things. If man was to have agency, he had to have alternatives between which to choose. Without alternatives, there could be no possible choice, and without choice there could never be agency. And again, if there are no opposites, there are no alternatives -- not even a choice of degree -- for unless one admits the possibility of evil, it is impossible even to conceive of varying degrees of goodness. Obviously, if one act is not quite so good as another, it must be just a little bit worse than the other; and "worse" is a degree of what we call "bad."

Men and angels were created "good," but with the right to choose for themselves, between opposites. They become evil because they chose to be. God did not make them evil; they made themselves evil. God could not have made it impossible for them to choose evil without at the same time making it impossible for them to choose good.

There must needs be an opposition in all things. The possibility of evil is inherent in all goodness. We said in a previous sermon that God exercises agency; that he is not good because some greater power is compelling him to be, but because he wants to be and chooses to be. If God has the right of choice, then he could logically choose evil -- the opposite of good. But God never has chosen evil, and we need not fear that he ever will. God is the absolute at the top end of the scale of goodness. God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. God is holy and righteous and pure, and in him is no evil at all. He cannot be tempted with evil, not because there is no evil to tempt him, but because his nature has nothing in it to be attracted by evil. We become like God as we choose good instead of evil, as we experience the new birth and learn to deny and eliminate the evil of our own fallen and rebellious natures by refusing to yield to the temptation of those things opposite to virtue, and by making all our choices consistent, habitual, and unvaryingly right.