
Dealing With Objections: The Problem of Evil

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.’” -Matthew 28:18-20

Group Discussion: How have you typically wrestled with the problem of evil as you grow in your faith? Was not aware it existed? Ignored it? Searched out answers but to no avail? Have a response to it?

One of the more common objections to Christianity is the problem of evil. While the argument may take different forms, it usually follows this structure (per Greg Welty):

1. A perfectly powerful being *can* prevent any evil.
2. A perfectly good being *will* prevent evil as far as he can.
3. God is perfectly powerful and good.
4. So, if a perfectly powerful and good God exists, there will be no evil.
5. There is evil.
6. Therefore, God doesn't exist.

Because a powerful God can prevent evil, and because a good God would prevent evil, the existence of evil proves that the God Christians believe in does not exist. Therefore, many deny Christianity for this reason.

However, before we get into why the argument above is flawed, it is important to note that *every* belief system must give an answer to the existence of evil in this world, not just Christianity. Atheists, agnostics, Muslims, Hindus, etc. all must come up with an explanation as to the origins of evil (the “How?”) and for what purpose it exists (the “Why?”).

Therefore, in sharing the Gospel with these various individuals, our goal is to make the case that Christianity best explains the origins of evil and why evil exists. We do that in two different ways. First, we can point out the flaws in those explanations by other religions. For example, Atheists struggle to explain “how” evil entered the world, and in the end, also struggle to explain for what purpose. They often have to consent that much of the evil in the world is meaningless, we simply have to endure it as a part of life. Furthermore, even calling these evil events “evil” is a problem for atheists, as in order to define what is “good” and “evil”, we must have an objective moral standard, which points to a higher authority (God).

Secondly, we can make a positive case for how Christianity deals with the problem of evil, which we will do now in two parts.

Part I: Christianity best explains the origins of evil.

Almost every major religion attempts to provide some explanation for the origin of evil, but Christianity does the best job of it. In seeking to answer how murder, theft, rape, wars, earthquakes, pain, etc. all entered the world Christianity takes us back to the Garden.

Here we see that God created a world, and it was all good. The stars and sun were good. The water was good. The dry ground was good. Every creature God created was good. And the man and woman God created in His image were very good. So how did evil enter this good world?

In answering this question, we must be careful not to say that God “created” evil. The Bible never teaches that to be true, and evil is not something that is even created. It’s an absence of good. In other words, evil exists apart from someone “creating” it.

According to the Bible, we see evil entering the world in two phases: First, in Ezekiel 28 we see that Lucifer, or Satan, turned from his blameless ways and sinned against God. He loved his beauty, taking pride in it, more so than he loved God. In Isaiah 14 we see that his desire was to make himself like the Most High (v. 14).

Once God cast Satan out of Heaven, along with those who followed him, Satan set about to tempt and destroy others, which brings us to Genesis 3. Here we see Satan enter the serpent and tempt Adam and Eve through lies and deceit. Adam and Eve believe these lies, and then eat the fruit that God forbade them to eat. Once they sin, they, too, are sent out from God’s presence in the Garden, and sin enters the world, corrupting everything that God created.

Exactly what the play-by-play was when Satan sinned against God, we do not know. And what exactly went on in the hearts of Adam and Eve when they sinned, we do not know. What we do know is that in each of these instances the blame for sin was put on Satan and Adam and Eve; not God.

Before moving on, there is one final note on this section that we must wrestle with. Even though God never does evil and is never to be blamed for evil, it is also too simplistic to say that the existence of evil is due to humanity’s free will. God is all-powerful and therefore can stop any evil action and could have prevented evil from entering the world in the first place. Our free will does not hamstring God’s power over evil (see Proverbs 16:9).

Therefore, we see that, on some level, God does ordain for there to be evil in this world (we will get into this in the next section). Yet, we do not fully understand how He ordains evil to exist, but yet is not to be blamed for the sinful actions of humans. But this is what the Bible teaches. And, at the end of the day, is still a better explanation for the origins of evil than other belief systems.

<p>1. On a scale of 1-10 with 10 being the highest, how confident are you that this explanation for the origin of evil is the best explanation among all belief systems?</p>

Part II: Christianity best explains the purpose for evil in this world.

When asked to explain the “Why” behind the existence of evil, many belief systems either resort to saying there is none, or it is to make us into better people. However, Christianity is able to say that God uses evil to bring about greater goods (see Rom. 8:28), of which there are multiple implications to our lives. Let’s take a look at some of these instances in Scripture:

1. **God permits evil to who His good provision for His people.** We see this is in the story of Joseph at the end of Genesis. God used the jealousy and hatred of Joseph’s brothers, his slavery, and his imprisonment to ultimately provide famine relief for the whole nation. What man meant for evil, God meant (permitted/used) for good (Gen. 50:20).
2. **God permits evil to show His good justice against evil.** All across the Bible we see God punishing the sins of others through curses, discipline, and even death. This is His way of showing that He is truly good by not allowing evil to persist or go unchecked.
3. **God permits evil to accomplish the good of making us more like Christ.** We see this in passages such as Romans 5:3-5 and James 1:2-4, in which God uses trials and sufferings to make us more like Christ. Suffering often takes our focus off ourselves and instead leads us to depend on God. In the Old Testament Prophets, we see God using the suffering of His people to lead them away from their sin and back to Him in repentance.
4. **God permits evil to bring about His good salvation.** The crucifixion of Jesus occurred as sinful men betrayed Jesus, falsely accused him, beat him, mocked him, and killed him on the cross. Yet, the Bible also teaches that each of these events came about as God’s “...plan had predestined to take place” (Acts 4:27). Peter also affirms both of these truths in Acts 2:23 where he says, “This Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.” In this situation, we see God ordaining evil and working through the evil actions of men to bring about the greater good of salvation to all who would believe in Jesus.

In the end, Christianity affirms over and over that though evil exists, it will not win in the end. God will ultimately overcome evil, using it for his greater purposes. So in regards to the argument at the beginning of this section, we now see that premises two and four are false. A perfectly good being would prevent evil as far as he can, *unless he can use that evil to accomplish an even greater good*. For God to choose to accomplish a lesser good without evil than the greater good he could accomplish by permitting evil would be a blow to His good character. Therefore, the premise that if a perfectly powerful and good God exists means there would be no evil is also false. For God in His power and goodness can use evil to show His greatness and goodness all the more.

Group Discussion: How difficult is it for you to say that God “ordains” evil? Does it help at all to know that He only does it to bring about a greater purpose?

In conclusion, as we approach the problem of evil, the Bible invites us to hold the following truths in tension (per Wayne Grudem):

1. **God uses all things, including evil, to fulfill His purposes for His glory and for our good** (see Rom. 8:28, Gen. 50:20, Prov. 16:4, Acts 2:23).
2. **God never does evil, is never to be blamed for evil, and does not delight in evil** (see Acts 4:27-28, Luke 22:22, James 1:13-14, Ezekiel 33:11).
3. **God rightfully blames and judges moral creatures for the evil they do** (see Isaiah 66:3-4, Ecclesiastes 7:29, Romans 9:19-20).
4. **We do not understand fully how all three of these truths coexist.**

Again, though we do have all the answers, Christianity gives us the best explanation for the origin of evil and reason for evil in this world. All other belief systems will likewise have questions they cannot fully answer. But Christians are at least able to deal with these unanswerable questions with hope, knowing that God will ultimately prevail over every evil and make right every wrong we have faced.

2. **As you think back through the points made this week, which, if any, are difficult for you to wrap your mind around? Which, if any, have brought further confirmation that Christianity provides the best answers to the problem of evil?**

Go Make Disciples

We are nearly at the end of this course, so be praying for courage to go out, share the gospel, and make disciples of those that God has chosen for you.

Praying This Week

- Thank God for overcoming evil in our hearts enabling us to trust in Him.
- Ask God to help you continue to believe that Christianity provides the best answers to the problem of evil.
- Ask God to give you opportunities to share these answers with a non-believer.