

# **There Is No All-Good & All-Powerful God Since There Is So Much Evil & Suffering In This World**

## **I. Preface**

The purpose of this article is not so much to defend the Christian faith before others, but to help a believer be more certain of the validity of his faith in the face of some serious and sincere objections.

Our answers to these objections may not be totally satisfying even to ourselves. This is the point where our human reasoning about God comes to an end, and we let our faith in Him carry us in our earthly journey with Him.

## **II. Questions about Evil**

Question 1: "What is evil?"

- Premise 1: God created all things.
- Premise 2: Evil is a thing.
- Conclusion: Therefore, God created evil.

The problem with this line of reasoning is that the second premise is not true. Evil is not a thing (as argued by early Church fathers like Augustine and Thomas Aquinas).

There are others since who have argued that evil has no ontological status in itself. The word "ontology" deals with the nature of existence. When I say that evil has no ontological status, I mean that evil, as a thing in itself, does not exist.

ILLUSTRATION 1: We talk about things in a fridge as being cold. But coldness is not a thing that exists in itself; it has no ontological status. Coldness is the absence of heat. When we remove heat from something, we say it gets cold.

"Cold" isn't a thing. It's a way of describing the reduction of the sensation of heat. So the more heat we take out of a system, the colder it gets. Cold itself isn't being "created". Cold is a description of a condition in which heat is missing. Heat is energy which can be measured. When you remove heat, the temperature goes down. We call that condition "cold".

ILLUSTRATION 2: "Did you ever eat a donut before?" Next question: "Did you ever eat a donut hole before?" I mean the hole in the donut itself. A donut hole is actually what has been left when the middle is cut out of a donut lump. There's a space called a hole, a "nothing". It is what comes about when something is taken away.

Evil is like that. Evil is the absence or taking away of good, and not created as a thing.

When God created the universe, He created everything good. After God was completely done with creating everything, something happened that reduced the good in the world. That loss of good is called evil.

In Genesis 1, we read “it was good” many times. From the record we know that God didn't create evil. But something did happen in which evil (the loss of good) took place, resulting in a lot of other “not good” things.

That's why we tend to speak of evil with a negative prefix (i.e. negation of the good)—e.g. unrighteousness, ungodliness, unethical, disobedience, anti-Christ. Though evil is not a thing, it is still real because it is the real lack in some good thing.

It is in the light of the good that evil becomes a problem. E.g. if it is morally good to save an innocent man, then it is morally evil to kill him. Ironically then, the reality of evil is an evidence for the existence of a good and moral God who speaks to our human conscience about the difference between good and the absence of good (evil).

Atheistic thinking:

- If God is all-good, He WILL defeat evil.
- If God is all-powerful, He CAN defeat evil.
- But evil is not defeated.
- So there is no such God.

Christian thinking:

- If God is all-good, He WILL defeat evil.
- If God is all-powerful, He CAN defeat evil.
- But evil is not yet defeated.
- Thus, there is such a God and He is still working.

Evil is still in this world because this world is not the best world that God wants to bring about in His own good time. This is the basis of our faith and hope in the biblical promises of God.

Isaiah 45:7 (KJV) – “I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the LORD do all these things.”

How do you explain this verse?

This verse must be interpreted in its context.

- Isaiah from the north was sent by God to preach against the idolatry of Judah in the south.
- A coming judgment in the hands of the Babylonians would be their fate (i.e. the exile).

- God said He “created evil” in the sense that He would bring forth disaster and calamity to judge His unfaithful people because they refused to repent and turn back to Him.
- NKJV translated the word “evil” here as “calamity”. NIV has it as “disaster”.

Question 2: “Did God allow Satan’s evil in Eden to infect Adam and Eve?”

Adam and Eve were not passively infected by Satan’s evil. In fact, they actively initiated their sin.

Also Satan did not create evil as he is not a god in his own right. He fell as a heavenly angel because he dug his own “hole” in his God-given goodness (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:13-17).

Yes, Satan made his own “hole” in his God-given goodness, AND he did influence Adam and Eve to do their own evil. Ultimately, Adam and Eve made their own “holes” in their God-given goodness. They made personal choices and were responsible for their own evil.

It isn’t that Satan did something bad and then passed that bad thing on to them because evil is not a thing. It’s like how a shadow comes about. You make a shadow not by making a thing called “shadow” but by blocking existing light, thereby making it absent.

God did not and cannot create in Adam and Eve with a thing called “evil”. There are some things that God cannot do. E.g. He cannot be God and not God, He cannot make a square be a circle, and He cannot do anything that’s against His own divine nature. So the omnipotence of God doesn’t mean he can do anything and everything. What it means is that God has all power over His creation, and the whole created order is always under His control and authority.

What God did was to create in Adam and Eve with a capability to make choices to obey Him or disobey Him. This is called moral free will—it’s a good thing, but it can also be used for bad. It can be used to rebel against God, which then will dig out a “hole” in our God-given goodness.

### **III. Questions about Suffering**

Question 1: “If ‘all things work for good for those who love Him’, is evil then really good in disguise?”

Many attempts have been made to argue that what appears to be evil from a temporal perspective is really good in God’s eternity (e.g. “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives”—Genesis 50:20).

In the NT, Romans 8:28 does not assert that “all things are good”, but that they work together for good for a certain group of people—i.e. those who love God. Also, the verse does assert that God will triumph over evil with His ability to redeem evil, to bring good out of evil. BUT the evil out of which God brings good is still real evil.

Atheistic thinking:

- There is no good purpose for so much suffering.
- An all-good God must have a good purpose for everything.
- So, there cannot be an all-good God.

Christian thinking:

- There is a difference between our knowing the purpose of suffering and God having a purpose for it.
- Even if we don't know God's purpose, He may still have a good reason for allowing suffering in our lives.
- So, we cannot assume that there is no good purpose for something just because we don't know what it could be.
- We don't know everything, but we know the God who does (“The secret things belong to the LORD our God ...”—Deut. 29:29).

We are not to promote suffering itself. However, one of the things about God is that He's capable of taking a bad thing and making good come out of it (Read “Thankful for Cancer” testimony).

C. S. Lewis (*Problem of Evil*, 106-07): “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”

On one hand, we must not always equate a person's suffering with his sin. E.g. the blind man whom Jesus healed in John 9 was not blinded because of his sin; the suffering of Job was also not because of his sin. On the other hand, there may be a relationship between a person's suffering and the corrective action of God on his sin. Thus, an occasion of human suffering is a good time for an evaluation of one's relationship with God.

When a disaster strikes, we tend to ask, “God, why did you allow these innocent people to be killed?”

A more self-evaluative response would be, “God, why are you still keeping me alive and tolerating my unfaithfulness?”

Question 2: “Why doesn't God make a world without evil and suffering?”

Atheistic thinking:

- God knows everything.
- So, God knew evil would occur when He created the world.
- God could have these options:
  - Option “A”—created human beings without free will.

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- Option “B”—created human beings with free will, but would not sin.
- Since such a world does not exist, there is no all-good and all-powerful God.

Option “A”: God could have created human beings without free will.

When we don’t have the free will to choose, then we are as good as being forced to choose. This will then make God not a loving Creator who helps us to do His will, but a legalistic dictator who forces us to do His will.

Option “B”: God could have created human beings with free will, but would not sin.

It is logically possible to have free will to choose and choose not to sin (e.g. Adam during the time before his fall; Jesus throughout His whole life on earth). But things that are logically possible are not automatically achievable. It still has to be intentional choice.

God could have tampered with a man’s free will such that whenever he is about to commit evil, He would use a distraction to turn the man away from that evil act. Or He could programme the man such that he could only choose to do good and not evil. But is that really freedom? Also, even if the man could be distracted from doing an evil act by God, what about the evil motive in him that first influences him to desire that evil act?

One positive that comes with evil in this fallen world is that people are challenged to do good and noble things so as to overcome evil.

If some people do not will to love God, then God cannot force them to do so. Forced freedom is not freedom but coercion. God will respect the freedom He has given to a man, but he must face the consequence of his free choice (for better or worse). God is not a puppet master, but a lover of people who would woo them and not force them to Himself.

#### **IV. God Is Working to Bring about a Better World**

This fallen world is not the best world possible. But it is the best way to the best world to come. If God is to preserve free will and defeat evil, then this is the best way to do it.

Freedom is preserved in that each of us makes our own free choice, even about our relationship with God. Evil is overcome in that once those who reject God are separated from the others, they are in eternal “quarantine” and cannot upset the perfect world that is to come.

God has provided for the salvation of all in Christ and He desires that all would freely choose to be saved (1 John 2:2; 2 Peter 3:9). But the lament of Jesus in Matthew 23:37 is this: “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your

children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were not willing.” Put in another way, the gates of hell are locked from inside by those who freely choose to reject God.

British philosopher Bertrand Russell (an atheist) once said that no one can sit at the bedside of a dying child and still believe in God. This is what an atheist would say to a dying child: “Too bad. Tough luck. Que Sera Sera.”

With that kind of thinking, there's no possibility of redemption for evil and suffering. But with God, there is hope for redemption of evil and suffering in the best world to come. The Bible has promised this hope in Revelation 21—i.e. God will one day bring about a better world where everyone has free will yet there won't be any evil and suffering.

## **V. Conclusion**

Some key points to remember:

- The reality of evil gives evidence for the existence of God.
- We may not be able to fully explain or understand evil, but we are exhorted to beware of the influence of evil (1 Peter 5:8-10).
- Suffering is a consequence of moral evil (acts of human beings) or physical evil (acts of nature). This reminds us that we are living in a fallen world.
- We are also called to anticipate suffering if we really want to be Christ-like (John 15:20).
- We embrace suffering not to gain merit, but to identify with Christ's ministry to those in pain. In that sense, God can use our suffering as a means of redemption (2 Cor. 1:3-6).