



ANSWERING THE **TOUGH QUESTIONS** ABOUT CHRISTIANITY

WHAT ABOUT EVIL?

LESSON #
3

THE LESSON AT A GLANCE

In this lesson, we will explore how Christians can respond to the question "Why is there evil in the world?"

THINK ABOUT THIS

Doesn't the existence of evil, pain, and suffering prove that God doesn't exist?

TODAY'S SCRIPTURES

ISAIAH 64:5-6; ROMANS 3:10-18 (*All Scripture CSB unless otherwise noted*)

THE MAIN IDEA

The existence of evil in the world is a major reason some people choose to reject the existence of God. In other cases, some people choose which god to believe in based on how that religion addresses the problem of evil.

QUESTION TO EXPLORE

What is evil, where does it come from, and why is it here?

SCRIPTURE IN CONTEXT

Isaiah 64:5-6. Isaiah 64 continues the prayer of the remnant of the children of Israel from Chapter 63, where they ask for God to "look down" and "return" to Israel. In verses 64:1-4, they pray for God to come in power and glory like He did during the Exodus.

But the prayer acknowledges in 64:5-6 the reasons God has withheld intervening on Israel's behalf: all men have sinned, and even the "good" things they do are like "polluted garments" because of their sinful motives. This prayer of the Hebrew remnant clearly shows the state of all mankind – that without a relationship with God, we are evil to the core and desperately in need of a redeemer.

Romans 3:10-18. Paul summarizes what he has outlined thus far in his letter to the Romans – that neither Jew nor Gentile (i.e., no one) can obtain on their own the sinlessness God requires to be a member of His family. Evil is present in human existence because humanity is evil without the intervention of God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit.



CONVERSATION EXAMPLE

After hearing about a mass shooting, a lost friend asks you how a good and loving God can allow such evil to occur and claims that your “thoughts and prayers” are worthless.

The concepts presented in this lesson can help you show that such evil was not created by a good God, that such evil can be used by a good God to accomplish his good purposes, and that one day, God will deal with evil by providing ultimate judgment with perfect justice.

START HERE

In general, evil is defined in the Holman Bible Dictionary as "That which is opposed to God and His purposes or that which, defined from human perspectives, is harmful and non-productive."¹

Every worldview must deal with the problem of evil.

- Most of those who **deny** the existence of a **god** **affirm** the reality of **evil** as proof there is no god.
- Pantheists (e.g., Hindus) **deny** the reality of **evil** and **affirm** a **god** (the "ultimate reality").
- Other theists, including Christians, **affirm** the reality of both **evil** and a **god**. Dealing with the problem of evil has led to various subcategories of theism, including:
 - *Deism* views God as uninvolved in the world, and evil occurs because mankind is on its own.
 - *Finite godism* claims evil exists because God is limited in His power to overcome it.
 - *Panentheism* (puh-NEN-thee-i-zm) views God as a finite changing force that works in cooperation with the world to achieve its greater perfection. As a result, panentheism considers evil a necessary part of the ongoing progressive interaction between this force and the world.
- Polytheists (e.g., some Hindus) also **affirm** the reality of evil and multiple gods, but in their view, evil is a result of the competing objectives between various gods.

ADDING CLARITY

There are at least two causes of evil:

¹ (n.d.). Evil. Holman Bible Dictionary. Retrieved November 9, 2024, from <https://www.studylight.org/dictionaries/eng/hbd/e/evil.html>.



- **Human activity** (e.g., unjust wars, murder, rape, slavery, cruelty, etc.) that is opposed to God and His purposes is called "**moral evil**." In most cases, moral evil also results in human pain and suffering.
- **Destructive natural forces** (e.g., disasters such as floods, tornadoes, earthquakes, disease, shark attacks, etc.) are considered "**natural evil**" because they can result in human pain and suffering. Although these forces are not according to God's original design (*"For the creation was subjected to futility – not willingly, but because of him who subjected it – in the hope that the creation itself will also be set free from the bondage to decay into the glorious freedom of God's children."* Romans 8:20), they typically don't have a moral component because they aren't caused by human activity.

Destructive natural forces that result from human activity, such as disease due to alcoholism, sexual promiscuity, etc., or a flood caused by a dam failure resulting from shoddy design, construction, and/or maintenance, may be exceptions that could fall under "moral evil."

As Christians, we must account for evil and the associated pain and suffering present in a world created and sustained by a good God. This is a difficult issue, and we are only scratching the surface of this complex topic. Due to time limitations, we will limit our discussion primarily to the problem of moral evil.

REVIEW AND DISCUSS

1. GOD DID NOT CREATE MORAL EVIL.

A person may claim that since God made everything and moral evil exists, then God must have created moral evil. Their thinking may go like this:

- God is the creator of all things.
- Moral evil is something that exists.
- Therefore, God must have created moral evil.

The error in this line of thinking is considering moral evil "something" (e.g., a created substance). Christians believe that moral evil is the lack of good; the corruption of the "good" substances God created. A similar comparison states that darkness is not "something," but the lack of something - light.

Genesis 1:2a states, *"² Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness covered the surface of the watery depths..."* In the rest of Genesis 1, God dispels the darkness with His good light and fills the void with His good creation.



Moral evil is introduced in Genesis 3 when mankind opposed God and His purposes and chose to seek wisdom without God.

Examples of how moral evil corrupts God's good creation include:

- Food is enjoyable, but gluttony is hazardous to your health.
- Sex within marriage is pleasurable and necessary for procreation, but adultery, rape, and molestation are detestable corruptions of this beautiful gift to a husband and wife.

Another way to frame the argument would be to say:

- God is the creator of all things.
- Moral evil is not a thing but the corruption of good things.
- Therefore, God did not create moral evil.

DISCUSS

What are other ways man corrupts God's good creation? (Possible answers: Pollution, poor land management, injustice, abusing other people, etc.)

GOSPEL FOCUS

The problem of moral evil is core to the Christian gospel because evil (sin) separates mankind from God. His redemptive plan through Jesus resolves this problem if we trust God is telling us the truth when He says:

This is the message of faith that we proclaim: ⁹ If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. ¹⁰ One believes with the heart, resulting in righteousness, and one confesses with the mouth, resulting in salvation. (Romans 10:8b-10)

2. GOD ALLOWS MORAL EVIL FOR HIS GOOD PURPOSES.

People who choose to reject God may claim that there is some moral evil with no apparent good purpose:

- An all-good God must have a good purpose for everything.
- There is no good purpose for some moral evil, pain, and/or suffering.
- Therefore, there cannot be an all-good God.

The Christian can refute this argument with the following points:



- We can see the good purpose in much moral evil. For example, evil, pain, and suffering are ways God reveals to the lost their need for a Savior. As C.S. Lewis observes, "Pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our consciences, but shouts in our pains. It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."² Joseph tells his brothers in Genesis 50:20: *"You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result — the survival of many people."* Heroes have given their lives or suffered horrendous injuries so others can live.
- God has a good purpose for everything, even if we cannot see it. For the Christian, Romans 8:28 promises, *"We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose."*

DISCUSS

Give an example from your life of how something "evil" resulted in something good. (Possible answers: Various personal responses)

3. GOD WILL DEAL WITH MORAL EVIL.

The persistence of evil is another problem the secular world uses to confront Christians about our belief in God. They might express their reasoning this way:

- If God is all-good, He would destroy moral evil.
- If God is all-powerful, He can destroy moral evil.
- But moral evil is not destroyed.
- Therefore, there is no such God.

To destroy moral evil, however, God would have to also eliminate the ability of mankind to choose evil. Here is how the Christian view might be phrased:

- Since God is love, He desired a world with moral goodness (i.e., a world with the choice of good or evil) more than a world without moral goodness (i.e., an amoral world with either just good or just evil) because moral goodness allows the creation to genuinely love the Creator in return (1 John 4:16).
- The possibility for moral goodness requires that creatures have moral agency to choose between right and wrong actions.

² C. S. Lewis. (n.d.) Goodreads Quotable Quotes [Review of Quotable Quotes]. Retrieved November 9, 2024, from <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/1180-pain-insists-upon-being-attended-to-god-whispers-to-us>.



- God desired a morally good world, so He created creatures with moral agency (Genesis 1:27).
- God is not morally culpable for allowing human moral evil to continue because He is achieving a more desirable world with moral goodness.
- God has not yet ended evil because He has reasons we do not completely understand.

Christians do know one reason God has not ended moral evil at this time, but that He will end moral evil at some point:

⁹ The Lord does not delay his promise, as some understand delay, but is patient with you, not wanting any to perish but all to come to repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed. (2 Peter 3:9-10)

Thus, we can say:

- God is all-good and desires to destroy moral evil.
- God is all-powerful and can destroy moral evil.
- Moral evil is not yet destroyed.
- Therefore, one day, God will destroy moral evil.

DISCUSS

How does the fact God will deal with moral evil at some point make you feel? (Possible answers: Various personal responses)

How could this fact make you feel about those around you who are unsaved? (Possible answers: I must share the gospel with them while there is still time, etc.)

REFLECT ON THE SUBJECT

People who reject the existence of God because of the problem with moral evil must answer a question of their own: "How do you know what evil is?" Without a Moral Law Giver to objectively define what is good, there is no corruption of that good to be called evil.

A discussion with someone who uses the problem of evil to reject the Christian God might go like this:

CONVERSATION EXAMPLE



A friend observes that the world is just getting worse and worse, so there must not be a good God. You might reply, "I agree the world is getting worse. Let's start resolving the problem of evil in the world by accepting God's resolution for our personal problem with evil - the death, burial, and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. In other words, let's stop talking about the general aspects of evil in the world and speak about God's solution for our specific personal problem with evil. To paraphrase that old saying, "The first step toward ridding the world of evil starts with letting God deal with the evil in our own heart."

¹⁸ So then, as through one trespass there is condemnation for everyone, so also through one righteous act there is justification leading to life for everyone. ¹⁹ For just as through one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so also through the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. (Romans 5:18-19)

DISCUSS

How is God getting rid of the evil in your heart? (Possible answers: Various personal responses)

A WORD OF CAUTION

Evil, pain, and suffering are very real to those experiencing them. When people around us find themselves in difficult situations, it is likely not the time to discuss why they are going through hard times. They may need us to be like Job's friends when they rightly joined him in his suffering **in silence for seven days** (Job 2:12-13), but not repeat their subsequent mistake of attempting to "help" Job realize that his condition was all his fault.

However, we should be open to the prompting of the Holy Spirit to have spiritual discussions at the appropriate time concerning why bad things happen to "good" people. If the person is a non-believer, Romans 1:20 says that God uses creation to reveal Himself to all mankind. An unfortunate characteristic of human nature is that it often requires a significant emotional event to force reconsideration of how we answer the question "Who is in charge?" As previously mentioned, C.S. Lewis observed that God uses evil, pain, and suffering to gain the attention of those who desperately need Him. Instead of letting the situation make them bitter, God desires for them to get better by accepting His final solution for the problem of evil - Jesus.

If the person is a believer, James 1:2-4 states,



² Consider it a great joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you experience various trials, ³ because you know that the testing of your faith produces endurance. ⁴ And let endurance have its full effect, so that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing.

In other words, a believer faced with trials has a choice: grow deeper in their faith or shrink back and allow the situation to weaken their faith. In addition, brothers and sisters in Christ are challenged to support their fellow believers, "*Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.*" (Romans 12:15)

APPLY

Who around you might think that the existence of evil is a reason to reject God? List their names and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit about how/when to use this issue to start a spiritual discussion.

LOOKING TO NEXT WEEK...

DOESN'T SCIENCE PROVIDE TRUTH WITHOUT NEEDING GOD?

In a world growing ever more technologically advanced with remarkable scientific discoveries frequently made public, it is easy for people to decide that science is the source of all truth and thus they don't need God. How does a Christian respond to this worldview called "scientism"?

GENERAL RESOURCES

Southern Baptists of Texas Convention Stand Firm Apologetics Course

<https://sbtexas.com/missions-evangelism/stand-firm/>