

CHAPTER 2

WHY IS THERE SO MUCH EVIL?

*what about sickness and death?
...and how about healing and life!*

2. WHY IS THERE SO MUCH EVIL?

Before reading this chapter, how would you answer the question, Why is there so much evil?

Bad news dominates

News can be depressing. We hear of wars, murder, rape, theft, cruelty, unfaithfulness, and dishonesty. Sometimes it gets so bad we do not want to listen to it anymore. The media has a tendency to report extremes so bad news will disproportionately make the headlines. However, we still cannot escape the fact that there is much evil in the world.

The Bible, on the other hand, is realistic. It does not paint a gloomy, depressing picture of the world, neither is it unrealistically positive. It shows us good things about the world (Psalm 19:1) but also acknowledges the existence of evil (Galatians 1:4). News can depress us, but the Bible will uplift us.

Psalm 118:24 This is the day the Lord has made; We will rejoice and be glad in it. (NKJV)

The Bible shows us things are going to get worse and not better but leaves us a hope for the future of a new heaven and earth (Revelation 21:1ff).

2Timothy 3:1–4 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (NIV)

Bad news can affect our relationship with God

The very fact we live in such an evil world can put us off God. We are told God loves us and is good and holy.

2Corinthians 13:11...the God of love and peace will be with you. (NKJV)

(See also Psalm 25:8; Revelation 4:8.)

Yet when we hear the news, it reminds us of the unrighteousness and utter depravity in this world. We expect God to create a good world but clearly this has not happened. What went wrong?

Two questions to consider

As we begin to examine the problem of evil, we see there are two basic questions we need to address. Firstly, we need to look at where evil came from. As God is so good it seems unthinkable He would create it. Secondly, we need to consider why God lets evil continue rather than immediately stamping it out.

The difference between evil and sin

Before we can answer the question, did God create evil, we need to clarify what we mean by the word evil. Evil is a similar word to sin but is broader in scope. It is the opposite of the word good, and generally speaking, there are two aspects to it. It can mean wickedness, moral corruption, and sinfulness (moral evils), or afflictions, wars, sickness, and poverty (physical evils).¹

Sin is a word used in connection with God that describes a behaviour which displeases Him. People who do not want to acknowledge God will avoid using the word sin, instead preferring to use the terms right and wrong to describe behaviour. This way they do not have to use God's standard but rather their own judgment of what is right and wrong.

God made everything good

The Bible tells us that when God created the world He created everything good and not evil.

Genesis 1:31 Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good... (NKJV)

(In chapter fourteen we will look at alternative views to creation.)

God remains good but man sins

So where did sin come in? God created Adam and Eve as good people with natures which instinctively wanted to do the right thing. He could have made them so they would always obey Him without thinking, yet He made them in His own image (Genesis 1:26) with the ability to make their own decisions. When God made them this way, He created the possibility of sin entering His universe, but He did not create sin itself. He gave them the choice to do right and wrong.

Ecclesiastes 7:29 Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright, But they have sought out many schemes.
(NKJV)

It is impossible for God to sin because everything He does is right.

Psalms 119:137 You are righteous, LORD, and your laws are right. (NIV)

Why man sins

Although God gave Adam and Eve good natures, He could not give them good characters because this was something they had to earn themselves. They had freedom to do wrong, so God needed to see whether they would actually exercise this choice. He therefore gave them a simple test to see if they would obey Him:

Genesis 2:16–17 And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.” (NKJV)

Adam and Eve would not have thought about disobeying God, so God permitted the devil to put it into their minds that they should do so. Satan suggested to Eve that God was not being truthful to them and that it would be in their best interests to eat of the tree (Genesis 3:1–6). She believed his lie, ate from the tree, and encouraged Adam to do likewise. After they ate the fruit they realised they

had done wrong. They were ashamed and hid from God (Genesis 3:8). Because they gave into Satan's temptation, they demonstrated that they were not always willing to obey God. As a result they lost their innocence, and their characters became tainted with sin. They also came under the sentence of death (Genesis 3:17–19).

We are born with a sinful nature

Sometime afterwards they started having children. Their children were born in the likeness of Adam and inherited his now sinful nature (Genesis 5:3). We can see this sinful nature vividly displayed when Cain, their first child, killed his brother Abel (Genesis 4:8).

Romans 5:12...through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned (NKJV)

Everyone inherits an evil nature and has a tendency to do wrong.

Psalm 14:2–3 The LORD looks down from heaven on all mankind to see if there are any who understand, any who seek God. All have turned away, all have become corrupt; there is no one who does good, not even one. (NIV)

Our problem lies not just with the fact we have sinned sometime in our lives but rather that we are sinful in nature. A newly born baby has a sinful nature even though it has never sinned. In our natural state, we are so corrupt and sinful that we do not even seek after God. We need prompting in some way to seek Him, perhaps through the preaching of the gospel, the prayers of a friend, or adverse circumstances.

1 John 4:19 We love Him because He first loved us. (NKJV)

Hopefully we can see why man sins. But what about the devil as he must have sinned first?

The devil is real

It is estimated that in Great Britain, only 20% to 30% of people believe the devil actually exists.² Indeed, scientific study and research is made on the assumption that he does not exist. The Bible, however, speaks of the devil as a personal spiritual being and even gives him a name—Satan, which means adversary. When Jesus spoke to the Pharisees about the devil, He referred to him as the head of all that is evil.

John 8:44 You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies. (ESV)

One time we see the devil standing next to Joshua to resist him (Zechariah 3:1–2). In this passage, God spoke directly to the devil, so we know he is alive and has a name. He is also called the dragon, serpent, devil, and the accuser (Revelation 12:7–10), and he has other names as well.

A spiritual world exists

We cannot see Satan, but the Bible tells us that in the beginning God created the Heaven and the Earth (Genesis 1:1). There are two parts to this creation; one visible and one invisible and Satan exists in the invisible part.

Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. (NKJV)

Obviously we cannot see the invisible world; however, we know that many different spiritual beings exist in it. These include cherubim (Genesis 3:24), seraphim (Isaiah 6:2), demons (Matthew 12:25–30), and angels (Hebrews 1:6). Each of these spiritual beings has a unique

personal identity, and we can see them sometimes speaking with men (see for example Genesis 16:7–12; Judges 13; Zechariah 1:9).

When God said He created everything good (Genesis 1:31), this also applies to the spiritual world. So we can assume every spiritual being was created good and at that time there were no such things as evil angels or demons.

God created the devil good

The devil, therefore, like every other created being, had originally a good nature, so something must have happened to cause him to become evil. We can gain some understanding of how this happened by looking at a word given to Ezekiel against the King of Tyre (Ezekiel 28). In this chapter, what Ezekiel said cannot apply solely to the King of Tyre because the descriptions he uses are so elevated. For example, he describes the king as being wiser than Daniel (verse 3) and says he was in the Garden of Eden (verse 13). These descriptions must apply to Satan. We say therefore that although the King of Tyre is the subject of the prophecy, the full force of the passage applies to Satan.

If we read the prophecy this way, we see that Satan is called ‘the anointed cherub who covers’ (verse 14) which indicates he held a very important position in God’s creation. He is described as being created perfect, but at some point he sinned (verse 15).

The devil sinned and became evil

We are told that the reason why he sinned was because of pride (1 Timothy 3:6).

Ezekiel 28:2 ‘Son of man, say to the prince of Tyre, Thus says the Lord GOD: “Because your heart is proud, and you have said, ‘I am a god, I sit in the seat of the gods, in the heart of the seas,’ yet you are but a man, and no god, though you make your heart like the heart of a god... (ESV)

The reason why Satan fell into sin is because he was so exalted that he looked upon himself and thought of himself as God. Instead, he should have kept his eyes on God and given Him the glory.

One thing worth considering is why Satan has become so utterly depraved. Even if he realised he could never have his relationship with God restored, why did he not recognise his error and resolve to sin no further? The reason for this must have something to do with him sinning so close to an infinitely holy God. A small sin in God's presence is equivalent to a huge sin far off. When Satan sinned his nature permanently changed (see for consideration Revelation 22:11).

Satan continues to this day to exalt himself as God, yet there is coming a time when he will be judged. His ultimate destination is the Lake of Fire where he will be tormented for eternity (Revelation 20:10).

Evil angels

Satan does not fight alone, but he has an army of followers serving him (Ephesians 6:11–12). In some way he must have enticed them to sin as well. Perhaps he promised to make them great by giving them some of the power and authority he had received from God. We know he tempted Jesus this way (Luke 4:5–8). Perhaps also he intimidated or threatened some of them.

God is not responsible for sin

In conclusion, we see that God is not responsible for either man sinning or the devil sinning. We are responsible for our own sin.

Why God permits sin to continue

When someone sins God could correct it immediately so it does not spread or get worse. However, if He did this, no one could live. God

is so holy that anyone who commits a sin, no matter how small, would have to die for their mistake (Genesis 2:16–17).

Instead, God shows mercy to us and allow sin to continue for a time, before dealing with it fully on the Day of Judgment (2 Corinthians 5:10). This gives us time to reflect on the sins we have done and to seek forgiveness.

One consequence of this is that we will not see God immediately intervening when people do wicked things we would never do ourselves. Jesus did not stone a woman caught in adultery, despite being urged to by the scribes and Pharisees, and despite this being taught in the Old Testament (John 8:2–11). He pointed out that no one is sinless before God.

God intervenes now

Although God waits until the Day of Judgment before fully dealing with sin, He still intervenes now in a subtle way. He has given us a conscience (1 Timothy 4:2) which urges us to do right. He has given us much teaching on righteousness through the scriptures, and He places blessings on those who do good and curses on those who do evil (Deuteronomy 28).

What makes a person commit such awful sins?

Some sins are worse than others. Although in God's sight any sin is wicked, He still views some sins as being more wicked than others (1 Samuel 2:17; John 19:11). It can grieve us deeply when people act in a depraved way, and it can also leave us perplexed as to why they would even consider doing such terrible things.

As we have seen, we are all born with a sinful nature. This means as we grow up we will be vulnerable to temptations to sin. If, as a child, we are not corrected when we do wrong, there is a danger that we will become emboldened to commit further and worse wrongs.

Proverbs 22:6 Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it. (NKJV)

(See also Proverbs 13:24; 29:17.)

This process can continue in adulthood. There is a tendency in man to commit a worse sin if he felt that his earlier sin remained unpunished.

Ecclesiastes 8:11 Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. (NKJV)

Man intervenes now

Because of this, mankind, (with God's help), has had to develop a judicial system to keep sin under control (Romans 13:1–5). We need a fear of the consequences in order to discourage us from doing something wrong. If a nation's rulers are not righteous, they will not be so concerned with sin and may even encourage their people to do wrong (Proverbs 28:2). Where the rule of law breaks down completely, anarchy exists, and truly awful things can happen. Sometimes, if the wickedness of a nation reaches a certain level, God will intervene Himself (see for example Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis chapters 18–19 and Jude 7).

Good and bad leaders

In the 1930s, Adolf Hitler took advantage of the weakened political climate in Germany and took control of the country. Using the powers of government, in a short space of time, he succeeded in influencing the opinions and morality of the population as a whole so as to permit the mass murder of many Jews and other minority people. Conversely, in Britain the leaders at that time were God-fearing and a number of National Days of Prayer were organised with the country as a whole taking part in them. Two Days of Prayer particularly stand out. On Sunday 26 May 1940, prayer was made for the British troops who were stranded in Dunkirk. Miraculously, almost the whole army were able to evacuate. On Sunday 8 September 1940, prayer was made for the RAF who were almost at the point of

defeat. Several days later, the German airforce (the Luftwaffe) inexplicably stopped their attacks when victory was almost assured.³

We have a responsibility to continually pray for our leaders (1 Timothy 2:1–2) because no country is immune to the threat of dictatorship.

Encouraging the devil

Another reason why people commit such awful sins is because they participate in the occult. People who actively invite Satan into their lives (almost always unknowingly) through an occult activity will open themselves to demonic affliction and an increased temptation to sin. They may come to the point where they cannot stop themselves from sinning (2 Timothy 2:26). Jesus delivered a man from this type of oppression, but He also warned him that if he allowed the demon to return, more wicked ones may follow (Luke 11:17–26).

Our understanding of sin is imperfect

Because we are born with a sinful nature, our understanding of sin is not what it should be. We do not automatically know what is right and wrong (Deuteronomy 1:39), so we have to learn it, and we are not always taught correctly. Our natural reaction is to excuse sin as human nature because everyone does it. Our own opinion on what is right and wrong depends on how we are brought up, the opinions of our friends and peers, the laws of the countries we live in, and what we see and hear. As we mature our opinions will change.

People tend to think of sin as being something very bad, but if we look to the Bible we realise that God's standard of righteousness is much higher than most people appreciate (Matthew 5–7). We hear about people committing acts of terrible evil, and this saddens us, and we wonder why they do it. Yet we are only looking at things from our understanding of righteousness. God's standard of righteousness is perfect, far higher than ours. If these evil acts grieve

us, they are bound to grieve God much more. Additionally, our own actions, which we think to be morally acceptable, may turn out to be sinful in God's sight.

It is sobering to consider why there is so much sin in the world. After reflection, we have to conclude that we, ourselves, are a part of the problem.

Good exists in our world

While looking at the question of why there is so much evil, we should consider whether we are only noticing the evil and overlooking the good. Evil is discouraging, but there is still a lot of good in the world to encourage us. There are people, for instance, who dedicate their lives to serve others without seeking recognition or reward. Some see their loved ones killed, yet they choose to forgive their enemies (Matthew 5:43–45), and some die while saving others (John 15:13). Their actions are so uplifting and are worth meditating on rather than the evil we constantly see.

On 22 January 1999, the Australian missionary Graham Staines, and his two sons Philip and Timothy were burnt alive at Manoharpur village, Orissa, India, by a crowd of about sixty Hindu extremists, while they were sleeping in their vehicle. He had been working in Orissa among the tribal poor and especially with leprosy patients since 1965. His widow, Gladys Staines, has repeatedly stated she forgives the killers. “I have forgiven the killers and have no bitterness because forgiveness brings healing and our land needs healing from hatred and violence.”⁴

Philippians 4:8 Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. (NKJV)

Questions to consider

1. In a typical day, are we receiving a realistic account of what is actually happening in the world? If not, should this concern us, and are there ways we can correct this?
 2. If a brother and a sister both sin, but the brother commits a worse sin than his sister, are the consequences for them different, and if so, why?
 3. Do we ever pray that God would deal with someone because of the harm they are causing others? If we pray this way, would God hear us?
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References:

1 The distinction between moral evil and physical evil is made by a number of theologians. See for example, *Mounce's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Zondervan 2006, p222; *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, Thomas Nelson 1985, p211 (New Testament section); *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, Moody 1988, p382.

2 British Religion in Numbers, <http://www.brin.ac.uk/figures/#ChangingBelief>—7.10 Belief in the Devil, 1957–2006.

3 See for further information the account given in the following book: Norman Grubb, *Rees Howells Intercessor*, Lutterworth Press 1956, pp 239–254.

4 See the following articles from Wikipedia and The Hindu:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graham_Staines;
<http://www.hindu.com/2003/09/23/stories/2003092305471200.htm>

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