

DEFINING EVIL: NATURALISM

- 1. Only the observable natural world exists.
- 2. No standard for delineating good and evil exists.
- 3. There is no objective evil. This contradicts the universal inherent human sense of right and wrong.

THE CHRISTIAN VIEW OF EVIL

- 1. Real love requires real choice. God really loves us but our real choices have real consequences.
- 2. There is purpose to our pain. God uses suffering to achieve his good purpose.
- 3. There will be a time when evil and suffering no longer exist.

THE NATURE OF LOVE

- 1. God is love.
- 2. You cannot have love without the choice to reject love. God has given us that choice (Gen 2:8-9).
- 3. The choice not to love God is sin.
- 4. Evil and suffering are the result of sin.

GOD DID NOT CREATE EVIL;
HE CREATED A SYSTEM IN WHICH EVIL IS A POSSIBILITY.

PURPOSE TO OUR PAIN

1. Pain protects us from ourselves when we won't listen to Him.

My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline, and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in.

Prov 3:11-12



PURPOSE TO OUR PAIN

1. Pain protects us from ourselves when we won't listen to Him.
2. Pain can draw us closer to God.

I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

Phil 3:10

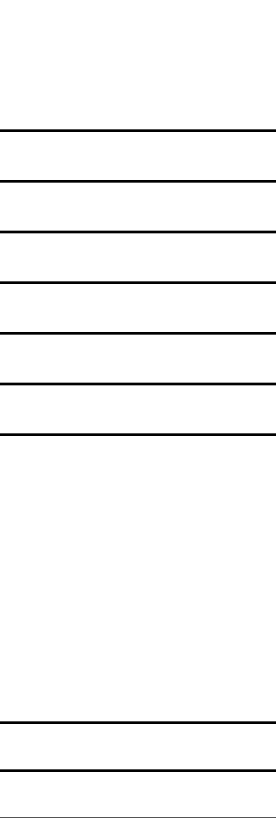


PURPOSE TO OUR PAIN

1. Pain protects us from ourselves when we won't listen to Him.
2. Pain can draw us closer to God.
3. Pain can deepen our character.

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

James 1:2-4





PURPOSE TO OUR PAIN

1. Pain protects us from ourselves when we won't listen to Him.
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3. Pain can deepen our character.
4. Pain can be a part of a story that ultimately glorifies God.

"... this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."

John 9:3



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PAIN, WHILE PREVALENT, IS ONLY TEMPORARY (2 COR 4:17-18).



GOD WINS

1. God will conquer evil.

The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign for ever and ever."

Rev 11:15

GOD WINS

1. God will conquer evil.
2. God will conquer evil in his time, not ours.

But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.

2 Pet 3:8-9

GOD WINS

1. God will conquer evil.
2. God will conquer evil in his time, not ours.
3. Creation will be restored.

"Look! God's dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

Rev 21:3-4

HE IS WITH US

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death – that is, the devil – and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like them, fully human in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people. Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted.

Heb 2:14-18

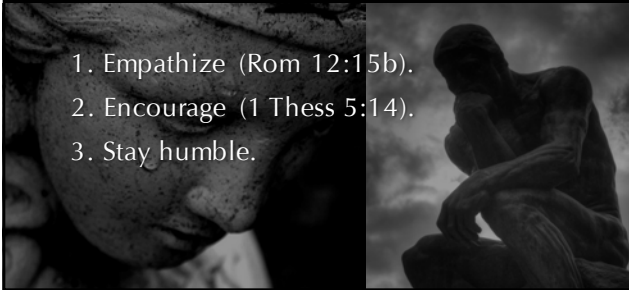
HE IS WITH US

Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Heb 4:14-16

A PROPER RESPONSE

1. Empathize (Rom 12:15b).
2. Encourage (1 Thess 5:14).
3. Stay humble.



ANSWERING THE TOUGH ONES WHY DOES EVIL EXIST?



Intellectual Challenge:

If God is all-powerful and is perfectly good, why does evil exist?

Evidential Challenge:

If God is all-powerful and is perfectly good, why does so much evil exist?

Response

The Problem of Defining Evil

Most people asking these questions are doing so from one of two worldviews.

1. A belief in some variation of dualism. Dualism states that good and evil are independent entities at odds with each other. This naturally leads to the conclusion that an entity independent of God is at war with him and that the outcome is uncertain because God is not all-powerful.
2. Naturalism. The naturalist is attempting to show that the idea of God is self-contradictory. He makes the mistake of concluding that if God is all-powerful and also perfectly good then evil *cannot* or *should not* exist, at least to the extent that it does.

Both of these worldviews misunderstand the assertion Christianity is making, and the nature of good and evil. That is why it is so important to define terms.

The definition of “evil” requires an understanding of a standard of good that is above it and precedes it. Without this standard, “evil” would have no meaning. We therefore reject dualism because evil cannot independently exist apart from good . . . it is dependent on good to have any meaning at all. C. S. Lewis is helpful here:

“If evil has the same kind of reality as good, the same autonomy and completeness, our allegiance to good becomes the arbitrarily chosen loyalty of a partisan. A sound theory of value demands something different. It demands that good should be original and evil a mere perversion; that good should be the tree and evil the ivy; that good should be able to see all round evil (as when sane men understand lunacy) while evil cannot retaliate in kind; that good should be able to exist on its own while evil requires the good on which it is parasitic in order to continue its parasitic existence.”

C. S. Lewis, “Evil and God” in *God in the Dock*

The acknowledgement that evil does exist is actually an apologetic for the existence of an absolute standard of good . . . a standard that Christianity asserts is personal.

The Source of Evil

A core tenet of Christianity is that God is personal (triune) and creative (we exist). Where relationship exists, choice exists. Where choice exists, the possibility of rebellion exists. God did not create evil; however, as a relational being he did create a system in which evil is a possibility. Again, Lewis is helpful:

“Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata – of creatures that work like machines – would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for his higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they must be free.”

C. S. Lewis, “The Shocking Alternative” in *Mere Christianity*

Man is created as a relational being with the free choice to rebel, the freedom to take the possibility of evil and make it a reality. This assertion is also a core tenet of Christianity. This is what primarily gets missed when discussing this issue. Most people talk of evil as if it is a distant problem that is oppressing them and the world in general, whereas Christianity asserts that man *is* the problem. The very one who speaks against evil (and rightly so) *is* the culprit. For someone to wish away evil is to wish away his own existence. This is what most people fail to see.

The Amount of Evil

The existential problem of evil accepts that the above arguments make evil logically possible, but the amount of evil in the world makes it logically improbable. The problem with this argument quickly becomes clear though by simply asking the question, "How do you measure the amount of evil?" The argument falters because there is no means to measure the amount of evil in the world, nor to compare the amount of evil to what it "should" be if there was an all powerful, good God.

This argument suffers even more because of the picture that Christianity paints of this God who allows evil and suffering. God is fixing our mess. This is a core tenet of Christianity. He is making men new; he will make everything new (Rev 21:3-6). He will ultimately remove all evil, so what basis does a person have to argue that the amount of evil in the present time is too great?

The Emotional Challenge:

If God is all-powerful and is perfectly good, why did this evil happen to me?

Response

Understanding

This objection is the aspect of the problem of evil that will most often drive people away from God. In the midst of pain people often lash out at anyone they perceive as responsible for their hurt, so God is regularly in the firing line. Be quick to listen. Give them an open ear. Give them an opportunity to process the situation that is has caused or is causing them so much pain. Be a tangible expression of the love and patience of God by listening to their complaints.

Encouragement

Be a source of encouragement to the person that hope in God will be rewarded (1 Thess 5:14-15). Pray with and for the person, that the Spirit would work in their heart to use the pain to drive them to a true understanding of God's love for them. Meet any physical needs possible to remind the person that God is directing you to demonstrate His love towards them. Remind them that the One they are appealing to has experienced suffering Himself, so He knows how to care for us in our suffering (Heb 2:17-18).

Humility

Remember Job's friends. Do not be quick to try to explain why the specific circumstances are happening. There is a time to question potential patterns of sin that have led the person to their present circumstances, but do not be presumptuous. Do not focus on solving problems; focus on helping them turn to the One who can bring healing to their problems.