The Existence of Evil

The Problem of Evil

It is a common misconception that because evil exists then God does not, that the two are incompatible. People often ask, **"How can there be a loving God with so much suffering in the world?"** In fact, the Greek philosopher Epicurus posed this dilemma. In essence, he claimed that either God desired to rid the world of evil and couldn't, or He could rid the world of evil but didn't want to. In the first place, God would be powerless; in the second place, He would be apathetic and, therefore, guilty of being evil Himself. While this argument is clever on the surface, it falls apart in light of truth.

First, the question must be asked, what is evil? People may answer that question in various ways, probably by providing examples of what they think is evil. But, in reality, what makes evil really evil? Who gets to decide what is evil and what is not?

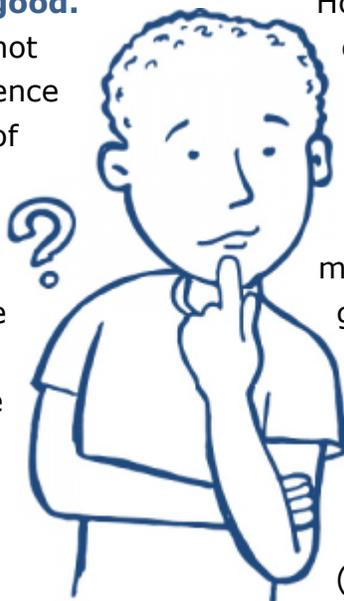**The only way to determine what is evil is first to determine what is good.** Like darkness and cold, evil cannot exist alone. Darkness is the absence of light and cold is the absence of heat; evil is simply the absence of good. **Good must exist for evil to exist.** Therefore, evil is not a good argument against the existence of God. It is actually a good argument for the existence of God.

The Origin of Evil

Many people blame God for the existence of evil. They say that God created everything that exists, and, since evil exists, God must have created it. But this is a mistake. God is neither evil nor did He create evil. So then, where did evil originate if not from God? We must go back to creation to find the answer (*Genesis 1-3*).

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, He observed all that He had made and remarked that it was good, very good. Evil was not present at creation. It was not an invention of God. Rather evil was a result of a choice by one of his angels. God created angels with free will, which goes against our stereotype of them. We often think of angels like robots, who worship God night and day as slaves, but that is an unbiblical assumption. Angels were created free to choose; they decide their own loyalties. They choose to worship God.

However, Lucifer, the most beautiful of the angels, chose not to worship God; rather he chose to worship himself (*Isaiah 14; Ezekiel 28*). In that decision, which was his to make, he hatched evil. Since all was good at that time, evil, then, can be defined simply as "rebellion to God."

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In that decision to reject God and worship himself, Lucifer became Satan (which means "adversary") and was cast to earth, where he quickly corrupted men. Once Adam and Eve made the choice to rebel against God, evil infected their descendants and all the earth.

God's Relationship with Evil

God gave His creatures the freedom of choice, knowing full well that they would choose to reject Him. Should He have created angels and men with the capacity only to choose good? That is no choice at all, neither is that an act of love. **To allow His creatures the free will to worship and obey Him is a great act of love**. God's creatures, then, unleashed evil; it was not God Himself.

Did God foresee that evil would result from the rebellion of His creatures? Of course. Did God enact a plan to redeem all that evil had undone? Yes. So then, how does evil fit into God's world, and how can we reconcile the two in our minds?

Though evil appears to be rampant and unwieldy, God is still sovereign and nothing can happen outside of His control. **He is neither surprised by evil nor powerless to do anything about it**. All events, even evil, must have God's permission to occur; and, since we know that God is holy, meaning entirely good, all that He does is good. Therefore, evil is allowed for His good purposes.

These truths do not somehow flavor evil on earth and make them more palatable to us. Evil is real and awful; however, it could be much worse than it is, if it were not for God's grace. We need not fear, because **God is not intimidated by the presence of evil, but is, in fact, the sovereign King over it**.

Thus, how can we answer Epicurus? Is God powerless to rid the world of evil? Of course not. However, **if He chose to eliminate those who rebel against Him, then there would be no one left**. Even you have chosen to rebel against God; if He chose to eliminate evil today, He would have to eliminate you as well.

Does God desire to rid the world of evil? Yes, but only in His way and in His time. God will one day eliminate Satan, his demonic companions, and all evil forever (*Revelation 21:4*); but, for now, He has allowed us the freedom of choice, either to follow Him or reject Him who has overcome the world (*John 16:33*).

We should consider God's "slowness" to judge evil not as apathy but as patience, for He is waiting for people to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ (*2 Peter 3:8, 9*). His patience with evil is so that as many as possible will be saved by His grace.