

Biblical Self-Defense
Part 1a: How Can God Allow Evil?

Question: Is God *ever* responsible for what mankind deems “bad” things?

1. God brings calamities:

- A. Genesis 6:17
- B. Numbers 16:31-33
- C. Job 42:10-12
- D. Amos 3:6; 4:6-10
- E. Jonah 1:4, 15
- F. Luke 13:1-5

2. God brings sickness, disease, and death:

- A. Exodus 4:10-11
- B. Deuteronomy 28:58-61 (see also 28:22, 27-29)
- C. 2 Kings 15:1-5
- D. 2 Chronicles 21:14-15
- E. Isaiah 3:17
- F. Acts 5:1-11
- G. 1 Corinthians 11:26-32

3. God brings evil:

- A. Judges 9:23
- B. 1 Samuel 16:14-15; 18:10-11
- C. 1 Kings 22:19-23
- D. 2 Kings 19:7
- E. Proverbs 16:4
- F. Isaiah 45:7

4. Principles:

- A. God is sovereign (Ps 115:3; 135:6-7; Rom 8:28).
- B. God is unpredictable (Deut 29:29; Isa 55:8-9).
- C. God is purposeful (Job 37:13).
- D. God uses the calamities of nature to reveal His attributes (see above).
- E. God gives and takes away (Job 1:20; Matt 5:45b; Jas 1:17).
- F. God does not delight in the suffering of humanity (Ezek 18:23, 32; 33:11).
- G. God delights in executing His judgments (Deut 28:63).
- H. God is the Creator; we are the creatures (Rom 9:19-21).

5. Applications:

- A. You can trust a God who controls the future.
- B. You can rest secure even when you don't understand God's purposes.
- C. You need not fear tragedies.
- D. You will not die before your time.

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Part 1b: How Can God Allow Evil?

1. What is evil?

- A. Since God created all things, it would seem logical that God created evil. However, evil is not a created “thing” (e.g., coldness, a shadow, a donut hole).
- B. Evil is the absence or corruption of something good that already exists (e.g., rot, rust, carcasses).
- C. Evil can be grouped in two primary categories: moral evil (e.g., war, crime, suicide, slavery) and natural evil (e.g., hurricanes, floods, earthquakes).
- D. Ultimately, it is impossible to distinguish evil from good *unless* one has an infinite reference point that is absolutely good. Therefore, if God does not exist, there can be no moral absolutes by which one has the right to judge something (or someone) as being evil.

2. What is the origin of evil?

- A. The original creation was “very good” (Gen 1:31). There was no sin, evil, pain, or death.
- B. Adam and Eve used their God-given freewill to choose to disobey God (Gen 3:1-24).
- C. God made evil possible; creatures make it actual. Although God is sovereign and all-powerful, He is NOT responsible for sin (Hab 1:13; Jas 1:13-15). It has been said, “God is the author of the author of sin.” But God cannot be the author of sin itself, for sin is the result of rebellion against God and God can’t rebel against Himself.
- D. The fall of man brought about the consequences of original sin and total depravity. Original sin (“I’m guilty”) means that a sin nature has been passed on to every person (Ps 51:5; Rom 5:12). Total depravity (“I’m corrupt”) means that mankind is unable to please God (Rom 3:10-18).
- E. Moral evil is attributed to the fall. In Mark 7:20-23, Jesus exposes the wickedness of the human heart (cf. Jer 17:9). In Romans 1, Paul provides an equation that explains our descent into sin: Knowledge + Rejection + Idolatry + Immorality (1:21-23) = God giving mankind over to impurity (1:24), degrading passions (1:26), and a depraved mind (1:28). C.S. Lewis contends at least 80% of mankind’s suffering can be attributed to bad choices made by cruel and lawless people. Most believe this is a very conservative estimate.
- F. Natural evil is also attributed to the fall (Rom 8:20-22). Yet, one day God will put an end to evil once and for all (Rev 21:4).

3. How can you interact with someone over the problem of evil?

- A. “Would you like to see laws prohibiting a person from choosing to have an abortion, premarital sex, or a homosexual lifestyle?”
- B. “So, it’s a good thing that you have freedom to make moral choices, is that right?”
- C. “Can raw power make it possible to have genuine moral freedom, but no possibility of doing evil?”

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Part 1c: How Can God Allow Evil?

1. What is the ultimate dilemma of evil?

- A. Both God and evil are realities that truly exist.
- B. If God were all-powerful, He *could* destroy evil.
- C. If God were all-good, He *would* destroy evil.
- D. Evil has not been destroyed.
- E. Therefore, there is not an all-powerful, all-good God.

2. What world view options exist?

- A. Atheism denies that God exists (1A). Evil is merely the product of evolution. It flows from ignorant people.
- B. Modern naturalism and ancient polytheism deny that God is all-powerful (1B). Modern naturalism (e.g., process theology) reduces God to a being of time and growth and imperfection and weakness. Ancient polytheism limited God's power by splitting God up into many little gods—some good and some evil.
- C. Pantheism denies that God is good and not evil (1C).
- D. Idealism is the denial of real evil (e.g., Hinduism, Christian Science, and New Age theology).
- E. Biblical Theism (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) affirms propositions 1A-1D and denies they are logically contradictory.

3. Is the Christian view the best explanation of evil?

- A. If God does not exist, life is void of purpose (Ecclesiastes 1).
- B. If God is not good, there is no point in defending Him.
- C. If God is not all-powerful, He is not in control and there is no hope.
- D. If evil is an illusion, so are the rest of man's senses and thoughts.

4. What does the Bible teach?

- A. God exists (Genesis 1:1; Psalm 14:1).
- B. Evil exists (Judg 2:1-11; Ps 51:2-5; Micah 3:1-3; Matt 23:13-36; Gal 5:19-26).
- C. God is all-powerful (Ps 147:4; Matt 10:29-30; John 19:11; Eph 1:11). Fifty-six times the Bible declares that God is "almighty" (*pantokrator*, e.g., Rev 19:6).
- D. God is all-good (James 1:17; 1 Peter 1:16).
- E. God controls the effects of evil (Gen 50:20; Rom 8:28).
- F. God has already solved the problem of evil (e.g., Rev 20:11-15; 21:4; 22:3-8).

5. What is God's Ultimate Purpose in Allowing Evil?

- A. God uses evil and suffering to draw people to Christ (Luke 13:1-5). Tragedy and trials are two means that God uses to persuade people of their desperate need of Christ.
- B. God uses evil and suffering to mature believers (Rom 5:3-4; James 1:2-4).
- C. God uses evil and suffering to unite believers (Rom 12:15; 1 Cor 12:26-27; 2 Cor 1:3-4; Gal 6:2). Suffering helps us to see our need of other believers and to meet the needs of others as we allow Christ to live through us.
- D. God uses evil and suffering for good (Rom 8:28). Paul writes that He "works all things after the counsel of His will" (Eph 1:11; cf. Gen 18:25).
- E. God uses evil and suffering so that good can be more readily appreciated (e.g., mercy, bearing up under suffering, dealing with injustice, acts of heroism, forgiveness, long-suffering, etc.).

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Part 1c: How Can God Allow Evil?

How Can You Help?

Right now you may be overwhelmed by pain. The thought of trying to help someone else may seem impossible. At some point along the way, though, as you receive God's comfort, you will be ready to give comfort (2 Corinthians 1). In fact, reaching out to help others may be an important part of the process of your own emotional healing.

Or maybe you have read this with the hope that you will be better able to help a hurting friend or loved one. The suggestions in this section are designed for you as well.

Helping others is risky. Our help may not always be welcomed. We may sometimes say the wrong things. But try to help we must. Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37) reminds us that we are responsible to help the hurting people we encounter. Here are some suggestions:

- Don't wait for someone else to act first.
- Be physically present with them if possible and touch their hand or give an appropriate hug.
- Focus on their needs and not on your own discomfort with not having adequate answers.
- Allow them to express their feelings. Don't condemn their emotions.
- Learn about their problem.
- Don't pretend that you never struggle.
- Keep your words brief.
- Avoid saying, "You shouldn't feel that way," or, "You know what you should do."
- Assure them of your prayers.
- Pray! Ask God to help you and them.
- Keep in touch.
- Help them dispel false guilt by assuring them that suffering and sin are not inseparable twins.
- Help them find forgiveness in Christ if they are suffering due to sin or if they become aware of some sin as they reflect on their lives.
- Encourage them to recall God's faithfulness in times past.
- Focus on Christ's example and help.
- Remind them that God loves us and cares for us and that He is in control.
- Encourage them to take one day at a time.
- Encourage them to reach out for the help they need (friends, family, pastor).
- Help them to realize that coping with troubles takes time.
- Remind them of God's shepherding love (Psalm 23).
- Remind them of God's control over the universe, both the big and small events of life.
- Don't ignore their problem.
- Don't be artificial in trying to "cheer them up." Be genuine. Be the friend you were to them before trouble hit.
- Show them the love you would like other people to show you if you were in their situation.
- Be a good listener.
- Acknowledge how much they hurt.
- Give them time to heal. Don't rush the process.

Note: This worksheet is courtesy of Martin R. De Haan II, *Why Would a Good God Allow Suffering?* (Grand Rapids, Radio Bible Class, 1990), 30-31. For more information: <http://www.gospelcom.net/rbc/ds/>

Biblical Self-Defense

Part 1d: How Can God Allow Evil?

1. Effective Responses

- A. Question: “How could a good God allow such a thing?” Answer: “I wish I knew.”

- B. After the Okalahoma City bombing, Billy Graham comforted people with the assurance of God’s knowledge, power, and care. When he was asked the ultimate “why” question, he replied, “I don’t know.” But then he added, “Times like this will do one of two things: they will either make us hard and bitter and angry at God or they will make us tender and open and help us reach out in trust and faith...I pray that you will not let bitterness and poison creep into your souls, but you will turn in faith and trust in God even if we cannot understand. It is better to face something like this with God than without Him.”

2. Follow-up:

- A. “Can you tell me what you’re feeling right now?”

- B. “There are some things *I do* know about God and life that help me at times like these. Would you be interested in hearing them?”

- C. “What have you found to be helpful in handling such difficult things?”

- D. “What has brought you hope during this trial?”

- E. “Do you have the kind of faith that has helped you deal with this?”

- F. “Some people have been comforted by praying during these times. Have you?”

- G. “I’ve been praying for you. Would you mind if I prayed for you right now?”

These ideas are from Randy Newman, *Questioning Evangelism* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2004), 112-13.

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