

# How Could a Good God Permit Evil?

by

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In a previous article, *Sovereignty and Suffering*, I dealt with the problem of evil from a pastoral perspective. The intent was to give comfort and counsel to suffering people. I steered away from intellectual analysis and focused on God's character as worthy of trust, despite circumstances. This left me with an incomplete feeling, since some need philosophical answers.

This article is designed to give Christians the ammunition to answer this objection when it comes from those who challenge the existence or goodness of God on this basis.

Rather than attempt to answer the question, the strategy is to show the objector why the question is devoid of meaning. The objector expects the Christian to attempt an answer he can then attack as absurd. The Christian puts the burden back on the objector by requiring him to show why the question makes sense. It is not the Christian has no answer. It is rather that the question is not a question.

## **The question assumes good cannot come out of evil events**

If this is not the underlying assumption, then the question is meaningless and must be withdrawn. Human experience shows that good often comes from evil. Or, sometimes suffering and pain are necessary to prevent a greater evil, such as a war to defeat a dictator who wants to enslave the world. Such a war, therefore, cannot be defined as an evil, despite the horrors associated with it.

Likewise, Christians have always taught and often exemplified the truth that suffering is a means toward increased virtue, such as patience, endurance and sympathy toward others. Scripture seems to give the greater weight to this particular answer.

The cross is the supreme example of it. Short answer: “Now all you have to do, sir, is show that good cannot come from evil.” The question commits the fallacy of circular reasoning. The question commits a logic fallacy with regard to the use of the term *good*. Normally this term in our society is derived from Judeo-Christian ethic. God's character, in other words, is the basis of the definition of the term *good*. It is illogical therefore to use the concept of good, of which God is the source, to refute the goodness of God. This is the fallacy of circular reasoning.

Short answer: “Sir, why are you using the concept of good to show that the source of the concept of good is not good?”

### **Relativists are excluded from any right to ask the question**

If a person says that truth and morality are relative to the individual, then how can he use the concept of good to show that God is absolutely wrong in permitting evil? In the case of the World Trade Center atrocity, the only thing a consistent relativist can say dispassionately is that relative to the terrorists, it was a good thing. Relative to us, it is a bad thing.

Short answer: “Sir, do you believe that truth and morality, good and evil, are relative to the individual?” “Then why are you asking the question?”

### **The question asks God to commit the greatest atrocity of all against humanity**

It implies that God should do something to others that we do not want him to do to ourselves. Most of the evil in today's world is caused by things people do to each other...man's inhumanity to man. We need to ask, “In practical terms, exactly what do we want God to do?” One possible answer to ask God to remove from others the ability to choose to do evil to their fellow man. He could, for example, perform a brain operation and remove their ability to choose between good and evil. This, of course, would dehumanize them completely. If we want God to dehumanize others, then why not ask him to do it first to ourselves? Which is the greater evil: the inhumanity of man to man? Or, the dehumanization of man altogether? Is it possible that the question is really asking God to commit the ultimate atrocity? Short answer: “Sir, are you asking for God to remove from mankind the ability to choose between right and wrong? If you are, then why not ask Him to start with you?”

### **It implies a moral contract between God and disobedient mankind**

Why is God obliged to protect anybody from anything? When and how did God acquire this moral obligation? Short Answer: “Sir, why is God obligated to protect the disobedient?” The questions ought to be put the other way around. The right question is, “Why isn't there more suffering in the world than there is?” If God is as holy as Scripture says He is and man as perverse as described in Romans 3, then it would seem that more there should be more suffering than there is.

Short Answer: “Answer sir, this question first. If God is holy and man is unholy, why isn't there more suffering in the world than there is?”

### **It assumes that mankind wants something from God other than His absence**

Mankind has shown consistently that he wants to be independent from God. Human nature wants nothing more than for God to leave it alone. People usually prefer for God to leave them alone except when they get into trouble. We cannot depose a king and ask for his protection at the same time. We cannot reject the Lord and then blame him for His absence.

Short Answer: “Sir, do you want God's intervention with or without submitting to His authority?”

### **It assumes an unrealistic dualism between good and evil**

Evil does not exist in the same sense as good does. Evil is a sort of parasite of the good. Example: A human body is a good thing in and of itself. But it can become sick. The sickness is a bad thing, but cannot exist apart from the body. The sickness therefore a kind of parasite taking something away that existed before...health. Evil is something that detracts from good and cannot exist on its own. By asserting that sickness exists, we are asserting that such a thing as health exists.

Darkness is merely the absence of light and cold is the absence of heat. Darkness and cold have no existence apart from these.

Therefore, to suggest that God is not good to permit evil is to say that good has no existence if evil is present. This is a contradiction.

The presence of evil, ironically, is proof of ultimate good. Short Answer: “Sir, if you say that evil has a real existence, then you must also say that good has a real existence also, since evil is merely the absence of good. Why then are you asking the question?”

### **Conclusion**

The issue is not whether a Christian has an answer to the question of suffering. The issue is whether the questioner has a legitimate question to ask. The question posed by the skeptic is self-contradictory as well as rife with dubious hidden assumptions. It is not so much that the Christian has no answer. It is rather that the question is not a question.

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