

# UNDERSTANDING GOD'S PURPOSES FOR EVIL

## WHAT IS EVIL?

This is one of the fundamental questions we must face before addressing the 'problem' of evil. How does one determine if something evil? On what basis do we make moral judgments?

### 1. Secular Answers to Defining Good and Evil:

- a) Good is whatever benefits a society. Evil is whatever harms a society.
- b) Good and evil is a function of brain chemistry and evolves as humans evolve.
- c) Good is whatever makes a person happy. Evil is whatever fails to make a person happy.
- d) Good is what promotes psychological stability. Evil is what harms psychological stability.
- e) Good and evil are *generally* subjective evaluations people or societies makes.
- f) Good and evil are illusions. The world is meaningless and absurd.

### 2. Secular Answers to Determining what is Good and Evil:

- a) Good and evil is determined by societal norms or a particular era (e.g., Victorian Era).
- b) Good and evil is determined by genetics and human evolution.
- c) Good and evil is determined by each person's subjective opinions.
- d) Good and evil cannot be determined by any standard because the subjective nature of good and evil renders such evaluations meaningless. Thus, good and evil are illusions.

### 3. Biblical Answer to Defining and Determining Good and Evil

- Moral good represents the obligations morally responsible creatures have to objective commands and principles established and revealed to us by a holy (morally perfect) God). Moral evil represents the disregard of moral obligations by morally responsible creatures in violation of a holy God's moral standards (cf. Rom. 1:18-23, 32; 2:14-15; 3:9-20, 23). Good and evil are expressed in thoughts, words, and actions (Matt. 5:21-22; 27-28; 1 John 3:15).

### 4. Distinguishing between Moral and Natural Evil

- **Moral Evil** is that which is committed by personal moral creatures and causes pain and suffering for themselves and others.
- **Natural Evil** refers to adverse conditions in a fallen (cursed) world that causes pain and suffering. Natural evil includes the following:
  - Natural disasters (e.g., fires, storms, earthquakes, etc.)
  - Accidents and mishaps (due to adverse consequences of the laws of nature)
  - sickness and disease
  - Physical and mental handicaps
  - Physical toil

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## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM OF EVIL?

Throughout the ages, the notion that an all-powerful and all-good God allows evil to corrupt His good and pristine creation has been regarded as the greatest challenge for Christianity. The following is representative of the argument against God due to evil going as far back as Epicurus in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC and more famously by David Hume, a philosopher in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1. The Logical Problem of Evil

- (1) The God of the Bible is all-powerful (omnipotent).
- (2) The God of the Bible is all-good (omnibenevolent).
- (3) Yet, evil exists.
- (4) Therefore, the God of the Bible cannot possibly exist.

#### Hidden Assumptions in the Argument:

- (1) The all-powerful (omnipotent) God of the Bible **CAN** prevent evil.
- (2) The all-good (omnibenevolent) God of the Bible **WANTS** to prevent evil.
- (3) Yet, evil exists.

This leads to some preliminary conclusions:

- (4) Therefore, either God is not all-powerful (he **CANNOT** prevent evil)  
OR he is not all-good (he does **NOT WANT** to prevent evil).

The supposed conflict between these two conclusions lead to the same conclusion as before:

- (5) Therefore, the God of the Bible cannot possibly exist (because the Bible insists that God must be **BOTH** all-powerful and all-good).

### 2. The Problem of Extensive and Senseless Evil

Some think: Maybe God could be excused for small amounts of evil or minor evil infractions.  
BUT...

What about the Holocaust? The Nazis did not kill 60, 600 or 6,000 Jews. They killed 6,000,000.  
What about the horrific atrocities that seem to be completely senseless (gratuitous)?  
See Elie Wiesel's haunting Holocaust memoir entitled: *Night*.

### 3. The Personal Problem of Evil

For many people, evil is not a problem for their belief in God until tragedy strikes home. Even Biblical writers struggled with how God handles evil.

See Psalm 13:1-4; 44:22-25; 77:1-10; Lamentations 3:1-18