

## Why does God allow evil?

By Graham Osborne

If God is truly good and “all-powerful”, why is there evil and suffering in the world? Why do bad things happen to good people, many ask? A young child dies and their parents are heart broken. Or a terrorist detonates a bomb inside a crowded church, killing hundreds. How do we explain these things in light of Christian teaching? Some even suggest that the occurrence of evil and suffering disproves the existence of [a good and loving] God all together.

To begin, let's lay some groundwork. God *is* love [1 John 4:16,18], and it is against his nature to *do* evil. And if God is good, then *everything* he has made is good: “And God saw that it was good. . . very good” [Gen 1: 4]. But it is also important to realize that evil is *not* a created thing. It is the absence of good, and the choosing of something that is contrary to God's will. So God neither creates, nor does, evil.

But if God is all-powerful [and he is!], how is it that he allows evil and suffering? Let's take these two things separately, for while they may be related, they are not the same thing.

The answer to why there is evil is, in some ways, quite simple. God created us to know and love him. But to truly be able to love, we must be able to freely choose – to choose between good and evil. Love is simply the desiring, and doing, of good for another. If we cannot *freely* choose to do this good, we *cannot* truly love! We would simply be robots programmed to perform a particular task that would have no merit to the person performing it.

But that said, every act of love that we perform, *first* comes as a prompting of God's grace. “Apart from you [Jesus], we can do nothing” [John 15:5]. But we are still *free* to choose this good, grace or not.

And evil is the ultimate result of the abuse of this incredible gift of free will that God has given to us [and the angels]. Some choose not to do the good. But God must also allow us this option to choose evil if he truly wants us to be able to love. If God stepped in and overruled our free choice each time we chose to abuse this freedom and commit sin, big or small, we would eventually realize that we are not actually *freely* choosing at all anymore! [Catechism303-311]

But here is where God shows his great power: by always bringing about a greater good from any evil he allows. “We know that in everything, God works for good for those who love him” [Romans 8:28]. St Augustine puts this beautifully, writing:

“For almighty God. . . because he is supremely good, would never allow any evil whatsoever to exist if he were not so all-powerful and good as to cause good to emerge from evil itself.” And St Paul confirms that, “where sin increased, grace overflowed all the more” [Romans 5:20].

Similarly, the Catechism reminds us of the ultimate example of God powerfully drawing a greater good from even the greatest evil: “From the greatest moral evil ever committed - the rejection and murder of God's only Son, caused by the sins of all men - God, by his grace that ‘abounded all the more’, brought the greatest of goods: the glorification of Christ and our redemption. But for all that, evil never becomes a good.” [CCC 312].

But we often lack a heavenly perspective when assessing God’s power to bring greater good from an evil. What do I mean by this? Sometimes we don’t interpret or try to understand events in light of the truth that *Heaven is real!* We may certainly believe in Heaven, but we may find that this belief is seriously lacking when it comes down to it – when difficult challenges arrive.

For example, if a young, baptized child dies for some reason and ends up in Heaven, it still can be incredibly difficult to understand and accept. Where is God in such a situation, many will ask? It is natural to miss that child, and parents can be incredibly saddened by such a loss – that we can’t be with our child, hold him and watch him grow up [my wife and I lost a little one a few years back, and a day doesn’t go by that we don’t think about him].

*But*, if that child is in Heaven, in the presence of God for eternity, what greater good in the whole world could there be? Truly! In fact, my job as a dad is done! My little one is in Heaven and there is nothing better than that. Yes I miss him. But if I really believe in Heaven [and I do!], is there any other place that a parent would ultimately choose for their child?

Clearly, we can’t always know why God does what he does, or understand the plan and wisdom of God. We can’t see the big picture the way he does – or the final outcomes drawn out from various seemingly unrelated events. “His ways are not our ways” [Isaiah 55:8-9].

Evil and suffering will sometimes be a mystery to us [suffering will be the focus of my next column]. But if we believe and love God, we must also trust that he loves us [John 3:16]. “I know well the plans I have in mind for you... plans for your welfare and not for woe, so as to give you a future of hope” [Jeremiah 29:11]. So let this be the foundation we view evil and suffering from: Jesus I trust in You...

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