

# Defend Your Faith

## Lesson 6

### IS EVIL A PROBLEM FOR CHRISTIANS?

*“And Gideon said unto him, Oh, my Lord, if Jehovah is with us, then why then is all this befallen us?” (Judges 6:13)*

#### I. INTRODUCTION.

##### A. We Must Be Ready to Give An Answer (1 Peter 3:15).

1. The problem of evil has been called the “Achilles heel” of Christianity. Many unbelievers say that this problem cannot be answered. According to them, it is the death knell of Christianity.
2. We certainly recognize that evil, pain, and suffering exist in the world today:
  - a) Natural evil (Genesis 3:18).
  - b) National evil (Proverbs 14:34).
  - c) Physical evil (Job 1-2; 14:1).
  - d) Moral evil (Romans 1:18-32).
  - e) Mental evil (Matthew 15:18-20).
  - f) Social evil (Galatians 5:19-20; Ephesians 4:25 – 5:5; Colossians 3:5-9).
  - g) Religious evil (Matthew 7:21-23; Luke 6:46; Acts 17:22; James 1:26).

##### B. The Importance of This Question.

1. Four propositions:
  - a) God exists.
  - b) God is all-good.
  - c) God is all-powerful.
  - d) Evil, pain, and suffering exist.
2. Five responses:
  - a) *Atheism* denies that God exists.
  - b) *Pantheism* denies that God is all-good.
  - c) *Polytheism* denies that God is all-powerful.
  - d) *Idealism* denies that evil, pain, and suffering exist.
  - e) *Theism* believes all four propositions and without contradiction.
3. While a small minority of people believes that evil, pain, and suffering are only illusions, a vast majority of people believe they are very real. Evil, pain, and suffering in the world cannot be denied (wars, social injustices, disease, etc.).
4. The question raised by unbelievers is this: If God is all-powerful and all-loving, why does he allow evil, pain, and suffering to exist in our world? If God is all-powerful why can't he just stop evil, pain and suffering from happening? If God is all-loving why can't he just desire evil, pain, and suffering to be eliminated? What

kind of a God is he who allows evil, pain, and suffering? According to the critic, he is not the God of the Bible. If God exists, how can he allow all this to happen? According to the critic, God must not be all-loving and all-powerful as the Bible teaches and he must not exist because there is evil, pain, and suffering in the world.

5. This is an old question and issue going back to the days of the Greek philosopher Epicurus (341-270 B.C.) who believed that evil in the world was irreconcilable with the idea of a divine creator. Gideon contemplated the same question (Judges 6:13).

C. Defining Some Terms Is Key to This Question.

1. First, what do we mean by *evil*? Evil is not a *thing*, it is a *will* of man and an *action* of man that is in opposition to God's will (Genesis 6:5). For example, consider a piece of money, a camera, and a stick. These *things* are not evil in themselves, but can with a certain *will* and *action* be used for evil.
2. Second, what do we mean by *omnipotence* (God is all-powerful)? Why did God not create a world without sin? He did (Genesis 1-2)! The issue is not of God's power, but of man's freewill. While God is indeed all-powerful (Genesis 1:1), he is not self-contradictory. He does not allow mankind to have freewill and no freewill (impossibility of sinning) at the same time.
3. Third, what do we mean by *goodness* (God is all-good)? God created a world that was "good" and "very good" (Genesis 1:31). But, some define "good" as the absence of all evil, pain, and suffering. Others define "good" as a nice act of kindness. However, "goodness" is what is *beneficial* (well-being) for mankind (Genesis 2:18). But, what is "good" and beneficial for mankind often includes pain. Ask the doctor who operates, or ask a person who kills an attacking animal.
4. The fallacy of this argument is the assumption that there is no good, beneficial purpose that can be served by allowing evil, pain, and suffering to exist.

D. Evil, Pain, and Suffering Are Best Explained by Christianity.

1. Everyone (including the unbeliever) has to deal with the problem of evil. But, other religions and philosophical systems offer an illogical explanation of evil, pain, and suffering. For example ...
  - a) Eastern religions and Christian Scientists believe that pain is an illusion. Yet, a broken arm still hurts whether one denies it or not.
  - b) Dualism believes that evil comes from a power equal to God. Yet, God is all-powerful and there is nothing outside of his control.
  - c) New Age religions believe that pain comes from our ignorance of right choices. Yet, many people now know the dangers of smoking but they still smoke anyway and reap the painful consequences of it.
  - d) Humanism believes that evil is a product of evolution. Yet, if evolution is true, then evil would have never evolved or it would have been weeded out long ago because it serves no beneficial purpose (natural selection and survival of the fittest).
  - e) Atheism believes that evil is relative; individuals and cultures decide what is right or wrong. Yet, atheists regularly make judgments about right and wrong (murder, rape, stealing) based upon their own absolute standards of right and wrong.
2. One by one, man's alternative explanations for evil can be eliminated. The Bible offers the only clear and consistent, reasonable and rational explanation of the problem of evil. Christianity is the best explanation for the problem of evil because

it points to the source of evil by God's standard (freewill), it defines evil by God's standard (the Bible), it forgives evil by God's standard (the gospel), and it leads to freedom from evil by God's standard (heaven).

3. The Bible not only *explains* evil, pain, and suffering, but it also helps us to *deal with* evil, pain, and suffering in our own life.

## II. PRESENTING YOUR CASE.

### A. Evil, Pain, and Suffering Did Not Exist At One Time.

1. God and natural law.
  - a) God made a world with natural law (Genesis 1:1). Many are happy when natural law works in their favor (like gravity), but they question the existence of God when natural law does not act in their favor (falling building, drowning). You can't have it both ways. Pain is a possibility with the gift of natural law.
  - b) There is evil, pain, and suffering in our world today that is caused by natural law (Luke 13:2-5) and not necessarily by sinful choices (John 9:1-2).
2. God and the Devil.
  - a) God made angelic beings and some of them chose to exercise their freewill to sin (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6).
  - b) The Devil – “the evil one” – is one of those rebellious angelic beings who has caused much evil, pain, and suffering in our world (Genesis 3:1-5; Job 1-2; Matthew 13:28; Luke 13:10-17; 2 Corinthians 2:11; 4:4; Ephesians 6:10-11; 1 Thessalonians 3:5; 1 Peter 5:8). But, we are also told that we can resist the Devil (Ephesians 6:10-11; James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:9).
3. God and a standard.
  - a) God gave Adam and Eve a standard, a law (Genesis 2:15-17) and they violated that law bringing upon themselves evil, pain, and suffering (Genesis 3:6ff).
  - b) Evil assumes a moral standard. Evil is present because someone has violated God's law (1 John 3:4; 5:17). Evil actually points to God (by pointing to a moral standard), not away from God. Ask the atheist if there is a standard for determining evil, who sets the standard, and where is the standard found. How does the atheist know that something or someone is “evil”?
4. God and freewill.
  - a) Everything was “*very good*” in the beginning (Genesis 1:31). God made Adam and Eve with a freewill to choose right and wrong and God warned them of the consequences of disobedience (Genesis 1:26-27; 2:15-17). However, mankind's choice to sin brought evil, pain, and suffering into the world (Genesis 3:6-13). *Man*, not God, has caused many of the problems we have today (Romans 5:12). If God chose to *prevent* evil from happening then mankind would not have had true freewill. If God chose to *overlook* evil and do nothing about it then he would have been unholy and unjust.
  - b) Many today are happy with the power of freewill when it works in their favor (eating, jobs, education), but they question the existence of God when freewill does not work in their favor (murder, abuse, violence). You can't have it both ways. Pain is a possibility with the gift of freewill. For freewill to be meaningful there must be consequences for the choices that are made.
  - c) Much of the evil, pain, and suffering in our world today is caused by the freewill choices of mankind (Mark 7:20-23). We receive the recompense of our error which was due (Romans 1:27) and we reap what we sow (Galatians 6:8-9).

God does not desire or will evil to exist; it exists as a result of *mankind's* desire and will.

5. God and punishment.

- a) Evil, pain, and suffering can come upon man as a result of God's punishment for sin (Genesis 3:14-19). Many are happy today when punishment works in their favor (law suit, restitution), but question the existence of God when punishment does not work in their favor (evil, pain, suffering). You can't have it both ways. Pain is a possibility with the gift of punishment.
- b) God can use evil, pain, and suffering as a punishment for sin (Deuteronomy 28). God has also punished the earth as a result of mankind's sin. This led to natural disasters such as earthquakes, hurricanes, tornados, tsunamis, etc. (Genesis 3:17-19; 8:22).

6. God and pain.

- a) God has chosen to be personally affected by the world's evil, pain, and suffering in the sending of his Son (Genesis 3:15, "*thou shalt bruise his heel*").
- b) Jesus suffered and felt the pain of sin's consequences (Isaiah 53:3).

B. Evil, Pain, and Suffering Are Not Incompatible with a Loving God.

1. Indeed, God is all-powerful (Genesis 17:1; Revelation 19:6) and all-loving (1 John 4:8,16). But, man's assumption is that God's power and love are incompatible with pain and suffering. God's power and love are not incompatible with pain just like a parent's power and love for the child are not incompatible with pain (Proverbs 3:11-12; Hebrews 12:5-10; Revelation 3:19). God's love to be genuine must be freely given to mankind and freely accepted by mankind. When freely given by God and freely accepted by mankind there will be the possibility of evil, pain, and suffering.
2. If evil, pain, and suffering were *permitted* by God as a consequence for man's sin (Genesis 3:14ff), why does he *continue* to allow evil without stopping it? He continues to allow mankind to have freewill which will continue to cause evil, pain, and suffering.

C. Evil, Pain, and Suffering Are Not Counterproductive.

1. Removing all physical pain is not a good thing. Physical pain in our body helps us to know that something is wrong so that we can take care of it (sun burn, touching something hot, toothache, headache, etc.). Removing all emotional pain is not a good thing either. Should parents do their child's homework problems for them? Or, should an employer do the employee's work for him?
2. Evil, pain, and suffering have benefits. *How* we react to evil, pain, and suffering makes the difference. The same sun that softens the butter hardens the clay. There are three benefits of suffering (all three benefits are found in 2 Corinthians 1:3-11):
  - a) It helps us to draw closer to God (Job 1-2, 41-42; Psalm 119:71; Habakkuk 3:17-18). We learn to look up.
  - b) It helps us to develop strong character (Romans 5:2-4; 2 Corinthians 12:8-10; Hebrews 12:4-13; James 1:2-3; 1 Peter 5:10). We learn to look within.
  - c) It helps us reach out to others and help them (Romans 12:15; Hebrews 10:34). We learn to look outward.

D. Evil, Pain, and Suffering Will Not Exist One Day.

1. The argument comes full circle. At one time evil, pain, and suffering did not exist – in Paradise (Genesis 1-2). At one time in the future, evil, pain, and suffering will not exist anymore – in Paradise (Revelation 21-22; especially 21:4).
2. There is a time coming when God will eradicate this world with all its evil, pain, and suffering (2 Peter 3:10; 1 John 2:15-17).
3. However, evil, pain, and suffering will continue to exist for those who do not obey the Lord – in hell (Mark 9:43-48). The topic of hell is related to the question of evil because many ask, “How could an all-loving God send anyone to hell?” Remember, God sends no one to hell. Each wicked person sends himself! Those who cause evil (including the Devil and his angels) in this life will be judged and sentenced to hell (Matthew 25:41; John 5:28-29).

### III. ANSWERING OBJECTIONS.

A. Objection #1: You Cannot Use the Bible to Solve the Problem of Evil.

1. Remind the critic that *he* was the one who used the Bible when he said that God was all-powerful and all-loving. You are simply using the same Bible to answer the question of God and evil.

B. Objection #2: If God Exists, He Would Have Made a Better World – a World Without Evil, Pain, and Suffering.

1. How does one really know what is a good, better, and best world? These words (good, better, best) imply and necessitate a standard. What standard is used to determine this? Who sets the standard? Where did this standard come from?
2. Is your “better” world a world *without* freewill? This would be a world of determinism. How is a world of determinism (robots, machines) better? Without freewill we cease to be human. How would you like to be married to a pull-string doll who mechanically said, “I love you...” after you pull the string?
3. Is your “better” world a world *without* natural law? This would be a world of random chaos. How is a world of random chaos a better world?
4. Is your “better” world a world *without* hate? This would be a world *without* love also.
5. Is your “better” world a world *with* freewill, but *without* sin? This is exactly the world God created (Genesis 1-2) and this is the world that he wants for us today. But, can you have true freewill and it also be impossible to sin at the same time? No. This is a meaningless self-contradiction like colorless color or round squares.

C. Objection #3: If God Exists, Why Does He Allow Mankind To Pay Such a High Price For Evil, Pain, and Suffering?

1. Mankind’s high price that is paid has beneficial results (see II. C. above).
2. Remember, God has paid more than his share of the high price for the evil, pain, and suffering inflicted upon his only begotten Son (Isaiah 53:3; John 3:16; Hebrews 2:18).

### IV. CONCLUSION.

A. The Presence of Evil, Pain, and Suffering Is Not Evidence Against the Existence of God And It Is Not A Problem For Christians.

1. Instead of doubting the existence of God, we should thank God for controlling the presence of evil, pain, and suffering in our world by implementing measures to keep man from completely destroying himself (civil government, marriage, the church, controlling Satan).

2. Additionally, God promises us two things to help us through a life of evil, pain, and suffering: the promise of eternal life (1 John 3:3) and help from within (1 John 4:4).
- B. Evil, Pain, and Suffering Are Not A Theoretical Problem, But A Practical Problem That Is Solved by the Cross of Christ.
1. Jesus came to *forgive* the sin and guilt of evil, not to *philosophize* about how God and evil can or cannot co-exist. Jesus is a Savior, not a philosopher. Yes, we need to be ready to give a *good answer* to others (1 Peter 3:15), but more importantly we need to be ready to give the gospel *good news* to others (Romans 1:16).
  2. What will you do today to obey the gospel of Jesus and receive forgiveness of sins (Mark 16:15-16; Acts 17:31; 2 Peter 3:9)? Trust *and* obey, for there's no other way!
- C. How Do I Respond To Evil, Pain, and Suffering?
1. Use it to build character (Psalm 119:67,71).
  2. Look beyond it to the reward (Hebrews 13:14)
  3. Joy in it (James 1:2).
  4. Persevere through it (James 5:11).
  5. Allow it to test us (1 Peter 1:6-7).
- D. Do You Have the Will to Believe (John 7:17)?