

GENESIS: Where Grace Begins

What Genesis 3 Tells Me About God, Evil, and This World

The Fall

³ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

He said to the woman, "Did God actually say, 'You shall not eat of any tree in the garden'?"

² And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' "

⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Genesis 3:1-7

What is the purpose/theme of all Scripture? What is everything about?

"Worthy are you, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they existed and were created." (Revelation 4:11)

God's glory in all of _____ ...

God's glory in _____ ...

God's glory in _____ ...

God's glory in _____ ...

Can God be glorified through something He *hates*?

See: Job 38-41, Genesis 50:15-21; Isaiah 53:10, Acts 2:23

The Dilemma (Our "Achilles Heel"?)

'Epicurus's old questions are yet unanswered. Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?'

- David Hume, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion, Part X.*

There are **two errors** that must be avoided concerning the problem of evil:

1) To believe that God is the _____ of evil.

This terrible error would blame God for evil and hold that evil was produced by God out of His own nature.

2) To believe that evil occurred _____ from God's sovereign plan.

This position would hold that evil entered the universe because God was helpless to prevent it, and thus it overthrew the purposes of God.

“... him who works all things according to the counsel of his will ...” (Ephesians 1:11)

“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.” (Job 42:2)

God is indeed _____ – nothing comes to pass apart from His plan (What He causes directly or permits indirectly).

He is sovereign over all sin.

He never sins.

Even when _____ exists, God uses that sin for a greater _____.

Therefore, evil does not occur apart from the _____ and _____ of God. Evil exists because God allows it; not because His creatures are able to overthrow His will.

But know this: Evil is not _____.

So why did/does **God allow evil**?

God allowed evil because the temporary presence of evil in the universe would result in the greatest glory to His name. And since God's glory is what most benefits His people, it is loving for God to seek His glory to the highest extent in all that He does. Therefore it is loving for God to allow the temporary presence of evil in the universe.

What is **evil**?

Where did it come from?

The problem of evil can be phrased in several ways. One approach addresses the origin of evil, prompting the syllogism (a series of statements that form a reasoned argument):

1) God created all things; 2) evil is a thing; 3) therefore, God created evil.

This formulation, if sustained, is devastating for Christianity. God would not be good if He knowingly created evil.

Augustine realized that the solution was tied to the question: **What is evil?** The argument above depends on the idea that evil is a thing (note the second premise). But what if evil is not a “thing” in that sense? Then evil did not need creating. If so, our search for the source of evil will take us in another direction.

Augustine approached the problem from a different angle. He asked: *Do we have any convincing evidence that a good God exists?* If independent evidence leads us to conclude that God exists and is good, then He would be incapable of creating evil. Something else, then, must be its source.

If Augustine's approach is fair, it prompts a pair of syllogisms that lead to a different conclusion.

First: 1) All things that God created are good; 2) evil is not good; 3) therefore, evil was not created by God.

Second: 1) God created everything; 2) God did not create evil; 3) therefore, evil is not a thing.

To Augustine, anything that had being was good. God as the ground of being was perfectly good, along with everything he brought into being. This goodness was a property that came in varying degrees.

With this foundation Augustine was now prepared to answer the key issue: *“Where is evil then, and whence, and how crept it in hither? What is its root, and what its seed? Or hath it no being?”* To this Augustine answered: *“Evil has no positive nature; but the loss of good has received the name ‘evil.’”*

Augustine observed that evil always injures, and such injury is a deprivation of good. If there were no deprivation, there would be no injury. Since all things were made with goodness, evil must be the privation of goodness: *“All which is corrupted is deprived of good.”*

The diminution of the property of goodness is what’s called evil. Good has substantial being; evil does not. It is like a moral hole, a nothingness that results when goodness is removed. Just as a shadow is no more than a “hole” in light, evil is a hole in goodness.

To say that something is evil, then, is a shorthand way of saying it either lacks goodness, or is a lower order of goodness than what ought to have been. But the question remains: *“Whence and how crept it in hither?”*

Augustine observed that evil could not be chosen because there is no evil *thing* to choose. One can only turn away from the good, that is from a greater good to a lesser good (in Augustine’s hierarchy) since all things are good. *“For when the will abandons what is above itself, and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil—not because that is evil to which it turns, but because the turning itself is wicked.”*

Evil, then, is the act itself of choosing the lesser good.

To Augustine the source of evil is in the _____ of persons:

“And I strained to perceive what I now heard, that free-will was the cause of our doing ill.”

Evil was a *“perversion of the will, turned aside from...God”* to lesser things.

Augustine saw evil in two primary categories:

1) A _____ of the positive thing being affirmed

Eg: *“ungodliness”, unrighteousness”, injustice”*

2) A _____ of the good God intended

“All which is corrupted is deprived of good.”

“For when the will abandons what is above itself, and turns to what is lower, it becomes evil—not because that is evil to which it turns, but because the turning itself is wicked.”

But is **“free will”** really an adequate answer?

How could a perfectly good being with a perfectly good will with a perfectly good heart ever experience any impulse that would lead them to sin?

Apparently, (in the language of Augustine) God created Adam and Eve *posse non peccare*.

After the Fall, Adam and Eve (and all humankind following) were *then non posse non peccare*.

But the Bible doesn't explain the *how*.

To say that Satan (first) and then Eve and Adam (later) had "free will" is not an explanation. It is a _____ of a mystery.

Let's consider "free will" for a moment ...

According to **Jonathan Edwards** (*Freedom of the Will*):

"... the will (without any metaphysical refining) is plainly, that by which the mind chooses anything. The faculty of the will is that faculty or power or principle of mind by which it is capable of choosing: an act of the will is the same as an act of choosing or choice."

However,

"A man never, in any instance, wills anything contrary to his desires, or desires anything contrary to his will."

"... the will is always determined by the strongest motive, or by that view of the mind which has the greatest degree of previous tendency to excite volition."

In other words, according to Edwards, true liberty insists that a man is free to do as he _____, but not to do what he _____.

Human beings, as responsible moral agents, _____ (without any exception) choose to do what they are most strongly inclined to do at that time. We "freely" choose what we _____.

Therefore, _____ begins with our _____ or _____.

Edwards also argues that:

- All human choices in time are already known by God.
- But if they are *known* to God beforehand, they are also as sure to come to pass in the *future* as if God were seeing them from the perspective of the *past*.
- With God, there is no difference between seeing a future event and a past one. Both are certain in his all-knowing mind.

Edwards' famous analogy of **two prisoners**:

_____ ability –

"We are said to be naturally unable to do a thing, when we can't do it if we will, because what is commonly called nature don't allow for it, or because of some impeding defect or obstacle that is extrinsic to the will; either in the faculty of understanding, constitution of body, or external objects."

_____ ability –

"Moral inability consists not in any of the things; but either in the want of inclination; or the strength of a contrary inclination; or the want of sufficient motives in view, to induce and excite the act of the will, or strength of apparent motives to the contrary."

The only way to account for an evil choice is to have an evil INCLINATION or DISPOSITION to that choice.

So where did that 'prior disposition' come from? What inclined Adam and Eve to disobey God?

- A) It was _____ ... No reason
- B) They were _____ by Satan
- C) They were _____ by Satan (“invincible ignorance”)
- D) Reasons of “_____”
- E) ?

Conclusion:

“... though we end our quest to answer the origin of evil, one thing is certain: since God is both omnipotent and good, we must conclude that in His omnipotence and goodness there must be a place for the existence of evil. We know that God Himself never does that which is evil. Nevertheless, He also ordains whatsoever comes to pass. Though He does not do evil and does not create evil, He does ordain that evil exists. If it does exist, and if God is sovereign, then obviously He must have been able to prevent its existence. If He allowed evil to enter into this universe, it could only be by His sovereign decision. Since His sovereign decisions always follow the perfection of His being, we must conclude that His decision to allow evil to exist is a good decision.”

- R.C. Sproul

For next week: **The Archetypal Story of Temptation, Sin, and (the Effects of) the Fall**

The appearance of a crafty snake prompting Eve to sin is a mystery. The text is interested neither in the origin of evil in the snake nor in the nature of the snake. It primarily is concerned with what the snake said. The narrative leaves all the other questions enshrouded in mystery.

- Allen P. Ross, *Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*, p. 134