

Why Does God Allow Evil?

J. Steve Lee

Early in the morning on April 16, 2007, the campus of Virginia Tech suffered an unspeakable tragedy when a gunman carried out the deadliest shooting spree in U.S. history, killing 32 people. One of the questions on people's minds was, "If God could prevent such a massacre, why didn't He?" The same question is pondered after any tragic death. The question has been put in many different ways, but always implies that if God is all-good and all-powerful, He would choose to destroy all evil. Why, then, does evil exist?

Many suppose that the existence of evil proves that God does not exist, but our ability to recognize evil is actually a good reason to believe in God. If there was no God, there would be no objective, universal standard by which to measure good and evil. But since all humans agree that good and evil are real distinctions, there must be an independent, eternal standard to ground moral standards. That standard is God.

That being the case, many still wonder why God would allow evil to occur. Some philosophers claim that the existence of evil is logically incompatible with the existence of an all-good, all-powerful God. If God exists, evil cannot. If evil exists, God cannot. God and evil are logically contradictory and thus cannot coexist in the real world.

Very few philosophers think this argument is successful. After all, it is logically possible that God, though He is all-powerful and all-knowing, has a good reason for allowing evil to exist. For instance, one reason God could allow evil is preserving human free will. If we have genuine freedom, then we have the possibility of choosing to do evil. God is certainly powerful enough to prevent us from doing evil, but He would be taking away our free will by doing so. In order for us to have genuine free choices, God allows us the freedom of choosing evil. He cannot "make" us always choose the good, because if He does, then we are not *free*.

There are other reasons God could allow evil to occur. For instance, if we did not have to cope with evil, we would not develop such virtues as empathy, patience, and trust in God as Savior. Without the ability to choose and exercise free will or the opportunity to develop virtue, our lives would be shallow and without love; we could not truly love one another or love God. We would essentially be robots without the ability to have a relationship with God, and that loving relationship is ultimately what He desires with us.

Though it is reasonable for God and evil to coexist, some say the presence of so *much* evil makes it hard to believe in God. However, this is a subjective judgment. How much evil is too much? Who but God can say? We do know, from a story like that of Joseph, that evil can be used for good in God's hands. Joseph said to his brothers, "You planned evil against me; God planned it for good to bring about the present result—the survival of many people" (Gn 50:20).

We are all troubled by evil, but God has dealt evil a fatal blow through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.