

Is God...Evil?

The famous philosopher Epicurus (c. 341-270 BCE) once said: "Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?" This line of reasoning has been used by many atheists today to argue that if God did exist, He would be evil. On the one hand they argue that it would be evil for an all-powerful God to allow so much suffering to exist and not prevent or stop it. On the other hand, they point to times when God did just what they demand of Him and destroyed evil, like the flood, or the annihilation of some Canaanite nations, and call God evil for killing so many "innocent" people. How do we respond to such accusations? Is God really Evil? Did He create evil?

Deuteronomy 18:10-12—The idea that the people, like the Canaanites, who were killed or displaced during the Israelite conquest were innocent victims ignores the historical facts. God had given them, as a people four generations to repent and they had only gotten more vile (Genesis 15:14-15). The description of the atrocities that were commonplace are too graphic to describe here, but simply put, because of their spiritualism and witchcraft the society had institutionalized child sacrifice, rape, bestiality, and the abuse of women. The destruction of the Canaanite nations was not genocide, it was police action. When an armed criminal is threatening and harming people and will not be talked down, sometimes the police have to use deadly force to protect the innocent. This was a culture of violence; they would respond to nothing less. But even in this time of conquest, people who repented were not only spared but accepted into the family of God (for example Rahab, Joshua 6:25, Matthew 1:5).

But why does God not just prevent or destroy all evil like He did in certain instances? To understand, we must first discover what evil really is.

What is Evil? Google defines evil as "profoundly immoral and malevolent."¹

The very fact that people talk about evil implies that they accept that there is some moral standard beyond a person's own idea, after all, someone has to define what is "profoundly immoral."

Ezekiel 28:14-15—The Bible tells us that evil began in the heart of a highly respected angel. Lucifer² had a place in the very throne room of heaven, covering the throne of God (Exodus 25:20). He was created perfect and was perfect until something entirely new began to grow in his heart—iniquity. Where did that come from?

Ezekiel 28:17—Lucifer began to become proud. He began trading the truth he experienced every day in the presence of God for his own made up, prideful self aggrandizement.

Isaiah 14:12-14—This pride trip led him all the way to seeking the very power and position of his Creator. God created only good. Evil originated in the rejection of the good that God created.

Is God evil for allowing evil? Deuteronomy 30:19—God clearly states what is right and what is wrong but He has always granted people the freedom to choose which direction to go. With those choices come consequences. God will plead for you to do right, but He will not force you to do so (CF. Joshua 24:15, John 1:11-12, 2 Corinthians 5:20). If we are to choose to love and obey God, then we must also have the ability to choose not to. Love cannot be forced or it becomes abuse.

When people say that God should disallow evil, they are essentially asking God to become a totalitarian dictator. But dictators create oppression - not freedom, fear - not love, subjugation - not peace. On October 16, 2002, Iraq had a "fair and accurate" election. "There were 11,445,638 eligible voters - and every one of them voted for the president" [Saddam Hussein].³ Evidence was abundant that the dictator's subjects supported him not because they loved and respected him but because they had no other choice. God could force everyone to do right all the time. He could annihilate anyone refusing to reject evil. But what kind of universe would that leave? Do we really want a totalitarian dictator of the universe?

Why does God allow evil? Because He wants free beings, not slavish robots. Arguably, to not allow evil would require force instead of freedom which, according to God's standards, is itself evil.

2 Peter 3:9-11—God has proven Himself to be very patient. He gives every chance possible for people to be saved, but eventually He must rid the universe of sin and rebellion. Even in His promise to destroy evil He pleads for people to repent and be saved. But while a God of love and justice will not force someone to do right, neither will He allow evil to continue eternally. The fire is not primarily intended for punishing people, it's for destroying the corrupted earth and the works in it.

Ezekiel 33:11—Those who will be in the fire will be there because they chose to hold on to the works of the evil; not because God wants them there. God pleads with them, He pleads with you to turn and be saved.

¹ From the search term "evil" on Google.com Accessed 2016/03/02.

² The word Lucifer, a transliteration of the Hebrew word "Day Star," is commonly used to refer to Satan before he became God's adversary. ³BBC NEWS Archive <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/2331951.stm> Accessed 01-12-2024