

## God's Control over Evil and Good (#30)

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Does God cause or just give permission to events that are at first glance evil like war, crime, disease, natural disasters, accidents, injustice, deformities, and death? He is omniscient and ubiquitous meaning no event is beyond his purview and control. But are there just two words in question here: causation and permission? God, who is absolutely holy, cannot sin, but he also must hate and judge sin to fulfill his plan for man's redemption within the context of a fallen and sinful world.

### Cause and Effect

When I say "within the context of a fallen and sinful world", I mean that the rules of cause and effect apply. An example is Adam and Eve being denied the Tree of Life, which led to the failure of their cells to regenerate flawlessly and eventual physical death. It also led to a knowledge that activated their consciences so as to give rise to fear, grief, worry, and depression. And because cells cannot multiply with precision better than a billion<sup>1</sup> to one, there are mutations that add to the devolution of the human race in the form of disease and deformity. Finally, because man is rebellious and attempts to replace God with idolatry with a zeal known to demons, we have war, persecution, crime, and injustice in a world where might makes right.

Cause and effect lead to sin begetting sin<sup>2</sup>. Man is rebellious and is in idolatry refusing to worship the one God. The fallout from man's sin is greater than God's periodic and Biblically well-documented judgment of sin. C.S. Lewis estimated that sinful man is responsible for 80% of the grief we encounter in our daily lives. Personally, I think the evil caused by both man and Satan is higher and equal to the percentage of those not saved. If Jesus' symbolic teaching at the Feast of Tabernacles shows that one in eight is saved, then seven eighths or 87.5% are unsaved and the cause of the same percentage of evil in this world. The remainder or complement is God's judgment on either his own church or those who persecute the church.

### God's Judgment on Believers

Concerning God's judgment within the church, Paul makes this statement: *29 For he who eats and drinks, eats and drinks judgment to himself, if he does not judge the body rightly. 30 For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep. 31 But if we judged ourselves rightly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord so that we will not be condemned along with the world* (1 Corinthians 11:29-32).

The ultimate discipline for the Christian is death itself or as it says above: *a number sleep*. Before Jesus died on the cross, Satan had the power of death over all people. After the cross, Satan retained the power of death only for unbelievers (He 2:14) and those believers who have

undergone the four steps of church discipline<sup>3</sup> (Mt 18:15-20) and have subsequently been excommunicated (1 Cor 5:5) and have been placed back under the power of Satan. Either way, no Christian can die without the permission of Jesus Christ. If a Christian is excommunicated, Jesus Christ will give Satan this authority.

### **God's Judgment in the OT**

Before the formation of the church during Old Testamental times, God's response was the same:

*So, I will choose their punishments  
And will bring on them what they dread.  
Because I called, but no one answered;  
I spoke, but they did not listen.  
And they did evil in My sight  
And chose that in which I did not delight."  
(Isaiah 66:4)*

Notice that this is not a passive God who lets things happen. Nevertheless, he does not do evil, but he also does not just let things happen. He is actively in control. In the famous Song of Moses, the following is recorded:

*See now that I, I am He,  
And there is no god besides Me;  
It is I who put to death and give life.  
I have wounded and it is I who heal,  
And there is no one who can deliver from My hand.  
(Deuteronomy 32:39)*

Another critical verse from Scripture concerning God's directed punishment for sin is found in Ezekiel:

*And if the prophet be deceived when he hath spoken a thing, I the LORD have deceived that prophet, and I will stretch out my hand upon him, and will destroy him from the midst of my people Israel. (Ezekiel 14:9 KJV)*

The above verse shows that God does not just allow, but takes a very active part in judgment. (This can actually be called "Hebrew active allowance". The Lord can send forth an evil spirit to persuade the prophet.) Since God is taking direct action against the sinner, it is not as though he happened upon the scene and allows evil to happen even though he has the power to stop it. It is more akin to his using a person to be his instrument of judgment. The judgment of a righteous God is justified while the acts of the instrument may or may not be justified, but will in either case properly apply God's judgment.

In ratifying the Mosaic Covenant, Moses promised the following blessing if the people (Dt 27:9) obeyed the Lord: ***The LORD shall cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated***

*before you; they will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways (Dt 28:7); and the following curse if they disobeyed: **The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth (Dt 28:25).***

Notice that whether it is a blessing or curse, the Lord is the cause.

### **Do not mock those who fall under God's Judgment.**

Even though Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon had been sent by God as an instrument to sack Jerusalem and destroy the temple, **Ammon's** glee was not acceptable to the Lord: *Because you said "Aha!" against my sanctuary when it was profaned, and against the land of Israel when it was made desolate, and against the house of Judah when they went into exile, therefore, behold, I am going to give you to the sons of the east for a possession...(Ezekiel 25:3-4).* This was their punishment. In contrast, because Nebuchadnezzar did God's will in destroying Jerusalem, God said this of Egypt: *"I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor which he performed, because they acted for me,"* declares the Lord (Ezekiel 29:20). In this example, the Lord rewards the perpetrator and condemns the victim.

Ezekiel is told not to rejoice, but to "wail" for the defeated Egyptians: *Son of man, wail for the multitude of **Egypt**, and bring it down, her and the daughters of the powerful nations, to the nether world, with those who go down to the pit (Ezekiel 32:18).*

The same fate befell Tyre, when they laughed at Judah's fate: *Son of man, because **Tyre** has said concerning Jerusalem, "Aha", the gateway of the peoples is broken (Ezekiel 26:2).*

A similar fate befell Moab for mocking: *Now was not Israel a laughingstock to you? Or was he caught among thieves? For each time you speak about him you shake your head in scorn (Jeremiah 48:27).* And later: *Terror, pit, and snare are coming upon you, O inhabitant of **Moab**, declares the Lord (Jeremiah 48:43).*

Taking glee in another's misfortune is decried in Proverbs. Let the wise remember: **17** *Do not rejoice when your enemy falls, and do not let your heart be glad when he stumbles;* **18** *or the LORD will see it and be displeased, and turn His anger away from him (Proverbs 24:17-18).*

At the end of the Civil War when General Lee surrendered to General Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia on 9 April 1865, Grant's troops began to celebrate the end of the war. General Grant quickly intervened and forbade any celebration because of the pain among our defeated. Grant's gesture and his pardoning of Lee's troops was instrumental in preventing the kindling of a much-discussed guerilla war.

### **Is God's Judgment and His Use of Instruments Evil?**

In the days of the prophet Elisha, Ben-hadad, the king of Aram was besieging Samaria at a time when there was famine in the land. After the besieged king of Israel, heard the story of a woman who ate her own son, he sent a messenger to Elisha saying that the situation was beyond hope and that he was not going to wait any longer on the Lord, but would surrender to Ben-hadad. The actual words of messenger from the king of Israel to Elisha are as follows: *Behold, this evil is from the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?* (2 Ki 6:33b)

To Israel (Samaria) the invasion of Aram, the instruments of God's judgment, was considered evil. The judgment under the sword of Ben-hadad and the famine was at the end of a long concatenation of sins committed by Samaria. The Lord is always slow to anger (Ex 34:6).

The story concluded with God striking fear into the Aramean army so that they fled in fear and the inhabitants of the besieged city plundered their supplies and were saved from both hunger and invasion (2 Ki 7).

Another example of the word "evil" is found in exchange between the prophet Elijah and King Ahab of Israel: **20** *Ahab said to Elijah, "Have you found me, O my enemy?" And he answered, "I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the sight of the LORD. 21 "Behold, I will bring evil upon you, and will utterly sweep you away, and will cut off from Ahab every male, both bond and free in Israel (1 Ki 21:20-22). So, the prophet brings a curse on King Ahab and his wife Jezebel, but Ahab is so distraught with the message, that he put on sackcloth and fasted. God then relented saying: 29 "Do you see how Ahab has humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days, but I will bring the evil upon his house in his son's days (1 Ki 21:29)."*

In the face of evil whether brought by man, Satan, or God, the following verse from Proverbs is our guide: **18** *He who walks blamelessly will be delivered, but he who is crooked will fall all at once (Proverbs 28:18). And again, from the same book: 16 When the wicked increase, transgression increases; but the righteous will see their fall (Proverbs 29:16).*

### **The Reason Why God Brings Evil**

So clearly, the Lord is the harbinger of evil. He can bring it, cause it, or stop it, but he does not do evil. The instrument of God's judgment is doing the evil—not the Lord. The difference is not in the act of doing or allowing, or causing and permitting as many exegetes have been attesting, but in the reason why. In God's case, the reason is righteous judgment by an absolutely holy being. The invading army, however, can be motivated by sundry reasons, none or all of which may be righteous.

### **The Causes of Evil**

The causes of evil are sin, which comes from three sources: 1) God's judgment, which is a small proportion to what we see, 2) sinful man with his fallen nature, and 3) Satan and his active

demons. I have already said that item #1 is about one part in eight while items #2 and #3 are the complement. Let's look at item #3.

Regarding Satan, who has been judged by God three times and has four more judgments awaiting him<sup>4</sup>, he interacts with **believers** in the following manner:<sup>5</sup>

1. Intellectual taunting by “*sifting like wheat*” (Lk 22:31)
2. Hindrance to their calling (2 Thes 2:13-15)
3. Beguiling like the serpent with Adam and Eve (2 Cor 11:3)
4. “Thorns and Thistles” (2 Cor 12:7)
5. Death by Satan to the excommunicated (1 Cor 5:5)
6. Mental control (Acts 5:3; 2 Timothy 2:26)
7. Warring with the saints (Eph 6:10-18)
8. Accusing believers before God day and night (Rv 12:10)
9. Sowing the seeds of doubt (Ge 3:1-7)
10. Persecution (Rv 2:10)
11. Infiltrating the church as tares in the field (Mt 13:38-39; 2 Cor 11:13-15; 2 Pt 2:1-19)
12. Church division (2 Cor 2:1-11)
13. Tempting (1 Thes 3:5; Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 7:5; 1 Tim 5:11-15; 1 Pt 5:8; 1 Jn 2:15-17; 5:19; 1 Tim 3:6; 1 Chr 21:1-8)
14. Transforming by perfecting, confirming, strengthening, and establishing (1 Pt 5:8-11)
15. Counterfeit Jesus against the one Gospel (2 Cor 11:3-4, 14)
16. Loss of Faith (1 Tim 1:19-20; Mt 13)
17. Employing his demons (Eph 6:10-12)
18. Misapplying Scripture as when Jesus was tempted (Mt 4:5-6; Lk 4:9-11)
19. Satan gaining advantage by failing to restore one to the church (2 Cor 2:11), scheming (Eph 6:11), snares to those with a bad reputation outside the church (1 Tim 3:7; 2 Tim 2:26), and miracles (2 Thes 2:9)

Regarding **unbelievers**, he has been recorded doing the following:<sup>6</sup>

1. Subduing initial desire for the Gospel (Mt 13:19; Mk 4:15; Lk 8:13; 2 Cor 4:3-4)
2. False religion and doctrine (1 Tim 4:1-3; 1 Jn 4:1-4; Eph 2:1-3; 1 Jn 2:15-17)
3. Power of death (Hebrews 2:14; Rv 1:18)
4. Suffering and oppression (Lk 13:16; Acts 10:38)
5. Infiltrating among believers (Mt 13:25-39)
6. Sorcery such as that by Elymus [Arabic for *Magus*] (Acts 13:8-10)
7. Disguising his ministers as angels of light (2 Cor 11:13-15)
8. Apparently worshiping God, but being in the Synagogue of Satan (Rv 2:9-10, 13)

### **Mourning or Grieving over Evil**

There is a way to do this correctly and a way to misapply the principle of mourning.

## The Correct Way to Mourn

There are two examples of mourning or grieving in Scripture. After choosing his 12 apostles, Jesus delivered his Sermon on the Mount. In it his second sentence was: **4** *"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted"* (Mt 5:4). What he meant was blessed are those who recognize evil and mourn when they see it. Blessed are they who are not inured to the daily crimes we read in the newspapers.

The second example comes from the OT. When Jerusalem was being sacked by Nebuchadnezzar, the Lord gave the following command to the Holy Spirit: **3** *"Then the glory of the God of Israel went up from the cherub on which it had been, to the threshold of the temple. And He called to the man clothed in linen at whose loins was the writing case."* **4** *The LORD said to him, "Go through the midst of the city, even though the midst of Jerusalem, and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and groan over all the abominations which are being committed in its midst"* (Ezekiel 9:3-5). Those saved were those who "sighed and groaned" when they saw evil. Jesus said the same thing.

## The Incorrect Way to Mourn, Sigh, and Groan

When tragedy in the form of evil caused by sin strikes, inappropriate responses can take the form of ignoring the issue by hardening your heart, complaining, worry, depression, fear, and revenge.

**Complaining:** **15** *A constant dripping on a day of steady rain and a contentious woman are alike* (Proverbs 27:15). *The contentions of a wife are a constant dripping* (Proverbs 19:13b).

**Worry and Anxiety:** **4** *Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!* **5** *Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.* **6** *Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.* **7** *And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus* (Philippians 4:4-7).

From the Sermon on the Mount we have Jesus saying: *For this reason I say to you, do not be worried about your life, as to what you will eat or what you will drink; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing* (Mt 6:25)?

From Proverbs we have: *Anxiety in a man's heart weighs it down, but a good word makes it glad* (Proverbs 12:25).

From Psalms: *Cease from anger and forsake wrath; Do not fret; it leads only to evil-doing* (Psalm 37:8).

From Psalms: *When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, your consolations delight my soul* (Psalms 94:19).

**Fear:** *Do not fear or be dismayed* (Dt 1:21). This exhortation is repeated 14 times in Scripture.

**Ignoring the issue by hardening your heart:** *17 Why, O LORD, do You cause us to stray from Your ways and harden our heart from fearing You* (Isaiah 63:17)? If you do not fear the Lord, you will not be sensitized to sin and you will not mourn, grieve, or sigh.

**External display of mourning:** *But they do all their deeds to be noticed by men; for they broaden their phylacteries and lengthen the tassels of their garments* (Mt 23:3).

**Taking revenge:** *Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, "VENGEANCE IS MINE, I WILL REPAY," says the Lord* (Romans 12:19 from Dt 32:35).

### **Why Doesn't God Contravene the Evil by Mankind and Satan?**

If seven eights of the evil in the world is done by mankind and Satan, why doesn't God contravene? The answer is because it does not make sense. If the Earth is truly a spawning ground for the eternal and we are here to determine with our own free will where we will spend eternity—with God or away from him—how can our response to the Messiah be properly measured if our inclinations to evil are blunted at every turn and Satan is not allowed to tempt?

Imagine the following scenario. An intoxicated man is driving home at 9 PM when a 10-year-old boy leaving a neighbor's house crosses the street on his way home. His vehicle strikes and kills the boy. So where could an allow-no-evil God had intervened to prevent the tragedy?

Should the boy be miraculously raised from the dead while under a sheet in the middle of the street? If this happened, both the boy and his parents would be traumatized for life by the accident even though they were cognizant of the fact that of the 200-plus fatal accidents in their town over the last 10 years, all were raised from the dead at the 5-minute mark. In fact, even the vehicles involved in accidents were restored like new in the same time period. The boy's parents, however, who had to wait five long minutes before they saw a sign of life in their child are now seriously questioning God's good will for taking so long to do what he could have done instantly.

Should an angel have taken control of the car and jammed on the brakes. In this case the boy might develop a phobia of crossing the street because of the near-death experience. The drunk, however, would be unfazed because brakes have historically been mysteriously applied for years all around the town. Nobody has ever been killed and because of this there are no driver education classes and no drunk would think twice about not getting into a car because of their allow-no-evil God. The more incapacitated the driver, the more he is under autopilot. His God is a God of many brakes.

Back the intervention up another step. Imagine that angels were not allowed to apply brakes. In this case, the drunk would have been guided home by a more devious route or the boy would have been restrained from leaving the house at that very moment. In both cases, confusion resulted. The drunk found himself on a strange street and was confused as to why he was there.

In fact, this had happened even when he wasn't drunk. This do-no-evil<sup>7</sup> God was becoming increasingly meddlesome. The parents releasing the boy were also frustrated because the front door latch was jammed for about 30 seconds before the problem cleared itself, but not before they tried the back door which was also jammed. There were so many incidents like this lately, you couldn't be sure what you had control of anymore. The people did not seem to be any happier for God's intervention.

Let's back the intervention up one final step. The driver of the car needs six shots of his favorite whisky every Friday night from Louie's Bar. This particular night, the fog didn't begin to roll in after the third drink. Unbeknown to him, his angel had diminished the effect of alcohol on his brain. After the fifth drink he accused the bartender of watering down his drinks and called for a double shot for his final drink. When that didn't have any effect, an altercation broke out. So what was the angel of the do-no-evil God to do? The following week he could confuse the shot count so that one became two and three registered as six, or he could cause the drinker to become nauseated after his second drink. In either case, the drinker would challenge the bartender for a miscount or bad liquor. What to do? For the angel, it was a no-win situation.

In conclusion, it is illogical to contravene the evil events of sinful man and pretend that this leads to a righteous heart. In fact, it leads to a more frustrated sinner thwarted by the abrogation of his free will and the suspension of his senses. Furthermore, the expectation of a *Deus ex Machina* leads to a feckless, imprudent, and unreal Alice-in-Wonderland fairyland.

### **Evil and Temptation**

We have seen that God brings evil, but God does not tempt. In fact, God gives us a guarantee against overwhelming temptation: **13** *No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, **who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it*** (1 Cor 10:13).

### **Thorns and Thistles**

The Adamic Covenant promises "thorns and thistles": **17** *Cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.* **18** *"Both **thorns and thistles** it shall grow for you; and you will eat the plants of the field;* **19** *By the sweat of your face You will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return* (Genesis 3:17-19).

The Adamic Covenant is still in effect. We are under the curse of "thorns and thistles" and will earn our living by the sweat of our brow. We were not born into a bed of roses, but a world rife with intrigue, backbiting, and turmoil. The path to salvation is through thorns and thistles making the Lord *a lamp to our feet and a light to our path*. It can be no other way for the redemption of sinful man. And if God had decided not to redeem sinful man, none of us would be here enjoying the gift of life free to make either his way our way, or our way the only way.

In Corinth, Paul said the following to the church during his second missionary journey circa 52 AD: **10** *We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are prudent in Christ; we are weak, but you are strong; you are distinguished, but we are without honor. **11** To this present hour we are both hungry and thirsty, and are poorly clothed, and are roughly treated, and are homeless; **12** and we toil, working with our own hands; when we are reviled, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure; **13** when we are slandered, we try to conciliate; we have become as the scum of the world, the dregs of all things, even until now (1 Cor 4:10-13).*

Later in that same book, Paul said: **58** *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your **toil** is not in vain in the Lord (1 Cor 15:58).*

In his message to the Philippians, Paul said: **14** *Do all things **without grumbling** or disputing; **15** so that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world, **16** holding fast the word of life, so that in the day of Christ I will have reason to glory because **I did not run in vain nor toil in vain** (Philippians 2:14-17).*

For those who endure (or “suffer” as was translated in the KJV), there is God’s promised reward: **12** *If we **endure**, we will also reign with Him; if we deny Him, He also will deny us (2 Timothy 2:12).*

And when the church endures, Thorns and Thistles will be turned into what in the Millennium? —Cypress and Myrtle (Isaiah 55:13).

### Conclusion

Most of the evil in today’s world, perhaps seven parts in eight, is caused by sinful man and Satan. In this process, God does not tempt. When man is tempted by Satan and his minions, God provides sufficient resistance. Only a small part of evil is brought by God in righteous judgment. God will bring and cause evil, but he can do no evil for his judgment is righteous. Never say “Aha” to those being judged for God may either relent from judging the sinful or pour his wrath on you. For the believer, judgment is meant to correct. We cannot escape thorns and thistles. They are a concomitant to God’s plan for Redemption for mankind with a free will in a sinful world. Without thorns and thistles, there can be no logical plan for redemption leading to cypress and myrtle. The alternative is a do-no-evil God meddling in a fantasyland filled with frustrated denizens. So, stop crying about it. Do not worry that your fate is ostensibly worse than someone else’s, for our reward is eternal salvation. Remember that oppression shades both sides of the street. Rain falls on the righteous and evil alike:

***4** Then I looked again at all the acts of **oppression** which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the **oppressed** and that they had no one to comfort them; and on the side of their **oppressors** was power, but they had no one to comfort them (Ecclesiastes 4:1).*

Even though both sides of the street are shaded by oppression, only one side will be saved, and we know full well that: *He who walks **blamelessly** will be delivered, but he who is crooked will fall all at once* (Pr 28:18). And again, we have: *By lovingkindness and truth, iniquity is atoned for; and by the fear of the Lord, one keeps away from evil* (Pr 16:6). In knowing these things:

**13** *Now may the God of hope fill you with all **joy** and **peace** in believing, so that you will abound in **hope** by the power of the Holy Spirit* (Romans 15:13).

If you have the assurance of salvation, then you will have joy and peace in the face of adversity.

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<sup>1</sup> According to Qi Zheng in Genetics 2005 October, it is about 5x10exp(-8) or 50 parts per billion.

<sup>2</sup> As an example, we can look at abortion. The increase in genetic mutations that result in deformities and the increase in deformity-causing pollution, and the increase in young women taking drugs can lead to severe fetal deformities such as CMV (cytomegalovirus), cat-eye syndrome, and other chromosomal disorders have led to the approval of late-term abortions. These in turn have led to an array of conflicting laws for and against certain procedures, each law in turn spawning its own turmoil.

<sup>3</sup> Church Discipline: 1) reproof in private, 2) reproof before 2 or 3 witnesses, 3) reproof before the church, 4) excommunication.

<sup>4</sup> Satan's seven judgments: Garden of God, Garden of Eden, Cross, Mid-Trib being cast out of Heaven, imprisoned in the Abyss for 1000 years, GWTJ, and the Lake of Fire.

<sup>5</sup> Ref: Arnold Fruchtenbaum, Manuscript #77, Satanology

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<sup>7</sup> Do-no-evil God: Actually bring-no-evil or cause-no-evil is more accurate here since God cannot do evil. What God does in terms of evil is justified by his righteousness.