Defense: If God is Good, Why Does Evil Exist? Memory Verse: Genesis 1:31

June 1, 2025 Scripture Reading: John 3:12-21

**[SLIDE 1]**

 We are continuing our series on apologetics. We are looking at some of the good reasons we have to believe what we believe, and we have been answering objections that people have about faith in Christ. We talked about the existence of God and how the advances in science seem to, more and more, point to a creator, a grand designer of all that we see. We talked about the Bible and how it differs significantly from any other book. We can verify that the text we read today is original to its first authors, and we can trust in its words because those authors were eyewitnesses to historical facts. Amazing as it seems, this grand designer of it all has chosen to reveal himself to us through His word.

 I also want to make sure that this series is encouraging to you personally in your faith, to build you up, but we also want to equip you to go out and engage with people who have questions or doubts. My friends, if you have someone asking you questions, God bless them! God promises that if you seek him, you will find him! A questioning person is a seeking person and if they are coming to you, if they feel they can trust you with their questions, hallelujah! Now, you might be freaked out by that. You might be anxious and worried that you won’t have the right answer, but let me assure you, the Holy Spirit is bigger than your answer. And, even better, the Holy Sprit is bigger than their response to your answer! Because even if you gave a perfect, textbook answer to their question, you nailed it, and they still don’t understand or they still don’t accept it, is that on you? No. Convincing someone, changing hearts and minds, all that work rests on the shoulders of the Holy Spirit. So for our part, we need to be praying for unbelievers in our life. Pray that they become seekers, that they start asking questions. And then, once they are seeking, we need to have an answer, an apologetic, to offer them in the midst of their questions.

 Today we are going to tackle a mess: The question is, if God is good, why does evil exist? Or why does suffering exist? I think for our purposes today; we are going to roll the two together and assume that suffering is evil or the result of evil. We have established that our conception of God includes an all-knowing, all powerful and all-present being. Christianity insists that this God is love that he is the source of goodness. So, if that is the case, then how could there be evil in this world? Now, off the bat, our response to this question should always be, “That is a great question.” It really is. It is not easy to answer. As I mentioned, almost by definition, it is a mess. And secondly, you need to think through who you are talking to. Are they currently dealing with evil circumstances? Are they currently going through some sort of suffering? We don’t want to talk about evil in abstract form as though it were some concept out there. We are all affected by evil and suffering and we know others who are affected greatly by it. So I think we want to keep the conversation real and applicable, not theoretical. We do not want to dismiss the suffering **[SLIDE 2]** someone might be going through.

 There are families who have lost loved ones in tragic ways, there are children born with terrible diseases, there are governments around the world that oppress their own people, there are tornados and floods and famines that end lives. We all recognize these events as terrible. We know, deep down, they represent a broken world in which something has gone wrong. And indeed, it has….

 In a weird way, the problem of evil is only a problem if there is a God. **[SLIDE 3]** Evolution is predicated on death and destruction; the survival of the fittest boasts of no goodness. A random universe will surely have random weather events that wreak havoc. Nature has no love for humans….but God does **[SLIDE 4]**. If we have an inkling that these events are bad, that evil is real, then the unbeliever has already admitted that there is goodness of some kind. But when the Christian comes along and asserts that God is love, we compound the problem, because, as we have established, this world is not loving. As I said, it is broken. So how could a loving God allow this world to be this way?

 Well, it has not always been this way. Genesis is clear that when God created, he made everything good. Let’s turn to the very beginning. Genesis chapter 1 lays out a day-by-day account of what God created. And God assesses his work as he goes along. Verse 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25 over and over again, God sees what he has made and says that it is good. Now look at verse 31. Once humans are added to the mix, God concludes that his creation was **[SLIDE 5]** “supremely good.” And within that creation, we are set apart because we were made in his image. And with this high level of goodness, came a high level of potential to go awry. But, for a time, all was paradise. Adam and Eve were in the perfect garden, with all their needs perfectly met and their relationship with God and nature in perfect harmony. All was well say for one particular tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. This is our first indication of a problem. In Genesis 2:16 God says, **[SLIDE 6]** “Eat your fill from all of the garden’s trees; but don’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because on the day you eat from it, you will die!” What is going on here? Why is this tree there in the first place? God purposefully planted it, he knowingly told Adam not to touch it. But we have all been children. Some of us still have some of those tendencies: You told me not to push the button. I would not have even noticed the button, but now you told me not to push it and here I am and all I can think about is this button I’m not supposed to push….Why did God set-up such a scenario?

 Now, we need to understand that God is both good and love. Being good is a character trait, it describes who you are. It is about you. **[SLIDE 7]** Love however is always about you in relation to another. Love speaks to at least two entities. And the nature of that love must be free otherwise it is not good. Forced love is not good. God loves humans. He does not love robots. He does not love mere animals. The whole point is that we should love God as a result of free choice. That’s good…very good! God loves humans made in his image and has established a way of relating to us, of knowing us.

 To love someone is to trust them. This is what we see in Genesis. Adam and Eve walk and talk with God in the garden. They trust him completely and are known by him completely. Sure there is this one tree, this button I’m not supposed to press, but if I stay away from that part of the garden, I can keep my mind off of it well enough. But then there is this snake **[SLIDE 8]**, characterized as Satan, the deceiver, our enemy. He is bad. He talks to Eve and he brings the whole scene into question. Genesis 3:1, **[SLIDE 9]** “Did God really say that you shouldn’t eat from any tree in the garden?” “No, actually, God said we can eat from any tree except for one specific tree. If we do, we will die.” Verse 4, **[SLIDE 10]** “You won’t die! You will be like God, you will see clearly.” By the way, what is wrong with Eve’s sight? Nothing! She already sees clearly.

 But now a seed has been planted. A seed of doubt. A chink in the trusting relationship Eve has enjoyed thus far. She is introduced to the idea that God is hiding something from her. He has some secrets he is keeping. The goodness of God has come into question and Eve thinks “Hey yeah, wait a minute, why would God put this tree here in the first place? He must be protecting himself, keeping his secrets. I want to know! I want to be like God! Maybe I will take a bite.”

 And the rest is history. Ever since then, mankind struggles to trust God. We struggle to live in a loving relationship with him, with one another, with nature, with ourselves. The world has been broken because of what happened in the garden of Eden. That’s why we call it the Fall. Mankind has fallen out of relationship with God.

 And if you wonder where the snake came from, it’s really the same story. Satan is a spiritual being, like an angel, who desires to be God. Even though it is not possible for him to fulfill this dream, he is going to do what he can to ensure that we humans share his ambition. He is still up to the same game: sowing seeds of doubt. “Did God really say? Well, he didn’t mean that. You know you can be like him right? You know you can sit on the throne right?”

 So, as Christians, we admit that a good God created a good world, but that world went bad. It was broken by sin, which, in effect, is distrust. I don’t trust God enough to obey him. I instead want to do things my own way. In our scripture reading, Jesus says, **[SLIDE 11]** “The light came into the world, and people loved darkness more than the light, for their actions are evil.” My actions can be evil. We all perpetuate evil. But that’s not the whole story. If we turn to Ephesians, we see that Paul has a lot to add to the discussion. In 2:2 he says, “You used to live like people of this world. You followed the rule of a destructive spiritual power.” That is not good. In 5:16 he says that we live in evil times. And in chapter 6 verse 12 he informs us, “We aren’t fighting against human enemies, but against rulers, authorities, forces of cosmic darkness, and spiritual powers of evil in the heavens.” So evil, in this world is a result of both Satan and his minions, what the Bible calls the dark powers or spiritual forces of this world, as well as the bad choices made by human freewill.

 Evil then, as we experience it, is a two-pronged reality. It is outside of us, a force that acts on this world, but it is also inside of us. Jesus says that we prefer darkness over light. For example: We live in a world that prizes pleasure. Certainly, pleasure is better than pain, but we also very often deem it to be better than obedience. We live our days in pride and boasting of ourselves. Why would I need a good God if I am good in and of myself? We juggle thoughts of covetousness. One poet put a description of evil in this way, **[SLIDE 12]** “I want something you have; I want it oh so bad, Don’t move hand it over, I won’t stop till it’s in my hand.” If you think that sounds like the musings of a four-year-old bully on the playground, you would be right. That is where we all find ourselves. We want what we want and we want it now. We are all capable of evil. The bible goes so far to say that not one of us is good.

If **[SLIDE 13]** God is good, then it is for our good to obey him. Our obedience to a good God is good. That then makes our disobedience to a good God is bad. It is bad for us and for others. It is morally bad as well. No good can come from disobeying a good God. But we live with free will. We live with that tree standing before us, with that button we should not press, with that snake in our ear…And we have a decision to make. Obey or disobey. Trust or not trust. Do good or do evil.

 **[SLIDE 14]** I never met my grandfather. He died before I was born. In fact, he died the night before my oldest cousin was born. My own father was 18 years old at the time. He and his dad had an argument. My grandfather fancied himself a mechanic on the side. He had a loner vehicle for folks to use while he worked on their car. On this particular night, the loner car had broken down. My father was asked to come along and help tow the loner back home. My father was disobedient and refused. Later that same night, out in the pouring rain, my grandfather, alone, was driving home and had to pull over onto the side of the road. There was a problem with the tow chain and it had to be adjusted. As he was struggling with the chain, he positioned his head between his truck and the other car to get a better angle. Then along came another vehicle down that same road. The driver was drunk and there was a collision. My grandfather suffered injury to his brain stem and was declared braindead that night in the hospital.

 Suffering. Pain. Evil. **[SLIDE 15]**You can see how it all merges together. Maybe my grandfather should not have argued with his son, maybe my father should not have disobeyed and should have come along to pick up the car. Certainly the other driver should not have been drinking, the rain should not have been falling. Couldn’t my good God have prevented this? Couldn’t he have saved my grandfather’s life? Couldn’t he have met his grandkids? Yes. God is good and he is all-powerful. God could have prevented this event, but he didn’t. Does that mean he is not good? Is God at fault for what happened?

 As I said, this question is messy **[SLIDE 16]**. There is no clean answer. But there is an answer. We look to the cross to find it. This world is broken, atheist or Christian, we can all agree on that. Sometimes evil things just happen, natural disasters, or childhood cancer for example. Sometimes fellow humans perpetrate evil actions, from Hitler and Stalin to petty crooks and vandals. Sometimes a genuine accident ends in tragedy. Sometimes we are the culprit…We are, in fact, part of the problem. Evil might happen for many reasons, but **[SLIDE 17]** God is good. He is opposed to evil. He has put together a plan to fix what has been broken. Pastor Tim Keller puts it this way, “Jesus came on a rescue mission for creation. He had to pay for our sins so that someday he can end evil and suffering without ending us.”

 God is love, and whether we like it or not, a free and loving relationship will always include risk. God asks us to obey his good commands and to follow his good way, but he will not compel us. Every parent knows this same risk. We can raise our kids and love them completely, yet, in the end, there is a possibility in which that love is not returned. Disobedient hearts can lead to severed relationships. This too is evil. My actions against another person have real consequences, evil consequences. And God, in his goodness, has made a way to repair and restore. He entered into this world, he took on our pain, he experienced our suffering, and he faced the epitome of evil…death itself; final separation. Our infinitely good God, made himself as one of us, lived obediently, without idolizing pleasure, without pridefulness, without coveting what the other kids on the playground have. He lived a perfectly good life and died a perfectly undeserved death in order to redeem and restore what was broken way back at the beginning.

 In the end, Christianity can explain the existence of evil in light of a good God. It’s not pretty, it is a mess and that is as it should be. Not only can we explain evil, but we can speak as well to the end of evil. We have hope that our good God will one day recreate this broken world and restore the original goodness of his creation.

 As with everything else, this problem of evil comes down to a personal question…Given the reality of this broken world, **[SLIDE 18]** what will be your response? Do you throw up your hands and declare that all is lost? We’re doomed! Or do you trust this good God? Do you put your hope in the good plan that he has laid out? Do we live our lives in obedience to him? I want to close by going back to Ephesians 2 where Paul lays out one of the ways this story can go; one of the ways we could react to this broken world. (READ Eph. 2:1-5)

 In this broken world, we all need grace! So we thank God for his goodness. We rejoice in the hope that he will put an end to evil and suffering. And, even though we might think, according to our wisdom, that God should do things in a different way, we look to the cross **[SLIDE 19]**. We cling to the saving work of Jesus, we turn from our sins and we trust that our good God can restore goodness in this evil world as well as restore goodness in my evil heart. Amen.