

# OpenTheo

## How Can Something Be Evil in Itself if Evil Is Only a Lack of Good?

March 24, 2022



### #STRask - Stand to Reason

Questions about how Greg can say something is evil “in itself” if evil is only a lack of good, how Jesus could have had a fully-human experience if he never doubted, and whether all bad things that happen to us are spiritual attacks.

- \* How can Greg say something is evil “in itself” if evil is only a lack of good?
- \* How could Jesus have had a fully-human experience if he never doubted God’s existence, never struggled to hear from God, and never grieved as he wondered if he’d see a loved one again?
- \* Are all negative and bad things that happen to us spiritual attacks?

## Transcript

You're listening to Stand to Reasons #STRSKpodcast. I'm Amy Hall and with me, today as in nearly every day is Greg Cocker. Yes I am.

We haven't had a guest on here in a long time, Greg. It's been for a while. Yeah, fine with me.

Although I'm so happy for my colleagues who fill in when I'm not here and that occasionally happens. We ought to do that more often. You get to take it right off it.

All right, let's start with a question from Andrew. All right. Would you please explain what you mean by quote, "Some things have to be wicked or bad or evil in themselves?" If I am paraphrasing William and Craig correctly or maybe Frank Turic, quote, "Evil is not a thing in itself but rather evil is the deprivation of a good thing." End quote.

We know good is grounded in God's nature. How can evil be something in itself instead of a lack of good? And Greg, this comes from a quote from STRU, which is STR University on our website. Which is not a real university just in case someone's confused.

We give no degrees. No. It's a bunch of training courses that you can go through.

It's free and just get there by [training.str.org](http://training.str.org). You can go straight there, set up an account. What are some of the courses that we have on there? Well, we have the Ambassador course in tactics and the problem of evil, John Noyce does that. And this one about atheism that I do called "Atheism Bumping into Reality." A story of reality.

Those are, I'm thinking of the ones I've done, Alinschley, a minute's done, a couple of them. Tim has done one on truth, the nature of truth. And so I think we've got like eight or nine and already done and they're a number of in the queue.

So yeah, it's great because there are like five or six sessions. There are seven to 15 minutes each, max. There's a little testing feature at the end.

And then you move on to the next one. It's meant to give you the basics on these different issues. There is no charge for them.

It is behind the registration, but that's okay. It's easy to do. And then you're in.

You apply and you get accepted and off you go. All right. So we encourage you to check that out.

But meanwhile, now we have to come back to this question. Hopefully you can still remember it, Greg, in a nutshell, he wants to know how can evil be something in itself instead of a lack of good? Okay. This is a good question.

I'm very glad to be able to make a clarification on this. And Bill Craig and Frank Turic are correct. I make the same point.

And it just goes back a long ways to Augustin, the first one that I know made the characterization that evil is privation. Everything that God made is good. And then it gets broken, so to speak.

And so when it's broken, then something has been lost that creates circumstances that we call evil. And the way I put it in one talk is, did you ever eat a donut hole? And the answer is, well, you can't eat a donut hole. I mean, I don't mean those little cup bombs that you get at church those round things.

I mean, the, I mean, a donut hole, because the donut holes were the donut ain't. But we can refer to the donut hole, just like we do to shadows in virtue of something that's missing the donut in the case of the, I'm sorry, the stuff in the middle of the donut in the case of the donut where the donut ain't, that's the donut hole, or we're light ain't, that's a shadow. So this understanding of evil helps us to characterize, or at least begin to address the issue of evil by not dealing with evil as a thing in itself.

Okay, as philosophers would say it has no ontological status. Evil doesn't have existence.

But it is a word that we use and a condition in which good is missing.

So when I say in the class on atheism bumping into reality, and I'm talking about the bump of bad, that is the reality of evil in the world. Okay. And I'm asking which worldview is better suited to address that problem, the atheistic worldview, or the theistic worldview, that's the direction I'm going with that line of thinking.

We need to understand that when I say evil in the world, I am not speaking of the evil as a thing in the world, but a circumstance that is real in the world, that is, is a circumstance that is evil itself, because to be most precise, it lacks the goodness that it used to have or something like that. Okay, it is an example of a lack of goodness. All right.

It's not the way things are supposed to be. So this, the reason this is an important move is we don't want to think of evil as a kind of a stuff. It's floating around the universe, glomming on to people and things and and and making them evil like itself.

No, it's not a stuff. By the way, if it if it is a stuff, then it had to be created. And if God created everything, then God created evil, that's the problem.

If evil is a thing, but evil is not a thing. It's it's a circumstance. But the circumstances, and this is what's key Amy here, the circumstances that we refer to as evil have to be features of the objective world.

They are not mind dependent. They are mind independent. Now, when I say that 31 flavors, Jamokam and Fajai scream is delicious.

This is mind dependent. If my mind disappears, then that deliciousness, that judgment disappears. Or if I don't think it's delicious, then it's not to me.

But if I say rape is wrong, or if there's a claim that rape is wrong, then rape is either right or wrong. Even if some people, some minds think it's okay, that doesn't make it okay, because it is not mind dependent or dependent on the people. It is it is in a feature or a property of the action itself.

And if everybody thought, rape is fine, rape would still be bad if it is bad in itself. It would be it would be a condition that we characterize as evil. But what we don't mean is that some evil stuff latched itself onto a sexual act.

The important thing here is for my argument for God, which is the standard moral argument, if there is no God, then there then there is no objective morality. That is, there is nothing that is immoral in itself and nothing good in itself either, by the way. But there is objective morality.

How do we know that the problem of evil? What's the problem of evil? It's acts that are

characterized by people as evil in the world. And that follow this characterization of evil that I just mentioned. So, so I'm not saying anything different from what I've said or others have said in the past.

It's just the manner of speaking. When I say there's evil in the world, I am talking about the evil circumstances. Okay.

And the evil evil is not simply an assessment of the mind, because when the mind changes or disappears, then the assessment that goes with it would disappear too. That would be relativism or subjectivism. And the easiest way or the most, the crispest way probably to characterize the difference between relativism and objectivism in morality is that relativism is mind dependent or the right or wrong is inside of the believer.

It's an assessment merely inside. It doesn't say anything about the outside world. It says something about the opinions of the subject, the individual, where objectivism right or wrong, that concept is resident in the is on the outside.

These are qualities of certain actions or circumstances, regardless of what people think about them, they are mind independent. So basically what you're saying is that when you say in itself, you're talking about it objectively lacking good. You're making a comment on the objective nature.

That's correct. Yeah. And I'm not, I'm not just talking about my truth.

All right. And by the way, that is what everyone is referring to, whether they have a sophisticated sense of it or not, when they talk about evil in the world. This is why they say, how can they be so much evil in the world? They are talking about something they think is outside of themselves, not just merely something inside, like they don't happen to like Brussels sprouts or something or liver and onions or something.

They are talking about something that is actually bad. Whenever this topic comes up, I cannot help but think of this movie called Time Bandits. So anyone, any Gen X are out there, remembers that at the end of the movie, there's this stuff that's evil.

And I think they put it in the microwave and blow it up, like get rid of the evil. Every time I always think of that movie, that movie's not right. It's not correct.

Right. That's right. All right.

Let's go on to a question from Fridders. How can Jesus have had the fully human experience if he never doubted if there was a God, never struggled to hear from him or grieved not knowing if he'd see his loved one again? Well, no one who understands the incarnation is saying that Jesus had the fully human experience. What we are saying is that Jesus was fully human and he experienced the standard kinds of things that humans experience, qua human in virtue of being human.

All right. So in this sense, he was more like Adam, where Adam didn't have all that. Jesus never had a human being's have guilt.

They feel guilt, actual culpability for wrong things that they have done. Well, this is part of the universal human experience of fallen human beings. But Jesus never felt that because he felt the consequence of guilt on the cross, but he never felt being guilty because he never was guilty.

Okay. No deceit was ever found in his mouth as the first Peter two and other things like that. And so there is not a one to one correlation between the life of Jesus and our lives.

Clearly, there are things that he did not personally experience because they are inconsistent with him being a sinless human being. However, notice that none of these are essential parts of being human. They are what called accidental parts.

So I used to have brown hair and now I have white hair. All right, because the this property that I had of the color of my hair is accidental. In other words, it could have been otherwise and I could still be me.

All right, man's fallen. This is not an essential property to humanity. God didn't make human beings fallen.

It was a consequence of their behavior. He made them able to fall for sure, but he did not make them bad. And by the way, this comes up a lot in conversations with people who question the sexual morality of the Bible and they say, well, why would God make me gay and then tell me not to pursue that kind of sex? Well, that presumes that God made them gay.

Why would anybody believe that? There is no evidence such a thing. Certainly, no theological evidence and no biological evidence they were made gay biologically. I mean, that's an urban legend when it comes to the research.

Okay, so when God made human beings, he made them morally innocent, no sin. All right, but he didn't make them immutably innocent. Jesus also was made morally innocent.

And he had all the qualities that are native to true humanity. He did not have qualities who were accidental to humanity and have gray hair. That's an accidental property.

I don't think he had gray hair. You don't know, maybe he did. I'm presuming maybe he was bald for goodness sake for all we know, but the point, I think you see the point I'm making.

And so there are many experiences that we have that are in virtue of being a fallen in a fallen world. But by the way, he did share in a lot of those things. When he suffered, he

uttered no threats.

And when he was reviled, he did not revile himself. He did not revile in return, but kept entrusting himself to him who judges righteously. That's in the end of 1 Peter 2. So Jesus succumbed to the experience of the contingencies of a fallen world.

But there were other features of his life that of experiences in interior life that were going to be different because of his divine nature. And the fact that until the cross, he was in complete and perfect harmony with the Father, relational harmony. We don't have that.

We don't have anything like that. And that's something that will be the case if I understand John 17, the prayer there properly, but it's not now. So when I look at these specific things that Fritter's mentioned, he never doubted there was a God.

He never struggled to hear from him. He was never grieved, not knowing if he'd see his loved one again. All of these things are a result of separation from God, which is a result of being a fallen human being.

And or a lack of trusting God or a separation from God. So obviously Jesus wouldn't have those things. But Greg, since you mentioned Adam, you would have to say that God did not create a human being because when Adam was first created, he was not fallen.

So it can't be essential to being a human being or Adam wasn't a human being. That's right. So yeah, so the idea that it's not central to human nature, I think, is is here.

Yeah, fallenness is accidental. It's not essential. Everything that was essential to being a true human was true about Jesus.

Let's go into a question from matchless M. Being tired is being tired, having headaches, COVID fatigue, etc. All essentially spiritual attacks are all negative and bad things that happen to us spiritual attacks. I don't have any reason to think that's the case.

Jesus experienced weariness. But there's no indication when we read that that he is experiencing it in virtue of some spiritual attack. I think that there remember there are three enemies of the world of flesh and the devil is the way John puts it.

And it can be characterized in different ways. But part of our difficulty is living in a fallen world, in a fallen self. We groan with the expectation of some time and the longing of being whole again.

All right. Now that is a function of the flesh and our fallen natures. Can the devil take advantage of that? Absolutely.

The fact that I come home, bushed at night from full day of broadcasting, like we have ahead of us. Well, that's not satanic attack. Can the devil tempt me in virtue of my

physical weakness to be unkind to my family? Of course.

By the way, I don't need the temple to tempt me in order for me to do that. My flesh is capable of accomplishing that all on its own. And for those who are not clear on this, all you have to do is look at Galatians chapter five.

And in Galatians chapter five, Paul lists a lot of things that are characteristic of the flesh. Sometimes we look at our own sinfulness and we try to externalize it. This happens in relationships when people push the blame for problems onto someone else.

That's a dynamic of relationships. Okay. When in fact, this we may be very guilty of aspects of this, but this is also just characteristic of the Christian life.

Here's Paul in Galatians five, now the verse 19. Now the deeds of the flesh, okay, is identifying what the flesh produce or evidence, which are immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying drunkenness, corals, things like these. Well, it's a long list.

And then the last thing he says is things like these, I haven't really gotten going yet. Just giving you a sense. These are all what Paul calls deeds of the flesh.

They originate with us and we are responsible for them. And we are to overcome them, which is the point of the passage because just above that, I read 19 and following in verse 16, but I say walk by the spirit and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. So that's the antidote.

So we want to be aware that there are spiritual powers out there that can fan the flames, but the fire is already there in our flesh. And what the antidote that Paul gives is not to blame the devil, the devil made me do it and start binding demons or whatever. It is to attend to our own fleshly behavior in the power of the spirit.

And frankly, I asked God to take care of the bad guys. That's in the Lord's prayer as far as I can tell, lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil is the literal translation. Many translated at the evil one.

And so that's my prayer for me and for my family. But the deeds of the flesh are what we are supposed to take care of and take responsibility for in the power of the spirit. And I don't even think we need to figure out exactly who is causing or what is causing certain things in our life, in our life to go wrong.

And the reason I say that is because our purpose is to respond in the way that God has called us to respond. So I mean, look at Jesus when he was tempted in the wilderness. What did the devil do? He tempted him in his weakness.

So not the weakness of his sin, but just his physical weakness of being hungry. And so the devil tempts him to do something that God wouldn't have him do. So he does use those weaknesses, but where those weaknesses come from or where the sickness or whatever comes from in this fallen world, there's one thing we know for sure.

And that is that God said all things are being worked together for our good to make us like Christ. So we can, we never need to despair when we're going through any of these things and say, oh, the devil's doing this to me, my life is ruined. Because the fact remains that God is working through that very thing to make you like Christ and he will use it for a good purpose.

So you don't have to despair. All you need to do is respond the way he would have you respond. As you just said, Greg, while while being reviled, he did not revile in return.

So there's something right there. If someone is persecuting you, you respond as Jesus would respond. If you're sick, you respond in faith to God and you don't run after other gods or other, you know, seek the help of another God.

I just heard the story of somebody who asked a friend of mine. It's really sad. He's suffering from cancer.

He's he's going to die basically, eventually. And he asked my friend if it was okay if he saw a shaman because he was getting desperate for healing. So there is an example.

If you are suffering, you respond in faith towards God, you get the help you need medically, but you don't seek other spiritual things. And there are a lot of different ways that we can respond. You know, we don't respond in evil.

We don't respond with bitterness. We don't respond in kind to people who revile us and on and on. So I think that's it also means I'm sorry, we don't need to take it fatalistically like we do nothing and kind of in an abstract sense, trust in Jesus, a lot of the way we have means of expressing that trust.

We can take comfort from other brothers and sisters, for example, we can receive counsel from that, not from shamans, obviously. But there are avenues that God has offered us largely the body of Christ that helps us to deal with those difficult circumstances. We are not kind of isolated, just me and God.

And that's it. Right. Our response is active.

It's active in all sorts of ways, but it's active in a way that's faithful to God, if that makes sense. Well, thank you for your questions, Andrew, Fridders, matchless M. We really appreciate hearing from you. And if you have a question, send it to us on Twitter with the hashtag #strask or send it through our website with the hashtag #strask.



Make sure you put that in there. We won't know it's for the show. Sometimes people forget and then they write back to me and say, "No, no, I meant that for the show." So make sure you do that and keep it to a couple sentences.

And we'd love to consider it for this podcast. This is Amy Hall and Greg Cogle for Stand to Reason.

[Music]