Did God Create Evil?
By Steve Schmutzer

An unsettling question may arise when one ponders the implications of John 1:3 which states, *"All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being."*

The question is, "Did God create evil?"

Let's step back a few paces and get a wide angle view. After each sequence of bringing the heavens and earth into existence in Genesis 1, God considered His creative work to be good. Over and over the phrase is repeated, *"And God saw that it was good."* The point is God makes good things.

This emphasis at the start of the Bible remains the same emphasis much later on. In 1 Timothy 4:4, it's underscored again, *"For everything created by God is good…."* With these verses in perspective, it's fair to say God wants us to understand He created all things, and *all* those things are good, proper, noble, pure, wonderful, virtuous, beautiful, and lovely, and so on.

But in between the record of Genesis and that letter to Timothy, Jesus' own words introduce a troubling consideration. In Matthew 25:41, Jesus stated He prepared eternal fire for the devil and his fallen angels. So, God created hell.

Whoa - wait a minute! Did God really create hell, and if so, how does *that* fit into this whole notion that God creates good things? And, if hell is intended to be the final and unending consequence for those who *"loved darkness rather than light"* as John 3:19 outlines, then did God create the conditions by which humanity would receive ultimate condemnation? In other words, did God place evil in the mix?

The first question is the easier of the two to answer. Of course God created hell. He said so. Nobody else could prepare it and incarcerate Satan and his demonic hordes. Satan has one adversary infinitely more powerful than himself, and that is God. Nobody else is capable of preparing Satan's final destruction.

Furthermore, Revelation 4:11 declares: *"You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for you created all things, and by your will they exist and were created."* The point is God freely chooses to create when, how, and what He will. He is not obligated to any outside force nor indebted to any situation that others may feel passionately about. He considers His own Triune will, and if that means that hell needs to be, then hell is what He will prepare.

There's no sense in debating it. Psalm 115:3 says: *"But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases."* The Bible says God will have His way. He is God, and nobody else is – case closed. Hell's purpose fits squarely within the rights and will of God no matter that some may wish it didn't or may choose to argue otherwise.

But is hell a good thing? That's basically the second part of the first question and the tougher portion to answer. Our limitations of human understanding are confined to *"seeing in mirror dimly"* (1 Cor. 13:12), and we are challenged to see any virtues in the judgments of hell so long as we live on this earth.

It's best to let the Bible speak plainly and accept what it says. In Rev. 16:5-7 and 19:2, God's actions against Tribulation sinners are called *"….just and true,"* and in Rev. 15:3, God's pending judgments are

described as *"….great and marvelous."* In these passages and others like them, the Scriptures make it clear that the most extreme of God's judgments are righteous and good. The faithful believer must therefore regard the terms and conditions of hell no differently than the Word of God sees them.

God's judgments serve to destroy everything that has unrelentingly sought the destruction of mankind who is *"....made in [God's] image and likeness"* (Gen. 1:26) and the absolute corruption of God's "good" creation. His "just, true, great, and marvelous" judgments are a finale of vindication that eliminates the sordid stains of sin from all of history. Seen in that light, hell presents an element of virtue because it fits properly into God's victorious plan.

Let's now wrestle with the underlying question that is a common thread in the fabric of all these matters: "Did God create evil?" It's a question that has embattled dedicated Biblical scholars for a long time, and diverse and passionate opinions continue to persist in reply to it.

At first blush, it seems rational and defensible that if God created all things, then evil must have been one of those things. After all, John 1:3 is fairly cut and dried; nothing exists apart from God's intentions. The proper assumption is God created everything, and nothing else was necessary for that to occur. This is the Biblical **'creatio ex nihilo'** doctrine which means *"creation out of nothing."* Any other view suggests that God is somehow insufficient.

While it adheres to responsible Biblical interpretation, one of the challenges of the **'creatio ex nihilo'** position is it provokes unrest when placed alongside other plainly-stated Biblical doctrines. As earlier noted, tensions may arise as other truths concerning God are given equal consideration.

A small sampling of some of these truths, together with some supportive Scriptures, might look something like this:

1. First, God is timeless, unlike everything else. God exists now as He always has and as He always will. (Gen. 1:1; 2 Tim. 1:9; Jude 25, Rev. 1:8)

2. Second, because God is God, He has certain qualities that nobody else has. For example, among other things He is omnipotent (Job 42:2; Ps. 33:6; John 19:11), omniscient (Ps. 147:5; Isa. 55:9; Job 28:24; Matt. 10:30), and omnibenevolent (Ps. 19:7; John 3:16; Rom. 5:8).

Let's assess this. With God's omnibenevolence in the equation, it would seem that He'd want to prevent all forms of evil. And His omniscience means He knows every way evil could find expression. Finally, because He's omnipotent, He has the power to prevent all forms of evil from even coming into existence at all.

Interesting.

Let's tighten that. A God who knows every way in which an evil can come into existence, who is able to prevent that evil from coming into existence, and who by their nature would want to do so, would therefore prevent any possible entry of evil at all.

Hmm. Uhhhh, well….uh, um.…

Okay, let's be blunt. If an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God really exists, then evil should not.

Ouch!

Are you feeling uncomfortable now?

The fact remains that evil does exist. Furthermore, God is every bit the omnipotent, omnibenevolent, and omniscient being the Bible clearly states Him to be. Herein lays an apparent contradiction of logic.

This awkward truce of disparate truths is not the only dilemma of this complexion in the Word of God. The "free will of man" and the "absolute sovereignty of God" are also sound Biblical truths that co-exist with some unease. The Triune nature of God is another such matter. These sorts of doctrines cannot easily be explained in terms that satisfy the natural human spirit.

We would do well to properly receive a solemn warning at this point. We tend – by our human nature – to value that which is most measureable, not necessarily that which is most important. The truth is, strains to our understanding of the ways of God not only keep us faithful, but they help to preserve a right relationship with Christ (Heb. 11:6). If everything concerning God is easily explained, readily measured, and effortlessly known, faith is unnecessary as Heb. 11:1 implies. These contradictions of logic are intended for our own good; they keep us on the right path.

It is dangerous to be too partisan about matters which the Scriptures present with built-in tensions. A choice to emphasize one side of truth to the exclusion of the other may satisfy our desire to have clear structure, but it's akin to walking flippantly along the edge of a steep chasm - one's personal welfare is threatened. Matthew 7:13-23 underscores the perils of partial truth; it has the same consequences as full deception.

So, did God create the universe with evil a part of it the same way He created the universe with the sun in it? Some may feel that's the point of Isaiah 45:7 which says, *"I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create evil. I the LORD do all these things."* Personally, I don't think that's the right way to see the situation as that notion wrestles against other Scriptures which clearly encourage a different thought process.

Let's ask the question another way: "Did God create a universe in which it's possible for evil to find form and flourish?" I think that's a more accurate way to think about it, and I believe that satisfies the language of Isaiah 45:7 as well.

Let's see if we can make some sense of this as we start with the very basics.

Part of the problem with the question, "Did God create evil?" lies in a translational crux concerning the words "evil" and "create."   Let's begin by examining the word "evil."

The most common term used to describe evil in the Old Testament is used over 200 times. That Hebrew word is *awon* which means "perversion," and it appears to be related to the verb *awah*, which means "to bend" or "to twist." Other Biblical words used to describe evil include the sibling-like nouns of *awel* and *awla,* both of which are derived from a root term which is translated, "to deviate." Already inherent within all these words is the notion of "moving away" from a prior standard or virtue.

A chief intent of these Biblical terms is to denote something contrary to the character of God. Stop! Go back and read that sentence again. Okay, now read it one more time.

A moment of sober-minded reflection is in order here as the full implications of this should not be regarded lightly. As their Biblical contexts show, these Hebrew terms are generally paired with the synonymous words of wickedness, rebellion, and violence. As they are also antonyms for words denoting faithfulness, justice, and honesty, the Biblical passages in which they are used often reveal a corresponding divine response of judgment.

That said, evil is not a "thing" like a brick or a tree. You cannot put evil in a container or measure it when you find it. As words like **awon, awah, awel, and awla** suggest, evil has no inherent existence of its own. It is instead the absence of something, just like darkness is the absence of light, the latter which God called "good" when He created it (Gen. 1:4).

A helpful insight is evil is a departure from something good or a perversion of something proper, because that also argues that something good and proper was established as a righteous standard to begin with. For example, God intended men to be in a sexual relationship with women, and so within an appropriate earthly relationship, heterosexuality is good and proper. Conversely, the Bible teaches that under no circumstance is homosexuality to be regarded as good or proper. Homosexuality is a perversion of God's good standard, and so by Biblical definition it is therefore evil.

We're kind of getting back to where we started. As John 1:3 reminds us, God created everything, and all those things were good. Some of the good things God created were creatures who had the freedom to decide for themselves, to make choices. In order for *real* choices to exist, God permitted an alternative to any choice for good. And so, God allowed these creatures - free angels and free humans - to choose what is good or reject what is good.

That's how Lucifer became Satan. He started out fine, but he made choices that were wrong. When one rejects good, then that choice becomes evil. With the aforementioned '**awon'** and its derivatives in view, this makes sense. Evil, in all its forms, emerges when there is a decision to depart from God's standard.

The conclusion is evil originated with God's created beings - angels and humans - who had been provided with a free will. They misused this free will to make wrong choices; they disobeyed and denied the truth, and they chose standards which did not conform to the goodness of God. This is evil and we call it sin. God did not create sin, but He created beings that could abuse their free will and thus fall into sin. And so it was that *"….sin entered the world"* (Rom. 5:12) which God had created and called good. This is the consequence of self-determination, and this same dynamic continues to be evident in our present world in so many ways.

So, what does it mean to "create?" This specific question returns to the original query, "Did God *create* evil?" Are there latitudes here to the **'creatio ex nihilo'** processes of the universe's origin?

Let's consider how you and I might "create" or make something - taking a little of this and a little of that, for example, and making a batch of chocolate chip cookies. As a matter of fact, that is not unlike how man was made. God took the dust of the earth and He "formed" Adam (Gen. 2:7). He took Adam's rib and He made Eve (Gen. 2:22).

For the purposes of this document, I would argue that both Adam and Eve arrived on the scene in conformity to every definition of "make" or "create" as did the rest of God's creation. It is obvious from the Biblical account that God could have made Adam and Eve through the same '***creatio ex nihilo'*** process as He made everything else before them, but - - - God chose not to.

Now, if God had made Adam and Eve using His own pre-existent conditions and materials to do so, then this raises some interesting speculations concerning His "creative" role behind evil. Since nothing comes into existence except for the authorship of God Himself, and since God created a world in which He knew that evil could – and *would* – find expression, then one might make the case that His direct sovereign oversight of evil's emergence was creative in its own right.

It's true that God actively employs evil in the affairs of mankind*.* Amos 3:6 asks, *"Shall a trumpet be blown in the city, and the people not be afraid? Shall there be evil in a city, and the LORD hath not done it?"* Here perhaps, lays another logical contradiction, because the Word of God also declares forthrightly that God's character is without flaw, and James 1:13 says *"God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man..."* The whole complexion, once again, lies beyond our ability to easily explain.

Some scholars try to settle their anxieties by saying that God "allowed" evil. In their pursuit of an "easy-to-package-and-easier-to-measure" answer, they see a difference here, but I do not. God only "allows" that which is already within His full control to change should He so desire. Nothing has ever eluded Him or caught Him by surprise, nor will it ever. God is not subordinate to any power or processes greater than Himself because no such thing exists.

The fact is God is aware of all evil from its inception, and He is able to deal with it into eternity future. This is not awareness in the sense that evil was introduced from "out there somewhere" and into His sphere against His control as one is *aware* of crime and locks their doors each night to cope with it. Rather - and as much as it is challenging to comprehend this - God is aware of evil as part of His own sovereign plan and purpose.

The concept that evil fits into God's sovereign plan and purpose is an apex issue that stands high above all chatter and babble about the matter. If God had not allowed for the existence of evil, both mankind and angels would still be serving God out of *obligation* and not by choice. Scientists today forge new programmable circuits and robotic technology, but God did not want robots, nor does He still. God allowed for the existence of evil so that you and I could genuinely exercise our free will and choose whether or not we wanted to serve Him.

This comes full circle back to the original claim that God creates only good things. He permitted the existence of evil in order to manifest an even greater good, and that greater good is His grace to redeem sinful human beings. If evil (sin) did not exist, there would be no need for His grace and redemption. Salvation would be meaningless and entirely unnecessary. But grace and redemption by a just and holy God, when assessed against the backdrop of evil, manifests His unfathomable love and unsearchable ways as nothing else is able to (Rom. 11:33). For this greatest of all good things, God permitted evil a path to existence.

This is it! This is what it's all about! This was God's plan before he ever created the world, and He knew even at that point how it would all work out. God knew that sin would enter the universe, first through Satan, and then into the entire human race through Adam. God knew evil would be introduced as

choices were made against His good and proper standards. And he devised His magnificent plan of grace and redemption based on that knowledge.

I still have a lot of questions, as you probably do too. But what I most need to know right now is this: Without evil, there would be no need of a Savior. Without evil, there would be no need for God's grace. Evil is a necessary element of God's plan from the very beginning, and so in that light it is part of a greater good. God did not create evil the very same way he created the heavenly bodies, but he created human beings capable of evil and therefore in need of a perfect Savior.

In the end, you and I are finite beings trying to gain insight into the One and Only infinite and supernatural God. While in His great grace and mercy He has provided us with the absolute truth of His Word, in remains that this life there will always be questions that we may not fully settle within the milieu of the human condition. We must accept that on this side of eternity's door, we will only see shadows of the things that someday we will understand with blazing clarity (1 Cor. 13:12).

Meantime, our faith must express itself by setting firm guards against those doors through which human error can enter. The God we proclaim does indeed know the answers, and in His omniscience, His omnibenevolence, and His omnipotence, He absolutely has a reason and explanation for everything. How small our God would be if we could explain Him fully and know all His ways.

May our faith be increased!