

I was asked recently if I thought that sin and evil were the same thing. What would your response be? Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary states: **Evil** is a broad term used to describe intentional negative moral acts or thoughts that are cruel, unjust, or selfish. Evil is usually contrasted with good, which describes acts that are kind, just, or unselfish. **Sin** is a term used mainly in a religious context to describe an act that violates a moral rule, or the state of having committed such a violation. Commonly, the moral code of conduct is decreed by a divine entity, i.e. Divine law.

There is no doubt that sin, and the evil that accompanies it, exists in this world. Most people agree that the taking of thousands of innocent lives on September 11, 2001 is a prime example of evil at its worst. When atrocious examples of evil come to our attention, people commonly wonder why does God allow such evil to happen. Atheists will use the very existence of evil to argue against God. "If God were so good," they smirk, "why is there evil in the world?" Since evil exists, they conclude that God must not exist.

Have you ever thought about reversing the argument? If evil is so prevalent, why is there righteousness in the world? Since righteousness exists, should we conclude that evil does not exist? Obviously the existence of one extreme does not preclude the existence of the other extreme. Yet, still the question needs to be addressed.

Evil always involves sin. Some sins are much more abhorrent than others. The loss of thousands of innocent lives strikes us as more evil than someone's lie. Yet, we must understand that both are different facets of evil. The Apostle John defines sin as the breaking of law (I John 3:4). The very existence and recognition of evil argue that a law or several laws are being broken. The tragedy of 911 was evil because innocent people were murdered.

This means that we recognize the fact that murder is wrong. In other words, we acknowledge that a law exists making murder sinful. If such a law did not exist, then there could be no violation of that law (Romans 4:15). Recognizing this, some have foolishly argued that here lies a quick way to remove evil from the world - remove laws against evil! Too hard to believe?

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW EVIL?

We all recognize that this nation has a drug problem. What has been suggested as a solution to the drug problem? Why, legalize the drugs! As if this would solve the problem! Truth is, it's a suggestion to gain tax dollars! It was once against the law to have sex outside of marriage. Those laws have been dropped from the books as being unenforceable. Has the sin of fornication therefore disappeared with the removal of the law? Has it even decreased? No, the exact opposite effect has been recorded. People are living together in staggering numbers and the rate is increasing phenomenally.

Consider the age-old response, "*I didn't know that was illegal!*" Does our ignorance of a law mean the law doesn't exist for us? Obviously no. We are still held accountable even if we did not know of its existence. If the sin of fornication has been removed from the books, does that make it any less sinful? Or the sin of adultery? To summarize, sin exists even when the written laws do not acknowledge a particular action as sinful.

Putting on blinders to avoid seeing evil does not make the evil go away, nor does it make it any less evil. E.g. Drunken driving is evil because it's sin and a violation of law – not because you get caught doing it! Where, then, does sin originate? We all will come to a fork in a road and we must choose which direction we will take. Because a decision must be made, I can guarantee that everyone will not choose the same path. Even if I put up a sign explaining the desirability of one direction over the other, I can still guarantee that the less desirable path will still be used – James 1:12-18. This explains that sin comes from people making the wrong choice. Sin comes from man not God - v.14.

We all have desires that are necessary for us to live. Satan uses these natural desires as a trap that we willingly walk into because we want what is offered. Much like the demise of the mouse – he WANTS the cheese! Other times we don't see the bait or the trap. We are like an unsuspecting animal, doomed to await death. E.g. foxes have been known to chew their own leg off to escape the grasp of the steel jaws of the trap, but they remain hurt and crippled the rest of their life. That's the way sin works. It leads us down the path of evil and we will never be same again. Oh, with Christ we can be forgiven, yes, but you can never erase the pain of your choice. It is forever etched in your mind.

Yet, if evil exists, and people will choose to do evil, why did God bother giving men a law? Paul explains that the law does not cause people to sin, but it does clarify our sins (Romans

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW EVIL?

7:7-12). The law, being from God, is holy and good. It defines for man what God declares as sin. It helps us understand the nature of sin and of evil. Unfortunately, the law is also exploited by Satan. By defining sin, it lets us know about options we might not have considered before. Paul spoke of this here in Romans 7. He, by nature, would not be one to covet what belongs to another man. But when he learned about coveting through the law, he faced the temptation to covet from the simple fact that he was now aware of the possibility.

Perhaps now we can address why evil continues to exist in this world. Sin exists because people want it – Jeremiah 5:30-31. God tolerates its existence because it creates a distinction between the righteous and the wicked - Romans 7:13. When we sin, and we see the effect of evil on our lives, then we learn, however reluctantly, that God was right. We are forced to see that God's laws are actually the best path because we see the devastation caused by people who sin.

We must also acknowledge that evil continues to exist in this world because we refuse to recognize sin. This is the trap the Jews fell into (Romans 2:17-23). When you don't pay a bill, are you not stealing? If you leave out some of your income at tax time, are you not lying? How can a person lead others out of sin if they wallow in sins that they feel are not so bad?

This was a major point in Jesus' sermon on the mount. Murder is awful, but it is preceded by the sin of anger – Matthew 5:21-22. Adultery is evil, but it is preceded by the sin of lust – Matthew 5:27-28. We cannot make a half-hearted stand against evil. We cannot accept some sins but reject others. This is an all-or-nothing war.

Evil cannot be defeated if we allow sin to continue to exist in our own lives. Edmund Burke writes: "All that is necessary for evil to succeed is that good men do nothing." Henry David Thoreau wrote: "There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root."

Where do you stand in this battle against evil? Either you are for righteousness and God or you are against him – Matthew 12:30. There is no middle ground.