

## God does evil, but He never sins

People read **Isaiah 45:7** where God says, “I create evil,” and they can’t believe it. Why? They assume evil to be sin. In order to define evil, let’s examine two inspired contexts:

► In **Genesis 37:33**, Jacob called the beast that he thought had killed his son, “evil.” What did Jacob associate with evilness? “An evil beast hath devoured him; Joseph is without doubt rent in pieces.”

An evil beast is one that breaks down, dismantles or rends. This is opposed to a good beast, such as a lamb, which just stands around looking cute. But is either a lion or a lamb a sinner? Your new poodle Godzilla may chew your slippers, and you may swat Godzilla’s rump with a newspaper, but you don’t send him to confession, preach him repentance, or call the police. That’s because Godzilla hasn’t sinned.

► In **Numbers 20:5**, Israel said to Moses: “Why have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? It is no place of seed or of figs, and neither is there any water to drink.” Can a desert sin? Of course not. The Israelites knew that evil meant, “to be shattered,” and they did not confuse it with moral deficiency.

Evil is morally neutral, which is why God can both create it and employ it without sinning. *Why would God bring shattering (evil) into our lives?* So that He can heal us and make us stronger (and wiser) for the experience. ■

# Martin Zender's Clanging Gong News

*“If I know all mysteries and all knowledge, but have no love, I am a clanging gong” --1 Cor. 13:1-2*



Two out of three isn't bad.

## EVIL Motive is everything



Several years ago, a man named Timothy McVeigh parked a blue van alongside a city street in front of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City. The van contained a bomb. Minutes later, after McVeigh had fled, the bomb exploded. In the horrible blast, the Murrah building crumbled. Brick upon brick, it fell upon itself: rent; dismantled; shattered. And many precious human lives turned to dust with it.

One early summer Sunday morning, I stood on a downtown street in St. Louis. A man parked a blue van alongside a city street, next to a large, government building. As I looked on, he and several helpers loaded dynamite into the building. Watching from a safe distance, I saw the men detonate the load. In the horrible blast, the building crumbled. Brick upon brick, it fell upon itself: rent; dismantled; shattered. But no human lives were lost.

What was the difference between McVeigh’s act, and that of the crew in St. Louis? I first want you to think about the similarities: they both did evil to a building. They both brought nearly identical destruction upon a structure of brick. For this is what evil is: destruction, dismantling, shattering. The Hebrew word is “*ra*,” and it literally means, “to shatter.” The word, by itself, has no moral bias. Evil is an indifferent tool, capable of being bent toward either right or wrong purposes.

Back to my two examples of identical evil.

What were the motives in each case?

McVeigh’s intent was to destroy lives. He was out for revenge, his heart full of hate. McVeigh committed an evil act. But he also sinned, and sinned grievously.

What about the St. Louis crew? They were a special team, hired by the city to destroy an already-dilapidated building to make room for a new hospital. Did the crew commit an evil? Yes. They broke down, dismantled, and shattered a building. But did they sin? No. Their intention was to eventually save lives, not destroy them. They were operating under the law. The workers committed an act that was as evil as McVeigh’s, but they did not sin.

Allen grabs a hammer and breaks glass; he’s a hero. Joe grabs a hammer and breaks glass; he goes to jail. The difference? Allen summoned the fire department; Joe robbed the hardware store. Smashing glass with a hammer is an evil act, and both men did evil. Their motives, however, were as opposite as can be.

John killed a man last Thursday. He washed his hands, picked up his paycheck, and went home to dinner. Bryan killed a man the same day. He was arrested, handcuffed, and led away in a

## “God can do evil without sinning.”

squad car. The difference? Joe worked for the state and was assisting in the death of a convicted, serial rapist. Bryan got burned on a drug deal and was stalking a pusher on the street. Both men killed, that is, they took a life. But one committed murder, and the other did not. The difference: motive.

*Motive.* This is what makes an evil act either sin or not sin, and this is why God can do evil without sinning; *His motives are always right.* God created evil so that we might appreciate the presence of good. When evil has done its necessary work, God abolishes it from His universe forever (1 Cor. 15:26). ■

## I'm a believer, not a Universalist

**W**hile I do believe in the universal application of the blood of Christ, such a belief no more makes me a Universalist than believing in the baptism into Christ's death (Rom. 6:14) makes me a Baptist. The only organization *I* belong to is the Auto Club.

I like to call myself a believer. I believe that Jesus Christ died, not only for my sins, but for the sins of the whole world (1 Jn. 2:2). I believe the God-breathed scripture that attests to the fact that Jesus Christ will make righteous the same people that Adam made sinners (Romans 5:19). If my calculations on the number of sinners born into the world is to be relied upon, then the gift of righteousness eventually includes everyone.

Universalists believe that God returns everyone to Himself simply because He is a nice guy. I believe that all creation eventually returns to God because of the sacrifice of Christ

on the cross. (Scripture backs me up on this—namely Colossians 1:20). Does this mean that God *isn't* a nice guy? He is a righteous judge and a loving Father. Since scripture never refers to Him as a nice guy, then I'll refrain from it as well.

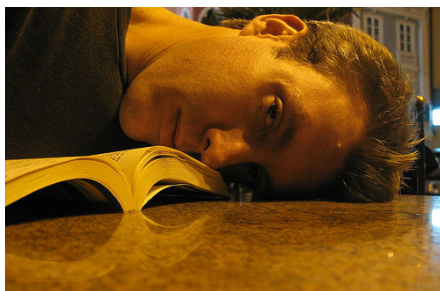
As far as judgment goes, Universalists generally dispense with it. Not me. I believe in all the judgments mentioned in the Bible. I believe in gnashing teeth, eighty-pound hailstones, and a lake that burns with sulfur and other combustibles. I believe that the unrepentant will be judged according to their deeds at the Great White Throne, and that it just may hurt. These folks will miss out on some glorious times ahead. *But glorious times ahead do not eternity make.*

In the end, God will be all in all (1Cor. 15:28), not because I think He should, but because His title of "Savior" depends on it. ■



## Do Christians *really* believe in eternal torment?

**W**hen some Christians put on their righteous faces in the morning, they emerge prepared to defend the "Turn or Burn" teaching of their church. They *must* be ready to profess this doctrine to stay in the club and avoid persecution. But if they *really* believed in eternal torment, wouldn't they be banging on doors, charging everyone everywhere to repent—instead of driving to Starbucks in their pressed slacks?



At night, when these Christians can safely unload the burden of belonging and lie in their beds where only God sees and hears, they let go and trust Him. They trust Him that, "Somehow, everything will work out."

What a pleasant thought! "Somehow, everything will work out." This is a very deep thing of the spirit, implanted by God Himself. It is such a high spiritual thought that it survives even in the face of the horrific man-made creeds that receive lip service by day, whenever the mainstream profession is pressed and elicited.

But then comes the peace of night once more, when the hidden faith once again finds expression—faith in the ultimate goodness of God.

Oh, and by the way: everything *will* work out—not somehow, but because of Christ's sacrifice on the cross of Calvary. ■

## Q&A

Is God behind the Holocaust?

**Q:** Martin, I know you believe that God created evil, but how can you believe that God could be behind something as horrible as the Holocaust?

**A:** It's tough some days, it really is. But I know that evil is temporary and that God will return all things to Himself (Rom. 11:36) better for the experience.

**Note:** At least I believe that the Holocaust victims—most of them Jews who did not believe in Jesus—are dead now, to be resurrected, judged, and reconciled to God later. Christian doctrine, on the other hand, has them presently burning in hell for eternity. Now, whose belief is the weird one?

Though I cry and writhe sometimes at God's process, it's much easier to believe as *I* do (knowing the goal), than to believe that the universe is in



chaos, that evil is eternal, and that no good outcome is assured.

Either way, the Holocaust happened. Right? Now, I can either believe that there was no purpose in it and that, because of human free will and the sovereignty of the devil, not even God can guarantee a good outcome, or that there was a high (though perhaps hidden) purpose in it and that even its victims will one day laud God for the experience. I can't ask people who believe the former thing, "How can you think *that* way?" because the people who claim to believe this way rarely, if ever, think about it. I think about it for a living, and I've found answers.

God creates evil for the purpose of contrast, providing the black backdrop in front of which He reveals His love and grace. ■

# Rants & Stuff

The Apostle Paul says we should not murmur (Philippians 2:14). Therefore, I shall rant.

## Here's wondering if love ever fails

A FUN CONVERSATION BETWEEN RELIGION AND YOUR'S TRULY

**Religion:** God is love.

**Zender:** Does love ever fail?

**Religion:** Of course not.

**Zender:** Am I supposed to love my enemies?

**Religion:** It's a command.

**Zender:** Does God love *His* enemies?

**Religion:** Only if they love *Him*.

**Zender:** But if they love Him, then they're no longer enemies.

**Religion:** Don't start with me.

**Zender:** I'm just asking questions. What happens if someone doesn't love God?

**Religion:** God burns them in hell for eternity.

**Zender:** Doesn't that hurt?

**Religion:** Of course it hurts. It's supposed to hurt.

**Zender:** But I thought you said love never fails.

**Religion:** It doesn't.

**Zender:** Then how could Love let someone burn in hell for eternity? That sounds like a major fail for Love, especially after the cross.

**Religion:** People have to be smart enough to return God's love.



**Zender:** But Romans 5:6 says that Christ saves people while they're helpless.

**Religion:** Romans doesn't mean what it says there. You have to help yourself long enough to believe in God. You have to make a smart decision.

**Zender:** So *dumb* people go to hell for eternity?

**Religion:** Hell is for idiots, yes. It takes an idiot to not choose Christ. I wish you hadn't made me admit that.

**Zender:** This sounds like survival of the smartest rather than salvation of the helpless.

**Religion:** Stop making me confront my hypocrisy.

**Zender:** How about a diversion then.

**Religion:** Fine. I would feel much better if we sang a song and lit a candle.

**Zender:** Why don't we put a "Congrats!" sign in heaven and a "Duh!" sign in hell.

**Religion:** I don't like your tone.

**Zender:** I don't like your gospel.

**Religion:** Strike the choir!

**Zender:** You will *so* have to answer for this. ■

## The solution to evil? *God created it.*

Isaiah 45:7, "I am Yahweh Elohim, Maker of good and Creator of evil," solves the problem of evil in one simple, easy-to-grasp verse. How does Isaiah 45:7 do that? Like this: There is a wise and benevolent mind behind evil—namely God's—that will use evil for a wise purpose and discard it

when that purpose is through. If you're uncomfortable with that, then consider the alternative: *Satan created evil and God can't stop him.*

Let me know how that works for ya. ■

