



**TOUGH QUESTIONS FROM CHRISTIAN TEENS**

# Did God Create Evil?

By

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This new series, *Tough Questions From Christian Teens*, is designed to help parents and teens talk about anything that bothers them about the Bible or being a Christian. We have asked Christian teens from several locations to ask us tough questions — and we mean TOUGH questions.

Writing as a former atheist who despised Christians and thought of them as ignorant and weak, I now realize that Christianity is the only worldview that can stand up to the really tough questions young people are asking today.

We want to do something about the problem facing Christian teens today and have joined with youth groups and a Christian school to address the tough questions from their teens. I appreciate the young people who asked the questions and pray our answers will help them in their journey to discover and live out truth in the real world.

[The teenage questioner introduced this in the category of ‘Things that, from the human perspective, seem to suggest evil of God.’]



# God and Evil

“Why did God create Lucifer if He knew he would turn evil (being omniscient)? This relates to the question of Sovereignty and free will: How can God control all of reality and let us control part of it simultaneously?”

## God’s Sovereignty, Evil and Suffering

This is one of the most difficult issues for Christians: the existence of evil in the world God created. If God is the Creator of the universe, as He claims, then why are things so bad? Why the existence and almost limitless power of Satan? Why overwhelming evil and suffering if God has the power to overcome it with the ease of speaking a Word? Couldn’t He just flick His little finger and the devil with all of his evil would fly off the map and into non-existence?

Let’s see what we can find for answers that meet the need of our hearts and minds.

It is obvious by looking around us that we live in a world that has order and purpose and makes sense on many levels. It appears to be designed, even though atheists and agnostics think the universe and everything in it came about by random chance and has no purpose. They view life as ‘meaningless.’ Is that true? Does life, your life and the lives of people you love, have no meaning? No purpose?

I believe life has meaning and purpose. Why? I can see the order and design by looking at the world and the sky above. That's the 'what.' However, I don't know the 'why' (the meaning and purpose) unless the Designer tells me why. God inspired the Apostle Paul to write that "what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them." How did God do that? "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse." (Romans 1)

So, why would people not give God the credit He is due for His great creation? Because they have 'suppressed' the truth in unrighteousness. That's why God's wrath is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men. Not only have people suppressed the truth of God's creative power, they "changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man—and birds and four-footed animals and creeping things." People think they are wise, but they are in fact 'fools.'

So, this brings us to your question about God's sovereignty, the existence of evil and suffering, and the free will of humans.

## God's Sovereignty and Free Will

If God is sovereign, why does evil exist? Why would God create a world where evil was a possibility? If God is sovereign, couldn't He have created a world where evil and suffering were impossible?

God says He created the heavens and the earth. He makes it clear in His revelation (His Word) to us that He is sovereign over all things in His creation. God says He is all-powerful. God says He is all-knowing. God says He is present everywhere at the same time. God says He never changes. God says a lot of things, but can we believe Him?

The first question the serpent asked the woman in the Garden addressed that very question: "Has God indeed said ... ?" (Genesis 3) When Eve said that God had said she and the man would die, the serpent replied with – "You will not surely die." There, in a nutshell, is the heart of the matter. The serpent proposed the idea that God cannot be trusted. So, can we believe what God says or not?

The serpent went on to clarify why he believed God can't be trusted – "For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." The serpent accused God of having a bad motive, maybe even evil motive, for what He told the man and the woman and that He couldn't be trusted. We know the rest of the story. Eve ate the fruit and gave the fruit to her husband who also ate it. God cursed the serpent and the earth and told the woman and the man how difficult life would be for them – introducing evil and suffering as what they

and generations of humans would face from that time on. Evil and suffering come from that event and exchange – evil from Adam and Eve’s disobedience to God and suffering from God’s curse on them and Satan.

So, why would God let things get to that point if He is sovereign? Maybe He’s not sovereign. Maybe God’s power is limited. Maybe His knowledge is limited. Maybe He isn’t able to be everywhere at the same time. Maybe things get past Him and He has to clean up messes when they get out of His ability to handle them. That’s one way I’ve seen Christians and non-Christians explain why we have evil and suffering in a world God created. He’s just not big enough or strong enough or smart enough to deal with all the problems of this world.

I think there’s another reason.

I believe God created a world where evil and suffering were necessary to accomplish His greater purpose. **What?** Why would God want to do that? Why not create a perfect world with perfect creatures where there would be no evil, no suffering, no trouble, no heartache, no pain, no death? Is God weak? Is He, as some accuse Him of being, a moral monster, or is He loving and wise as He says He is? Did God create the best possible world to accomplish the best possible situation for the best possible outcome for those He loves?

I think it’s the latter and here’s why I think that.

Everything I see in this universe and in this world points to a Designer. The God of the Bible is the best explanation of all the explanations I've ever seen for the order and design and purpose we find in our universe and on our planet.

Notice that within seconds of God confronting the serpent, the woman and the man, God introduced a note of hope. He told the serpent that the woman would give birth to a Son (her Seed) and that her Son would destroy the serpent's seed, even though the serpent would have the opportunity to damage the Son in some way (the heel of the Seed).

What was this? Did God know what was going to happen before the serpent deceived the woman? Was God caught off guard or did He see it coming? Did the serpent sneak into the Garden unseen by God and pull a fast one on the Creator? Did God have to run around the Garden flailing His arms over what had happened trying to think of how to fix the mess? Or did God know exactly what was going to happen? Did God already have a plan in place to deal with what happened? Was it a plan He came up with at the last minute or was it a plan He designed long before the events in the Garden? If it was a designed plan, why did God design it? What would God get out of the serpent deceiving the woman? What would God get out of the Seed of the woman destroying the seed of the serpent? What would humans get out of the deception and the evil and suffering that would certainly follow?

The woman, Eve, gave birth to two sons and Satan went after both of them. Satan may have thought that enticing Cain to kill Abel would put an end to God's plan for the woman to give birth to the Seed that would destroy him.

God was involved from the start of the whole thing.

Cain and Abel brought their offerings to God. God "respected Abel and his offering, but He did not respect Cain and his offering." (Genesis 4) If God had the intention of making nice with humans and trying to fix the problem, why would He do that? Why be so specific about which offering, type of offering or attitude of worship He would respect?

Bottom line is that Cain became angry, very angry, so angry he wanted to kill his brother. Look at what God said to Cain. It's the first time in the Bible that we see the word 'sin' –

"So the Lord said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.'"

The Hebrew word for 'sin' comes from a root word that means 'to miss, to go wrong, make a mistake.'

God gave Cain a choice. That's an excellent example of the free will God gave to humans. We first see free will in the choice of the first woman and man. The woman used her free will to make a choice after being deceived by the serpent. The man used his free will to make a choice not based on being deceived. Adam knew what he was doing when he did it. (1 Timothy 2:14) Those are two types of free-will decisions. Humans do that all the time. They make a free-will decision based on knowing all the facts and doing it anyway. They make a free-will decision based on not knowing all the facts. They make a free-will decision based on being deceived. They make a free-will decision based on making mistakes.

God created humans in a way that He created nothing else. He created humans in His 'image,' His 'likeness.' He created humans to have dominion over the earth and everything in it. Being an image-bearer of God means having free will.

One thing God is that we aren't is being necessary. God is the Necessary Being. Everything exists because of God. He is necessary for everything to exist. Everything has life because of God. He is the Necessary Being. We are not 'necessary' beings. We are 'contingent' beings. Our existence is contingent on the Necessary Being. Our life is contingent on the Necessary Being. However, we are like God in that we have a free will.

We make choices and that's exactly what Cain did. He made a choice – a bad choice. God told Cain that 'sin,' the thing that would cause Cain to 'go wrong, was lying at the door, ready to trip up Cain. God told Cain he should 'rule over it.' The Hebrew word for 'rule' means 'dominion, reign.' Cain was an image bearer of God and had within himself the ability to make a different decision than he did. However –

“Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.”

We don't know what Cain and Abel talked about in the field. Whatever was said between brothers led to Cain expressing his free will in killing his brother. The first murder on the planet Earth – an expression of free will. That event was devastating to the first family and led to more murders in the future. So, was God caught off guard by this? He warned Cain, but Cain did it anyway. Did this mess up God's plan? Did God have to rethink what He had told the serpent about the Seed of the woman destroying the seed of the serpent?

What happened was that Eve became pregnant and bore another son. She named him Seth, “For God has appointed another seed for me instead of Abel, whom Cain killed.” At some point in raising her sons, Eve realized that Abel had the character to be the bearer of the seed God had promised her. After Cain murdered Abel, Eve then believed that Seth would be the appointed seed. She was partially correct. Seth was not 'the Seed' that would destroy the seed of the serpent, but he would carry that seed forward

through many generations until it came to a virgin in Nazareth who would give birth to Jesus. And that was God's plan all along.

God reveals to us in His Word that He designed His plan before time began, before the foundation of the world. It was not something God threw together in response to His plan going terribly wrong. It was His plan from eternity.

2 Timothy 1:8-9, Titus 1:1-3, 1 Peter 1:18-21, John 17:24, and Ephesians 1:3-4 are examples of that eternal plan. God determined before time began that Jesus was going to shed His precious blood on the Cross, "as of a lamb without blemish and without spot." Paul wrote that Jesus "was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God." God saved us and called us with a holy calling, "not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began." God, "who cannot lie," promised us before time began the hope of eternal life. Jesus, on the night He was arrested, prayed to His Father that His disciples would behold His "glory, which You have given me; for You loved Me before the foundation of the world." Paul wrote that we Christians are blessed "with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love."

God planned everything in eternity before He created anything! Everything that happened during and after creation was according to God's plan. We'll take a look at whether God's plan was good or bad in a bit, but let's first see that God claims clearly in His revelation that He planned it. God is sovereign and we have free will. Did God know the serpent would deceive Eve? He did. Did God know Adam would disobey and eat from the forbidden tree? He did. Did God know Jesus would die on the Cross to pay the penalty for Adam's sin and the sin of everyone who came to Him in faith? He did. God knew it all.

One other thing: Jesus came from Heaven to earth to accomplish many things. He came to seek and save the lost. He came as the one offering God the Father would accept for sin. Jesus came to give life and give it abundantly. He came to give eternal life. But here's something else Jesus came to give that is at the heart of many of your questions. Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil –

“He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.” 1 John 3:8

We'll address that in more depth when we get to other questions about Satan, but keep that important revelation in mind. Jesus was revealed for the purpose of destroying “the works of the devil.” God knew what the devil would do before He created him. God also knew that His Son would destroy the works of the devil. That's a deep mystery and difficult for us to understand.

## God's Sovereignty and Reality

You asked – “How can God control all of reality and let us control part of it simultaneously?”

Let's begin by defining two primary words from your question: control and reality.

Control means “to exercise restraining or directing influence over” Merriam-Webster ... “the ability or power to decide or strongly influence the particular way in which something will happen or someone will behave, or the condition of having such ability or power” Cambridge Dictionary ... “the power to make decisions about something and decide what should happen” Macmillan Dictionary

Reality means – “the quality or state of being real” Merriam-Webster ... “the actual state of things, or the facts involved in such a state” Cambridge Dictionary ... “the real character or nature of things, not what you imagine or think is possible” Macmillan Dictionary

Reality is the way things really are. Control is the power to influence. To control reality means to influence the way things really are.

Who can do that?

Christians believe God can do that because He invented and created reality and controls it. That's another way of saying that God is Sovereign over all He created. He has the power to make decisions and decide what should happen. That's what God did in eternity. He designed a spiritual and physical plan that is currently playing out in the universe. He created a spiritual world and a physical world and filled it with spiritual and physical objects and beings. Unlike the deist who believes God has no interest in what He created, the theist believes God cares very much about what He created and is in control of it according to His plan and His will.

To your question: how can God control all of reality (be sovereign over it all) and let us control part of it simultaneously?

God, being the inventor of reality, designed a system within reality that gives humans some power (influence) over reality (the actual state of things). That is an integral part of His eternal plan. God created us differently than His other creatures. God created our first parents to bear His image, to be like Him. No other creature is like human beings. No other creature bears God's image and likeness. We are unique in the universe.

So, how can we express control within reality when God is sovereign over it all? God gave us something He has – personal will. God wants to do something and does it. That is an expression of His personal will. Humans do the same thing. We want to do something and do whatever we can to make what we want to happen, happen.

One big difference between God's will and our will is the power to do it. God is all-powerful and can do anything He wants to do (total control). Humans are limited in power and can do only some of what they want to do (partial control).

However, that does not mean humans cannot do some of what they want to do. I want to reach over to the other side of my desk and take hold of a cup, bring that cup to my mouth and drink the water that is in the cup. I want to do it, can do it and, in fact, just did it. I drank from the cup on my desk.

I had a desire to do something, made a decision to do it and did it. Desire, decision and doing are fundamental aspects of expressing our will and playing a role in reality. My reality included drinking water from a cup that sat on my desk. I had desire and made a decision. I acted on that decision (expressed my personal will) and drank.

God has given many of His creatures the ability to desire, decide and do, but humans have the highest framework of will from which to work. We are like God in thinking, reasoning, choosing and doing. Animals, fish, birds and other creatures act according to instinct and awareness and knowledge of their surroundings. Some animals can even mimic human actions, so the question then becomes the difference between them and us. That's where we enter the world of will and morality.

If you see a predatory animal in the wild hunting its prey and you watch as it chases, captures, kills and eats another animal, do you think of that action as unimaginable or immoral? Was their action a bad decision? Should the predator have taken a step back and considered whether killing and eating another animal would be a positive or negative expression of its will? Of course not. Animals may see a larger predator nearby and decide not to chase a prey because they see that the larger, more powerful predator wants it. Animals have preservation instincts, but they do not have ethical/moral will power. They do not make decisions based on positive or negative expressions of their will. They do what comes 'naturally.' They do what God designed them to do.

However, if you see a human being chase, capture, kill and eat another human being, what do you think of that? Would you call that a usual and normal occurrence or would you call that unimaginable and immoral? I would hope you would agree that humans killing and eating humans is unimaginable and immoral. Why would that be true in comparison to non-human creatures like animals, birds and sea creatures? What is it about the human control of reality that is different from all other creatures?

God has given humans a specific power to control some things in their sphere of influence at the same time God controls all things. That's the way He designed reality. He wants us to be involved in helping control some aspects of reality.

“Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’ Genesis 1:28

God made creatures to live in the sea, live on the land and in the air. He blessed them, saying “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.” (Genesis 1: 20-22). However, God did not tell them to ‘subdue’ and ‘have dominion’ over all creatures. God said that to only one of His creatures – human beings.

Subduing and having dominion over something is an expression of control. God created humans to share control with Him over other creatures God had made.

God has given humans that control-role from the beginning. Adam and Eve made decisions that affected their reality and the reality of every human being who would come into existence after them. God gave Adam and Eve a moral command and they broke it. They desired, made a decision based on their desire, and acted upon their desire, even though it was in direct opposition to what God had told them to do.

Cain made desire-based decisions that affected his reality, Abel’s reality, their parents’ reality, and the reality of Cain’s family line for generations. People have been having desires, making decisions and doing what they wanted to do for thousands of years. We do it every day. We can have strong desires and decide not to act on them. We can have strong desires

and decide to act on them in varying degrees. God has given us that kind of control over our personal reality.

We need to remember that there opposing desires in our world. God explained that to Cain when He said – “And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it.” Cain was a human being just like us. He was the first human to be physically born on Earth and he had the same kind of reality-control we have. That’s why God talked to Cain the way He did. Sin is an opposing desire to what God wants us to do. Sin is always lying at the door and its desire is for us – “but you should rule over it.”

There we see how God gives us partial control in a world He controls completely. God shares control with us at the level we can control. I can’t control whether a tornado hits my house in the middle of the night, but I can control my temper, my tongue, and my actions.

If a tornado does hit my house in the middle of the night (which is beyond my control) and I live through it, I can control what I think about what just happened to my house and my family. I can control what I say about what just happened to my house and family. I can control how I respond to the needs of others in my neighborhood who may have suffered loss of property and life.

I can control what is within my control. I cannot control what is not within my control.

There are other examples from a physical position, but the spiritual is probably the more important one because it has eternal consequences. Just like Cain, how will we control sinful desires that come into our lives? "... sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." I don't believe God lied to Cain. I believe that God meant exactly what He said when He told Cain that he should 'rule' over sin. Sin is everywhere. It's all around us. It's in us. What do we do with it? That leads us to our next question.



## Being Born Into Sin

“In what way is this concept misinterpreted by one who says that God punishes people for things they have no control over? Again free will and sovereignty come up.”

Another great question! Let's first look at sin, then the consequences of being born into sin.

We've seen that the biblical definition of sin, in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, is 'missing the mark, doing wrong.' The question then becomes what's the 'mark'? And what's 'wrong'?

God, the Necessary Being, determined the 'mark.' He decided what's right and what's wrong. We see that from the beginning of His relationship with the human 'contingent being.'

God took the man He created and “put him in the Garden of Eden to tend and keep it.” Tending (working, serving) and keeping (watching, preserving, caring, guarding, protecting) was the first assignment God gave to the man. Remember that God's intention for humans was to have dominion over the earth and everything that lived in it. He started that process by putting the man in charge of working and preserving the Garden. The Garden included lots of plants and trees. “God made every tree grow that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (Genesis 2:8-15)

Then God said something very interesting to the man –

“And the Lord commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day the you eat of it you shall surely die.’ (Genesis 2:16-17)

It appears from the way we read Genesis 2:15-17 that God’s warning to Adam was part of the job description. God put the man into the Garden to work and preserve it and told him that part of the reward of working the Garden was eating freely from ‘every tree of the garden’ except for one, ‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’ God made it clear to the man that eating from that particular tree would lead to his death.

In verse 9 we saw a description of the trees in the Garden. God made every tree grow that was pleasant to the sight and good for food. The earth currently has more than 60,000 species of trees. We don’t know if the Garden had that many different types of trees, but it does say that it had every tree “that is pleasant to the sight and good for food.”

Two of the trees mentioned specifically in Genesis 2 are the ‘tree of life’ and ‘the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.’

We know that life came from God. Genesis 1 makes that clear.

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures ... So God created great sea creatures and every living thing that moves ... Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind’; and it was so.” Genesis 1

God created herbs and trees to feed His living beings –

“And God said, ‘See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food.’” Genesis 1:29-30

The tree of life seems to have been a special ‘reward’ or ‘prized’ tree. God didn’t tell Adam he shouldn’t eat from the tree of life, just that he shouldn’t eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. We know Adam didn’t eat from the tree of life because God placed angels and a flaming sword at the east of the Garden of Eden to guard ‘the way to the tree of life.’

“Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’—therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at

the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.” (Genesis 3:22-24)

We also know that the tree of life now resides in Heaven, bearing twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree will be for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22)

Adam and Eve did not eat from the tree of life, but they did eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What’s that all about? Did that tree have some kind of magic juice that would poison anyone who ate it? I don’t think so. The knowledge of good and evil was much deeper than just the contents of a particular fruit.

Even as God created life, He also created knowledge. The Hebrew word for ‘knowledge’ comes from a root word for ‘to know.’ God claims to know everything. Since God is eternal and has no beginning or ending, the same would be said about what He knows. God’s knowledge is eternal. He knows all things from eternity. No knowledge is withheld from Him.

God has revealed Himself to us through His Word. We know something of His essence and substance from what He has revealed to us. We know that He is immaterial and incorporeal. We know that He is invisible. We know that He is alive. We know that He is personal (three persons in one being). We know that He is self-existent. We know that He is immense. We know that He is eternal. Those are all part of who He is. As He identified Himself to Moses, “I AM WHO I AM.” (Exodus 3:14)

So, what kind of God is God? We turn from essence and substance to His attributes. That's similar to knowing a person. I know that you are a young man (essence and substance), but kind of young man are you (attributes)? We can ask the same about God.

There are two types of attributes when we come to God: non-moral and moral. Non-moral doesn't have anything to do with 'morality.' It has to do with the necessary predicates of God's essence that do not involve moral qualities. Those include His omnipresence (everywhere present at the same time), omniscience (all knowledge), omnipotence (all power), and immutability (unchanging).

God's moral attributes are those necessary predicates of His essence that do involve moral qualities. Those include His holiness, righteousness and justice, goodness, and truth. God is holy in every way. He is righteous and just in every way. God is good in every way. He is the 'ideal' person. God's goodness includes his love, grace and mercy. God's truth means that everything He does is true and everything He says is true. God does not lie.

What we see in the Garden is the serpent (Satan) attacking every aspect of God's ideal personage. Satan attacked God's holiness, His righteousness, His justice, His goodness and His truth.

So, back to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

We know that God is good, so what is evil? If God knows all things from eternity and is eternally good, then what is evil? Did God know about evil from eternity? Yes, He did.

Evil is the opposite of good. Augustine argued that evil is the absence of good, but I think it's more than that. God told Adam that good existed and that evil existed. They existed in a tree God called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The knowledge of good and the knowledge of evil both existed when God introduced Adam to tending and keeping the Garden.

Evil is not doing good. What was good in the Garden? Doing what God said. God told Adam not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Good was doing what God said. Evil was disobeying what God said. God gave Adam a moral choice – obey or disobey. Both choices were before Adam at the same time. Adam didn't stumble into eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He chose to eat from the tree. Choosing to disobey God was Adam's sin – missing the mark God had set for him.

The heading of your question is about being 'born into sin.' Adam was not 'born into sin.' In fact, Adam was not 'born.' He was created by God. The same for Eve. She was not 'born.' She was created. The first human birth was Cain. He was 'born into sin.' So, what does that mean?

We learn in the Old Testament that people are born into sin. After the Flood, God said “I will never again curse the ground because of man, for the intention of man’s heart is evil from his youth.” (Genesis 8:21). The Hebrew word for ‘youth’ means early life, childhood.

When Nathan the prophet confronted King David about his sin, David cried out to God for mercy. As he cried out to God, David said “Behold I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me.” (Psalm 51:5) We learn in the New Testament that sin entered the world through one man and death through sin, “and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned” (Romans 5:12). The Apostle Paul explained that the offense of Adam resulted in condemnation and that “by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one.” The law, Paul wrote, “entered that the offense might abound.” That’s the bad news.

The good news is that God’s grace superabounded to many through the sacrificial death of His Son, Jesus Christ. “For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.” (Romans 5:15-17) That goes back to what we saw earlier that Jesus came to ‘destroy’ the works of the devil. Sin began with the devil and he brought it to humanity through deception. Satan knew about good and evil because he had disobeyed God. He knew that disobedience brought about evil and evil brought about God’s condemnation and judgment. Satan had experienced God’s condemnation and judgment and wanted to bring down humans in the same way.

However, God had an eternal plan that Satan probably did not know about and that was what God revealed to him in the Garden about the Seed of the woman destroying the seed of the serpent.

“For as by one man’s disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man’s obedience many will be made righteous” (Romans 5:19)

There it is – obedience. Good is obedience to God. Evil is disobedience to God. Adam and Eve and every human who lived after them have disobeyed God. Beginning with Cain, humans were born into sin. The only person who did not sin is Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God.

You asked – “In what way is this concept misinterpreted by one who says that God punishes people for things they have no control over? Again free will and sovereignty come up.”

Condemnation and judgment came into existence by sin. Adam made a choice and plunged the human race into sin and the need for reconciliation. God quickly made a way for humans to be reconciled. We see that in the offerings Cain and Abel brought to God and how God prompted Cain to “do well” and “be accepted.” Cain had free will. He could have chosen to cool down and not let sin control him. In fact, God told Cain that he “should rule over it.”

God could have brought the human race to a screeching halt as soon as Adam and Eve disobeyed Him, but that wasn't the plan. The eternal plan was for Jesus to suffer and sacrifice His life on the Cross and destroy the works of the devil. Everything we see in the Old and New Testaments were about Jesus coming to die for humans and destroy the works of the devil. That was God's plan.

When we look at the first days of humanity we see a warning from God about two things: sin and death.

1. Sin – “but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat”
2. Death – “for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

God introduced sin and death in the same brief warning. Sin (disobedience to God) would lead to death (separation from God).

We often think of death as physical, but it's really much bigger than that. Adam, Eve, their children and every person born since Cain and Abel have experienced spiritual and physical death. The Apostle Paul called it “dead in trespasses and sins” (Ephesians 2:1). People who are alive physically are dead spiritually and will eventually die physically. That's what God meant when He told Adam “you shall surely die.”

Adam brought death into the world when he sinned. We saw that earlier in Romans 5:12. Romans is one of the best New Testament writings to understand sin and death. I highly recommend it and have been writing an online commentary on Romans for almost eight years. The most recent commentary was from Romans 5:15-17. You can [look at it here](#) if you're interested.

“But the free gift is not like the offense. For if by the one man’s offense many died, much more the grace of God and the gift by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ, abounded to many. And the gift is not like that which through the one who sinned. For the judgment which came from one offense resulted in condemnation, but the free gift which came from many offenses resulted in justification. For if by the one man’s offense death reigned through the one, much more those who receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”

Romans 5:15-17

Adam’s offense (disobedience to God’s command) led to the death of many. The judgment of God came from Adam’s offense and resulted in condemnation. Death reigns by Adam’s offense (sin). Sin and death are connected. What saves us is the “grace of God and the gift of by the grace of the one Man, Jesus Christ.” That gift “abounded to many” those who receive it “will reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ.”

As Paul wrote later in Romans, “There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:1-2) Notice how sin and death are a ‘law.’ They are connected as one law – ‘the law of sin and death.’

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that “The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” (1 Corinthians 15:56-57) Here we see that sin is the sting of death and gets its strength in the law.

Paul wrote in Romans 5:20 that “the law entered that the offense might abound.” The sin of Adam was terrible and impacted the human race deeply, but things got even worse when God introduced His Law through Moses. Why did God do that? So that Adam’s sin (offense) might abound.

“But where sin abounded, grace abounded, much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

Paul wrote the Galatians about the purpose of the law –

“It was added because of transgressions, till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made; and it was appointed through angels by the hand of a mediator.” Galatians 3:19

That takes us back to Genesis 3:15 and what God told the serpent about the Seed of the woman destroying the seed of the serpent – “till the Seed should come to whom the promise was made.” Jesus is the promised Seed, which is the heart of God’s eternal plan. When we understand God’s introduction of the Seed to the serpent in the Garden, then we understand what John meant when he wrote that “For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil.”

God’s plan combines His sovereignty with our free will. We have a choice. That’s what we see in the Gospel. Jesus began His earthly ministry by preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God. He said, “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mark 1:14-15)

God continually offered salvation to people through the Old Testament. He gave people choices. Jesus continually offered salvation to people through the New Testament. He gave people choices. The apostles of Christ offered salvation to people. They gave people choices. God is sovereign and He gives people choices.

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