

**First Christian Church (Lawrence, KS)**  
**Dr. Barry M. Foster**  
**March 21, 2021**

### **There Is An Enemy**

Revelation 12:1-17 (NIV)

*12 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. 4 Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who “will rule all the nations with an iron scepter.” And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. 6 The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.*

*7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*

*10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:*

*“Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down.*

*11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

*12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short.”*

*13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in*

*the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. 15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring—those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.*

1 John 3:1-10 (ESV)

*3 See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. 2 Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

*4 Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness. 5 You know that he appeared in order to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. 6 No one who abides in him keeps on sinning; no one who keeps on sinning has either seen him or known him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. Whoever practices righteousness is righteous, as he is righteous. 8 Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil, for the devil has been sinning from the beginning. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. 9 No one born of God makes a practice of sinning, for God's seed abides in him; and he cannot keep on sinning, because he has been born of God. 10 By this it is evident who are the children of God, and who are the children of the devil: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is the one who does not love his brother.*

[Slide 1] *Opening*

Good morning church! We began this series asking this universally troubling question: How is it possible to reconcile belief in a God who is perfectly good and all-powerful with the reality of pain and suffering and evil in the world? How can all three parts of this paradox be true? And we saw that there are a number of inadequate answers that are given by other religions or from popular culture. Then we embarked on this eight-part answer to our question.

[Slide 2] *Review*

The first (and foundational) part of the answer is this: *The creation of a real world in which cause and effect (the law of consequences) operates shows us that some pain is due merely to the fact that the properties of the universe are constant and that the possibility of choosing evil was a necessary construct of this world.*

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The second part was this: We saw that the introduction of evil into human history through the exercise of our free will brought about our estrangement from God. As a result, we are all broken, cut off from the source of life and the knowledge of what is good, true, and right. In our brokenness, we act in such a way that we bring damage and pain to ourselves and to others.

*Consequently, much of the pain and suffering and evil in the world is due to: (a) the effects of human sinfulness on the natural world; (b) the sinful choices of people; and (c) the consequences of those choices, including the systemic and universal integration and enculturation of evil.*

[Slide 4] *Introduction*

That brings us to the third part of the answer.

When we read the story of Adam and Eve last week, the narrative that tells of the introduction of human sin into the world, there was a hint for us about the origin of sin. For when the story begins, the figure of the tempter is already present in the character of the serpent. Before the creation of Adam and Eve, there had come into existence “the tempter.” That means that the entrance of evil into the world must be pushed back to a prior event involving a different set of beings. Sin was already present in creation before Adam and Eve chose to disobey God—because a different being who was also self-aware, who also knew that he was not God, decided that he would try to change the situation so that he could be God. When that failed, he turned his now-twisted power in a different direction—to try and convince humans to follow in his path.

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There’s a second hint in that story that is also important to note. From the very start of the story, the most characteristic feature of the serpent is that he is utterly and irreconcilably opposed to God. That opposition indicates a condition which is presumed to be the case on every page in the rest of the Bible.

The event that preceded the temptation in the Garden and which led to that presumed condition of opposition to God is pictured for us in the passage we read this morning from the other end of the Bible. Revelation 12:7-12 describes the attempt by Satan (the “dragon”) to overthrow God’s throne. In his rebellion he led approximately one-third of the heavenly host in a battle against the rest of the

angels. For this rebellion he was thrown out of heaven and “exiled” to the earth. In that same passage, Satan, the leader of this angelic rebellion is identified with the serpent of Genesis 2 and is said to be the deceiver of the whole world. The angels that followed Satan in his rebellion are also known as demons: spiritual beings that are intent on using their power to oppose God.

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The Bible consistently portrays God as engaged in a cosmic battle in which his good creation is threatened by evil forces determined to destroy that which he has made and to thwart his intentions for his creation, especially people whom he created for relationship with himself.

*The Scriptural narrative thus reveals that there is a powerful spiritual being who is intentionally trying to inflict suffering on people and to increase the evil in the world because of his hatred for and opposition to God. This being (Satan) leads a host of fallen angels who join him in his war against God and humanity.*

[Slide 7] *Satan and the demonic realm*

When it comes to the topic of angels and demons, there are a lot of superstitious ideas and odd notions taken from folk lore and Hollywood scripts. I’m not going to go through all of the biblical teaching about angels and demons today, but I do want to note a few crucial facts that are important for understanding how they factor into the discussion about suffering and evil.

First, angels and demons are created beings and therefore, like humans, are dependent upon God for their continued existence. They are spirits: they lack physical bodies, but at times they appear in human form and are capable of engaging with humans, as we can see from examples in both the Old and New Testaments. They also have many capabilities that are comparable to humans.

For instance, angels have personality, will, power, and intelligence, including the ability to acquire and retain knowledge. This capability is at least comparable to, if not superior to, human intelligence. Their ability to communicate allows them to serve as messengers for God (Matthew 28:5-7; Luke 1:13-20, 28-33). They are part of God’s good creation, and were created with the capacity to worship and exalt God with praise (Revelation 4:11-14).

Angels have a measure of power that may be wielded in various ways. They can influence, and even exert a measure of control over humans and human society. Psalm 103:20 refers to angels as “mighty ones,” or as “mighty in strength,” while 2 Peter 2:11 notes that angels are mightier in power than human beings. In Daniel 10:10-11:1, we see that Daniel’s intercession on behalf of his

people is a factor in a spiritual conflict involving angelic forces, one of whom is described as having a kind of rulership over the Persian empire or region.

[Slide 8] *The crucial point*

The crucial thing to see in all of this is that angels and demons have the capacity for moral judgment and decision: they are able to know what is right or wrong and can act upon that knowledge. This may be shown by the fact that some of the angels sinned and lost their place among God's hosts (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). That God judged the angels and punished them for their sin demonstrates that the angels who sinned acted intentionally, indicating that they possessed the capacity for moral judgment and were responsible for their actions. Therefore, all angelic beings—angels and demons alike—possess the capacity to choose; like humans, they have free will. And like humans, their actions have consequences.

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*Just as God did not annul Adam's decision to disobey, but allowed the consequences of that action to stand, so too God did not annul Satan's decision to rebel, but allowed the consequences of that action to stand.*

Angelic sin and its consequences are therefore also part of the broken world. As a result of the sin of Satan in rebelling against God, and the sins of the angelic host that followed him, there now exists in the spiritual realm a kingdom of spiritual beings (demons), led by Satan, which opposes all that God is and all that he wants for his creation.

[Slide 10] *Consequences of Satan's sin*

The consequences of Satan's action were massive. Two are particularly important for us to recognize today. (1) As a consequence of Satan's action there came into being a "kingdom of darkness," as Satan's followers formed a hierarchy of sorts, with Satan at the lead. His character, corrupted by evil, shaped the nature of that over which he would rule. This kingdom is opposed to God, to his ways, his people, and his rulership over people.

(2) Another consequence follows from this—namely, the inauguration of cosmic war between these two opposing kingdoms. That initial rebellion in heaven continues in the present age, as the kingdom of darkness battles against God's kingdom with evil intent and by evil means, including violence, deception, and cruelty.

Demons share Satan's malevolent intentions for God's creation, especially towards humans. They harass, deceive, confuse, oppress, and inflict harm on humans in numerous ways, including such things as mental instability, physical diseases and disabilities, and spiritual delusions. Their primary goal, as far as

humans are concerned, other than simply inflicting suffering on people, is to dissuade people from learning about or following Christ.

[Slide 11] *Satan and spiritual warfare*

Satan cannot harm God directly. So he directs his rage against God toward the destruction of God's image. He attacks that which God loves—his creation, especially people. Fueled by hatred and pride, he vainly aims at overthrowing God by overthrowing humanity. This cosmic war is not the “normal” state of affairs for the creation, since it does not represent God's intention for the universe. But it is the presumed state of affairs for all of creation, particularly since Adam's fall into sin. It is only because of Adam's sin that humanity has become subject to the kingdom of darkness and to the evils that result from being under the authority of Satan. The greatness of Adam's sin is seen in this: It not only introduced evil into human history and corrupted human nature, but opened a way for the demonic realm to invade and hold power over humanity.

[Slide 12] *Satan and evil*

I said in the opening sermon of this series that saying that Satan is the cause of all suffering was an inadequate answer. It doesn't give us the full picture, because Satan is neither the direct cause nor the indirect cause of all suffering and evil in the world. He is, however, the cause, both directly and indirectly, of much of the suffering and evil in the world.

He influences humans through deception and temptation, so that we act on our selfish lusts and desires with the result that we become trapped in sinful tendencies, habits, and lifestyles. His temptations lure people to harm others or themselves through destructive ways. He deceives people and distorts the truth, inspiring the creation of deceptive belief systems, whether those beliefs are organized into religious or philosophical systems or merely contained in the fevered delusions of a paranoid individual.

He suggests courses of action through lies and half-truths and manipulates people so that a person's own sinfulness is reinforced and our choices to sin are magnified in their effects (e.g., the person whose Ponzi scheme defrauds thousands of families, or the national leader who embarks on a war to enhance his political image).

He gains power over humans through their sins, so that he may torment them with fears, delusions, emotional and spiritual anguish/madness, and physical pain and suffering.

Demonic influence and power in a person's life may become a spiritual stronghold, magnifying that person's capacity for and receptivity to evil. Such a

stronghold also greatly magnifies the strength of the hold of evil over the person, making him or her more resistant to God's Spirit.

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The result of Satan's involvement in human history is the magnification of human capacity for evil, with a corresponding increase in human suffering.

Let's remember this, though. Satan's power, including his power over people, is not absolute. He does not have limitless or unrestrained access to people's lives—otherwise he would possess every single individual on the planet and everyone would exhibit symptoms like that of the Gadarene demoniac. There appears, therefore, to be a natural protection given us by God, which Satan cannot overcome apart from deliberate acts on our part that open us up to demonic influence and involvement. This serves to limit Satan's ability to harass, influence, or control people. (Aren't you glad that God is restraining him?)

But you may ask, "*Why didn't God just destroy Satan before he could tempt Adam and Eve?*" Part of the answer is related to what we noted already—God made a real world, in which choices have meaning because God allows the consequences of those choices to stand. That includes the choices made by Satan and the angels who followed him in rebelling against God. Some of the answer to that question will be addressed in Part 5. But there is a measure of the answer that is cloaked in mystery—God has not revealed everything to us and thus we must be content with incomplete and imperfect knowledge.

[Slide 14] *An honest admission of frustration*

If that statement frustrates you, I absolutely understand how you feel. Contentment with incomplete and imperfect knowledge goes against almost everything inside of me. I am anything *but* content when I have incomplete and imperfect knowledge. Eliminating incomplete and imperfect knowledge is one of the primary driving motivations in my life. So I get it. We want to know 'why.'

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But . . . But I have learned that the God who made me, who loves me, is not only perfect in power and knowledge, he is perfect in kindness and wisdom. So he does not burden me with things that I cannot carry. And I have learned that I can trust him to tell me the things that I do need to know when I need to know them.

Corrie ten Boom, the famous survivor of the Nazi concentration camp at Ravensbrück, learned this lesson from her father when she was still a young girl. The scene is portrayed quite well in the movie about her life, "The Hiding Place." Corrie confided in her father that she was frightened about the prospect of dying. As she tells the story,

*“Father sat down on the edge of the narrow bed. “Corrie,” he began gently, “when you and I go to Amsterdam—when do I give you your ticket?” I sniffed a few times, considering this. “Why, just before we get on the train.” “Exactly. And our wise Father in heaven knows when we’re going to need things, too. Don’t run out ahead of Him, Corrie. When the time comes that some of us will have to die, you will look into your heart and find the strength you need—just in time.” ~ Corrie Ten Boom (azquotes.com)*

[Slide 16] *A quick summary*

Let’s summarize where we are. So far, we’ve seen that some of the pain and suffering in the world can be explained simply as the result of the fact that the universe is real, not a fantasy. For the universe to be real, certain properties of the universe must be constant. Actions have consequences, and those consequences do not evaporate simply because we didn’t intend for them to happen or we don’t want to experience them. For example, things that are hard or heavy or have sharp edges can cause damage and pain if they fall and land on my body.

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We’ve also seen that much of the pain and suffering in the world is due to the sinful choices of human beings. Those choices are freely made, and God does not annul either our choices or the consequences of those choices, even when those consequences bring suffering to us or to others. So, for example, the decision by a king or a government to invade a neighboring nation will bring great suffering to people in both nations—psychological anxiety, economic hardships, separation of families, destruction of property, and death. Similarly, the decision by an individual to pursue an adulterous affair will bring about pain and suffering to both persons involved, as well as their families and friends; it could lead to financial hardships for them, their families, their companies, and those who work with them. And on and on.

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Now we’ve seen that some of the pain and suffering is due—directly or indirectly—to the involvement of Satan and his demons in this world. They attack people directly to cause mental and physical trauma or disease, and they lure people into adopting false beliefs and engaging in sinful behaviors that bring damage and suffering to themselves and to others. We could think, for instance, of the ruler whose decision to invade the neighboring country was fueled by hatred for that people group and the false notion that he was part of a superior race ordained by God to rule over the inferior people who lived nearby.

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Sorting out those different explanations for why pain and suffering are in the world is helpful. But they still leave us with our problem. We want to know “why;” we want an answer to our question, a diagnosis that not only explains how we got here, but offers us a solution we can use to eliminate our pain.

But there’s the rub, as Will Shakespeare would say. Those three explanations can overlap, and the strings that tie them together are many and tangled—which makes it exceedingly difficult, and often impossible, for us to identify the reason that something happened. Let me illustrate.

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Take the examples I just mentioned. Suppose an ambitious man from a tribe that has been historically oppressed by the majority powers rises to leadership in the military. He then leads a coup that overthrows the existing government and establishes a dictatorship with himself at the head of the new government. The defeated leaders, all members of the majority tribe, flee to the neighboring country for refuge. The new king is determined to exterminate the tribe that formerly oppressed his family. So he accuses the neighboring country of conspiring against him, declares war against that nation, and orders his army to pursue the former leaders and to attack every facility where they might be housed. In the ensuing offensive, a missile carrying a warhead hits a hospital and explodes. The falling debris lands on the head of a young woman, a talented surgeon, and kills her. Her death leads to even more deaths, since she is not there to perform life-saving operations on those wounded in the attack. But the only reason she was even in the hospital that was bombed was that she had taken the day off from work at her normal hospital to come and have lunch with her lover, with whom she has been carrying on an adulterous affair for several years.

If this was the plot of a movie or a criminal forensics TV show, as the audience, we would want to know “why” she died (and the cast would be acting out our question for us as they attempted to solve the mystery of her death). Was it simply a case of being in the wrong place at the wrong time, the result of the inexorable laws of physics playing out before us as gravity caused chunks of concrete and steel to fall with such force that they crushed her, causing her organs to stop functioning? Was her death due to the actions of the military? Or the decision of the tyrannical despot to destroy his enemies? Or was it due to the demonic spirit who whispered into the usurper’s ear and fed his bitterness at being oppressed, suggesting that he get revenge upon his enemies? Or was it due to her own sins, sins that led her to be somewhere that she would otherwise have never been?

In the movie or the TV show, the writers would probably leave us with the mystery. But in real life, we want to know the reason. Not knowing nags at us. Like Job, we cry out to God: “*Why me? What have I done?*” Unfortunately, like Job, we are incapable of untying all of the strings.

[Slide 21] *Some practical wisdom*

We’ll come back to this nagging question in a few weeks. For the moment, however, let me offer a little bit of practical advice.

First, recognize that a lot of the pain around you and within you has one or more of these three contributing factors. But without the benefit of omniscience, you’re going to come up short when you try to nail down the “reason” for your pain. You might be able to identify some possible causes, maybe even with some measure of accuracy. But you won’t see them all, and you won’t be able to trace the strings back to the origination point.

That’s the second thing you need to recognize and repeat to yourself, if necessary. You’re not going to be able to find an answer that satisfies your itch to know for certain. It’s simply beyond your reach. Even when you have an accurate diagnosis, it doesn’t put an end to the question. Like it or not, that is the truth.

Which leads to number three: recognize that if you continue the search for a conclusive answer to the question of the specific causes of your personal pain, you will eventually learn that there is no end to this road. Best therefore to abandon the pursuit before you exhaust all of your energies in a futile effort.

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So you need to be very careful what you do at this point. Some of us opt for a false sense of certainty. We decide, “*This is what I choose to believe is the cause of my pain.*” Or, “*This is what I want to believe about the reason that \_\_\_\_\_ happened, because believing it dulls my pain.*” Both of those decisions will lead you astray on a path that ends in self-designed religion rather than in the knowledge of God. Instead, may I recommend that you simply lay the entire quest on the back shelf of your mind, and leave it with God for later. Don’t throw it away—just set it aside until later. There may come a point when God will show you some of the answer, or give you just enough information to allow you to keep setting it aside while you continue to seek God (and not just seek answers).

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James 4:7 says, “*Submit yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.*” Submit to God—accept the fact that God doesn’t owe you an explanation and that you couldn’t understand it even if he gave it to you. Resist the devil—treat him like an enemy instead of like an amusing nuisance. Never

forget that he only brings more pain, more heartache, more trouble. Nothing that he says is true, nothing that he offers will last or satisfy. Submit to God and resist the devil's temptations and lies. And he will flee from you. That's how you respond when he starts feeding you lies about why bad things have been happening to you.

[Slide 24] *Conclusions: Part 3*

So let's sum up what we've discovered about this portion of the answer to the question of why suffering and evil exist in this good world God made.

*(1) Demonic evil is the result of angelic rebellion, at an unknown time in the past, prior to the temptation of Adam and Eve. It introduced evil into God's creation and began a cosmic conflict between God and the kingdom of darkness, led by Satan.*

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*(2) Because people are created in the image of God and beloved by him, Satan and his demons seek to inflict pain and suffering upon people and to destroy all that God loves, especially human beings, their relationships, and societies.*

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*(3) Demonic evil, though not unrestrained, is intertwined with and behind much of human suffering, so that suffering and evil are increased from what would otherwise be the case.*

[Slide 27]

So we have another piece of the puzzle, another part of the answer to the question of suffering and evil. You might still feel a little frustrated—that's okay. Put your frustration on the back shelf for later. And then be sure to come back for the rest of the series. Because God has an answer for you. Next week, in fact, is especially crucial. But in the meantime, we continue to walk by faith, to trust in the good God who loves us and showed it by giving us his Son.

*Transition to communion*

*[Worship team, if you would begin making your way to the platform . . . ; those who are helping to serve communion please join me in the front . . .]*

God intervened in history in order to make a new possibility, the possibility of having a different set of consequences. He intervened in order to solve the problem of human sinfulness. He came to us in the person of Jesus, lived a sinless life, and died on a cross as a substitute for you and for me to make it possible for you to be right with God, to know God, to experience new life.

In his death on the cross, Jesus not only paid the penalty for our sins, he conquered the kingdom of darkness and defeated Satan and all of his demonic hosts. His resurrection proved that his victory was certain for all those who would choose to walk away from the kingdom of darkness and put their trust in him instead.

We celebrate communion as a way to say again with cup and bread “thank you” for making it possible for the consequences we deserved (eternal separation from God) to be annulled and the consequences we didn’t deserve (eternal life) to be given to us through our faith in Jesus Christ.

*Benediction /Blessing*

Please be careful to maintain our safe distancing practice as you leave.  
[*Lift your hearts to heaven, and your hands if you like . . .*]