

How Did The World Get So Messed Up?

Not everything in the world is good, pleasant or beautiful. In fact, real evil exists. Check the news - you'll find terrorism, war, payoffs, lies, gossip, scams, abuse, murder, arson; scandal, fraud, graft, embezzlement; drug use, gambling, adultery and every kind of scandal and sin you can think of.

Given all that, I don't see how any rational person could genuinely deny that evil – real evil – exists in this world.

How did the world get SO messed up? Today we'll be looking at four things: the cause of it all; the consequences of that; the circumstances of our current situation. Then finally, the cure that counters the condition we're all in.

So, how did the world get so messed up? **The Cause of the Mess is: Sin** - We've All Sinned. Every single one of us. When we sin it brings evil into the world. Sin is any attitude or action that goes against God. When we do or think things opposed to or resistant to God it brings sin into the world and that sin creates evil.

Genesis says *"When Adam sinned, sin entered the world. Adam's sin brought death, so death spread to everyone, for everyone sinned."* It started long ago and didn't stop in ancient times; We're all culprits. *"Not a single person on earth is always good and never sins."* Not you, not me - I don't even measure up to my own standards, much less God's. I disappoint myself and others. It's a problem that includes everyone who's ever lived. 1 John 1:8 & 10 says *"If we claim we have no sin, we are only fooling ourselves and not living in the truth. If we claim we have not sinned, we are calling God a liar and showing that his word has no place in our hearts."*

There are actually three types of wrongdoing in the Bible. We generally translate them as "sin", "transgressions" and "iniquity." So what's the difference?

The word we translate as sin in English is an archery term - literally shooting an arrow that falls short and misses the target; misses the mark. Sin is missing the mark; falling short. That's the word in Romans 3:23 *"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."* When you don't fulfill God's purpose; if there are things God wants you to do and you haven't done them, that's falling short.

Then the word "transgression" means breaking the law - not falling short but a deliberate, willful decision to break the law. It literally means deliberately going over the line and refers to willful disregard for God's boundaries. It's sort of like when it says sixty-five miles an hour and I go eighty - that's a transgression; I purposely disregarded the law. Galatians 3:19 says *"Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins."* The word sins there is the word for transgressions. God created the law to help us to see where we step across the line. When God says don't and I do it anyway, that's not falling short, that's a transgression.

Then the third word is "iniquity." It's our basic disposition to go our own way. It's literally "crookedness," perverseness, not straight or upright. Isaiah 53:6 compares human beings to sheep. *"All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own."* We wander away from God.

In Psalms 32:5 you can see all three words used in the same verse. *"I acknowledge my sin [falling short] to You. I did not cover up my iniquity [going astray] and I confess my transgression [breaking laws] and You forgave my guilt."*

God made us and loves us - we owe everything to God, but still we choose to ignore God and do what we want. Unfortunately, that's human nature: to do what we want and resist God. Romans 8:7 says our, *"...sinful nature is always hostile to God. It never did obey God's laws, and it never will."* It's inborn in us. No one really has to teach it to children. They want what they want and they learn to say no all by themselves. We want what we want. We want to do what we want to do. When you meet someone your first thought isn't "How can I meet their needs?" What we tend to think is, "What do they think of me?" We focused on ourselves.

So we need the Bible and other believers to help us. Just because your mind tells you to do something doesn't mean it's right. Just because your heart tells you something doesn't mean it's true - your heart can lie. Murderers have said things like, "I knew in my heart it was the right thing to do."

But you have to be careful when you consult other people because you also learn sin from other people. You got plenty of examples growing up because your parents, family and friends weren't perfect. You picked up some of their wrong-headedness and as you got to know more people, you picked up more and more things. We have to evaluate what people say to us and go to God with it.

But beyond that, we have a problem called our culture. We live in a culture that **wants** you to be selfish. That's what advertisements are about. So Romans 12:2 says, *"Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think."*

So we have messed up, we do mess up and we will keep on messing up. What I'd like to do today is look at what that's done to the world and what our response should be.

So the world got so messed up with people - right from the beginning - making the wrong choice, defying God, doing the wrong things. Every time I or you or anyone sins, it damages something – either me, another person, a relationship to God, the world, something. That's why God doesn't want us to do it. God knows the damage it does.

So the reason the world's in a mess is because we've all sinned. **The Consequences of the Mess Are: Brokenness and Frustration.** Everything's been damaged, broken, spoiled and corrupted in some way by evil. God's creation was entirely good. But sin has separated the creation from the Creator. So let's look at some implications of sin entering the world and continuing in our lives.

There's, **1. Natural and Physical Devastation.** Romans 8:20-21 says, *“Against its will, all creation was subjected to God's curse. But with eager hope, the creation looks forward to the day when it will join God's children in glorious freedom from death and decay.”* The creation isn't a harmonious place anymore and that can have very unfortunate consequences.

The environmental problems we have in the world are a result of sin. God didn't create pollution. God doesn't want anyone ruining the landscape. God's wanted us to take care of the planet and if we were in harmony like we were meant to be, natural disasters wouldn't be a concern. We would know what was happening with the world. Nothing would be a shock. Earthquakes wouldn't surprise us - we'd be in tune with God so we'd be able to call on God to calm the storm or just avoid it. Our separation from God because of our sin - our limitations of faith - restricts what we can know or do.

And our bodies experience devastating consequences as well. 2 Corinthians 4:16 says, *“Our physical body is becoming older and weaker...”* Everyone agree? Can I get an Amen?! Things break down. Things don't work right and nothing lasts. If we were as close to God as we're meant to be there'd be no need for doctors. But we live in a fallen world. *“Our earthly bodies which die and decay are different from the bodies we're going to have in heaven where they will never die. The bodies we have now embarrass us for they become sick and die. But they will be full of glory when we come back to life again in heaven.”* The whole of creation - including ourselves and our bodies - is damaged because of sin.

The next consequence is that we have **2. Personal and Interpersonal Dysfunction.** Why do you get stressed out and disappointed with yourself and with your relationships? Because you live in a world where evil and sin exist.

For one thing, we let ourselves down a lot. Paul says in Romans 7:18 *“I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. I want to do what is right, but I can't.”* Sin not only disconnects and alienates us from God, it alienates and disconnects us from each other and makes it difficult for us to even understand our own motives, much less one another's.

All relational problems, all family crises, come down to sin. Every conflict is based on sin and on the separation sin creates in us and between us. I want what I want and you want what you want. We each need to grow up in this. Either we grow up or we grow apart. In marriage you either grow up and learn to be unselfish and think of the other person or you'll grow apart. It's your choice. In all relationships, unless you're unselfish, you'll have conflicts the rest of your life.

And we each need to be genuine with one another. This is something that keeps people from getting close. Do you wear a mask, play a role, pretend? Sin makes us defensive, demanding and distant in our relationships.

The next consequence is, **3. Perceptual and Spiritual Distortion.** Sin distorts how we see things and experience life. Sin leaves an emptiness in you - a sense you need something more. We try to fill that with many things: hobbies, sports, homes, work, possessions, many different things. But like putting a square peg in a round hole. It doesn't fit. Augustine said, Lord, *“You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless, until they can find rest in you.”* You were made by God for God. The separation sin caused in us leaves us feeling discontent. We can't live like that anymore - lives that are no different from everyone else around us. Ephesians 4:17-18 says, *“You must not live any longer like the people of the world who do not know God. Their thoughts are foolish. Their minds are in darkness. They are strangers to the life of God. This is because they have closed their minds to Him and have turned their hearts away from Him.”*

There are a lot of great things in the world, but we've got to be realistic about it. We live on a broken planet where devastation, dysfunction and distortion are what's normal. We live in a culture where there's an epidemic of depression. I'd be depressed if I thought that what we experience here is all there is, that it's the end of the story. But it's not.

So how do you deal with a world full of pain, suffering, sorrow, broken relationships and bad memories? How can you be hopeful in a world that has all these problems?

Jeremiah wrote two books in the Bible: Jeremiah and Lamentations. Jeremiah went through much more than it's likely any of us will have to endure. In Lamentations 3:19-24 he gives this testimony: *"Just thinking of my troubles and my lonely wandering makes me miserable. That's all I ever think about, and I am depressed. Then I remember something that fills me with hope. The Lord's kindness never fails! If he had not been merciful, we would have been destroyed. The Lord can always be trusted to show mercy each morning. Deep in my heart I say, 'The Lord is all I need; I can depend on him!'"*

That phrase *"The Lord is all I need."* Is the antidote to depression; the key to hope in a damaged, messed up world. Don't put your hope in people because they'll let you down. Don't put your hope in circumstances because they're going to disappoint you. Don't put your trust in people or things; put your trust in God, and say, *"The Lord is all I need."*

So, given the consequences of sin, why didn't God just shut the earth down? Because history is moving toward a goal. **Our Circumstances Are: We're Being Given an Opportunity.** God has planned something and God has at least four reasons for not shutting down the earth just yet.

1. To Permit Us to Choose. Deuteronomy 30:15 says, *"Now listen! Today I am giving you a choice between life and death, between prosperity and disaster."* The point is, God made you in God's image so you have free moral choice - a conscious. God doesn't force you - you choose.

I can't say that I really love you unless I have a choice to not love you - then it's voluntary. I couldn't make Linda fall in love with me. I can't make her stay in love with me. It's her choice. God's not going to force you to love God. God's not going to make you a puppet or force you to worship. You can either love or not love; believe in Jesus, or reject him; follow God's purpose for your life or make up your own.

It's good news is you have free choice, but the bad news is you live with the consequences. I'm free after church to go out and do whatever I want. But I'm not free from the consequences of it. I'm free to turn my back on God and go do whatever I want to do the rest of my life, but I'm not free from the consequences. If you want to you can live your entire life doing your own thing. But you've got to be willing to live with the consequences for eternity. Ecclesiastes 3:17 says, *"In due season God will judge everyone, both good and bad, for all their deeds."* There will be a day of accounting.

A second reason why God is allowing the earth to go on is, **2. To Prove to Us Our Need.** The worse the world gets the more we realize we need God. The more messed up life gets the more you realize, you're not such a good manager of it and you have a need for God. Sometimes it even takes being laid out flat on your back to make you look up to God.

Romans 5:3-4 says, *"We can rejoice... when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they help us develop endurance. And endurance develops strength of character, and character strengthens our confident hope of salvation."* The problems of this world can actually strengthen us if we are living by faith in the light of God's grace.

Romans 5:20a says, *"God's law was given so that all people could see how sinful they were."* Without God you have a tendency to drift further and further from what is good and right. There are people who have drifted so far that they have no conscience. They'll say anything to get what they want or get others to buy what they're selling.

Years ago Annie Lenox sang, "Some of them want to use you, some of them want to be used by you, some of them want to abuse you, some of them want to be abused by you," "Everybody's looking for something." She was exactly right.

Human nature is we want to live on our own terms. We act like we actually know better than God how we should live our lives or what will make us happy. We act like God doesn't have our best interest at heart. What do we end up with? Broken hearts, broken bodies, broken dreams, broken promises, broken memories. God's rules aren't for God's benefit, they're for ours. It's because God loves us.

There are things you don't like about yourself and would like to change but can't. Paul said it like this: *"The trouble is with me, for I am all too human, a slave to sin. I don't really understand myself, for I want to do what is right, but I don't do it. Instead, I do what I hate."* We could probably list a hundred things you know would be good for you that you don't do. Or a hundred things you know are bad for you that you still do. You don't have the power on your own to make your life what it should be. You need a savior to do that. You need God.

A third reason God lets things go on is **3. To Provide Us with Far-Reaching Grace**. 2 Peter 3:9 says, *"The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants everyone to repent."*

God puts up with all the grief because God's being patient and waiting for people to step across the line and join in. If you're a believer, God wants you telling family, friends and neighbors because God wants them in the family too.

If someone says to you, "I can't believe in, worship or love a God who would stand by, unmoved, while little children suffer or women are raped," say, "I don't believe in that kind of God either." In fact, God isn't like that. When God sees the sin on earth, it hurts God more than anyone else. God cares about it and weeps and grieves! Our emotions are just an image of God's - God feels far more than you and I ever will.

I believe in a God who one day is going to stop evil dead in its tracks. God's going to shut it down and settle the score and bring those who put their faith in God to a perfect place.

God's waiting for as many as possible to step across the line. So God puts up with pain, grief and problems.

One day Jesus was walking by the Jordan River and John the Baptist looked up and saw Jesus walking toward him and said *"Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"* In the Old Testament God established a Day of Atonement - Yom Kippur - where they would sacrifice a lamb as a symbol of repentance and atonement for the nation. Because Jesus came we don't have to go animals. He shed his blood for every person, once and for all, including sins that you don't know you've committed or haven't committed yet. That grace is the only antidote to sin and evil.

4. To Prepare Us and Make Us Godly - God wants us to learn and mature. In Colossians 1:9b-10 Paul tells the church that he has been praying for them. He says, *"We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better."* He wanted them to grow in every way by getting closer to God.

Even when we have to be dealt with and disciplined in this life, it has to do with helping us to grow. Paul wrote in his second letter to the Corinthian church, *"I am writing this to you before I come, hoping that I won't need to deal severely with you when I do come. For I want to use the authority the Lord has given me to strengthen you, not to tear you down. Dear brothers and sisters... be joyful. Grow to maturity. Encourage each other. Live in harmony and peace. Then the God of love and peace will be with you."*

So our response - **The Cure for Our Condition Is...** 1. every day with each choice we have to, **Reject Evil; Accept Grace**. Jeremiah 2:13 sums up the dilemma: God says, *"My people have done two evil things: They have forsaken Me – the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!"* We reject God and we try to take care of our problem ourselves. A cistern isn't a well, it's a storage tank - a hole dug in the ground and lined with clay. In a well, you've got living water welling up. In a cistern you collect water in a place that has no water of its own and store it there. It soon becomes stale, brackish, polluted, murky and cloudy. Bacteria grows in it, insects get in it, things fall in. But people in desert areas still drink it because it's the only water they've got. We have something better - the one who is living water.

The Bible says *"Through the sin of one man [that's Adam] death began to rule but now how much greater is the result of what was done by one other man [Jesus]. All who receive God's abundant grace and are freely put right with Him will rule in life through Christ."* It's not enough to just do one or the other. Accepting grace without rejecting evil is cheap grace. Rejecting evil without accepting grace is useless!

Then, **2. Reflect Your Homeland; Perfect Your Love**. 1 Peter 2:11 says, *"Dear friends, I warn you as 'temporary residents and foreigners' to keep away from worldly desires that wage war against your very souls."* Don't get caught up in this fallen world – in fashions, possessions, events and values because nothing is going to last. Instead, let your life reflect your true home with God. The only things here that will last for eternity are God's word and believers. So build your life connected to what is going to last. The Bible says *"...this world is not our*

permanent home; we are looking forward to a home yet to come.” Don't base your life and love on this imperfect place. Let God work to perfect you in love; grow you to spiritual maturity, based on God's perfect love and the perfect place prepared for us.

Finally, **3. Connect with People; Protect the Fellowship.** Tell others about the love. Once you know the meaning of life, pass it on, explain it to friends, family, to people living without hope, who don't know why all this is happening. And do it in such a way that it will be like a breath of fresh air to them. God wants you to pass it on to others. Go tell them. And God wants you to do it together in harmony, love and cooperation with other believers in such a way that it builds up and preserves the fellowship that we share. Philippians 2:14-15 says, *“Do everything without complaining and arguing, so that no one can criticize you, innocent lives as children of God, shining like bright lights in a world full of crooked and perverse people.”*

The cure for this sick world isn't political, psychological, material or cultural - it's spiritual and it's lived out together. Let's pray.