

The Problem of Evil Part 1

A Common Question and Objection About God and His Character Has Been:

If God is all powerful and all loving, then why does evil exist?

- Mostly everyone wrestles with this problem from time to time in their lives
 - Especially those who have been seriously hurt by others
 - Or those who have experienced personal tragedy and trauma in their lives
- Where was God?
- Where is God?
- Why has He allowed this to happen to me?
- He promises to protect me in Scripture
- How long, o Lord, will you allow this to keep continuing to happen?

The logical struggle we are faced with:

- Either God is not - all-loving / all-powerful / or = He is evil Himself
 - Why is there so much misery and suffering in the world?
 - Why do bad things happen to good people?
 - Why do some people have it much harder than others?
 - Is this what you would allow if you were God and could prevent it?
- There are no problems with the first two premises
 - God is all loving completely good and God is all powerful
 - There is no contradiction here
 - The problem comes when trying to understand *why evil exists*
 - How an all loving and all-powerful God exists simultaneously with evil
 - **Why** God would even allow evil to exist and continue to exist

The atheist's use this to their advantage with their argument against the existence of God

- If God exists, then God is omnipotent, omniscient, and morally perfect.
- If God is omnipotent, then God has the power to eliminate all evil.
- If God is omniscient, then God knows when evil exists.
- If God is morally perfect, then God has the desire to eliminate all evil.
 - But Evil does exist.
- If evil exists and God exists:
 - then either God doesn't have the power to eliminate all evil,
 - or doesn't know when evil exists,
 - or doesn't have the desire to eliminate all evil.
 - Therefore, God doesn't exist.
- How would you respond?

The Christian Counter to this Objection: Evil Forces the Unbeliever to Admit that Moral Absolutes Exist

- If evil does exist:
 - Good must exist as well
 - An objective moral standard must exist in order to judge what is right and wrong
 - Moral relativism cannot produce moral absolutes that all people must follow
- What moral standard does the unbeliever use to determine what is good and what is evil?
 - Any standard outside of God being the absolute standard for right and wrong is relative and subjective
 - Without God – any personal standard is meaningless because it is not an absolute standard that can be applied to all people at all times
 - There is no foundation for a relative moral standard other than a person's subjective opinion (abortion, equality)
 - One person says this is right and this is wrong
 - Another person objects and says “no, this is correct”
 - They simply give their personal opinion on what is right and wrong
 - If everyone's opinion is equally valid
 - Then there cannot be a unanimous agreement
 - But the unbeliever is forced to admit absolutes exist
 - How do they respond to this?
 - They use the moral absolutes against God and judge Him
 - They say – “If God does exist, then He is the one to blame”
 - Where have we seen this before?
 - **Gen 3:12** - ¹² *The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”*
- The unbeliever now has to affirm the very thing against they are dead set against
 - The existence of an absolute set of morals standards
 - It is a part of being created in God's image
 - We all have this implanted in us
 - This can only come from an absolute law Giver
- Without the existence of God there would be no such thing as human responsibility
 - It is God who personally governs the universe
 - The universe does not impersonally govern itself
 - It is God who has decreed nature, history, and human events
 - All of these are to be evaluated by His standards alone
 - Not by the subjective opinion of human beings
 - If God did not exist:
 - There would be no such thing as nature, history, or human events
 - There would be no such things as moral obligations
 - Things would simply just “be”
 - Everything would be neutral
 - No values would exist or be attached to anything

- There would be no such thing injustice
 - It would never even enter into our minds
 - The reason things have value is because God gives it value
 - The reason human beings have value is because we are created in His image
 - The reason animals have value, but less value than humans, is because they contain the breath of life from God but are not created in the image of God
 - The reason morality exists is because it is based on God's personal character
- For this reason:
 - Rather than charging God with evil because we do not understand Him
 - Or because we want Him to be guilty
 - ***We should rather expect and concede the fact that we do not know how or always understand why God allows evil to exist***
- We are to do this:
 - As perfect image bearers
 - Out of humility and reverence
 - Understanding God is perfect and cannot sin
 - Understanding we are finite and God is infinite

Human Beings Are Fully Responsible to God in Their Moral Conduct

- Humanity chose to personally rebel from God in Genesis 3
- Humanity chose to personally side with Satan
- Evil is rebellion, a personal act of the will that resulted in being disconnected from God = spiritually dead
 - We have no true desire to follow after God
 - We forfeited our state of perfection
 - We do not have the ability to meet God's demands
 - We do not have the will or desire to believe in Him for salvation
 - We gave all of this up when we sided with Satan
 - This being the case:
 - God never changes His expectation of us being perfect image bearers
 - He still requires us to believe in Him and obey His commandments perfectly
 - Even though we have forfeited our ability to do so
 - His standard never changes
 - **Matt 5:48** - *You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect*
 - Pain and suffering are the natural effects of human rebellion
 - These are the punitive consequences because of our rebellious choices
 - We have all contributed to the evil that is in the world
 - We are all responsible to some degree for the pain and suffering we all experience
 - God is free to do as He chooses with evil

The Importance of Having the Correct Starting Point

- Who is God and what is His character / humanity and our character?
- How does God cause something to come to pass (divine causality)?
- How do human beings cause something to come to pass (human causality)?
- How does God's sovereignty interact with human choice and freedom?
- Who has the ultimate final say on one's salvation? God or us?
- What effects did the fall and sin have on our human nature?
 - Do we have free will?
 - Are we predetermined to do what we do?
 - Are we stuck in a fatalist loop with no escape?
 - How can we be free if God knows everything we are going to do?
 - Does God have no knowledge of the future so we can be free?
 - Is God so far and distant that we are left to fend for ourselves?
 - Does God sit back and allow humans to exercise their free will without violating it, and then He acts?
 - Does God not have exhaustive knowledge of the future, but rather He only has knowledge of every possible outcome that could take place?
 - Does God ordain every aspect of reality to do what it does?
 - If so, how can humanity be free?
 - How can humanity be held responsible for what they do?

The Problem of Evil Creates Many Areas of Confusion

- The Christian trusts in God - even if their life is not making sense from their own perspective
 - It trusts that God has a morally good, justifiable, and sufficient reason for allowing evil to exist
 - Evil is NOT purposeless or pointless
 - Evil is NOT random or outside of God's control
 - God has a specific plan for evil
 - Even if we have no idea what that plan is
 - God is sovereign over ALL of it
 - **Eph 1:11** - *also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will*
- The problem of evil and suffering is not simply a logical problem, or a philosophical problem, or even a theological problem:
 - It is an **experiential problem** of deep personal difficulty
 - This struggle manifests itself when one tries to make sense and cope with:
 - the personal pain in one's own soul
 - the pain and suffering that our loved one's experience
 - the pain and suffering that exists in the world in general
 - Christians seek the guidance of God, and when doing so:
 - The results may be completely different than what they expected

- How does one discern God’s overall purpose when bad things happen?
- With everything that happens to us on a personal level:
 - How can they be reconciled with the claim that God cares and provides for us?
- With everything that happens to the church:
 - How do we reconcile this with the fact that God loves and cares?
- With everything that happens in the world in general:
 - How do we know the purpose of all the evil that comes to pass?
- How are we to make sense out of all of this?
- This is an argument from soul as well as the intellect
 - We do not have the complete answer to this problem because God has not given us all the information
 - God does not always provide an exhaustive explanation for everything
 - But He does give us **sufficient** and **adequate** reasons
 - We must always keep in mind:
 - *The secret things belong to the Lord our God* (Deut. 29:29).
 - We would not be able to understand God’s ways even if He told us (Isa. 55:9)
- We have to be willing to accept a certain amount mystery in our lives
 - And not to shift the blame on God for the evil that exists (James 1:13-16)
 - We are responsible for our own actions
 - We brought sin and death into the world because we chose to rebel
 - The consequence for this is ours as we live in this fallen world

We forget that the ultimate destiny for all humanity is the same

- **Ecclesiastes 9:2** - *It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath*

We forget God blesses the righteous the same as the unrighteous

- **Matthew 5:45** - *so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust*

Be careful when attempting to interpret the reason for natural disasters

- **Luke 13:2-5** - *²Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? ³No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. ⁴Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? ⁵No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish.”*