The Problem of Evil

All arguments against the Christian position utilize logical fallacies in order to work. The most common and perhaps potent argument in our culture is referred to as "the problem of evil," and it goes like this: "If God is both all-powerful and all-loving why does evil exist?" Stated in a more formal way the argument looks like this:

1. God is completely good
2. God is completely powerful
3. Evil Exists

In our day the argument has taken on a more emotional component. A nonbeliever will ask, "Was what the terrorists did on 9-11 evil?" Of course a Christian must say, "Yes." The antagonist then follows, "If you had the power to stop them would you?" Again, the Christian must say "yes." The nonbeliever then asserts, "You must be nicer than God then!" It's the same argument, but stated in a much more emotionally charged way.

- To respond to this criticism, we as Christians must first understand the basic assumptions the unbeliever is making. We should really throw the question back on them when they ask, "Was what the terrorists did on 9-11 wrong?" We of course can easily say that it is wrong because we have a transcendent standard to appeal to. Our God says it's wrong because it's murder. However, what does the nonbeliever have to stand on? As Ravi Zacharias points out: "To assume evil you must assume good. To assume good you must assume a moral law. To assume a moral law you must assume a moral law giver."

- A Logical Resolution
  1. God is completely good
  2. God is completely powerful
  3. Evil Exists
  4. God has a morally sufficient reason for the evil which exists.

  This sufficient reason for the existence of evil does not actually have to be understood, it merely has to exist. As Bible-believing Christians we can really only go so far in our explanation as Scripture itself does. We can talk about how "all things work together for good for those who believe God and are called according to His purpose." We can talk about trials being for our benefit and the "testing of our faith." We can also talk about original sin and how man doesn't deserve anything but God's wrath, yet God is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." In the end however, "The secret things belong to the Lord." Ultimately, the sections of Scripture (Job, Romans 9, Luke 13) that deal with this problem don't give an answer other than to assert that man has no standing or right to question God.

- If we assert the Bible's claim, "Who are you oh man to judge God," and apply it to the

situation, the roles are reversed. The question then becomes, "If God is all-good, and all-powerful, Why does He not punish us all now?" You see, open-theism doesn't solve the problem nearly as well as the Biblical doctrine of human depravity (i.e. that we all have an "Adamic nature" and are thereby sinners). <u>So why do bad things happen to good people? The response is really, "What good people?"</u>

•   Other major Christian arguments to reconcile God's goodness with the existence of evil unfortunately fall short of biblical theology.

1. The Unreality of Evil Defense

This defense basically says, "evil doesn't actually exist, it's just an allusion." Eastern religions and Christian cults may use this, but for a Bible-believing Christian it's not an option (plus it creates way more problems than it solves).

2. The Divine Weakness Defense

This is one and the same with the open-theist claim that God doesn't have the power to control evil. In other words, He's not "all-powerful." Again, this is unthinkable for Bible-believers.

3. The Best Possible World Defense

This is an interesting defense, and one I've actually used in the past. As John Frame says, it goes like this, "Certain evils are logically necessary to achieve certain good ends. For example, there must be suffering if there is to be compassion for sufferers. So the best possible world will include some evil." The problem I have with this response now is that it almost seems to say, "The perfect world is one in which there exists imperfection." This as you can see is a self-refuting statement. I tend to shy away from this defense now, although there is a ring of truth in it. Evil will achieve a "good" end when God righteously punishes evil-doers.

4. The Free Will Defense

This is by far the most common defense, yet I believe it's among the least Biblical ones. Adam perhaps had a "free-will" as we Christians do too. However, unregenerate man is not free to choose good, but only evil. He is restrained by his sin nature. So to say that God created a world in which evil was possible, because without a "choice" there would be no "love" is to say that man is capable of choosing God, which we know is not the case from Scripture. God is the one who draws His elect, and He gets the credit for it. This is a rather Arminian argument, and you won't find it being made in Scripture; in fact I think it can be demonstrated that Scripture opposes such a notion.

5. The Character Building Defense

God's intention in allowing evil is to build our characters, or so the defense goes. According to the book

of James, for Christians this is perhaps a legitimate defense. Yes, trials do make us stronger. However, for the nonbeliever, this rule does not apply, and generally it's the nonbeliever raising the question.

6. The Stable Environment Defense

This defense asserts that the laws of physics inevitably will lead to pain (i.e. you fall down the stairs, etc.). In order to make this argument though you would have to assume that conditions in the Garden of Eden were different. Either humans didn't get hurt, or physics was different, or something. This is mere speculation however. Also, it doesn't answer the whole question. It tries to account for pain, but what about evil inflicted by other humans? I don't see this as any kind of satisfactory answer.

7. The Indirect Cause Defense

God is not responsible for evil because He is its indirect cause. He created the Devil and Adam and Eve, yet they were the ones who rebelled, not Him. So they bear the responsibility even though they were created by him. On a human level indirectness does not mitigate responsibility. Does it work on a cosmic level? I find this argument debatable. It doesn't really "solve" the problem though even if it is a valid argument, because all it does is refer back to the creation of evil. It doesn't explain why God doesn't intervene currently.

8. The ex Lex Defense

This defense says that God is outside or above the laws He prescribes for man, therefore he isn't responsible to react in the same ways man is expected to (remember the 9-11 scenario?). This is a true in one way, but let us not forget that the laws that God has given man reflect His nature. So while He is above them, He is not "outside" of them. I'd say this is valid, although again it doesn't answer the entire question. It does explain however potentially why God doesn't intervene currently. He has a higher purpose man is perhaps incapable of understanding and the right thing for Him to do is to allow evil to exist in certain vicinities.

- In conclusion, I would like to emphasize that our "theodicy" (realm of theology dealing with defending the existence of God's goodness and power in light of the existence of evil) needs to have Christ at the center. The nonbeliever has no hope. He or she has no way to deal with evil. No way to cope with it. We do. When God entered human history He did so as a man "tempted in all points as we." He was a "man of sorrow acquainted with grief." The ultimate pain was placed on Him, yet He defeated evil "for the joy set before Him" enduring the cross and rising on the third day. He then promised to send us the "Comforter" (Holy Spirit) to illuminate Scripture and intercede for us with the Father. As a result of His substitutionary atonement for our sins, we have hope that one day we will be in a place devoid of evil and pain for eternity. It's a privilege we don't deserve, but one which God freely gives us. We have a way to cope with evil, the nonbeliever does not.