

# SYSTEMATIC THEOLOGY

Theology Proper – Study of God– Part

4

The Problem of Evil

## Introduction

- The most effectively used attack against the Christian worldview has been the problem of evil.
  - Most Christians have no idea of how to correctly answer this problem.
  - Many of the supposed solutions end up being ridiculous.
- The Christian would do well to realize the problem of evil is not really a problem for the Christian, but instead it is a problem for the unbeliever.
- The Christian should also be able to address the charges of the “new atheists” that the God of the Bible is evil.
- These and other matters will be covered in this lesson.

## Problem of Evil

- This is the single most effective arguments atheists make against the existence of God.
- David Hume’s argument:
  - Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent.
  - Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.
  - Is he both able and willing? Whence then is the evil?
  - In other words, the idea of a God that is all good and all powerful is inconsistent with evil in the world.
- Those who are “Big-God-ers” allegedly have a problem.
  - So what is the solution?

HE DOES NOTHING TO PREVENT EVIL.  
THEN HE IS NOT OMNIPOTENT.  
HE IS ABLE BUT NOT WILLING.  
THEN HE IS MALEVOLENT.  
HE IS BOTH ABLE AND WILLING.  
THEN WHERE COMETH EVIL?  
HE BE BOTH ABLE AND NOT WILLING.  
THEN WHY CALL HIM GOD?

## Open-Theism and Process Theology

- They attempt to solve the problem by denying total omniscience of God, and by implication total omnipotence.
  - Thus they shrink God to deal with the philosophical problem.
- They usually site free-will as the cause of moral evil and then catastrophes as the cause of natural evil.
  - Moral evil comes from humans and natural evil from disasters of nature.

If God is so  
**GOOD**  
why is there  
**EVIL?**

## Different Christian Attempts

- Irenaeus said that evil was a necessary accompaniment to human existence in order for God’s plan to work out to its fullest.
  - This is the “Evil is Necessary View.”
- Augustine tried to deal with the issue by saying that God did not create evil because evil is not a “thing” in and of itself. Instead, **evil is a lack of good.**
  - This is the “Privation of Good” view.
  - Heat and Cold analogy.
  - This explanation still does not satisfy the atheist, since the question can still be posed, “Why doesn’t God remove such a destructive lack of good?”
- The Free Will defense is common today.
  - God’s desire that we have a free will left open the possibility of the existence of evil.
  - Us not having a free will would be a greater evil.
  - “Love demands a choice.”
  - Everything we learned in the providence lesson refutes this (redemption was planned before the foundation of the world; God uses and directs evil; the free acts of men are rendered certain; nations and boundaries are appointed; etc.

## Let’s Get Some Things Straight

- From Genesis to Revelation, we see a God that is in complete control and is ultimately sovereign.
- The freest will is God’s will because there are no restrictions upon His will, other than acting against His nature.
  - I have a will, but it is not free (unhindered) because I did not choose to be born, or where I’d be born, or when, and so on. Instead, I have a limited will within the confines of the parts of life that I do have power over.
  - Therefore, to say a collective of limited wills (all people) overrode the unlimited free will of God and caused the evil in the world is logically inconsistent.
- God could have created a world in which we had free will and yet still not have us sin. He didn’t have to put that tree in the middle of the Garden, or allow Satan to deceive Eve, and make the fruit look pleasing to the eye.
  - If some say that is not realistic, I ask why? In heaven, will we not be free and yet at the same time be unable to sin?

## Trusting God

- Knowing that evil does exist, and knowing that God is all powerful and all good, we must conclude that He would only allow the amount of evil that would lead to the greatest amount of good, which leads to His glory.
- The amount of evil in the world leads to a greater quantity and quality of good than if there were no evil at all.
  - Without tension, there is no growth. Without pain there is no relief. Without this world being as it is, there would be no hope of a greater world to inherit.
- So the amount of evil that exists simply serves to demonstrate that God is sovereign, good, and all powerful.



## Now To a Real Discussion on This

- Ultimately, the problem of evil is summed up in Job 40:8.
  - God asked Job, "Would you really challenge My justice? Would you declare Me guilty to justify yourself?"
- Fallen man will do anything to justify himself, and the problem of evil represents his most blasphemous attempt.
- To declare his own righteousness and autonomy, he declares God to be guilty, and then uses that as a basis to deny His existence.
- Truly, it is not an intellectual problem, but instead it can be reduced down to the fallen, rebellious heart.



## The Wrong Answers



- Often Christians lean on human philosophy rather than the Bible to answer this issue.
- Unreality of Evil Defense (privation of good).
  - Problems: Scripture treats evil as a real thing (Genesis 2:17; Genesis 6:5; 2 Samuel 11:27).
  - The word "evil" appears 520 times in the ESV.
- The Divine Weakness Defense (Open-theism).
  - Problems: Why pray to a God that is not in control? Psa 139:9-12 & Jer 23:23-24 show omnipresence; Psa 90:2 & Jude 1:25 show that God is omnipresent and omniscient (beyond time); Psa 147:5 shows that God's knowledge is unlimited.

## Wrong Answers

- The Best Possible World Defense.
  - Problem: Scriptures do not teach this. God made a world with no sin at first, things now are cursed. How could that be best? We will inherit a world without evil, so how can this world with evil be best?
- The Free Will Defense.
  - This was defeated by the rest of this third lesson!
  - Furthermore, the portions of Scripture that deal with the problem of evil (Job; Psalm 37; and Romans 9) offers nothing even close to this defense.
- Stable Environment Defense (C.S. Lewis).
  - Problem: The earth in Genesis 2 was a stable world, but no evil was present. The world to come will be stable too, yet no evil will be in it.
  - This view lets man blame shift sin on the environment.



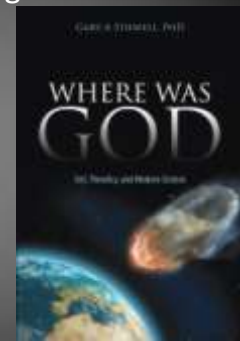
## Wrong Answers

- Indirect Cause Defense (Reformed).
  - Problems: Kind of makes God as a mob boss. It does not relieve God of responsibility.
  - There is some truth to it, though. God is never the proximate cause of sin.
- The *Ex Lex* Defense (Outside of the Law).
  - Problems: Lev 11:44 shows the law is a reflection of God's character.
  - It is at least true that it takes into account the Creator/Creature distinction.
- All of these responses have one thing in common: they attempt to answer the problem philosophically rather than Scripturally.



## First Thing First!

- We need to take evil seriously.
  - The unbeliever takes it seriously (this will be their undoing later).
  - We have all been affected by evil.
  - Authors of Scripture cry out against it (Psalmists, and even Jesus Christ).
- Understand that some may bring it up because they are hurt.



## Logical Argument

- Typical Snooty Presentation.
  1. God is all good.
  2. God is all powerful.
  3. Evil Exists.
  4. Therefore, God does not exist.
- Easy Solution.
  1. God is all good.
  2. God is all powerful.
  3. Evil Exists.
  4. God has a perfectly moral reason for the evil that does exist.
  5. Therefore, God does exist.
- Ultimately who is evil truly a problem for? Not us.

## Who is it Really a Problem For?

- Can the unbeliever justify the reality of evil?
  - Time, chance, chaos, randomness, natural selection, etc.
  - So what standard can they appeal to? The epistemological problem.
- The unbeliever's case depends upon them being able to show that evil is a real thing with real properties that can be evaluated.
  - If their worldview is true, such a thing cannot exist.
  - Yet evil is a real thing, therefore their worldview is wrong.
- They can't even call the Holocaust evil



## What They May Try

- Majority Vote (Cultural View)
  - Fallacy of *ad populum*.
  - Morals do not reduce to statistics (otherwise, you can't call the Holocaust wrong).
- Evil is a real thing with certain properties.
  - How is it determined? When people disagree (and they do), it is reduced to relativism.
- Utilitarian Pragmatism.
  - How can you compare and rate happiness?
  - Also, you would have to know ahead of the time what the desired result is, which *begging the question*.
- So they cannot call anything evil.
- We can.
  - The existence of a living creator that is holy, immutable, and sovereign declared such things to be evil since they are opposed to His perfect nature



## Ex Nihilo

- Any appeal to evil should be evaluated upon their worldview.
  - Such as people's happiness (what if evil makes them happy?)
- Thus, when atheists appeal to the existence of evil to say God does not exist, they remove the precondition of evil's existence in the first place.



## So What is the Answer?

- God never tells us this answer.
  - Perhaps we cannot comprehend this.
  - Second, man cannot judge God. An answer would be putting God under our judgment seat.
  - Romans 8:28 gives us a promise, and we just have to trust. How God does this is beyond us (Isaiah 55:8-9; Deut 29:29).



## A Quote From My Book

- The unbeliever absolutely hates this idea. He wishes that God could be put on trial. If God was obligated to answer us concerning this problem, it would be akin to saying that God must tell us why bad things happen and then we, with our limited human judgment and wisdom, will independently judge whether or not God's reason is just. Philosophically, this is absurd. The idea of God not owing us and not being judged by our own rationality is absolutely intolerable for the unbeliever's pride. Such a person refuses to believe in a God that will not tell him why evil things happen. The unbeliever is upset that God will not allow him to sit as judge over Him to assess His answer. No amount of proof, evidence, logic, rationale, etc. that a Christian offers will ever be enough to satisfy the unbeliever's demand. Simply put, the unbeliever will not trust God unless God will subordinate Himself to the intellectual authority and moral evaluation of man. Thus, it all boils down to authority. The unbeliever thinks that he should be the judge of God rather than God being the judge of the unbeliever. Humans are the guilty party and God is the one we owe restitution to, yet the unbeliever demands that God trade places with the guilty and allow the guilty to judge Him. In grace, this is exactly what God did when 2,000 years ago He was born of virgin and was then tried and crucified three decades later. Man's quest for rebellion was not satisfied.

## Is God Evil?

- Canaanite Genocide? The Flood? Hell?
- First, can the unbeliever truly advance this question?
  - They can't justify evil's existence. On their worldview, they cannot declare these things as wrong.
- Answer with the Christian Worldview:
  - The Canaanites were evil people who set their children on fire for the gods Molech and Chemosh, and they committed just about every detestable sin known to man.
  - In addition to that, God knows the fallen condition of man, and so His command served two purposes.
  - First, He was using the sword of Israel to execute judgment on a very wicked people. God, being sovereign and distinct from creation, has the absolute right to serve as judge, jury and executioner, and He may use whatever means He determines in His own will.
  - Second, God was protecting Israel knowing that in their fallen nature they would copy the practices of the Canaanites. Since Israel failed to destroy them, this is exactly what happened as both the Bible and secular history have demonstrated widespread idolatry and polytheism in Israel prior to the exile.
- Concerning the children, they have original sin, but there is plenty of reasons to think they went to heaven (Deut 1:39; Rom 2:14-15; 5:13; 7:9).
- The guilt of those judged answers the Flood and Hell too.

## Reading My Answer To An Atheist

## Conclusion

- The problem of evil is not a problem for the Christian worldview.
- It is a problem for the atheistic worldview.
- Christians need to trust that God does work it for our good.
- Christians need to let the Scriptures dictate their answer.
- Christians should give God glory regardless of what happens.