

## **Apologetics | Week 11**

### **Evil and the Existence of God**

- In John 16:33 Jesus said “In this world you will have tribulation, but take courage I have overcome the world.”
  - From a Christian perspective suffering should be viewed not as an anomaly but as part of the normal fabric of life (Acts 20:22-23)
  - Not “normal” as God intended, but as a normal consequence of the fall.
  - To a secular individual, as well as many Christians (of the last 200 years especially) unintended suffering can bring about a question as to God’s existence or power.
  - The modern objections to a God we profess as good allowing suffering in the world can be traced as far back as Epicurus.
    - Epicurus lived between 340-270 B.C. and is credited with the following statement: “Is God willing to prevent evil and not able? Then He is not omnipotent. Is He able, but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is He neither able nor willing? Then why call Him God?”
  - As we look at objections and answers to how the evil in our world and the existence of the God of our Bible, most arguments will come from these basic premises.
- What do we mean by Evil?
  - In a metaphysical sense Evil in and of itself is not a thing or substance, but the corruption of a created “good” thing. That however, does not mean it is real.
  - This is one argument (a trilemma) against the statement that God caused evil.
    1. God only created actual things or substances.
    2. Evil is not an actual thing or substance.

### 3. So God could not have created evil.

- Think if it like this: heat is actual (measured in btu's) but cold is not and measured in the lack of heat. Similarly light is actual (measured in lumens) and darkness is the absence of light.
- Evil would be measured as the absence or diminishment of God's good purposes or creation.
- Good can exist apart from Evil, but evil needs a good thing to prey upon.
- The two common categories of evil are generally broken down into moral evil and natural evil.
  - We will look at these in detail separately in the next two weeks and discuss the relationship of God's existence in light of them in greater depth then.
  - We will also look at the issue of human suffering outside of evil intent during those discussions.
- Moral evil occurs when free persons misuse their freedom in such a way that their action violates a moral standard.
  - From a Christian perspective we call that sin (hamartia; or missing the mark).
  - Moral evil involves moving from desire or temptation to forming an intention.
  - Intention involves forming a plan of action to do something even through the act itself could possibly be intervened upon by an outside party (whether man or God).
- So we can here realize that evil can occur absent of suffering, such as when an evil act is thwarted.
  - As such suffering can also occur absent of evil, like when a prison sentence is carried out in a serious criminal.
  - In this case suffering occurs for a morally justified reason, which wouldn't make the resulting suffering wrong.

- So, while suffering is the usual result of morally wrong behavior, evil can't be simply reduced to be present simply because emotional or physical suffering is occurring.
- Likewise, there can be some perceived human good in actions that would be considered morally wrong, such as adultery.
- A person often commits this act to gain emotional or physical pleasure, yet the act is morally wrong.
- Jeremy Evans, in his book "The Problem of Evil" likens this to the forbidden fruit in Genesis 3. While it was labeled as "good" for food and "pleasing" to the eye, to eat of it violated a divine command.
- The second category of evil most often discussed is natural evil.
  - For our purposes here we will hold natural evil and natural suffering in the same light.
  - As we discussed above, human or moral evil involves an action or suffering placed upon another with intent, a determination of what is evil can be readily determined.
  - With natural evil, it is broken down into two subcategories; ecological (hurricanes, earthquakes, floods, etc.) and biological (cancer, infection, infirmity).
  - Here pain and suffering can certainly be tied to an act, but to call it evil can be a difficult attribution.
  - In Job chapter 1 we see satan is allowed to use biological elements against Job, which is certainly an evil act.
  - But in Genesis we see God use plagues to bring judgement and famine to produce reconciliation in Joseph's family.
  - Elizabeth Eliot wrote about sheep resisting being dunked in antibiotic fluid unaware that it was all for their good and comparing it to our unknowing state of how God is working for our good in seemingly bad events.
- Arguments against God

- There is no denying the prevalence of suffering inflicted upon humans (and creation in the general) to natural and moral destructive events around the world. Any news cycle can validate this.
- As he took issue with God's existence, William Rowe used a trilemma to stress his point.
  1. There exists instances of intense suffering in which an omnipotent, omniscient being could have prevented without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some evil equally bad or worse.
  2. An omniscient, wholly good being would prevent the occurrence of any intense suffering it could, unless it could not do so without thereby losing some greater good or permitting some equally bad or worse.
  3. There does not exist an omnipotent, omniscient wholly good being.
- However, by expressing his argument in this form, Rowe shifted the determination of what was good away from the creator and placed it on the creation.
- What Rowe calls unredeemed suffering is now to be determined by man and not God.
- This is the view held by virtually all secularist (primarily using natural evil or suffering) to undermine the existence of God in the world.
- But in using this approach to try and disprove God. They don't provide and an answer or solution for the suffering they point out.
- Some, like Richard Dawkins, don't attempt to attach any meaning to life, which allows them to skirt a need for a solution.

- But without a moralistic view, nature itself appears inherently brutal, to which Tim Keller offered this explanation in “The Reason for God”, “if violence is totally natural why would it be wrong for strong humans to trample weak ones? There is no basis for moral obligation unless we argue that nature is in some part unnatural”.
- Therein lies the issue, how do we explain the suffering we experience in the physical world around us without God? We will spend the next weeks answering this question.