

Apologetics | Week 13

Moral Evil and God's Existence

- **What is moral evil?**

- As mentioned in our earlier discussions, what we call moral evil is intentional harm perpetrated on humans by other humans.
- We noted in our discussion on natural evil that this can show up in natural suffering through greed and selfishness, but for our purpose here we are looking at direct acts by humans to other humans.

- **Moral evil and relativism**

- As we deal with a post-modernist view in our culture the term "moral relativism" is a common phrase heard.
- This is a belief that absolute truth and thereby moral absolutes are nonexistent, so what one person may call evil may not be true over time and across various cultures.
- However, not all post-modernists are relativists, as pointed at by Dr. Stewart Kelly in his comments on Nietzsche when he noted that Nietzsche (a pillar of the postmodern society) rejected Christianity because he believed in "me first" philosophy, not because he rejected a set of truths. The truths he operated on were just different than those of Christians.
- So while post-modernism can be hard to define, there are certain traits post-modern thinkers have that help when discussing man's (and God's) role in evil in the world.
 - They have a low confidence in human reason.
 - They also put a great deal of weight on how much environment influences how a person looks at the world.
 - They reject all traditional world views (which he noted is in itself a world view) because they say they all lead to oppression. " They believe all historical writing is

politically motivated and is unreliable, and that there is no such thing as true objectivity.

- This collection of beliefs brings them to an elimination of moral standards, which makes a person unanswerable to anyone.
- Interestingly, however, they come up with their own views about what is right and wrong.
- But, as Kelly pointed out, just because they are wrong about many things doesn't mean they are wrong about everything.
- Much of history was motivated by selfish desire and there certainly was oppression brought out under the name of religion. Also, we are more influenced by environment than we probably admit.
 - So, as Christians, we need to be cautious about letting scripture, not culture, guide us. This is where ultimate truth lies, not in our intellect or environment.
- **Evil in view of God**
 - While a discussion on the origin of evil is outside of the time we have in our discussion, the most dominant theodicy (theodicy - "the vindication of the goodness of God in view of the existence of evil" is the freewill defense.
 - A theodicy, as we talked in our week one discussion attempts to answer the "why" questions of evil in the world.
 - This is a statement that we, as free creatures, are allowed by God to make choices in the circumstances we find ourselves in. It is best if we use our will to choose good, but we will sometimes misuse our freewill. God, even in His sovereignty, can't force us to do good in all situations.
 - An objection is asked as to why didn't God simply make us capable of only choosing good all the time?
 - To do so would have removed our ability to choose or reject Him, thereby eliminating the possibility of love.

- In this scenario, while not creating evil, God allowed its possibility to allow for the opposite possibility of love. While love in the world is boundless, we can still see (as in Job) that evil, while existing, is still limited by God even though we may disagree on what an appropriate limit is.
- Frank Turek in his book "Stealing from God: Why Atheists Need God to Make their Case" pointed out the problem of evil is a question all religions deal with, not just Christians.
- He noted that objective evil pre-supposes objective good, and objective good requires God. He expanded on this with C. S. Lewis's statement that you need a straight line to understand a line that is crooked.
- Without an unmovable set of moral standards that are outside of ourselves, we have an inability to understand good from evil.
- When trying to determine the role of evil/ suffering in the world, Turek stated that some virtues can only be developed in confronting evil and going through trials. There is no compassion without suffering, no character without adversity, no courage without danger, and no perseverance without obstacles.
- He said the Job of chapter 40 was a man much deeper and richer in character than the Job of chapter 1.
- In tempering my desire to decide how the world should run, I was drawn to this quote from Jacques Marie Louis Monsabre', "If God would concede me His power for 24 hours, you would see how many changes I would make in the world. But if He gave me His wisdom too, I suspect I would leave things as they are."
- **The "New problem of Evil"**
 - While evil isn't new, how the modern world we live in views it is.
 - Evil and suffering are now couched in term of progress and holding on to ideas to prevent it are labeled as unacceptable.
 - This is not unlike the modernist views of the 18th and 19th centuries that civilization was mostly good and moving toward

perfection, that seemed to be undone by WWI and the atrocities of the Holocaust.

- Given this, as noted by N.T. Wright in his book "Evil and the Justice of God" it seems remarkable that a belief in "progress" still survives and triumphs in our society.
- People believe our problems are basically solvable through technology, education and "development" by which they mean pressing western thought on the rest of the world.
- Wright says this has made manifest three things that now characterize the "new" problem of evil.
 - First, we ignore evil until it hits us in the face (9/11 and its warnings come to mind here; also the fact that sexual freedom and adultery creates massive unhappiness in families and individuals but as 21st century thinkers we can't tell others that it's wrong.)
 - Second, we are surprised by evil when it does hit us in the face. We believe our small towns to be safe and react in horror when a crime is committed or when death itself shows up in a form to be unplanned for.
 - Third, because of these two scenarios, we react in immature and dangerous ways. Projecting evil done to us onto everyone else and lashing out in retribution can be just as harmful as projecting it onto ourselves saying we are to blame and drowning in depression.
- **God's response**
 - So what are we to do and how are we to respond when faced with suffering and evil?
 - In Turek's book he notes that nowhere does God promise to keep Christians from evil and suffering. God Himself suffered, which sets Him apart from any other man-made god.
 - God then takes this on Himself in His plan of redemption from ourselves and back to Him.

- Wright goes even deeper, allowing that evil will not ever be solved through progress or evolution, but through the promised act of "the renewing of all things."
- Our role in this is to live as "Exodus people" in forgiveness, focused not on what is behind but in the new kingdom that is to come since we have been released from the claim of evil on our lives through the cross.
- Wright argues the ability to forgive is the only thing that can free us (and be given as an answer to an unbelieving world) from the harm done to us in this world.
- Forgiveness is not tolerance, excusing or a waiving off of evil, but a facing up to and acknowledging of the evil done to us and a releasing of the bonds that keep bringing us back to it, whether or not the perpetrator accepts it or not.
- Among his many examples of our scriptural calling to this response he cites Matthew 18: 21-22 where Peter asks about our burden of forgiveness and Jesus answers seven with seventy times seven. This parallels with Daniel 9: 2, 24 where Daniel asks is Jeremiah's seventy years enough for restoration and Gabriel says "to finish the transgression, to put an end to sin and atone for iniquity, to bring everlasting righteousness" will be seventy sevens.
- Only through the Messiah can evil be dealt with in our life and on earth.
- We are to "forgive our trespasses as we have been forgiven" living as new kingdom people. Then and only then can God truly "Deliver us from evil".