

Answering Difficult Questions

I. The Problem of Evil

A. The charge stated.

1. God is the author of everything.
2. Evil is something
3. Therefore, God is the author of evil.¹

Simply put, if God exists, there should not be such evil, since God would have the power and desire to stop it. Evil exists, therefore no God.

B. The origin of evil.

1. God. This is the logical result of hard determinism. R.C. Sproul Jr. states, “It was his desire to make his wrath known. He needed, then, something on which to be wrathful. He needed to have sinful creatures.”² In objection Kenneth Keathley writes, “If determinism is true, then God is the first cause of sin. The logic of R. C. Sproul Jr. demonstrates this. However, since God is not the cause of sin, then causal determinism cannot be true.”³ William Lane Craig writes, “All good ultimately comes from God, whereas evil derives from creaturely misuse of freedom. Whatever explanation of evil one adopts, the central point here is that God’s foreknowledge of evil deeds...cannot be accounted for on the basis that God has predestined everything that comes to pass.”⁴ Keathley sums up, “If everything is ‘cause and effect,’ then the causal chain goes back to God. Not only does that make our decisions illusory but, as we have seen, it also makes God the author of sin.”⁵
2. Theodicy – The defense of God in relation to the problem of evil.
 - a. Natural evil - Natural evil consists of things like tornados, earthquakes, floods, diseases, deformity, etc.
 - b. Human evil - Human evil consists of things like lies, murder, stealing, cruelty, and other evil acts.
 - c. Definition - “It is a lack in things. When good that should be there is missing from something, that is evil... Evil is a lack of something that should be there in the relationship between good things.”⁶
 - d. Scripture presents God’s creation as perfect (Genesis 1:31).
 - e. God’s attributes do not allow for evil in His being (Habakkuk 1:13a). Fred Chay states, ““Since God is just, perfect, love, and goodness, He can’t be the author of evil.”⁷ Chay notes, ““The perfectly good God can’t create Evil. Evil is not a created thing.”⁸
3. Freewill - Man’s freedom caused moral evil that resulted in physical evil.
 - a. The logic:
 1. God made everything perfect.
 2. One of the perfect things God made was free creatures.
 3. Free will is the cause of evil.

¹ Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask: A Handbook On Christian Evidences* (Wheaton, IL: Baker Books, 1990), 61.

² R.C. Sproul and Jr, *Almighty Over All: Understanding the Sovereignty of God* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Books, 1999), 57.

³ Kenneth Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty: A Molinist Approach* (Nashville, Tenn.: B&H Academic, 2010), 84-85.

⁴ William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God: The Compatibility of Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, Reprint ed. (Grand Rapids: Wipf & Stock Pub, 2000), 47-48.

⁵ Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 95.

⁶ Geisler and Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, 61.

⁷ Fred Chay, *Apologetics Class Notes, DM-935*, Grace School of Theology, 2018.

⁸ Chay, *Class Notes*.

4. So, imperfection (evil) can arise from perfection (...indirectly through freedom).⁹
- b. The danger - With real freedom comes the possibility of bad choices. Chay writes, "Freedom is good but it carries the possibility of actualizing a free choice that is bad. (The FACT of free choice is good. The ACT of choosing evil is bad)... The result – the fall of man and the curse."¹⁰
- C. The presence of evil. A related question is, "Why doesn't God do something about evil?"
 1. The criticism.
 1. If God is all-good, He would destroy evil.
 2. If God is all-powerful, He could destroy evil.
 3. But evil is not destroyed.
 4. Hence, there is no such God.¹¹
 2. The response.
 1. If God is all-good, He will defeat evil.
 2. If God is all-powerful, He can defeat evil.
 3. Evil is not *yet* defeated.
 4. Therefore, God can and *will one day* defeat evil.¹²
- D. Summary. Fred Chay summarizes the issue of evil:
 1. God is sovereign, in control and loving.
 2. God is good, pure, righteous and can't create evil.
 3. The problem: Evil comes from man's freedom.
 4. The result: Innocent and non-innocent suffer in the world.
 5. The plan: God will justify suffering and evil by using it to accomplish a greater good.¹³

II. Is Jesus the only way?

- A. Other people sincerely seek God. We must remember that sincerity has nothing to do with whether or not something is true or false.
- B. The Bible does teach Jesus is the only way.
 1. John 14:6, "Jesus answered, 'I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me'"
 2. Acts 4:12, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."
- C. The necessity of Jesus being the only way.
 1. All have sinned and are incapable of saving themselves.
 2. No creature (man included) is capable of paying man's sin debt.
 3. Jesus is the only person, the God-man, able to pay the sin debt.
 4. The only sacrifice that God accepts is the sacrifice of His Son.

III. Those who never hear the gospel.

- A. What is the fate of those who through no fault of their own never hear the gospel?
 1. Universalism. The view that everyone will eventually be saved, even those who never hear the gospel. The Bible is clear that some people will reject Jesus Christ and spend eternity in Hell (Revelation 20:10, 14-15). Universalism has no biblical support.
 2. The necessity of belief. John 3:16-18 makes it clear that people are condemned for *not believing* the gospel.
 3. God's desire. In 2 Peter 3:9 Peter states that God "...is not willing for any to perish but for all to

⁹ Geisler and Brooks, *When Skeptics Ask*, 62.

¹⁰ Chay, *Class Notes*.

¹¹ Geisler and Brooks, 63.

¹² Geisler and Brooks, 63.

¹³ Chay, *Class Notes*.

come to repentance.” John tells us that Jesus died for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). Jesus said the Holy Spirit would convict the world of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 7:7-11).

B. Solutions.

- 1 – All below the age of accountability¹⁴ will be saved. This would include babies and intellectually disabled. However, can a person be saved without hearing the gospel?
 - 2 – God, being all knowing, knows who would have believed if they were able and who would not have believed.
 - 3 – Aborted babies and other children who never reach the age of accountability will be resurrected into the Millennium and have the opportunity there to believe or not believe.¹⁵
 - 4 – Molinism, or middle-knowledge. God knew every possible scenario and choose the best one.
- C. Summary. Regardless of how we understand the fate of those who never here the gospel there is no doubt that God will judge fairly. Josh McDowell writes, “God is going to judge the world fairly and righteously. ‘Because he hath appointed a day, in which he will judge the world in righteousness’ (Acts 17:31, KJV). This means that when all the facts are in, God’s name will be vindicated and no one will be able to accuse Him of unfairness.”¹⁶

IV. Genocide in the Old Testament.

A. Genocide - Genocide comes from the combination of the Greek word, *genos* (race or people) and the Latin suffix *cide* (act of killing). The question is asked, “If God loves mankind why did He command Israel to kill certain groups, including women and children, in the Old Testament?”

B. Old Testament texts. Deuteronomy 20:16-18, Joshua 6:21, and Joshua 8:24-5 are examples of Israel being commanded to destroy the Canaanites, and of Israel actually carrying out that command.

C. Two major responses.

1. The destruction was only military targets. Groothuis summarizes, “Neither the biblical text of Joshua nor that of Judges supports any genocide. The attacks on Jericho and Ai were assaults on military targets. The major wars that Israel fought were defensive.”¹⁷ In this defense, genocide is denied because God does not indiscriminately target every Canaanite.
2. It was capital punishment, not genocide. The charge is usually put forth as:
 - a. Christians condemn genocide.
 - b. Yahweh’s command to kill the Canaanites was an act of divine genocide.
 - c. Therefore, Christians should condemn Yahweh for commanding genocide.¹⁸

However, Jones makes a strong case that the second premise is false. He shows that God punished the Canaanites for “specific grievous evils.”¹⁹ Idolatry, incest, adultery, child sacrifice, homosexuality, and bestiality were common among the Canaanites. God also warned Israel about the potential of Canaanite influence if the Canaanites were allowed to exist (Judges 2:1-3). Concerning Israel God proclaimed, “All of them have become to Me like Sodom...” Jeremiah 23:14.

D. Conclusion. In light of the character of God and the above arguments we can confidently say that the charge that God instituted genocide and approved the murder of innocent women and children is false. The truth is that God loves the world and desires for any and all to come to him for forgiveness. However, God does punish sin and eventually the wickedness of the Canaanites and their rebellion against God caused their destruction.

¹⁴ The age of accountability, “Is the belief that a child must reach a certain point of mental, emotional, and spiritual development before he is accountable.” Keathley, *Salvation and Sovereignty*, 77.

¹⁵ Bob Wilkin puts forth this view as a possibility in *Grace in Focus Magazine*, <http://faithalone.org/magazine/y2013/13B3.html>

¹⁶ Josh McDowell, <https://www.josh.org/resources/apologetics/answering-skeptics-detail/?id=34546>

¹⁷ Groothuis, 675.

¹⁸ Jones, <http://www.equip.org/PDF/JAF3334.pdf>

¹⁹ Jones, <http://www.equip.org/PDF/JAF3334.pdf>