



Evil and the God Who Knows

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The earthquake in Pakistan, the tsunami in Southeast Asia, the devastating hurricane in the gulf coast of United States, babies dying of malnutrition around the world, children killed by warring factions in Palestine, and child abuse in every corner of the world causes the human heart to cry out, "Why is this world so cruel?" If Jesus loves the little children, then why does He allow them to suffer such intolerable suffering? The point is, in light of God's providence, His plan, His love, and His power, why all of this intense, unequally distributed suffering, and the suffering of children (the innocents)? The atheist says that such things are sure evidence that the God of the Bible does not exist. The theist is sure that such things do not count against God but not sure how to answer the questions that rise even within the heart of the Christian. This lecture affirms that God is the all-knowing, all-powerful, omnibenevolent God of the Bible, but attempts to put all of these questions in a context different from how they have normally been understood.

1. What Are The Issues For Our Subject?

- 1.1. If God is the creator, did God create evil?
- 1.2. If God is all good and all powerful why is there so much intense, unequally distributed suffering, and suffering of innocents?
- 1.3. If God is sovereign, then why did God plan a world with so much suffering?
- 1.4. If God is omnipotent and all loving, why does He allow the worst of the evils in this world?
- 1.5. Three categories of evil
 - 1.5.1. Moral – suffering caused by moral agents (killing)
 - 1.5.2. Natural –suffering caused by nature being

out of joint (Tsunami)

1.5.3. Physical –suffering caused by corruption in the body (cancer)

2. The Questions We Ask

- 2.1. Why does God allow so much suffering?
- 2.2. Why did God allow my father to die before he could see his grandchildren?
- 2.3. Why does God not protect the children from terrible suffering?
- 2.4. Why did God allow such a good man to die so early, why not someone who is mean?
- 2.5. Could not God stop the worst of the evils in this world?
- 2.6. How could there be any purpose in all of this?

3. Answers We Give

- 3.1. God will bring some good from this.
- 3.2. It is a mystery, we do not know the mind of God in this matter.
- 3.3. God's knowledge does not extend into the future, therefore God does not know what man will do and therefore He cannot stop him before he does it.
- 3.4. God is judging people for their disobedience to him.

4. What Should We Do?

- 4.1. Consider that we claim a Christian Worldview.
- 4.2. That this worldview is superior to other worldviews.
- 4.3. That this worldview gives answers raised in the human heart.
- 4.4. One of the persistent questions of humanity is the problem of evil, or the matter of suffering.
- 4.5. If our worldview as Christians is what we claim, then we must have an answer for this.
- 4.6. Furthermore, this is not only an academic issue, it is a pastoral issue and must be answered by the leaders in the community of faith.
- 4.7. Although there is sin in the angelic realm, I will only deal with mankind.

5. God and Suffering

- 5.1. The question before us is: if God exists, why does He allow such acts of terrible, intense and often unequally distributed suffering and evil that often includes the innocent?
- 5.2. Two points must be made at once.
 - 5.2.1. What is God like?
 - 5.2.1.1. If God is not there then there is no

question.

5.2.1.2. If He is there, then we must understand Him to be as He is.

5.2.2. How does God work in this world?

5.2.2.1. How does the infinite Being relate to the finite being in a way that is meaningful and consistent?

6. What is God like?

6.1. God is:

6.1.1. Omnipotent – Absolute in power.

6.1.2. Omniscient – Comprehensive in knowledge.

6.1.3. Omniscient – Complete in presence.

6.1.4. Sovereign – Autonomous in choice.

6.1.5. Justice – Just in action.

6.2. Because of this, He is able to work providentially in this world.

6.3. He is a simple being in that He is not divisible and always acts as a whole although certain attributes may be more evident at one time than another.

6.4. Here I say nothing new, but only speak to remind.

7. How does God work in this world?

7.1. Who God is does not usually present a point of controversy in a group such as this.

7.2. Therefore, we will move to the second question which I think is most often ignored, but stands at the heart of the discussion.

7.3. Although we affirm what God is like as the Trinitarian God, the question before us is how does He apply His attribute to this world?

7.4. Does He, as in the incarnation, limit the manifestation of any of His attributes in order to accommodate the limitedness of the created order?

7.5. Does He work within a divinely determined prescribed created order and if so, does this help us in any way to understand evil in this world?

7.6. If so what might that look like?

8. Moral Choice

8.1. God was morally free to make man in His Image.

8.2. Part of that “image” is the power to make choices.

8.3. Power of “moral choice” is essential if one is to love.

8.3.1. The term moral is used in its broadest sense. I mean here that man has libertarian

freedom.

8.3.2. By libertarian freedom I mean that man may be influenced, but not determined in his choices because of antecedent events, choices, and ideas.

8.4. Love by most standards is considered the ultimate human act (Matt. 22:37-40).

8.5. Love sponsors acts of courage, acts of compassion, acts of encouragement.

8.6. Without the power of moral choice one cannot love and without love humanity would not be humanity.

9. Mankind's choice to sin

9.1. At a point, God decides to create which includes all of nature which includes mankind.

9.2. Adam and Eve were not perfect in the sense that God is perfect, but they were flawless.

9.3. However, because man was created, he was limited.

9.4. Contingent being is by nature different than a necessary being.

9.5. To overcome their creatureliness, they decided to not love God, which they demonstrated by disobeying God in an attempt to be like God (Gen. 2:17).

9.6. Because mankind was over creation, all creation felt the consequences of sin. From this flows (either directly or indirectly) all suffering and pain in this world.

9.7. Except that evil caused by satanic forces.

10. The physical Creation Order

10.1. Prior to God creating anything, God established an order for his creation.

10.2. This order determined how God would interact with His creation and how creation would operate.

10.3. God created a physical order for His creation.

10.4. This determines how things work in the physical world, both at a cosmic as well as a cellular level.

10.5. This limits man's possibilities physically.

10.6. When he builds a plane, ship or walks across the road, he must acknowledge this order.

11. The moral Creation Order

11.1. God has also established a moral Creation Order.

11.1.1. This moral order is reflected in the Ten Commandments.

11.2. It explains God's relationship to man and

man's responsibilities to God and to his fellowman.

11.3. This order makes possible or includes a number of realities for man, such as:

11.3.1. The possibility of obedience and love (justice, compassion, etc).

11.3.2. The power of moral choice (which means the one making the choice has accountability).

11.4. At the heart of this order is the existence of two minds.

12. Two Minds

12.1. Two minds.

12.2. Necessary Mind and Contingent Mind.

12.3. God Creates a moral Created Order whereby:

12.3.1. The two minds can interact meaningfully.

12.3.2. The necessary mind creates the contingent mind which is compatible with the necessary mind.

12.3.3. The contingent mind cannot overrule the necessary mind.

12.4. God limits the manifestation of some of His non-Moral divine attributes in order that man can have a true freedom.

12.5. This freedom (power of moral choice) permits man a range of choices within which he has genuine (libertarian) freedom.

13. Freedom and Love

13.1. It is this freedom that makes it possible for man to love God (Luke 10: 27 — the highest function of man) and for man to love man.

13.1.1. This is the moral basis for justice, peace, etc.

13.2. Man is influenced by antecedent choices and actions, but they do not determine future actions.

13.3. God has limited man's choices, but not his power to choose.

13.3.1. This requires at least two options with corollary consequences.

13.3.2. We see this in the Garden.

14. God's Providence

14.1. God creates a material world and creates man who has a mind which in turn shapes much of how history unfolds.

14.2. According to Christian thought, God has and does providentially intervene at points.

14.3. To always intervene to prevent evil, would cancel out the power of moral choice as it would eliminate consequences.

14.4. Under the conditions of contingent beings

having the power of moral choice, this world is best in terms of moral and physical ordering and historical outcomes.

15. The Effects of Sin

15.1. The question might be asked: Was it not possible for God to create a better world than this one?

15.1.1. Maybe one with less suffering.

15.1.2. No, the Christian would answer. If there could have been a better world, that is the one we would live in.

15.1.3. Furthermore, we must take Gen. 1:31 seriously.

15.2. However, when man disobeyed God, death became a reality in this creation (Gen. 2:17).

15.3. Death had wide ranging effects as we see it in man, in the animals and in nature itself.

15.4. Man's power of choice when exercised, really influences the flow of history. This was true in the Garden and all that has followed.

16. The Best Possible World

16.1. God knows all possible choices his moral agent could make and the consequences of each act.

16.2. Before God actualized the world we have, He saw all possible worlds.

16.3. He actualized the best of all possible worlds.

16.4. The choices you make in this world are your own choices. Maybe in another world you would have made another choice, but in this world your choices were your own responsibility.

16.5. We do not always make the best choices which can cause pain for others.

16.6. So, we are responsible for some of the pain and suffering in this world and God is not obligated to step in and eliminate or mitigate the consequences.

17. God and Gratuitous Evil

17.1. God is morally justified in allowing even gratuitous evil because He honors His Word (Gen. 2:17). The curse is real! And he is faithful to His Creation (1 Peter 4:19).

17.2. God has not obligated Himself either by promise or covenantal word to bring good out of evil, only to redeem men from evil (Gen. 3:15).

17.3. God can, when it is consistent with His character and purpose intervene in the affairs of men or do so in answer to the prayer of His people.

17.4. Some evil in this world is without purpose

and God is under no obligation to do anything with it except condemn it.

17.5. The Christian maintains that God is providentially involved in giving mercy and comfort to those who look to Him in their suffering.

18. God's Involvement with the World

18.1. Those who would have God act in justice and eliminate all evil, must then face the fact that that would also mean that God would intervene and judge us every time we acted unjustly, unlovingly, and so forth.

18.2. The question about evil in this world often begins with an assumption about God and His relationship to this world that is simply mistaken.

18.3. We often make the mistake of arguing from what God may do in suffering as to why He allowed suffering.

18.4. In order to understand properly the entire matter of evil, we must begin with understanding God's created order.

18.5. We see God working within it in the Virgin Birth and in the Incarnation itself.

19. Suffering and the Kingdom of God

19.1. Furthermore, one must understand that according to Christian teaching, God is more than just a powerful being — among other things He is just. Theologians refer to God as a simple being meaning that He always acts in a way that is consistent with all His attributes.

19.2. Finally, the Christian doctrine teaches that the true hope of mankind is found in God one day establishing His Kingdom on this earth where justice, peace and love will prevail. What does this mean for mankind?

19.3. Until then, Christians are responsible for living right, having compassion on the sufferer, pointing the sufferer to the mercy and comfort of God, and standing against all forms of social justice as we act as God's representatives on this earth until He comes again.

19.4. In the flow of human history, evil must be seen for what it is and we must realize that often evil in this world serves no larger purpose. Although God may at times work to reverse the intents of evil people, the evil itself may often be gratuitous.

Suggested Reading

I do not necessarily endorse all the theological or philosophical positions represented below.

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