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Creation and the Problem of Evil

By Dave Greear, BSEE, DMin

Perhaps the most frequent argument used by skeptics against the Christian faith is that a good, loving, and all-powerful God wouldn't possibly allow evil (along with sorrow, pain, bloodshed, etc.) into his world. Evil obviously exists in our world. It is all around us. Thus, the biblical God can't possibly exist. If he did, and he was indeed omnipotent, he would obviously do something about it! It is not only skeptics, however, who struggle with this "problem of evil." The Christian who shares his faith will find that this question probably causes more people to doubt the validity of the Bible and the Christian faith than any other. This author, based only on his own anecdotal experiences, would argue that it is a greater stumbling block to people than is even the creation-evolution debate. Therefore, the Christian must be prepared to explain the existence of evil. Fortunately, within the Christian worldview it is possible to do just that. Outside the Christian worldview, it is not. There are no adequate explanations for evil in other worldviews.

For starters, other worldviews cannot even account for the very concept of evil. Evil, by definition, is a moral construct. Without morality there is no such thing as evil. Therefore, to even speak of evil we must first be able to account for the origin and existence of objective morality. This is impossible, for instance, in an atheistic worldview for without God all morality is subjective. What possible basis can there be for objective morality in an atheistic universe? Therefore, evil, is nothing more than a subjective opinion that will vary from person to person. Creation scientist Jason Lisle comments on evolutionary worldviews:

In the evolution worldview, right and wrong can be nothing than electro-chemical reactions in the brain—the result of time and chance. If the concepts of right and wrong are to be meaningful, evolution cannot be true. Right and wrong are Christian concepts that go back to Genesis. By attempting to be moral, therefore,

the evolutionist is being irrational, for he must borrow biblical concepts that are contrary to his worldview.¹

Therefore, for the evolutionist to argue, on the basis of morality, against the existence of evil in a theistic universe, he must inconsistently borrow the Christian's worldview to even make the argument. Thus, he is unintentionally proving the truth of the Christian worldview in the process of making his argument! To be consistent, the atheist must insist that there is no such thing as "evil" and that all actions, including Adolph Hitler's attempted extermination of the Jewish people, are only subjectively evil based on the opinions of the majority of people. Therefore, how can the atheist consistently argue that God is "immoral" for allowing evil?

Biblical creationists believe in objective morality because we have a basis for morality, and that is God. There can be no moral law without a moral lawgiver, and biblical morality reflects the morality of its author. Thus, in a Christian worldview, certain attitudes and actions are objectively evil because they go against the very nature of God. Interestingly enough, only the Judeo-Christian god of the Bible provides such a basis for morality. For instance, in a polytheistic worldview, competing gods would have competing natures, and thus there would be no one objective form of morality. Also, in a pantheistic worldview, "god" is not personal and, therefore, does not have an objective moral nature. In pantheistic systems the opposite concepts of good and evil (like "ying" and "yang") are often said to emanate from the one pantheistic "god" of the universe. A pantheistic universe is really no different than an atheistic one with deity attributed to the "all" of the universe. Even in Islam, another theistic religion, Allah is pictured as very arbitrary in his "morality":

One cannot help but notice that the Allah of the Quran seems to act quite arbitrarily. He can choose good, but he can just as easily choose evil. He can choose mercy, but he might just as easily choose se-

¹ Lisle J, (2009) *The Ultimate Proof of Creation-Resolving the Origins Debate*, Master Books, Green Forest, AR, 48

verity. He could choose love, but he could just as easily choose hate (see Surah 11:118–119).

So the Quran teaches that Allah engages in both good and evil, and therefore we should not be surprised that the Quran never suggests that Allah is holy. The Quran seems to emphasize Allah's power rather than his purity, his omnipotence rather than his holiness."²

The biblical god, in contrast, is pictured as never changing and never going against his own character/morality.

Therefore, only the Christian worldview can account for the concept of objective morality and objective evil. The fact that man is inherently moral and all men seem to have an objective moral compass or conscience (see Rom. 2:14–16) is a strong argument in favor of the existence of the biblical god.

However, that still does not completely suffice when answering those bothered by the problem of evil. The skeptic might ask why evil, as defined by the Christian worldview, exists within the Christian worldview. This criticism is easily answered by those who accept the biblical account of the fall of man in Genesis 3. God did not bring evil into the world. As holy God, he could never do so. The Bible clearly teaches that God is not the source of evil and that he never tempts man with evil (James 1:13). Man brought evil into the world when he chose to rebel against God. It was Satan that tempted Eve, not God. As a matter of fact, it could be argued that Satan, not man, was the one who initially brought evil into the universe when he rebelled against God. Either way, God's original creation was "very good" (Gen. 1:31), without sin, evil, death, disease, pain, or suffering. Today, however, we see sin and evil universally present among men. The current universe does not properly reflect the original perfect universe that God created. Pain and suffering are natural consequences of man's sin. Even natural disasters (i.e., earthquakes, hurricanes, tsunamis, etc.) are a result of the curse on the earth, which is a direct result of man's sin.

One commentator elaborates:

The Divine record of the Fall is the only possible explanation of the present condition of the human race. It alone accounts for the presence of evil in a world made by a beneficent and perfect Creator. It affords the only adequate explanation for the universality of sin.³

However, even if God did not create evil and/or suffering, critics will often ask why he allowed it. Would not a sovereign god be able to prevent it, and would not a loving

god act to do just that? According to Isaiah 55:8–9, God's ways and thoughts are not like our ways and thoughts; they are high above ours:

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8–9).

Furthermore, God is not required to give us every explanation for why he does what he does. For instance, in the book of Job, the patriarch Job was not told of the behind-the-scenes events in heaven that led to his sorrow, suffering, and pain. God is sovereign and he reveals to us what we need to know but not necessarily everything we want to know:

The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law. (Deut. 29:29)

Therefore, we will never fully be able to access the mind of God and give all the reasons that evil was allowed in the universe. However, we are not left totally in the dark. God does give us hints in his Word as to some possible reasons why evil was allowed in the universe. The two most often cited by theologians are man's free will and God's own glory (Isa 43:7). Some Christians would look at these potential explanations of evil as mutually exclusive (i.e., one or the other is true but not both). Those strongly inclined to emphasize the responsibility of man focus on the "free-will defense," while those inclined to emphasize God's sovereignty focus on the glory of God as a defense against the problem of evil. This author believes they actually complement one another nicely in a "both-and" relationship.

There is good reason to infer from Scripture that the primary reason God allowed evil and suffering was based on a desire for man to willingly love, obey, and worship him, ultimately for his own glory (Isa. 43:7; Rev. 4:11). Scripture clearly teaches that man's chief purpose is to glorify God. For instance, Isaiah 43:7 states, "Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him." God is glorified when man chooses to love, worship, and obey him. For there to be genuine love and worship, however, there must be a choice given. It cannot come by compulsion. God did not create robots that had to obey; rather he created us in his own image, which certainly must include our intellect, emotions, and will. To have a will is to have a choice! Therefore, God allowed man to choose his own way apart from God. However, God is still glorified even in this. He is glorified when sin is punished, accentuating his holiness, righteousness, and justice (Rom. 9:22); and he is glorified when men freely come to Christ as Savior, ac-

² Rhodes R (2007) *The 10 Things You Need to Know about Islam*, Harvest House Eugene, OR, 52

³ Pink AW (1950) *Gleanings in Genesis*, Moody Press, Chicago, 2

centuating his love, mercy, and grace (Eph. 2:7). Either way, God is glorified, which, again, is man's whole purpose for existence. Furthermore, if there had not been evil in the universe, then God's righteousness and his mercy and grace would not be known, at least not to the degree that they now are. In a way then that we do not completely understand, the existence of evil, death, and suffering brings glory to God.

An example of this idea is found in John 9:1–7 in the New Testament. Here Jesus stated that a man that was born blind was not suffering due to his own sins nor the sins of his parents. Rather, it was so "that the works of God should be made manifest in him." His blindness, though due to natural physical causes, was all a part of God's sovereign plan. One day Jesus would heal him and thus manifest God's omnipotence, mercy, and grace. In other words, God's ultimate purpose for his blindness was to bring glory to God himself.

In addition to this primary purpose for evil and suffering, Scripture lists several other possible benefits from evil and suffering. One of these is drawing unbelieving men to himself (Ps. 78:34–35). If there were no consequence for sin, neither Adam and Eve nor any of their descendants would ever have sought after God! God has to give us a little taste of death (separation from Himself) to draw us to himself. The late Henry Morris comments:

A world in which there was no judgment for sin, no struggle to survive, and no contemplation of suffering and death would be suitable only for beings wholly in fellowship with their Creator. For creatures who had deliberately broken that fellowship, however, such a perfect world could only encourage them to persist in that rebellion and even to intensify it, forever.⁴

Other benefits of suffering listed in Scripture include helping Christians grow in Christ-likeness (Rom. 8:28–29), helping Christians mature spiritually (James 1:2–4), equipping believers to comfort others who are suffering (2 Cor. 1:3–4), and giving us more opportunities to trust God (Hab. 3:17–19). Each of these should be thought of as subsets of the primary purpose, the glory of God, not as entirely separate purposes. For ultimately everything is about the glory of God! Even the salvation of a soul, which brings great benefit to the individual soul, is ultimately about the glory of God and not the benefit to the sinful soul (Eph. 2:7, 2 Cor. 4:15).

In conclusion, only a biblical worldview, and more particularly a young-earth creationist worldview with its insistence that evil and death followed sin, can adequately account for the existence of evil in the world. That is not to

say that we, as Bible-believers, can always understand why God allows specific forms of evil at specific times to impact specific people. Some of this will always be wrapped in mystery. God is sovereign; and while on earth, we "see through glass darkly." That being said, we can be confident that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28). ☩

COMING EVENTS

Thursday, April 11, 7:00 pm, Providence Baptist Church, 6339 Glenwood Ave., Raleigh, Room 237

Implications of the Fall. Dave Greear will be addressing the topic of the article in this newsletter, "The Problem of Evil," along with some other scientific and worldview implications of the fall of man in Genesis 3, including the origin of sin and death.

⁴ Morris HM (1984) *The Biblical Basis for Modern Science*, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, 196