

Whose Evil is it Anyway? (part 2)

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made and he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?... And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as god, knowing good and evil.” (Gen. 3.1,4-5)

Introduction

- ❖ Last week we began looking at the Bible’s answer to the problem of evil. That evil began with Satan and Adam and spread to the entire created universe. These problems made the entire created world start to decay and break down. Death, pestilence, disease and eternal separation from God were some of the results of that fall. All seemed hopeless but God made a way to fix it for us and will one day destroy all evil and suffering. Just as the LORD triumphed over death and hell on Calvary, he will triumph over Satan and all evil, banishing them to the Lake of Fire forever and ever. Amen.
- ❖ This week we will be looking at the problem of evil as an argument against God. That is to say, as the atheists would use it to argue there is no God based on the pain and suffering in the world.

The stakes

- ❖ There are many reasons that it is so important to study the problem of evil.
 - We learn we are evil and need a savior. Rom. 3.23, 6.23
 - This was our focus last week. The Biblical explanation of evil and its consequences.
 - We learn that there is a purpose to many ‘evils’ we face. Rom. 5.3-5
 - Not all ‘evil’ is necessarily bad.
 - For example fear and pain often keep us alive, as well as the threat of pain gives us excitement.
 - Suffering can be one of the best teachers. Think of all the lasting lessons you have learned through a painful experience.
 - We learn of the hope, love, grace, mercy, justice, power, and will of the Almighty
 - This is important because we learn that many terms we use to describe God are often used ambiguously. More on this soon.

- We learn one of the very few, or the only real positive argument against the God of the Bible.
- ❖ As one of the only positive arguments against the God of the Bible, we need to familiarize ourselves with it. What I mean by positive argument is that it is an argument that can be used as proof that there is no God. There are many Positive arguments for the existence of God as we have been studying the last few weeks. i.e. the Cosmological, Teleological, and Moral arguments. Atheists can argue negatively and say all those arguments are false or inconclusive but only with the Argument of evil can they go on the offensive. This is why we must have a good ready answer for the problem of evil.
- ❖ There are essentially two sides to the Argument of evil. The logical side or head. This deals with the question of “is it logically consistent to have evil and God?” Then there is the emotional or heart side which asks “but why did this evil happen to me? Why do I hurt so much?”
 - Of the two which is easiest to answer? For me the logical side is easiest since I am more logical in thinking. The Emotional side is harder because the person is obviously the one suffering and needs love and sympathy and not facts and arguments. My “toughen up buttercup” approach may not be very effective in helping them see the love of Christ.

The Head

- ❖ As stated before the Logical side is easier to deal with because you have arguments, definitions, proofs and examples to draw from. You have a problem and you fix it. This does not mean that it is easy though in practice.
- ❖ So the argument of evil is as follows
 - God exists
 - God is all powerful
 - God is all good
 - Evil exists
 - There seems to be a problem with this. It seems that if you pick any three of these you must deny the fourth, but the Bible teaches all of them. That is to say if God exists and is all good he would want to get rid of evil and if all powerful he could, yet evil exists so God must not be all powerful or, good or both or exist at all.
 - To state the argument slightly different goes something like...

- If God were all-good, he would destroy evil.
- If God were all-powerful, he could destroy evil.
- Evil has not been destroyed.
- Therefore there is no all-good, all-powerful God.
- This may help highlight the problem. Why if God is so loving, so good, and so powerful, did he simply not just create a better world? We answered this question last week from scripture. That God gave us a perfect world and all things we needed but gave us the choice to love and obey or hate and disobey. We his creations are the ones who rebelled and by doing so gave occasion for evil to work in us. Yet God also loved us so much that he gave his only begotten son who humiliated himself to become his creation and die. He faced the righteous judgment of God in our place.
- ❖ We will now survey several ways other world views handle evil as well as some bad solutions proposed in religion. (Adopted from Summit ministries handbook)
 - Naturalism
 - The physical world is all there is
 - There is no real evil, just bad luck
 - Evil has no meaning
 - Transcendentalism (non-naturalism) New age, Pantheism
 - Physical world is an illusion
 - Evil is an illusion
 - Evil is the result of karmic debt (and is deserved) Hindu, Buddhism
 - Theism
 - God allowed evil in the world for his own purposes
 - Islamic position
 - “The gist is that good and evil are foreordained. What is foreordained comes necessarily to be after a prior act of divine volition. No one can rebel against God’s judgment; no one can appeal His decree and command. Rather, everything small

and large is written and comes to be in a known and expected measure.” – Al-Ghazali, *Theodicy in Islamic Thought*

❖ Bad solutions

- Fideism: the problem should be ignored, just have faith.
 - This redefines man’s ability to know God saying it is impossible to know and understand God so why bother trying.
- Illusionism; evil is an illusion
 - Redefines evil or the world
- Finiteism; God cannot control evil
 - Redefines God’s power
- Transmoralism; God is beyond moral categories (Islamic view)
 - Redefines God’s goodness - To God morals are arbitrary.
- So as one can see these are all bad solutions to the problem. The other world views also do not do justice to the problem we face. The only worldview that takes evil seriously and deals with it in a responsible and definite manner is the Christian faith rightly divided. Only if God exists as a good, moral God can evil even have existence. Therefore, evil is an internal issue and needs to be dealt with internally. Only in Christianity do you get a real answer to evil. And you must accept its response or at least allow it to attempt a response. It is not fair to point out an apparent contradiction then not let someone show that it is not without appealing to an outside source. The Bible gives the answers we seek in regards to evil.
- The irony is that since everyone knows that things are evil, they have unknowingly admitted then that there is a true moral standard that we compare things to. That perfect standard is God. The very real existence of evil is then a proof of God existing and not the opposite.

❖ Ambiguous terms

- It seems that some of the terms or ideas used in the argument are ambiguous. This is partly because of the atheists not understanding Christian Theology and I believe in part because some bad teaching exists on certain issues.
 - All powerful – The first term I would like to consider is God being all powerful. Some have taught that being all powerful means that God can do literally anything, but is this what it really means? Where does this idea come from? Well from scripture.

- matt 19.26
- Gen 18.14,
- jer 32.27
- So some might be tempted by viewing these verses that God can in fact do anything. But, the scriptures seem to indicate that there are things God cannot do. This leads to paradoxes like “can God create a stone so heavy he cannot lift it?” clearly there are some limitations to God’s power as some have defined it, some examples are...
 - God cannot lie or do evil (by nature of his goodness)
 - God does not repent of evil (by nature he cannot do evil to repent of)
 - Cannot be tempted or tempt us (by nature of his righteousness)
 - He cannot not exist (by nature of his self-existence)
 - He cannot be wrong (by nature of his all knowing)
 - He cannot do the logically inconsistent such as a married bachelor or a square circle.
- Power defined by Webster has at least 26 definitions the first though is I believe best applicable to the issue at hand.
 - Power n. 1. In a philosophical sense, the faculty of doing or performing any thing; the faculty of moving or of producing a change in something; ability or strength. A man raises his hand by his own power or by power moves another body. **The exertion of power proceeds from the will, and in strictness, no being destitute of will or intelligence, can exert power.** Power in man is active or speculative. Active power is that which moves the body; speculative power is that by which we see, judge, remember, or in general, by which we think. Power may exist without exertion. We have power to speak when we are silent.
 - I believe the power that God possesses is at least two fold the creative power to create and sustain an entire universe out of nothing but the power of his word, and the power to have his will accomplished in spite of many competing wills ie. Satan, demons, and rebellious man. Even with these working against him and his perfect will, he somehow still accomplishes what he desires. This is true power.

- The second is the idea that because God is good and merciful that he somehow owes me happiness or that I have some right to happiness. This I commend to you to consider. I have no real reason why I would ever think God owes me anything. He is God, I am HIS creation. I exist to bring him glory and praise. Yet many people believe that God owes me happiness and when things go wrong God is to blame. Very similar to prosperity gospel is this idea that, since God is so good he will give me good things (blessings) especially if I do things to please him. This leads us into the next issue in the debate.

The Heart

- ❖ So now let us turn our discussion to the emotional side of the problem. This is the heart issue with evil. As stated before the emotional side is the harder to deal with. This is because it requires not only knowledge of arguments, logic, science, scripture, and experience. It also requires us to place ourselves in an open and vulnerable position of love and care for the person who is hurting. This side is in one sense, the 'real' problem of evil since it is the one we experience. This is the feeling we get when our child looks at us through tears and asks "why did you let me hurt so much?" This is when you lose a good friend and stand by their hospital bed with their family saying that she will come out of it. You, knowing full well she is gone and, she will not be walking away from this. This is the heart wrenching, gut twisting, tear jerking problem of evil.
- ❖ Let's look at some scripture regarding pain and suffering. Obviously Job saw a lot, and we saw that it was at the hand of Satan. God ended up blessing Job with much more in the end and Job lived out his days in peace and happiness. But what others saw much struggle?
 - Ruth and her mother saw suffering
 - Ruth 1.3-5,12-14
 - David was a man that saw much sorrow in his life
 - II Sam 12.21-23 David's son dies and he hopes God will be gracious to him. This sin committed with Bathsheba causes many issues for David. (as in vs 10)
 - II Sam 13.20-21 His daughter is raped by one of his son's
 - II Sam 13.30-31 he is told that all his sons had died, then only one.
 - II Sam 18.33 David mourns for his son Absalom
- ❖ All persons have seen trial and suffered. This is neither a new concept nor an uncommon one. I believe that it has become a 'problem' for Christianity though relatively recently due to many factors. One I would like to consider is that of the rise of individualism.

- During the 20th and 21st Century we have seen the rise of radical individualism. Where, I am the only thing that really matters. I have the right to happiness. I am entitled to... No longer do God, King and Country really matter. I believe this is part of why we see this as a problem, because we think that God owes us something. He owes me happiness, protection, wealth, success, and if I don't have those things he is to blame. The problem is really compounded because I only focus on the bad happening to me and don't praise God for the good happening to my neighbor.
- The Bible often paints a corporate view of humanity and not an individual one. God deals with vast numbers more than individuals. As titles like the world, Jew, gentile, the Church/Body, the Elect, Men, Women, and all flesh, are normal ways God sees humans. This is demonstrated in the idea that he is no respecter of persons
 - II Sam 14.14
 - Job 34.12-19
 - Matt 22.16
 - Acts 10.34
 - Rom 2.11
 - Dan 4.34-35
- With the rise of individualism our focus has changed, we stop seeing humanity as a unit and see only our own suffering. Instead of seeing the good things happening to others we tend to only view our problems. This reminds me of the parable Christ taught about the hired people who helped bring in the harvest and all were paid the same wage which they agreed to. The ones who labored all day were mad at the master because he paid the ones who only labored an hour the same wage. The response was "Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own: Is thine eye evil, because I am good?" (Matt 20.15) God gives good to the world but allows us to make our own choices which have real natural consequences on the whole of humanity and creation. (Acts 14.15-17)
 - Our actions are not done in a vacuum. (butterfly effect)
 - All for the lack of a nail.
 - There is no victimless crime or action.
 - Our actions affect others and their actions affect us.

- It is imperative in understanding evil that we remember who we are and who God is. Evil was our fault and God still will fix it for us. God loves us and died for us. Most people love that God is love but hate that he is just, especially when it affects them.
- ❖ So then what do we say to the one who is suffering? I am not an expert in counseling but I will share what I believe to be good general advice.
 - Be there. Job's friends may get a bad reputation but are you even as good a friend as them? They sat for 7 days and nights to grieve with him! When is the last time you did that for a friend in need? My first advice is, be there for those who need you, when they need you. Not just when it is convenient for you.
 - Be Sympathetic, Rom 12.15 tells us to weep with those who weep. Show genuine care for the person. Demonstrate that you care for their well being.
 - Be silent. Job's friends didn't know what to say. They should have remained silent. Offer advice only when necessary, or asked for, or not at all.
 - Be over the top. If you offer to help, do it, and go big. Do everything you can, show them you care.
 - Be prepared and humble. Have a story of a similar experience to show sincere empathy with them. (not a contest of better stories)
 - Be the body. If you have been these things then show them that as we have suffered, Christ suffered with us. OUR God suffered for us and with us. He sympathizes, he understands what we are going through and he is for us. Even if the worst should happen he is there and will be our hope and comfort. True hope and love come from God. We can only imitate and try to show it to others. This is the fundamental difference in Christianity and other world views that evil exists and God is in control. We can trust and hope in him, and he will love and give us grace.