

The Problem of Evil

Sunday, May 29, 2022

INTRODUCTION:

- What are the questions that lost people seem to ask as they seek to understand Christianity?
Allow for some discussion...
- Extensive surveys have been done in this area and the #1 question is always a version of, “If God exists, why is there evil?” What are the ways this question is often worded?
 - If God is all-powerful and all-loving, why doesn’t He do something with evil?
 - Why do bad things happen to good people?
- Here is the logic that is often followed:
 - If God is all-powerful, He could destroy evil.
 - Evil exists; therefore, God is not all-powerful.
- The amazing thing is that this is also the #1 question that Christians ask! Why do you think that is? *Allow for discussion...*
 - Point: When we experience evil, we question evil. (It’s a personal question.)
- Today’s lesson will require you to think! How do we answer the most-asked question?

BIBLE STUDY:

1. DEFINING EVIL

- a. The Hebrew word for evil is “RAH,” and it means to spoil, ruin, or corrupt someone or something.
- b. The key point in our thinking: Evil does not exist alone. Evil is a lack (privation) or corruption of a good thing. Evil only exists in someone and/or something else.
 - i. ILL: Darkness is a lack or privation of light, or disease is a corruption of health.
 - ii. There must be a good thing first; evil is the corruption of it.
- c. Preacher provided several illustrations to help us understand this topic:
 - i. Evil is like a wound in a body—a corruption of good health.
 1. The body is created by God and is good.
 2. A wound can’t exist by itself; could not exist without a body.
 3. You can have a body without a wound; no wound without a body.
 - ii. Evil is like rot on a tree – a corruption of good wood.
 1. Again, rot could not exist without a tree.
 2. You can have the tree without the rot, but no rot without the tree.
 - iii. Evil is like rust on a car – a corruption of good metal. Are you seeing a pattern?
- d. What does this teach us about evil?
 - i. Evil is not something God created, it is a corruption of God’s creation.

2. WHY GOD ALLOWS EVIL

- a. Have you ever thought: Is there anything God cannot do? The answer may surprise you!
 - i. There are things God cannot do (such as logical impossibilities).
 - ii. God can’t make $2 + 2 = 5$; a square circle; a rock so big He can’t lift it.
- b. Key thought: God can’t force anyone to freely love or accept Him.
 - i. ILL: What if the young man proposed marriage to his girlfriend with a gun?
 - ii. Would she say “yes” because she loved him? Forced love is not love by definition.
- c. God allows evil to exist because He can’t destroy evil without eradicating free-will (the power of choice) which is necessary for a moral universe.
 - i. Freedom to choose (free will) is part of the Image of God.
 - ii. With freedom comes the possibility of evil – the decision to reject that which is good.

- d. What does the Bible teach about free will? Look up the following verses (quickly) and notice the exercise of free will: Matthew 16:25; John 3:16; Acts 2:21; Romans 10:13; James 4:4; 1 John 2:23, 4:15
 - e. When God gave man freedom, He opened the door to the possibility of evil.
 - i. JB Phillips once said, “Evil is inherit in the risky gift of free will.”
 - ii. With the choice to love comes the choice to hate.
3. THE CAUSES OF EVIL
- a. Because of free will, much of the evil that takes place in the world is the result of men’s choices.
 - i. We see this in the news every day: thieves, murderers, racists, crooked governments, wars, etc.
 - ii. Can you think of any Bible examples? *Miriam (Numbers 12:10), David & Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12:13-18), Ananias & Saphira (Acts 5:1-11).*
 - b. The Bible also teaches that Satan is free to work evil and cause suffering on the earth. Can you think of any Bible examples? *Job 1:6-12, Matthew 13:28...*
 - c. The one thing we don’t want to think about is the truth found in Matthew 15:19-20 (read). At the heart of evil is the human heart!
 - d. Alexander Solzhenitsyn, who was a survivor of Stalin’s gulag camps, wrote, *“If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.”*
 - e. Once we grasp the fact that we are flawed, a more realistic question to ask regarding evil might be: *“I think and do evil. If then, there is a God, why does He tolerate me?”* Read Lamentations 3:22.
4. GOD’S PLAN FOR EVIL
- a. God has taken the problem of evil personally in His Son. In Isaiah 53:3, Jesus is called “the Man of Sorrows.” Think about all that Christ endured for us.
 - i. (Side note: When people ask, “Why do bad things happed to good people?” it is not a good question if we understand our own sinful hearts. A bad thing happened to a Good Person only once – at Calvary.)
 - b. God has fully met the problem of evil in His Son’s death, burial and resurrection. Satan – evil personified – is a defeated foe.
 - c. God has a plan to apply ultimate justice to all evil in His final judgment.
 - d. In the meantime, God knows how we feel and will help us navigate this evil world and endure through any personal suffering (Hebrews 2:18, 4:15).

CONCLUDING THOUGHT:

- If someone ever asks you about the problem of evil, there is one thought you need to keep in mind. Assuming the questioner is being sincere, their question is more likely personal than theological or philosophical. Most likely, they have experienced something in their life that has them thinking on this topic.
- A good response often sounds like this, “I appreciate your question – it is a good one and it is very important. But before I share with you what the Bible says, may I ask you a question? You could have asked me any question about the Christian faith, but you asked me this one. Why?”
- Then carefully listen, and most likely they will open up about their personal experience with evil and suffering. Many times, they already know the answer. They simply need someone to listen, care and pray.