

MidWeek - Problems with Christianity

Week 5 - The Problem of Evil

Intro Matters

- Why is the Problem of Evil [POE] a problem for Christianity?
- Syllogism:
 1. Christians would say “The biblical God **exists** and is all-**good**, all-**powerful**.”
 2. Reality says “But **evil** exists!”
 3. Hence the problem: “Therefore the biblical God, **cannot** exist...or he is **unable** or **unwilling** to prevent evil.
 - “Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil? Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?” Epicurus, ~300 B.C.
- Types of Problems:
 - Logical POE
 - **How** can both God and evil **exist**?
 - Practical POE
 - **Why** is this evil happening to **me**?
- Types of Evil:
 - **Moral** Evil: An agent causes evil. Ex. Sin.
 - **Natural** Evil: No agent causes evil. Ex. Hurricane, tornado, tsunami, virus
 - Moral evil caused natural evil. [Gen 3:17; Is 24:6; Rom 8:22]
 - **Metaphysical** Evil: Demons, Satan
 - **Eternal** Evil: Hell¹

¹ John MacArthur: Why Does God Allow So Much Evil and Suffering? Ligonier 20078 West Coast Conference Address. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6LFzk1afiD8&t=3354s>

Worldview Answers to the POE:

- Atheism - Evil just **happens, randomly** and without **reason**.
 - Fails - Inconsistent: Everyone wants **justice**.
- Selfism - The existence of evil has to have a reason that I can **understand**.
 - Fails - Impossible: Why are we **owed** an explanation and what makes us think that we could **understand** it?
 - IOW - I cannot see a reason for evil, so therefore there must not be one.
 - Temptation: **Reinvent** God to make him **understandable**.
 - **Process** Theology: God is developing and changing in response to circumstances.
 - **Open** theism: There are some things that God does not know or cannot control. (God is not sovereign)
 - **Dualism**: There is a war: God vs. Evil. He wins some and loses some.
- Theism - God is **sovereign** over all things including evil.
 - "If you are having trouble accepting that God is sovereign, then think a while about the possibility of him NOT being sovereign." - John MacArthur
 - Biblical Evidence ["Spectrum Texts"]
 - Deuteronomy 32:39
 - 1 Samuel 2:6-7
 - Isaiah 45:7
 - Main challenge to this view - is God the **author** of sin?
 - No. Human beings are.
 - BUT... if he created humans with free will he knew they would choose sin so he is ultimately responsible? Sort of.
 - Answer: He didn't **create** evil, but **sovereignly ordains** evil.
 - "Even a verse such as Isaiah 45:7, which speaks of God "creating evil" does not say that God himself "does" evil, but should be understood to mean that God ordained that evil would come about through the willing choices of his creatures."²
 - Beware the temptation to let God off the hook, it has led to several bad theodicies.

² Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology, 328

- Theodicy is a defense of God.

Common Theodicies and their Failures

- **Illusion** theodicy
 - Definition: Evil doesn't actually exist, it's an illusion. [Buddhism, Christian Science]
 - Fails because the pain of evil is real and thus evil is actually real.
- **Best possible** world theodicy
 - Definition: God couldn't create perfect beings, because they would be God. [Liebniz]
 - Fails because God is free to make things perfect or imperfect, and how are we to know what is a "best" world?
- **Free will** theodicy
 - Definition: God had to preserve our free will and therefore the potential for us to choose evil, therefore God can't be blamed
 - Fails because God is **sovereign**, yet man is **responsible**.
 - "Even when Scripture specifically mentions God's foreordination of an evil event, the blame for the evil rests exclusively with the human perpetrators."³
 - Ex. OT Israel; Pharaoh; Jewish leaders; Romans who put God on the cross.
 - It makes an idol of our own free will
- **Greater good** theodicy
 - Definition: God will always bring about a greater good from evil.
 - Fails because this is not 100% true.
- **Ex Lex** theodicy
 - Definition: God is above the law
 - Fails because God's character is bound up with his law
- **Fallen World** theodicy
 - Definition: We brought sin into the world, not God.
 - Fails because this doesn't answer the question

³ John Frame, Apologetics, 165

So Where Does This Leave Us Apologetically and Spiritually?

- Ultimate answer: We **don't know**. [No one does!]
- Remember the **limitations** and **purpose** of apologetics
 - Limitations: we will never prove the existence of God beyond all **doubts**.
 - Purpose: Provide a **contextualized**, **compassionate**, and **compelling** defense of the faith that **stimulates** serious consideration.
- What is our defense to the POE?
 - **Explain** the biblical worldview
 - This brings HOPE that God WILL do something to fix evil forever.
 - “Though we cannot understand the origin of evil, we do know the future of it!”⁴
 - This brings the TRUTH that he HAS done something to fix evil forever.
 - “Good” Friday
 - This brings the REALITY of God’s presence with us when we suffer and his plan in the midst of it, even when we don’t understand it.
 - **Emphasize** the sovereignty of God
 - God must be in total control of his creation in order to be God.
 - **Assert** that the existence of evil doesn’t necessarily mean that God can’t exist
 - Just because we can’t see reasons for evil doesn’t necessarily mean that there aren’t any
 - The rest of the world clearly brings good from evil...a few examples:
 - Life-saving medical treatments that cause pain in the process
 - Disciplining children to train them
 - Pain of personal growth
 - Pain of loss that eventually brings life [tragedy, relationships, etc.]
 - **Ask** them to explain the problem of evil from their worldview - their answers will fall far short of the biblical worldview.

⁴ RC Sproul, Ligonier 2010 National Conference, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hzc7KuMj6o>

- This should cause our worship to soar to new heights!

- Romans 11:33-36

Big Idea: Evil exists because the sovereign God allows it to exist, for his purposes.

Next Week: Problem of Science