

Christian Apologetics
“always be prepared to give a defense...”

X. God [good] and Evil, pain and suffering

Dialogue with an Atheist – from the book, *I Don't Have Enough Faith to be an Atheist*

The Dilemma of Evil

The prevailing dilemma with evil is that it not only *exists*... it *happens*. On the surface, good always seems like the weaker force, evil seems the stronger. Maintaining good seems like a delicate balancing act that evil can easily disrupt at will. Therefore, our view of evil is formed within the drama of human history and activity. In addition, to love evil is to *become* (condone) evil, to hate (condemn) evil is to *succumb* to its attributes.

How did Christ solve the dilemma of evil? Jesus' answer was *forgiveness*. Forgiveness neither condemns nor condones. It seems impossible for God to solve the dilemma of justice versus mercy. Mercy seems weak, justice seems harsh. God provided both on Calvary. Full justice was done – sin was once and for all punished.

Pain and Suffering

Our not knowing all of the good purposes God has for pain and suffering does not mean that there are none. *Romans 8:28* As we studied previously - evil, pain and suffering many times are the direct result of original sin or vindicated by vicarious atonement. However, if we believe that God is all-good and all-knowing, then He must know the good purposes produced by pain and suffering.

- To develop character in ourselves and others – sympathy is not achievable without misery, patience without tribulation, courage without fear, endurance without hardship.
- To teach moral consequences – Some physical pain is necessary to teach individuals that certain types of behavior are wrong and have physical and moral consequences.
- To warn of impending danger – research with sensory-deprived individuals (leprosy, paralysis) have shown that the loss of sensation many times leads to danger or damage to themselves (e.g. getting too close to a hot surface). Researchers have concluded that in order for pain to properly serve its purpose and warn someone of danger, it has to be of the right intensity and out of that individual's control.
- To avoid a greater suffering – the body is programmed to react in an attention-getting manner when it is neglected or abused to warn the individual before the situation gets worse.
- To get our moral or spiritual attention – Just as a parent who loves their child disciplines him in order to get his attention, God does the same. Most people turn to God in times of suffering, not ease.

God's sovereignty, intervention and human free will

Can God's sovereignty coexist with human freedom...or are the two contradictory? As Norman Geisler observes – “Human freedom is *delegated sovereignty*. *The Sovereign* made man sovereign over his own moral destiny. Nevertheless, God is in control of the whole process because a) God by His own foreknowledge sees what freedom will do and He can *bring a greater good out of it* and 2) God is ultimately *in sovereign control of the end*...”

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God exists outside of the space-time continuum and His sovereign plan outside of the space-time continuum will always be accomplished. However, inside the space-time continuum free creatures exist and freely act upon their own will. God decrees from eternity, but the results of those decrees take place within and over time. (example: prescription – a doctor prescribes (decrees) once a certain medication which is to be taken over 10 days, but the prescription actually takes place (effect) over time.

In addition we, through obedience, have the ability to be a willing part of God’s plan - a participant, a contributor, a partaker...or, through disobedience try and thwart God’s plan which will bring about both consequences *and* being used to bring about His plan anyway.

Christ’s crucifixion is the perfect example. Men made individual free choices that entire week – betrayal, abandonment, lies, mockery, cruelty, torture, and the physical death of our Lord. But God’s ultimate plan was successful.

C.S. Lewis adds, “The crucifixion itself is the best, as well as the worst, of all historical events, but the role of Judas remains simply evil. We may apply this first to the problem of other people’s suffering. A merciful man helps his neighbor and aims at his neighbor’s good and in doing so “does God’s will”, consciously co-operating with and producing a simple good [act]. A cruel man oppresses his neighbor, and by doing so does [simple] evil. But in doing such evil, he is used by God, without his knowledge or consent, to produce the complex [ultimate] good – so that the first man serves God as a son and the second man as a tool. For you will certainly carry out God’s purpose, however you act – but it makes a difference whether you serve like Judas or John.”

Additional points to ponder:

God intervenes when needed and as He determines.

God allows evil for the greater good to result either in this life or the next.

God redeems bad choices – our own and others – as part of His plan to bring about a greater good.

The ultimate victory over evil is one of the central themes of the Christian message.