

Why, Why, Why Evil?

When I was about ten years old I was an inquisitive lad that asked my Dad a lot of questions. He used to take me to church services on Sundays, and the congregation all recited The Apostles Creed. Afterwards I asked “Since we are not Catholic, why do we say we believe in the Catholic Church?” He said he didn’t know. What is the trinity? I don’t know. What is an apostle? I don’t know. Why do we get baptized? We just do. Where is heaven? I don’t know. Dad, do you mind me asking all these questions? Not at all son, how else are you going to learn?

In the same way, I think most people just live and practice their religion while having a lot of unanswered questions. Because of tradition, people accept that their denomination or their specific church does it the right way. We just recite memorized creeds, and sing memorized songs, and say memorized prayer because we are Christians and that’s what Christians do. By the way, the Bible has all the answers to the questions I asked. The word Catholic comes from the Latin word universal, so we say we believe in the universal church, meaning that everyone who believes in Jesus as their Savior is in God’s universal church. No matter where they are or what they call themselves, or what race, language or color- they are in the universal church. The trinity is the biblical concept that there are three persons in one God. So God exists as the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The word apostle in the original Greek, meant “sent one”. The twelve disciples, plus Paul were given a special commission in person by Jesus to go out and preach the Gospel. Therefore they were sent ones who received their revelation of truth directly from Jesus Christ. Why baptism? We get baptized not to be saved, but because we are saved, and it’s important for us to make that public demonstration and announcement that we believe in Jesus as our Savior. The short answer to the location of heaven is that it is a different spiritual realm where Christ is, and after the resurrection we will spend eternity in heaven with Him.

The Toughest Question—Why is there Evil in the World that God Created?

When I was a freshman in college a required course was religion 101. The professor announced on day one that there was no God and he could prove it. His logical argument was that If God was all-powerful he could prevent evil, and if God was loving and good he would prevent evil, but since an abundance of evil exists in the world there must be no God. At the

time my only thought was to wonder why an atheist was teaching the religion course. What I know now is the flaw in his supposed logic. He assumed that no good thing can come from a bad thing. It escaped him that God can bring about good results from what appears to us as bad things. In Scripture we read “God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God”(Romans 8:28), and James 1:2 says, “ Consider it all joy when you encounter various trials knowing the testing of your faith produces endurance...so that you may be mature and complete”. See also Romans 5:3-5. Remember that when you disciplined your children, they considered it as bad, but you did it for a good purpose, and also all of us who have been through trials and tribulations emerged more mature, more experienced, and possessing more wisdom. I used to play golf with a Hall of Fame athlete who admitted to me he had the moral maturity of a 15 year old because no one had ever said no to him or disciplined him. He was such a superstar that everybody gave him everything from a young age. He never had to grow up. On the other hand, the greatest generation of my father had to live through the depression and fight in WW2, so they grew up in a hurry.

The biblical answer to “why evil” begins with the creation account in Genesis 2-3. God created the earth, the atmosphere, and all the plant and animal life, and afterward we read “ and God saw that it was good.” Then lastly God created His crowning achievement, the human race, and God created the human race in His image to have a loving intimate relationship with Him in which we would rule over His creation underneath His authority. God saw that man was “very good”, meaning everything was perfect and in order just as He meant it to be. Man had fellowship with God in Paradise, and it was all good—no evil existed. In the Garden of Eden where man lived there was wonderful food in abundance growing for man. There was fruit trees, vineyards, grain of all kinds, and everything man needed. Yet God knew you can’t make someone love you, and that all love, obedience, and reverence must be tested to be proven true. Therefore God put one forbidden tree in the garden as a simple test, and God said “If you disobey, you shall surely die”. Now in the Bible, the essence of death is to be separated from God. We were created to have a relationship with God and to serve and glorify Him, so to be separated from God means to be unfulfilled with no purpose or meaning. Therefore, the worst thing that could happen would be for man to be kicked out of Paradise and live apart from God. Now we know God being omniscient, He knew mankind would eventually fall victim to temptation, and God even allowed His adversary to come into the Garden to tempt them. Once they fell into temptation, God also having an eternal perspective, knew that experiencing separation would have a good result in eternity. It would

seem horrible now, but in eternity it would be good for us to experience what it's like to be separated from God.

Immediately after the "original sin", bad things started happening. They began lying and deceiving, and their intimacy was broken. Keep in mind that evil is not a created thing like flesh and blood, wood, plants, etc. Evil is an adjective or an adverb describing the consequences of sin. For the first time man knew what guilt and shame was, and lying became natural to him, so everything was different after they disobeyed. The text says they now knew both good and evil, whereas before they only knew what was good. Now that sin had created a sort of chasm between the holy righteous God and man, God determined that they had to leave Paradise. They would go their own way and experience what life apart from God was like. God in his omniscience and wisdom determined that from then on all of mankind after them would experience the futility of life apart from God. The Lord even fixed the world they went into by cursing the very ground so that it would be difficult to live, and they would only eat by "the sweat of their brow", meaning they would have to work hard for it. All of a sudden there would be hardship and toil, natural disasters, sickness, aging, and physical death. Paul explained it well in Romans 8:18-23 that the creation was subjected to futility by God in hope that mankind would return to the Lord. So God rigged the creation so that it would not work for mankind. We could find no fulfillment, meaning, or purpose apart from God, but God did it for a good reason, in hope that we would come to our senses and realize how much we needed him. God sent mankind out of Paradise so that we would experience what life lived for ourselves without God is like. The Bible calls the fallen world "East of Eden", and mankind and their descendants have lived East of Eden ever since. God made the creation perfect, but through our disobedience, evil, violence, depravity, disasters, and war became routine. Then out of love God provided the means by which we could be reconciled to Him.

John 3:16, For God So Loved the World...

This is the well known passage that so totally explains what God did for us, why He did it, and how we can receive it as ours. The first clause "For God so loved the world" says that God was purely motivated by His perfect love. We did nothing to deserve it, and we can do nothing to earn it, because forgiveness was provided only by God's love. The next clause tells us what God did, "that He gave His only begotten son", meaning the Son of God was born in

the flesh— we call it the incarnation. But God gave Him up to die on the cross to atone for our sin. The next clause reveals how we can receive this pardon from God, “that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” You can’t earn or buy what God wants to give you, so with belief and commitment God gives it to you, and we are saved by God’s grace. Good works and a changed life then come as a result of your belief and commitment.

Philosophy 101, Man has a Problem so how can he fix it?

I took several philosophy classes in college, and later we studied most of the well known philosophers in Seminary. One thing they all had in common was they knew that the human race has a huge problem. How they all differed was in their proposed solution to the problem. For instance Karl Marx said the problem was caused by economic conditions. He claimed that the laws of history are economic by nature. Your material life determines the social, political, and spiritual processes of life. The poor working class is alienated from necessary relationships. Private property and capitalism is responsible for man’s problems. So, he prescribes a complete nationalization of property and money. This solution has been tried in many socialistic and communistic countries in the 20th century, such as Russia, Cuba, Venezuela, etc.—all miserable failures. Sigmund Freud saw man’s problem as neurotic illnesses which man tries to subconsciously repress. These repressions were not all sexual, but basically sexual in nature. They are caused by anyone who exerted influence and authority on the growing child. Freud’s prescription was psychoanalysis. This theory was a widespread practice during the 20th century, and is still used today, but it has changed nothing. Most psychiatrists today see more promise in drug prescriptions. John Paul Sartre was a leading proponent of existentialism. He believed there is no purpose to life, and the only foundation for values is human freedom—we decide what to make of ourselves and there are no rules or absolutes. I could go on and on, but you get the point—each brilliant great thinker realized the world is totally messed up and mankind is historically a disaster. Each great philosopher thinks he/she has a theory that will straighten it all out, but so far none of them in 4,000 years of recorded history has worked. My question is this: How can the people who cause the problem and are responsible for the mess, be expected to come up with the cure?

Answering the Critics

Regarding the presence of evil, critics continue to say that if there is a God, He would eliminate all evil. My inclination is to say to the critics, "Let's start with you!" But I think Paul gives a better answer and perspective about evil in Romans 8:18-23, "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." Paul is the perfect witness about God's perfect plan to overcome evil for two reasons. First, no innocent man has ever suffered as much and as long as Paul. In 2 Cor. 11:24-28, Paul detailed all the imprisonments, beatings, whippings, beatings with rods, stonings, starvings, etc. that he went through for 20 years of ministry and then he was martyred. So, when Paul says he considers the sufferings a small thing compared to what God has in store for us in heaven—that's really saying something! Secondly, in 2 Cor. 12:2-4, Paul revealed that early in his ministry God took him up to see and hear heaven as he says he was "caught up to Paradise". I'm sure God did this to prepare Paul for the incredible ministry he would have, and to strengthen him, but he is an eyewitness to the awesome glory of heaven for us. Therefore Paul can assure us that whatever sufferings we endure in this world, it is nothing compared to the eternal glory we are promised in eternity.

Conclusion

1. K. Chesterton was asked what is wrong with the world? His short answer was, "I am, yours truly". By this he meant that like all people, he was not perfect, and 7 billion imperfect people make for a truly big mess. Another Chesterton quote is, "Jesus promised his disciples three things: they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble." By this he meant that believers in Christ would be bold in their witness, have great joy in their salvation, but constant persecution, pain, and suffering in this fallen world. If that doesn't seem fair to you, remember Jesus took His own medicine. The greatest evil was that Jesus was the only truly innocent person, yet He was falsely arrested, accused, beaten horribly, and then murdered on the cross. Nevertheless, God brought the greatest good out of the greatest evil. Jesus' death on the cross, made possible the redemption of mankind!

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