

# A BIBLICAL VIEW OF THEODICY

## INTRODUCTION

- A. Definition of theodicy - the vindication of divine justice in allowing evil to exist.
- B. Basic issues
  - 1. Omnipotence of God
  - 2. Goodness of God
  - 3. Existence of evil in the world.
    - a. Natural evil - does not involve human willing and acting, but is merely an aspect of nature that seems to work against human welfare. There are the destructive forces of nature: hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, etc.
    - b. Moral evil - can be traced to the choice and action of free moral agents. Here we find war, crime, cruelty, discrimination, slavery, etc.
- C. Concerns
  - 1. Millard Erickson, *Probably the most difficult intellectual challenge to the Christian faith is the problem of how there can be evil in the world. If God is all-powerful and all-loving, how can evil be present in the world?*
  - 2. Dave Hume, *Is he (God) willing to prevent evil, but not able? then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing: whence then is evil?*
  - 3. Thomas Aquinas, *The strongest argument against the existence of God is the existence of evil.*

## PROPOSALS

- A. Premise: Most attempted solutions try to modify one or more of the three elements which cause the dilemma.
  - 1. God's omnipotence
  - 2. God's goodness
  - 3. Presence of evil
- B. General solutions
  - 1. Finitism
    - a. Rejection of omnipotence.
    - b. Often this takes the form of a dualism: there are not one but two ultimate principles in the universe, God, and the power of evil. This evil is generally thought of as uncreated, simply a force that has always been present.
    - c. Lance Morrow, *Admitting the existence of evil carries the implication that Satan is coequal with God.*
  - 2. Redefinition of the goodness of God
    - a. Whatever happens is caused by God - Whatever is caused by God is good - Whatever happens is good.
    - b. God is not bound by man's definition of goodness.
  - 3. Illusionism
    - a. Evil can't exist in view of an omnipotent and good God.
    - b. Disease is an illusion.
- C. Responses
  - 1. Presuppositions
    - a. God is not the author of sin.
    - b. God overrules sin for the good.
    - c. God saves from sin.
    - d. God resolves the issue of evil.
  - 2. Biblical considerations
    - a. Recognize the origin of evil.
      - 1) God is not the author of sin.
        - a) Evil in the universe is older than man. It is older than nature. But it is not as old as creation.
        - b) He did not necessitate it but mankind chose it.
        - c) Not all evil is brought on individuals by sinful or unwise actions, John 9:2-3, *His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.*

- 2) Sin is a byproduct of the creation of humanity.
  - a) Humans would not be genuinely human without free will.
  - b) It was better to create beings capable of fellowship with and obedience to Him, even in the face of temptations to do otherwise.
  
- b. Regard the divine perspective of good and evil
  - 1) God's will
    - a) Good is to be defined in relationship to the will and being of God, Romans 8:28, *We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose.*
    - b) Good is not our short-term good but long-term welfare, Rom. 8:29, *being conformed to the image of Christ.*
    - c) God overrules sin for the good, Joseph and his brother, Gen. 50:20, *Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today.*
  
  - 2) Element of time or duration
    - a) Some evils are very disturbing on a short-term basis but in the long term work a much larger good.
      - 1] Romans 8:18, *I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us.*
      - 2] 2 Corinthians 4:17, *For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure,*
  
    - b) Temporary suffering is to be evaluated in light of eternity.
  
- c. Realize that God is a victim of evil
  - 1) God is a fellow sufferer with mankind of evil in this world.
  - 2) He took sin and its evil effects on Himself through His Son.
  
- d. Rejoice in God's victory
  - 1) If this life were all there is, then surely the problem of evil would be unresolvable.
  - 2) But, He defeated sin and death at the cross.
  - 3) There will be a restoration of His creation, the Millennial Kingdom.
  - 4) There will be a time of judgment and evil will be no more.
  - 5) There will be a sinless new heaven and earth.
  
3. Opinions
  1. Robert D. Culver, *Evil is allowed in the world for reasons God has never seen fit fully to disclose and which human wisdom has not discovered.*
  2. I don't have simple answers to questions concerning the workings of repentance and faith, or God's sovereignty and man's free will.
  3. I surely don't have simple answers concerning the relationship of God's omnipotence, and goodness to the presence of evil.
  4. But, I do have a simple faith, one in which I can trust my God Who is faithful, omnipotent, and good.
  5. I don't know all things now but I am thankful that I have a personal relationship with the One Who knows all things.

## A VIEW OF THEODICY IN PSALM 73

### A. An introduction to Psalm 73

1. Asaph was troubled by the apparent injustice of God (theodicy) (1 - 14)
  - a. Asaph claimed that God is good to those who are pure in heart (1)
  - b. His experiences gave a different picture (2-14)
    - 1) He almost fell away from God because of what he saw (2)
    - 2) The wicked seemingly prospered (3-12)
      - a) He was tormented by their behavior: they had plenty to eat, they were not afflicted with troubles, they were prideful and violent, they pursued foolish deeds, they were abusive. (4-8)
      - b) They blasphemed God and drew others away from God (9-11)
      - c) They were at ease as they increased in wealth (12)
    - 3) Asaph suffered even though he sought to keep his heart clean (13-14)
2. He overcame his doubts by considering the destiny of the wicked (15 - 20)
  - a. Experiences don't define the nature of God - He is just! (15)
  - b. Understanding came in the presence of God (16 - 17)
  - c. He perceived the destiny of the wicked (18 - 20)
    - 1) God will bring the wicked to ruin (18)
    - 2) Their destruction will be swift and terrifying (19)
    - 3) The end of the wicked makes their lives look like a fantasy (20)
3. He gained confidence in God by considering his destiny (21 - 26)
  - a. His bitterness clouded his trust in God (21-22)
  - b. His prosperity is in his relationship to God (23-28)
    - 1) Fellowship brings guidance and hope (23-24)
    - 2) God is all he wants and needs (25-26)
      - a) It is a dependent relationship (25a)
      - b) It is complete satisfaction (25b)
      - c) It is unwavering trust (26)
4. He gained understanding of how God deals with evil (27 - 28)
  - a. Blessings of the wicked are temporary (27)
    - 1) God judges those who reject Him, *payday someday*.
    - 2) He has judged righteously in the past and will continue to do so.
  - b. Blessings of the righteous are eternal (28)
    - 1) One's greatest blessings is a personal relationship with God.
    - 2) He is the only dependable refuge.
    - 3) My privilege is to proclaim His glory.
5. Observations
  - a. The nearer I am to God, the less I am affected by the attractions and distractions of the world.
  - b. Having the Creator is much better than having things.
  - c. Things are temporary but a relationship with God is eternal.

### B. Biblical truths concerning evil

1. God is not the author of sin.
  - a. The sinfulness of man was a choice.
  - b. Emil Brunner, *Evil is that which God does not will*.
2. God overrules sin for good.
  - a. Genesis 50:20, Joseph and his brothers, *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today*.
  - b. Thomas Aquinas (13<sup>th</sup>), *God is so powerful that he can direct any evil to a good end*.

3. God saves from sin.
  - a. Sin was man's choice but only God has the solution, His Son.
  - b. God is a fellow sufferer with mankind of evil in this world.
4. God resolves the issue of evil.
  - a. Joseph Roux (19<sup>th</sup>), *Evil often triumphs, but never conquers.*
  - b. There will be a time of judgment and evil will be no more.

C. Why bad things happen to good people (Christians)

1. For instruction, Hebrews 5:8, *Although he was a son, he learned obedience through what he suffered.*
2. For preparation, 2 Corinthians 4:17, *For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison,*
3. For perspective, Romans 8:18, *For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*
4. For perfecting, 1 Peter 1:6-7, *...you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

D. Personal responses

1. Be in the light
  - a. Experience the nearness of God
  - b. James 4:8, *Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.*
  - c. A.W. Tozer, *Every man is as close to God as he wants to be.*
2. Share the light
  - a. Share with others God's goodness.
  - b. Unknown, *He who is willing to declare the works of God shall never be silent for lack of wonders to declare.*

<b>CONCLUSION</b>
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- A. On evil, John Newton (18<sup>th</sup>), *Many have puzzled themselves about the origin of evil. I am content to observe that there is evil, and that there is a way to escape from it, and with this I begin and end.*
- B. On true prosperity
  1. Prosperity must be measured from an eternal perspective.
  2. God is better than things.
  3. True prosperity is the nearness of God, *Near to the Heart of God*, Cleland B. McAfee

There is a place of quiet rest, near to the heart of God,  
A place where sin cannot molest, near to the heart of God.

There is a place of comfort sweet, near to the heart of God,  
A place where we our Savior meet, near to the heart of God.

There is a place of full release, near to the heart of God,  
A place where all is joy and peace, near to the heart of God.

O Jesus blest Redeemer, sent from the heart of God,  
Hold us who wait before Thee, near to the heart of God.