Sunday Evening Study

March 9/16, 2018

The Problem of Evil

**Question**: If God exists, how can there be so much evil in the world?

**Syllogism**:

Premise 1: If God were all-powerful, he would be able to prevent evil.

Premise 2: If God were all-good, he would desire to prevent evil.

Conclusion: So, if God were all-powerful and all-good, there would be no evil.

Premise 3: But there is evil.

Conclusion: Therefore, there is no all-powerful, all-good God.

**Methodological Consideration:** In seeking to answer this question, we are *doing theology*. “The discipline of theology, at its heart, seeks to apply all of Scripture to all of life, which minimally involves correctly interpreting the whole Bible on its own terms and drawing proper conclusions which are consistent with the entire canonical presentation.”

Also remember: Scripture *alone* is our final authority and epistemological warrant for all theological proposals.

(Stephen Wellum, “God’s Sovereignty over Evil,” in *Whomever He Wills: A Surprising Display of Sovereign Mercy*, eds. Matthew Barrett and Thomas J. Nettles [Cape Coral: Founders, 2012], 158).

**A recent argument:** Open Theism – God doesn’t know the future.

“If God does not foreknow future free actions, it is not because his knowledge of the future is in any sense incomplete. It’s because there is, in this view, *nothing definite there for God to know!*” ~ Greg Boyd

**Perspectives on Divine Foreknowledge**

Augustinian (Calvinistic) – WSC Q/A 7 and LBC Q/A: What are the decrees of God? A: The decrees of God are his eternal purpose, according to the counsel of his will, whereby, for his own glory, *he hath foreordained whatsoever comes to pass* (Eph. 1:4, 11; Rom. 9:22-23; Is. 46:10; Lam. 3:37).

Arminian – God knows the future, but doesn’t ordain everything that comes to pass.

*Open Theists disagree with both.*

**Two traditional Christian arguments for dealing with the problem of evil**:

1. Evil is a privation.

Frame calls this “The Unreality-of-Evil Defense.” – Augustine said, “Evil is only the privation of a good, even to the point of complete nonentity.”

1. The Free Will Defense.

Presupposes libertarian freedom – Human choices are *in no sense controlled or ordained by God.* Our character may influence our decisions, as may our immediate desires, but we always have genuine freedom to choose contrary to our *character* and our *desires.*

Compatibilism – People always choose according to their desires.

Not determinism – Determinism teaches that our actions are completely controlled by something *external* to us, making us do what we don’t want to do. Our actions are \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ but we are never \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.

Again, remember: *How we understand the nature of human freedom* must *be derived from Scripture.*

“Beware of bringing to the Bible assumptions that are not taught in the Bible” ~ John Piper

Does the Bible make the free-will defense?

Does God will evil to come to pass? Is God the author of evil?

“In some mysterious way, and without being tainted with evil himself, God stands behind unintentional manslaughter (Exod. 21:13), family misfortune (Ruth 1:13), national disaster (Isa. 45:6-7), personal grief (Lam. 3:32-33), even sin (2 Sam. 24:1; 1 Kings 22:21ff.)” ~ D. A. Carson (*A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, 149).

Beware of the QIRC – Quest for Illegitimate Religious Certainty: This happens when humans seek “to achieve epistemic and moral certainty” on issues that God has not revealed (Deut. 29:29).

“Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding” (Job 38:4).

“Who are you, O man, to answer back to God?” (Rom. 9:20).