

Lecture 5: Demonstrate God's Goodness in an Evil, Empty World!

In our fifth presentation our goal is three-fold: (1) review give reasonable proofs for God's existence based upon: (a) creation, (b) design, (c) morality, (d) existential need, (e) joy, (f) and the universal idea for God within humanity. (2) We will then proceed to examine the "hole-in-the-heart" argument and (3) be able to reconcile the perfections of God and the reality/presence of evil.

A. REVIEW FROM LAST TIME...

Last time we examined the importance of natural revelation as a common ground for appealing to God's existence:

1. **Cosmological:**
2. **Teleological:**
3. **Moral Argument:**
4. **Argument from Joy:**
5. **Religious Need:**
6. **Innate Idea argument:**

Within the teleological argument we examined both **Intelligent Design** and the **Strong Anthropic Principle**. Under the moral argument we gave 8 reasons why the Moral Law is objective.

B. THIS TIME...

We will now consider the hole-in-the-heart argument and the reconciliation of the infinite perfections of God and the reality of evil answering the question that if God is all-powerful, then He is able to destroy evil. If God is all-good, then He wouldn't tolerate evil and suffering. If so, then why does evil exist?

1. RECOGNIZE THE HOLE-IN-THE-HEART:¹

- A. **Heart-hole may be defined as the reality of spiritual incompleteness.**
- B. **What size is the hole in the heart? Nearly any defense mechanism will do in order to determine its size:**
 1. The more you rationalize to avoid responsibility for your behavior, the greater is your need and appetite for filling
 2. The larger the gap between what you would like to do and what you actually do, the larger is your need to be filled.

¹ Material is adapted from Ramesh Richard, *Mending the Soul*, pages 29-31.

3. The more you project your thoughts, feelings, & guilt on others, the more desperate is the hunger in your heart.
4. The more you indulge in repressing the fact of your heart's emptiness, the more intense is your need for filling it.
5. The more you attempt to compensate & excel in non-spiritual areas to fill what essentially is a spiritual hole, the more urgent is the passion for filling.
6. The more you assume responsibility to fill the hole, the more emphatic the lust is to fill it.
7. The more you act like your own savior, your own deity, the deeper is the hole. The sonar evidence shows up everywhere. Your penchant to self-deification in grounding the solution for the heart-hole in yourself also reveals the vast dimensions of your spiritual need.
8. The self-deification phenomena may be explained further as:
 - a. your quest for power;
 - b. your ambition for freedom & autonomy;
 - c. your sole arbitration of moral decisions;
 - d. your aspirations for eternity, unchangingness, & immortality;
 - e. your attempts to influence public opinion & buy people's favor;
 - f. your understanding of your unconscious needs & provision for their satisfaction;
 - g. your negotiation of social contracts for personal benefit;
 - h. your competence in increasing people's good & bad actions, productivity, and morale;
 - i. your ability to destroy people permanently.

C. What about the depth of the heart-hole?

“We can measure the width of the human heart-hole, but we don't know how deep it is. You can't see bottom, but it sends back an echo. The hole can't get wider, but it can get deeper. It is immense, but it is not infinite, and while you can't see the bottom, it reverberates. The sonar bounces back and shows how deep, how empty, how needy it is.” ~ Ramesh Richard.

2. Christian Response to Evil, Suffering, and God's Existence: Philosophical Problem and Religious Problem of Evil.

A. **Consider**...If there is an omnipotent, omniscient, perfectly good God, how can it be that the world is full of evil? Or, why, does an all-loving and omnipotent God allow, moral evil, sin in our world?

B. **Consider** the fact that people hear about terrible suffering everyday. In fact, just in one newspaper you have the following stories: rape, genocide, assault, murder, war, greed, and exploitation. Consider these examples:²

Somalis are stealing food from starving neighbors...people are dying by the thousands;

Muslim women and girls are being raped by Serb soldiers,

In India, Hindus went on a rampage that razed a mosque and killed over 1,000 people.

In Afghanistan gunmen fired into a crowded bazaar and shot ten people including 2 children.

Cigarette company is having to defend itself against charges that it is engaged in a campaign to entice adolescents to smoke.

High school principle is indicted on charges of molesting elementary and middle school boys over a period of 20 years:

A man is being tried for murder in the death of a 9 year old boy; he grabbed the boy to use as a shield in a gunfight:

C. And even this weekend we have Iran bristling at US warning regarding nukes; fires roasting Western states; abortion rights groups like Naral attempting to label or associate Supreme Court nominee John Roberts with violent anti-abortion activities; Lutherans debating compromise on homosexuality; Married Tennessee teacher pleading "no contest" with a 13 year old boy; England banning a radical Muslim cleric; tropical storm Irene heading for the eastern coast of the U.S.

D. What are our responses as Christians who believe that God is good all the time and yet live in a world filled with such evil and suffering? How can we answer the non-believer who can't seem to reconcile such problems they hear or see everyday? There are typically six responses to such things by both believers and non-believers alike.

1. **Look away approach:** We may take note, shake our heads sadly, and go about our business. We work, going about our business, worrying about our children, helping our friends and neighbors, and look forward to social gatherings.

2. **Can't ignore approach:** We sit in our cool homes with dinner on our table and our children around us, and we know that not far from us the homeless huddle, children go hungry...and you ask yourself: Is it human, is it even decent for us to enjoy our own

² Eleanor Stump, "The Mirror of Evil" in *God and the Philosophers: The Reconciliation of Faith and Reason*, ed. Thomas V. Morris (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 235-247.

good fortune and forget the misery that is near us? But we may even say it is morbid to keep thinking about the evils; it is depressive; it is not healthy. Nevertheless, how can we close our minds to what is going on around us?!!! Thus, we do little or nothing as we live with the angst after being told, “Just get use to it, that’s the way life is.”

142 “The Way I See it” quote on Starbucks cup:

“With childhood comes a brief grace period of ignorant bliss-when you’re not aware of the pain around you. That is the most special, truly unique time. It is the core of adult lament.” ~ Barry Privett, Lead singer of Carbon Leaf.

3. **Labor at Obliviousness approach:** We drown our minds in our work or in pleasure or in both.
4. **Good Samaritan approach:** Evil can be eliminated...Eden on earth is possible. Whatever it is in human behavior or human society that is responsible for misery around us *can* be swept away. Reform our world! Remove the human defects that produced the evil in the first place (e.g., apply utopian communism).
5. **Explain evil away:** In the Way I see it # 250... a statement on your neighborhood Starbucks cup, Bishop Carlton Pearson, who is an author, speaker, spiritual leader, and recording artist, wrote:

“In reality, hell is not such an intention of God as it is an invention of man. God is love and people are precious. Authentic truth is not so much taught or learned as it is remembered. Somewhere in your preincarnate consciousness you were loved absolutely because you were. Loved absolutely, and in reality, you still are! Remember who you are!”

Just like “hell” people will attempt to explain “evil” away, often in non-sensible propaganda-marketing type terms, often playing on our sentimentalities, but their statements lack cogency, common-sense, and substance. Haiku, anyone!

6. **It has led has led others to a disbelief in, resentment of the God of the Bible, or a path of absolute despair.** Some view that God is cruel, denial of His very existence, nihilism (there is no truth), agnosticism, other world religions, “*New age*” beliefs, or secular, humanistic philosophy. And still there are others who are deeply troubled. They want to believe in God’s existence as the Bible proclaims Him to be but because of present evil and suffering, are deeply troubled with the tension they experience, both intellectually and emotionally. Consider the following testimony by Philip Hallie.

Philip Hallie who studied cruelty for years, made an interesting statement in his study of Nazi medical experiments on Jewish children in the death camps. He states that Nazi doctors broke and re-broke “the bones of six-or seven-or eight year old Jewish children in order, the Nazis said, to study the processes of natural healing in young bodies.” Across all his studies on cruelty Hallie writes:

“...the pattern of the strong crushing the weak kept repeating itself, so that when I was not bitterly angry, I was bored at the repetition of the patterns of persecution...My study of evil

incarnate had become a prison whose bars were my bitterness toward the violent, and whose walls were my horrified indifference to slow murder. Between the bars and walls I evolved like a madman....over the years I had dug myself into Hell...”³

“No one has demonstrated that any alternative world is morally better than the one we have. Hence, no antitheist can show that God did not create the best world, even given the privation of God. This, of course, does not mean that the theist is committed to the belief that this present world is the best world that can be achieved. God is not finished yet, and Scripture promises that something better will be achieved. The theist’s assumption is that this world is the best way to the best world achievable.”
~ Norman Geisler,

Baker’s Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics, 224.

7. **And still there are others who don’t want to believe in God’s existence and so they attempt to rationalize against God’s existence (or indict Him as being responsible) with arguments.** How would you respond to the following four arguments:⁴

A. Consider this argument against God’s existence:

1. **An all-good God would destroy evil.**
2. **An all-powerful God could destroy evil.**
3. **But evil is not destroyed.**
4. **Therefore, as such God does not exist.**

B. Consider the following argument against God being all-perfect:

If God knew evil would occur, why did He create it? God was free to create or not to create. Why did he choose to create a world he knew was fall into depravity, suffering, pain, and death? Christians believe that God is both all-knowing, all-good, and free. As all-knowing God foresaw evil. As free, he could have avoided creating the world. But this conflicts with God as all-good, for such a God must have had a good purpose for creating a world he knew would decay, be depraved, and be deadly. Why then did he create it?

There were other better alternatives open to God. He could have chosen not to create it all. He could have created a world in such a way that there would be no sin. He could have created a free world where no one would have chosen to sin. He could have created a world where sin occurred but where everyone was ultimately saved. Any one of these worlds would have been better than the world conceived by the orthodox Christian believer, where evil occurs and where not everyone will be saved from damnation:

1. God could have chosen a better alternative by:

- a. not creating at all;
- b. not creating a free world;
- c. creating a free world that would not sin
- d. creating a world that sinned but would all be saved.

2. But God did not choose one of these better alternatives.

3. Therefore God did not do his best.

4. But to do so less than his best is an evil for God.

³ Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (Philadelphia: Harper & Row, 1979), 2.

⁴ Material adapted from *Baker’s Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 219-24.

DID YOU KNOW?

Physical suffering can often be explained in reference to human free choice:

(1) Some suffering is brought on directly by our free choice. The choice to abuse my body can result in sickness.

(2) Some suffering is brought on indirectly by free choice. The choice to be lazy can result in poverty.

(3) Some physical evil to others can result from our free choice, as in the case of spouse or child abuse.

(4) Others suffer indirectly because of our free choice. Alcoholism can lead to poverty of one's children.

(5) Some physical evil may be a necessary byproduct of a good process. Rain, hot air, and cool air are all necessary for food and

5. Therefore, no all-perfect God exists.

C. Consider God as the Author of evil:

1. God is the Author of everything.

2. Evil is something.

3. Therefore, God is the Author of evil.

D. Consider God being responsible for physical evil. Why do we have tornadoes, hurricanes, tidal waves, earthquakes, violent sand storms, droughts, and volcanic eruptions?

1. Natural evil cannot be explained by free choice of creatures.

2. Hence, God must be responsible for natural evil.

3. But natural evils cause innocent suffering and death.

4. Therefore, God is responsible for innocent suffering and death.

CONSIDER WHAT OUR RESPONSE SHOULD BE TO THE PROBLEM OF NATURAL DISASTERS? HOW SHOULD WE RESPOND AS CHRISTIANS?

First, we can trust God no matter how tragic the disaster is because God is the sum-total of His infinite perfections. We know from Scripture that God will never do anything less than His infinite perfect best. Therefore, we can trust Him no matter what happens. God is all-powerful, all-knowing, and absolutely God.

Second, consider the following values that emerge from natural disasters (adapted from Erwin Lutzer's work on this topic):

- a. Disasters clarify our values:
- b. Reminds us of our frailties;
- c. Exposes what was hidden.
- d. Motivates to us to think of our lives as being "vaporous."
- e. Gives us opportunities to represent Christ in ways that were not "opened" to us before.

And third, what should we say to our friends:

- a. We should weep;
- b. We should give thank to God;
- c. The question is not why disaster, but why are we still living?
- d. We must choose how we will respond to God (worship or curse?)
- e. Natural disasters are going to force you to make a decision about God.
- f. They are signatures of God (Mt. Sinai: When God speaks, the earth responds (e.g., earthquakes).
- g. Ravi Zacharias: "There is a story line."

E. The Problem of Gratuitous (unnecessary and pointless) evil.

1. If there were an all-powerful and all-good God, then there would not be any evil in the world unless that evil is logically necessary for an adequately compensating good.
2. There is some evil in the world.
3. Some of that evil is not logically necessary for any adequately for any adequately compensating good.
4. Therefore, there is no God of a relevant kind (all-powerful, all-knowing, and absolutely good).
 - a. Evil: anything that all rationally possible avoid for themselves; nobody wants for themselves unless there is a rational or adequate reason (e.g., pain, disability) unless one is irrational.
 - b. Some evil is justified (drilling on teeth) for a greater compensating good (amputate leg in order to save life).
 - c. The problem of evil arises because God has the skill to do something about it.
 - d. The only evils that God is justified in allowing is for a compensating good.

3. WHAT IS EVIL?

In order to answer these arguments, we must first ask ourselves what evil is & how it is perceived:

DID YOU KNOW?

Sin is a transgression of the law of God:

The Greek word *parabasis* means “*overstepping, transgression.*” God gave the Mosaic law to heighten man’s understanding of His standard and the seriousness of transgressing that standard (Rom. 4:15). Thereafter, when God said, “*You shall not bear false witness,*” a lie was seen to be what it is: an overstepping or transgression of the law of God (Rom. 2:23; 5:14; Gal. 3:19).

Sin is a failure to conform to the standard of God.

The Greek word *hamartia* means “*miss the mark,*” “*every departure from the way of righteousness.*” Thus, it means that all people have missed the mark of God’s standard and continue to fall short of that standard (Rom. 3:23). This involves both sins of commission as well as omission. Failure to do what is right is also sin (Rom. 14:23).

Sin is a principle within man. Sin is not only an act but also a principle that dwells in man. Paul refers to the struggle with the sin principle within (Rom. 7:14, 17–25); all people have this sin nature (Gal. 3:22). Hebrews 3:13 refers to it “*as the power that deceives men and leads them to destruction.*” Jesus also refers to sin as a “*condition or characteristic quality*” (John 9:41; 15:24; 19:11).

Sin is rebellion against God. Another Greek word for sin is *anomia*, which means “*lawlessness*” (1 John 3:4) and can be described as a “*frame of mind.*” It denotes lawless deeds (Titus 2:14) and is a sign of the last days, meaning “*without law or restraint*” (Matt. 24:12).

Sin is wrongful acts toward God and man.

Romans 1:18 refers to “*ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.*” Ungodliness refers to man’s failure to obey God and keep the commandments related to Him (Exod. 20:1–11); unrighteousness is seen in man’s failure to live righteously toward his fellow man (Exod. 20:12–17).

~ Paul Enns, *Moody Handbook of Theology*
(Chicago: Moody Press, 1997), 310.

A. Biblical usage of evil:

B. Religious views of evil:

1. Atheism affirms evil but denies the reality of God;
2. Finite godism can claim that God desires to destroy evil but is unable to because he is limited in power;
3. Deism can distance God from evil by stressing that God is not in the world, but beyond it.
4. Panentheism insists that evil is a necessary part of the ongoing progress of the interaction of God and the world.
5. Pantheism affirms the reality of God but denies the reality of evil.
6. Theism affirms both the reality of both God and evil.

C. The problem of evil may be viewed in simple form as a conflict involving three concepts:

1. God’s power,
2. God’s goodness, and
3. The presence of evil in the world.

Common sense tells us that all three cannot be true at the same time.

D. Solutions to the problem of evil typically involve modifying one or more of these three concepts:

1. Limit God’s goodness,
2. Limit God’s power, or
3. Limit the reality of evil (e.g., illusion)

E. Consider...

1. If God made no claims to being good, then the existence of evil would be easier to explain; but God does claim to be good;

2. If God were limited in power so that he was not strong enough to withstand evil, the existence of evil would be easier to explain; but God does claim to be all-powerful;
3. If evil were just an illusion that had no reality, the problem wouldn't really exist in the first place; but evil is not an illusion. Evil is real.

F. How may we define evil?

1. Evil is the corruption or privation of something good:
 - Rot in a tree (rot can exist as only as the tree exists).
 - Decay in a tooth (decay can only exist as the tooth exist).
 - Decay of a carcass (decay can only exist as flesh exists).
 - Rust on a car (rust can only exist as metal exists).
2. Evil exists only in another, but not in itself:
 - Evil may not be an actual substance, but it involves an actual privation in good substances. It is not an actual entity but a real corruption in an actual entity, e.g., rotting trees, rusting cars, tooth decay, brain cancer, etc.- all these are examples of how evil is a corruption of something good.

G. Various Theological Responses to Problem of Evil: Are these solutions adequate? I personally find them to be disappointing. Thinking about these responses, I want you to consider a painful problem that hits many of us. A baby is born but soon suffers and dies. In light of this issue, consider the following responses to grieving parents:

- a. Evil is punishment for sin (but it does not seem evil is distributed evenly).
- b. Evil is repaid in heaven (but which is better? What about a child going straight to heaven without having to suffer at all on earth?).
- c. Evil builds character (we become more compassionate? But couldn't God develop character in others by other means that suffering?).
- d. Evil leads people to glorify God (but is this fair that babies suffer in order that others might glorify God?).
- e. God has a reason, but we can't know it (This response seems more compelling if we know who this God is. I can trust Him if He is God of the Bible even though he may never tell me why this happened).

4. Reconciliation of God's Existence: Classic Free Will Defense:

A. The problem of evil can be summarized:

1. God is absolutely perfect.
2. God cannot create anything imperfect.
3. But perfect creatures cannot do evil.
4. Therefore, neither God nor his perfect creatures can produce evil.

B. Christian response...

1. God created every substance.
2. Evil is not a substance (but the corruption in a substance).
3. Therefore, God did not create evil (for evil exists only in another but not itself).
4. God is absolutely perfect.
5. God created only perfect creatures.
6. One of the perfections God gave some of his creatures [angels, lucifer, Adam, & Eve] was the power [gift] of free choice.
7. Some of these creatures freely chose to do evil.
8. Therefore, a perfect creature caused evil.

C. Evil arose in the abuse of a good power called freedom:

1. Freedom in itself is not evil. It is good to be free. But with freedom comes the possibility of evil.
2. God is responsible for making evil possible, but free creatures are responsible for making it actual.
 - a. Adam and Eve had finite perfection. They are able to "corrupt" because of their "finiteness" and the fact that they didn't have "the sum total of His infinite perfections" (e.g., they didn't have omnipotence).

D. Persistence of Evil. Having considered this, then how do we deal with the persistence of evil. Why does God allow it? Even if He did not produce evil, he does permit it? Yet, he is all-powerful and could destroy it. So, why doesn't he do so? The classical way to state the problem of the persistence of evil is this:

1. If God is all good, he would destroy evil.
2. If God is all powerful, he could destroy evil.
3. But evil is not destroyed.
4. Therefore, there is no such God.

Respond:

1. God can and will overcome all evil:
2. God is all all-good and desires to defeat evil.

3. God is all powerful and is able to defeat evil.
4. Evil is not yet defeated.
5. Therefore, it will one day be defeated.

E. How to use it with a non-believer in association with the Moral Law argument:

1. **Moral Law implies a Moral Law Giver.**
2. **There is an objective moral law.**
3. **Therefore, there is a Moral Law Giver.**

“Moral laws don’t describe what is, they prescribe what ought to be. Moral laws can’t be known by observing what people do. They are what all persons should do, whether or not they actually do.”

- a. Upon what basis do unsaved people know that the torture of Jewish children by Nazi doctors is evil?
 1. **By reason?** While it is true that moral principles and ethical theories do rely on reason (otherwise there is no coherence, logic, or intelligibility), we build those principles and theories, at least in part, by beginning with **strong intuitions** about individual cases that exemplify wrongdoings, and we construct our ethical theories around those intuitions. Typically ethicists look for what the individual cases have in common, then they try to codify their common characteristics into principles. Once the principles have been organized into a theory, they may revise their original intuitions until their intuitions and theories are in harmony. Nonetheless, original intuitions retain an essential primacy. If we found that our ethical theory affirmed those Nazi experiments, we would throw away the theory as something evil itself. But what exactly are these original intuitions? What cognitive faculty produces them? Not reason, apparently, since reason takes them as given and reflects on them.
 2. **How about memory?** No because we aren’t remembering that it is evil to torture children.
 3. **How about sense perception?** No because when we say that we just see the *wrongness* of certain actions, we certainly don’t mean that it’s visible.
 4. **Can we even identify the cognitive faculty that recognizes evil intuitively?** It would be a mistake to infer that there is no such faculty.
 5. It’s clear that we have many other cognitive faculties that similarly can’t be accounted for by the triad of reason, memory, and perception. For example: We have the abilities to tell mood from facial expression, to discern affect from melody of speech.
 6. While we don’t understand much about the faculty that produces moral intuitions in us, we all regularly rely on it anyway...we have some cognitive faculty for discerning evil in things, and that people in general treat it as they treat their other cognitive faculties: as basically reliable, even if fallible, and subject to revision.
 7. It is also clear that this cognitive faculty can discern differences in kind and degree of evil.

For example:

A young Muslim mother in Bosnia was repeatedly raped in front of her husband & father, with her baby screaming on the floor beside her. When her tormenters seemed finally tired of her, she begged permission to nurse the child. In response, one of the rapists swiftly decapitated the baby and threw the baby in the mother's lap.

a. Is this evil different? Did you feel it immediately? Did you have to reason or contemplate it before you came to the decision it is evil? Are we not filled with grief and distress, shaken with revulsion and incomprehension? See, the taste of real wickedness is sharply different from the taste of garden-variety moral evil, such as stealing a package of gum, and we can discern it directly, with pain.

8. This moral faculty also discerns goodness. We recognize acts of generosity, compassion, and kindness. Have you ever wept when we you were surprised by true goodness?

F. How to use the moral law argument? Consider the following argument from Ravi Zacharias:

“One of the strongest arguments against the existence of God is the presence of evil and suffering in the world. Can you not see what is brought in through the back door in that question? Because if there's evil, there's good. If there's good there has to be a moral law. If there's a moral law there has to be a transcendent moral lawgiver. But that's what the skeptic is trying to disprove and not prove. Because if there is no moral law giver, there's no moral law. If there' no moral law there's no good. If there's no good there's no evil. So what's the question, really? The strongest argument against the existence of God actually assumes God in the objection.”

1. An objective moral law can't be grounded in a materialistic, atheistic universe.
2. There is no explanation for even for noble deeds if self-preservation is the foundation for generating moral values.
3. Heinous evil cannot be adequately explained apart from a Christian worldview.
4. Evil is a problem from within, not simply is it “out there.”
5. Meaninglessness does not come from pain, but from pleasure.

G. Another question to consider: Why isn't God's existence more obvious?

1. Pascal and Peter Kreeft argue that God's purpose is to show or give us enough data to help us to believe, but not enough to coerce us. God wants us to come to Him; He wants us to pursue him; He doesn't want to force us to love Him.
2. Paul Moser argues that too much evidence may actually have the result of satisfying us without our ever coming to God.

H. William Lane Craig uses a conditional argument in his debate with Paul Kurtz over the question: “Is goodness without God good enough?”

If theism is true, then we have a sound basis for objective values.

If theism is true, then we have a sound basis for objective duties.

If theism is true, then we have a sound basis for moral accountability.

If theism is false, then we do not have a sound foundation for morality.

I. Consider this response to the problem of gratuitous evil (from William Lane Craig):

1. If God exists, gratuitous (pointless, unnecessary evil) evil does not exist.
2. God exists.
3. Therefore, gratuitous evil does not exist.
 - a. Cumulative case approach favors the probability that this God exists.
 - b. We don't have the knowledge to know gratuitous evil.
 - c. Theological doctrines:
 1. The purpose of life is not human happiness as such, but knowing God.
 2. Mankind is in a state of rebellion against God and His purpose.
 3. God's purpose spills over into eternal life.

5. Reconciliation of evil and suffering with the struggling believer.

- A. Will the intellectual answers given above be sufficient for someone who is in the midst of trials, afflictions, and horrendous suffering?
- B. Sometimes when news of suffering comes, a host of emotions come with it: bewilderment, a sense of hopelessness, helplessness, a feeling of abandonment, and even anger. As believers, we realize by looking at both Christ and disciples, that we aren't promised exemption from trials and problems, but sometimes it hits us unexpectedly. With one diagnosis, for example, a dark cloud can form above a godly Christian family that may or may not dissipate for the rest of their lives.
- C. What should we consider when facing this "religious problem of evil:"
 1. During times of emotional and spiritual turmoil, intellectual answers may prove to be the least comforting. Therefore, the religious problem of evil, the

crisis of faith precipitated by suffering, at its most fundamental problem, then is not an intellectual question but an emotional issue.

- a. To be sure, while there may be intellectual questions that the sufferer asks, and at an appropriate point in the grieving process when the afflicted is ready to hear the answers, it is appropriate to answer them. However, at that point, the sufferer needs comfort and care, not a theological dissertation or philosophical discourse on the logical consistency of God's existence and the reality of evil.
2. Ask God every day for the grace needed to make it through another day for "*God never promises us tomorrow's grace for today.*" Though you may not be able to handle well the "whole reality" of the situation, you will gain confidence as God gives you the grace needed for each particular day.
3. Remember that God has been gracious to you in other ways. 1 Peter 5:7 exhorts us to cast our problems on God, because He cares for us. Your situation could be a lot worse. And though God doesn't owe us such protection, He has graciously given it to us.
4. Remember that when tragedy hits, don't blame God. Paul explains that through Adam sin entered the human race, and death resulted from sin. In other words, people die as a consequence of sin. We live in a fallen world, and death is a consequence of sin. That particular death that befalls someone doesn't necessarily come from a specific sin, but rather from the fact that whole human race has fallen into sin. So, while it is human nature to blame God for what happens, Scripture is clear that these things happen because we live in a fallen, sinful world. If we are going to get angry, don't direct it toward God, but sin. Our problem is that we don't see sin from God's perspective. And though this principle may not comfort the afflicted, we need to learn how to redirect our anger.
5. Many think that because God is all-loving, He is obligated to do every loving thing possible. However, this is an incorrect assessment of God's obligations. Consider...

It would be very loving for God to make us all multi-millionaires, but God is not obligated to do it. So, God's love doesn't obligate Him to do every loving thing possible. Rather, everything He chooses to do (though he isn't obligated to do everything he can do) must exhibit His perfection of love. As to God's grace, at most it means that the thing He chooses to do will exhibit grace, but even here we must be careful. Grace is defined as undeserved favor...something never owed. So we can hardly demand that God act graciously toward us. The basic point is that before we get angry with God for failing to do what His perfections or characteristics requires, we must be sure that we understand what He is obligated to do.

6. Some of us think that since God has dealt with others in grace, we should receive the same treatment. We can't demand grace because grace is unmerited, undeserved, unearned favor. That is, you get something good that you don't

deserve, haven't merited, and aren't owed. Grace is not given to reward good deeds or excellent virtuous character. As unmerited blessing, grace is never owed-that's why it's grace and not justice. So God has done nothing wrong if He gives you grace that He doesn't give me.

7. While these realizations don't remove the affliction, it may make someone feel more comfortable with God. He will never abandon you or me as believers in Jesus Christ, for He is obligated to that promise.

SELAH!

NEXT LESSON: GOD AND MIRACLES!