

The Problem *of* Evil

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INTRODUCTION

One of the most overrated objections against Christianity is the so-called "problem of evil." It claims that the existence of evil is logically irreconcilable with the Christian concept of God. The existence of evil is either assumed or supposedly established, and then this premise is said to be incompatible with the Christian concept of God. Thus it follows that there is no God, or at least it follows that what Christianity affirms about God is false.

Non-Christians have found considerable success with this argument, and those who claim to be Christians are themselves often disturbed by the existence of evil, or the amount of evil in this world. Some Christians manage to provide plausible but inconclusive answers, whereas others evade the challenge and call the existence of evil a mystery. However, merely plausible answers are insufficient when the Bible provides an infallible response and an invincible defense. And to the extent that the Bible addresses the topic, so that it is something that has been revealed, Christians have no right to call it a mystery as if it is something that is still unexplained.

The truth is that the existence of evil poses no challenge to the Christian doctrine of God, or to any aspect of the Christian faith. Moreover, non-Christian worldviews in fact cannot make sense of the existence of evil, if they can have a concept of evil at all.

THE PROBLEM

Christians affirm that God is omnipotent (all-powerful) and omnibenevolent (all-loving). Our opponents reason that if God is all-powerful, then he possesses the ability to terminate evil, and if he is all-loving, then he wishes to terminate evil;¹ however, since evil still exists, this means that God does not exist, or at least it means that the things that Christians affirm about him are false. That is, even if God exists, since evil also exists, he cannot be both all-powerful and all-loving, but Christians insist that he is both all-powerful and all-loving; therefore, Christianity must be false.

There are different formulations of this argument, but regardless of the precise form that it takes, the claim is that Christians cannot affirm all the biblical divine attributes, because this would be logically incompatible with the existence of evil. And the claim is that, since this is the case, then Christianity must be false.

Although Christians have agonized over this so-called "problem of evil" for centuries, the argument is extremely easy to refute. Even as a child I thought it was a foolish argument, and it remains one of the most stupid objections that I have ever seen. Many people have trouble with the existence of evil not because it poses any logical challenge to Christianity, but because they are overwhelmed by the emotions that the topic generates,

¹ Sometimes the argument includes God's omniscience, that he is all-knowing. If God knows everything, then he knows how to destroy evil.

and these emotions disable the minimal level of judgment and intelligence that they normally exhibit.

Now, since our opponents claim that the problem of evil is a *logical* argument against Christianity, in our response we need to show only that the existence of evil does not generate a *logical* contradiction against what Christianity affirms about God. Although the Bible also offers answers regarding the emotional aspects of this topic, it is not our responsibility to present and defend these answers within the context of logical debate. So we will focus on the existence of evil as a logical challenge.

FREE WILL

Professing Christians, or those who claim to be Christians, often favor the "free will defense." There are indeed different ideas of free will and different versions of the free will defense. Nevertheless, with slight adaptations, what I say in this section will apply to all of them.

This approach states that when God created man, he granted free will to the creature, a free will to even rebel against the Creator. This is the ability to make decisions that are autonomous, that are not always actively predetermined and directly caused by God. Of course, God was aware that man would sin, but this is the price of granting free will to man. By creating man with free will, God also created the potential for evil, but as the free will defense goes, since man is truly free, the actualization of this potential for evil is blamed only on man. This depends on the assumption that responsibility presupposes freedom. Since this premise has never been established and it is in fact easily refuted, the free will defense fails without further consideration. But we will continue with the analysis. In any case, it is said that the potential or even the actualization of evil is not too high a price for granting free will to man.

Although Christians often employ the free will defense, and to some people the explanation sound reasonable, it is an irrational and unbiblical theodicy – it fails to answer the problem of evil, and it contradicts the Bible. First, this approach only postpones addressing the problem, in that it transforms the debate from why evil exists in God's universe to why God created a universe with the potential for such great evil. Second, Christians affirm that God is omniscient, so that when he created the universe and humankind he knew not only that they had the potential to become evil, but he knew for certain that they would become evil. Thus either directly or indirectly, God deliberately created evil.²

We may distinguish between natural evil and moral evil. Natural evil includes natural disasters such as earthquakes and floods, and moral evil refers to the wicked actions that rational creatures commit. Even if the free will defense provides a satisfactory explanation for moral evil, it fails to adequately address natural evil. Some Christians

² The doctrine of free will is unbiblical and heretical, and some have even followed the doctrine to its next logical step in saying that if man were to be truly free, then God cannot know for certain what man would do, thus denying the omniscience of God. But even then, God knew that it was possible for free will to produce extreme and horrendous evil, so that the same problem remains.

claim that it is moral evil that leads to natural evil; however, only God has the power to create a relationship between the two, so that earthquakes and floods do not have any necessary connections with murder and theft unless God makes it so – that is, unless God decides to cause earthquakes and floods because of the sins of his creatures. This occurred when God cursed the earth at Adam's transgression. So again God remains the cause of evil, whether natural or moral.

Even if Adam's sin had brought death and decay, not only to mankind but also to the animals, the Bible insists that not one sparrow can die apart from God's will (Matthew 10:29). That is, if there is any connection between moral evil and natural evil, the connection is not inherent, but sovereignly imposed by God. Even the seemingly insignificant cannot occur unless God actively wills it and causes it. Christians are not deists – we do not believe that this universe operates by a set of natural laws that are independent from God. The Bible shows us that God is now actively running the universe, so that nothing can happen or continue apart from his deliberate power and decree (Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3). In reality, there are no natural laws. If we should use the term at all, what we call "natural laws" are only descriptions about how God regularly acts, although he is never bound to act in those ways.

Christians must reject the free will defense because the Bible rejects free will; rather, it teaches that God is the only one who possesses free will. He says in Isaiah 46:10, "My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please." On the other hand, man's will is enslaved either to sin or to righteousness: "But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness" (Romans 6:17-18). Man has no free will – it is an assumption without any biblical or rational warrant.

Another popular assumption is that moral responsibility presupposes moral ability. That is, if a person is unable to obey God's laws, then he should not be morally responsible for obeying these laws, and thus God should not and would not punish him for disobeying these laws. However, like the assumption that man has free will, this assumption that moral responsibility presupposes moral ability is also unbiblical and unjustified.

Referring to non-Christians, Paul writes, "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Romans 8:7). If it is true that moral responsibility presupposes moral ability, and Paul states that the sinner lacks this ability, then it follows that no sinner is responsible for his sins. If a sinner is only a sinner when he has the ability to obey but refuses to obey, then since Paul says that the sinner indeed lacks the ability to obey, then it follows that a sinner is not a sinner. This is a contradiction, and it is a contradiction that the Bible never teaches.

The Bible teaches that the non-Christian is a sinner, and at the same time it teaches that he lacks the ability to obey God. This means that man is morally responsible even if he lacks moral ability – man must obey God even if he cannot obey God. It is sinful for a person to disobey God whether or not he has the ability to do otherwise. Thus moral

responsibility is not based on moral ability or freedom; rather, moral responsibility is based on God's sovereignty. Man must obey God's commands because God says that man must obey. It is irrelevant whether or not he has the ability or freedom to obey.

Free will is logically impossible. If we picture the exercise of the will as a movement of the mind toward a certain direction, the question arises as to what moves the mind, and why it moves toward where it moves.

To answer that the "self" moves the mind begs the question, since the mind is the self, and thus the same question remains. Why does the mind move toward one direction instead of another? If we trace the cause of its movement and direction to factors external to the mind, factors that impress themselves upon the consciousness from the outside and thus influencing or determining the decision, then how is this movement of the mind free? If we can trace the cause to the person's innate dispositions, then this movement of the mind is still not free, since although these innate dispositions decisively influence the decision, the person himself has not chosen these innate dispositions.

The same problem remains if we say that a person's decisions are determined by a mixture of his innate dispositions and external influences. If the mind makes decisions based on factors not chosen by the mind, then these choices are never free in the sense that they are not made apart from God's sovereign control – they are not free from God. Rather, the Bible teaches that God exercises immediate control over man's mind, and he also sovereignly determines all the innate dispositions and external factors related to man's will. It is God who forms a person in the womb, and it is he who arranges outward circumstances by his providence. Then, it is he who controls man's mind and cause each decision that he makes.

Therefore, although we affirm that man has a will as a function of the mind, so that the mind indeed makes choices, these are never free choices, because everything that has to do with every decision is determined by God, and on top of that it is in fact God who directly controls the mind to cause every decision. Since the will is never free, we should never use the free will theodicy when addressing the problem of evil.

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

Professing Christians are uncomfortable with the biblical teaching that man has no free will, because it appears to make God "responsible" for the existence and the continuation of evil. By their human standard, or by a standard that they invented and imposed on God, it makes him guilty of wrongdoing. In this section, I will provide an exposition on what the Bible teaches on the topic.

The Bible teaches that God's will determines everything. Nothing exists or happens without God, not merely permitting, but actively willing it and causing it to exist or happen:

I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say: My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please. (Isaiah 46:10)

Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. (Matthew 10:29)

God controls not only natural events, but he also decides and causes all human affairs and decisions:

Blessed are those you choose and bring near to live in your courts! We are filled with the good things of your house, of your holy temple. (Psalm 65:4)

The LORD works out everything for his own ends – even the wicked for a day of disaster. (Proverbs 16:4)

In his heart a man plans his course, but the LORD determines his steps. (Proverbs 16:9)

A man's steps are directed by the LORD. How then can anyone understand his own way? (Proverbs 20:24)

The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; he directs it like a watercourse wherever he pleases. (Proverbs 21:1)

Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed. (Job 14:5)

All the peoples of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Daniel 4:35)

But as he left, he promised, "I will come back if it is God's will." Then he set sail from Ephesus. (Acts 18:21)

For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:13)

Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then

vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." (James 4:13-15)

"You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." (Revelation 4:11)

If God indeed designs and causes all natural events and human affairs, then it follows that he also designs and causes evil. The Bible explicitly teaches this:

The LORD said to him, "Who gave man his mouth? Who makes him deaf or mute? Who gives him sight or makes him blind? Is it not I, the LORD?" (Exodus 4:11)

Who can speak and have it happen if the Lord has not decreed it? Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both calamities and good things come? (Lamentations 3:37-38)

I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things. (Isaiah 45:7)

When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the LORD caused it? (Amos 3:6)

The Bible insists that the greatest act of moral evil and injustice in human history was conceived and performed by God:

Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand. (Isaiah 53:10)

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. (Acts 4:27-28)

God decreed and caused the death of Christ for his own reason, namely, the redemption of his chosen ones. Likewise, he wills and causes evil for the worthy purpose of his glory. For this same reason, he created some people for salvation and some people for damnation:

I will say to the north, "Give them up!" and to the south, "Do not hold them back." Bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth – everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made. (Isaiah 43:6-7)

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:11-12)

And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD. (Exodus 14:4)

For the Scripture says to Pharaoh: "I raised you up for this very purpose, that I might display my power in you and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth." What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath – prepared for destruction? What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory...? (Romans 9:17, 22-23)

God controls everything that exists and everything that happens. There is not one thing that exists or that happens that he has not decreed and caused – not even a single thought in the mind of man. Since this is true, it follows that God has decreed and caused the existence of evil. He has not merely permitted it, because nothing can originate or happen apart from his will and power. Since no creature can make free or independent decisions, evil could never have started unless God decreed and caused it, and it cannot continue for one moment longer without God's will for it to continue or without God's power actively causing it to continue.

Those who see that it is impossible to disassociate God from the origination and continuation of evil still attempt to distance God from evil by suggesting that God merely "permits" evil, and that he does not cause it. However, since the Bible itself states that God actively decrees and causes everything, and that nothing can exist or happen apart from his will and power, it makes no sense to say that he merely permits something – nothing happens by God's mere permission. In fact, when it comes to ontology, "God's permission" is an unintelligible term.

Since "in him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28), from an ontological or metaphysical perspective, it is impossible to do anything at all without God's active power and control. Without him, a person cannot think or move. How, then, can evil be devised and committed without God's deliberate causation? How can one think evil apart from God's purpose and power? Instead of protecting God from the verdict of an unrighteous and irrational human standard while agreeing with this same standard, we ought to attack this human standard and refuse to let it stand in judgment over God, but instead agree with the Bible that God has decreed and caused evil, and that he is righteous in doing so.

David's census of Israel provides an example of evil that God decreed and caused in his creatures:

Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah." (2 Samuel 24:1)

Satan rose up against Israel and incited David to take a census of Israel. (1 Chronicles 21:1)

The two verses refer to the same incident. There is no contradiction if our view is true. God decreed that David would sin by taking the census, and he even caused Satan to perform the temptation.³ Then, God punished David for committing this sin:

David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing." Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: "Go and tell David, 'This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.'" So Gad went to David and said to him, "Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me." David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men." (2 Samuel 24:10-14)

Although evil is negative, God's purpose, which is his own glory, is positive. God is the only one who possesses intrinsic worth, and if he decides that the existence of evil serves to glorify him, then the decree is by definition good and justified – because *he thinks* it is good and justified. Anyone who thinks that God's glory is not worth the death and suffering of billions of people has too high an opinion of himself and humanity. A creature's worth is conferred by his creator, according to the purpose for which the creator made him. Since God is the sole standard of measurement, if he thinks that something is justified, then it is by definition justified. Christians should have no trouble with this, and those who find it difficult to accept what the Bible teaches should examine their spiritual condition, to see if they are indeed in the faith.

Many people, including those who claim to be Christians, would challenge God's right and justice in decreeing and causing the existence of evil for his own purpose. Paul

³ Satan himself is a creature, and thus has no free will. All his thoughts, decisions, and actions are controlled and caused by God.

anticipates a similar objection when he discusses the doctrine of election, in which God creates some people for salvation and creates some for damnation:

One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? (Romans 9:19-21)

Paul says, in effect, "Of course the creator has the right to do whatever he wants with his creatures. And who are you to make such an objection in the first place?" A supposedly Christian writer objects that man is greater than a lump of clay. But this complaint backfires. First, this is a biblical analogy, and a true Christian will not challenge it. But if one challenges it, then the debate becomes one of biblical infallibility. Since I have established biblical infallibility elsewhere, denying biblical infallibility is not an option. Second, if man is more than a lump of clay, then God is infinitely greater than a potter. Thus the objection not only fails, but it reminds us that the distance between God and man is even greater than that represented by the potter and the clay. The analogy is proper when we grasp its point, that is, God as creator has the right to do whatever he wishes with his creatures. "Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden" (Romans 9:18).

When a person refuses to accept that God would decree and create evil, it implies that he finds something wrong with God decreeing and creating evil. What is the standard of right and wrong by which this person judges God's actions? If there is a moral standard superior to God, to which God himself is accountable and by which God himself is judged, then this "God" is not God at all, but this higher standard would be God. But the Christian concept of God refers to the highest being and standard, so there is nothing higher. If there is something higher than the "God" that a person argues against, then this person is not referring to the Christian God. There is no standard higher than God to which God himself is accountable and by which God himself is judged. Therefore, it is logically impossible to accuse God of doing anything morally wrong.

Jesus says that only God is good (Luke 18:19), so that all "goodness" in other things can only be derived. God's nature defines goodness itself, and since he "does not change like shifting shadows" (James 1:17), he is the sole and constant standard of goodness. No matter how moral I am, one cannot consider me the objective standard of goodness, because even the word "moral" is meaningless unless it is used relative to God's character. That is, how "moral" a person is refers to the degree of conformity of his character to God's character. To the degree that a person thinks and acts in accordance with God's nature and commands, he is moral. Otherwise, there is no moral difference between altruism and selfishness; virtue and vice are meaningless concepts; rape and murder are not crimes, but amoral events.

There is no standard of goodness or righteousness apart from God to judge what he says and does; rather, whatever he says and does is a revelation of the standard of goodness and righteousness. Since God calls himself good, and since God has defined goodness for us by revealing his nature and commands, evil is thus defined as anything that is contrary to his nature and commands. Since God is good, and since he is the only definition of goodness, it is also good that he decreed and caused the existence of evil. There is no standard of good and evil by which we can denounce his decree and action as wrong or evil. This does not mean that evil is good – that would be a contradiction – but it means that God's decree and causation of evil are good.

Hebrews 6:13 says, "When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself." There is no one to hold God accountable, and no one can drag God to a court to press charges against him. No one judges God, but every person is judged by him.

Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger. He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble. He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars. He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea. He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south. He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted. When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him. If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, "What are you doing?" (Job 9:3-12)

"Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!" Then Job answered the LORD: "I am unworthy – how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer – twice, but I will say no more." Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: "Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?" (Job 40:2-8)

Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, "What are you making?" Does your work say, "He has no hands?" Woe to him who says to his father, "What have you begotten?" or to his mother, "What have you brought to birth?" This is what the LORD says – the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my

children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? (Isaiah 45:9-11)

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor? Who has ever given to God, that God should repay him?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen. (Romans 11:33-36)

Since we derive our very concept and definition of goodness from God, to accuse him of evil would be to say that good is evil, which is a contradiction. Therefore, men cannot say, "Because God is good (according to our false standard of goodness), he must not and would not do this or that." Instead, we must say, "Because God is good (according to his own standard of good, which is the only true standard of good), if he does this or that, then it must be good." Thus if God has decreed and caused evil, then while evil is evil, it must be good that he has decreed and caused evil.

THE SOLUTION

As we now consider the biblical answer to the problem of evil, let us first repeat the unbeliever's argument:

1. The Christian God is all-powerful and all-loving.
2. If he is all-powerful, then he is able to end all evil.
3. If he is all-loving, then he wants to end all evil.
4. But evil still exists.
5. Therefore, the Christian God does not exist.⁴

The argument encounters an insuperable obstacle by the time we reach premise 3, since the non-Christian cannot find a definition of love that upholds this premise without destroying the argument. By what definition of love can we assert that an all-loving God would want to destroy evil? Or, by what definition of love can we assert that an all-loving God would have already destroyed evil?

If this definition of love comes from outside of the Bible, then why must the biblical worldview answer to it? To form this argument using a non-biblical definition of love would make the argument irrelevant as a challenge to Christianity. But if we take the definition of love from the Bible, then the one who uses this argument must show that the Bible itself defines love in a way that requires an all-loving God to destroy evil, or to have already destroyed evil. Unless the non-Christian can defend premise 3, the argument from the problem of evil fails before we even finish reading it.

⁴ There are different formulations of the argument, but with slight adaptations, my refutation will apply to all of them.

If the non-Christian uses a non-biblical definition of love in premise 1, then the argument commits a straw man fallacy from the start. If he uses the biblical definition of love in premise 1, but uses a non-biblical definition of love in premise 3, then he commits the fallacy of equivocation. Then the most that the argument accomplishes is to point out that he has a non-biblical definition of love, but the argument would be irrelevant as a challenge to Christianity.

On the other hand, if he tries to use the biblical definition of love, then for his argument to be relevant, the Bible itself would have to define love in a way that requires God to destroy evil, or to have already destroyed evil. However, although the Bible teaches that God is loving, it also teaches that there is evil in this world, and that this evil is under God's complete and sovereign control. Therefore, the Bible denies that there is any contradiction between the love of God and the existence of evil, but it defines love in a way that is consistent with God's control and causation of evil. As with the definition of goodness, Christians do not invent their own idea of love and make God conform to it; rather, they receive their definition of love from God.

For the argument from the problem of evil to stand, the non-Christian must establish the premise, "The love of God contradicts the existence of evil," or something to that effect. But the Bible does not affirm this premise, and if the non-Christian argues for this premise with definitions of love and evil found in his own non-biblical worldview, then he can succeed only in showing that the biblical worldview is different from the non-biblical worldview. We already know this, or there would be no conflict between the worldviews, but what has become of the problem of evil? The non-Christian points to the biblical teaching about God's love, then smuggles in a non-biblical definition of love that requires God to destroy evil, and after that stupidly boasts in the "contradiction" that he has produced.

If a person wants to challenge the Bible or hold the Bible accountable for what it says, then he must first let it define its own terms; otherwise, he would be challenging only what the Bible *does not* say, and this makes all his arguments irrelevant. The unbeliever must demonstrate why God's love *necessarily* implies that he must destroy evil or that he desires to destroy evil, or that it *necessarily* implies that he must have destroyed evil or that he desires to have already destroyed evil.

It would not help to say something like, "Because a loving God would want to relieve suffering," since this only restates the premise in different words, and the same question remains. Why must a loving God desire to relieve suffering? How does one define suffering in the first place? If the non-Christian cannot define either love or suffering, or if he cannot logically impose his definitions on the Christian, then his premise amounts to saying that a God with an undefined attribute X must desire to destroy or to have destroyed an undefined Y. But if he can define neither X nor Y, then he has no intelligible premise from which to construct an intelligible argument against the Christian faith. The whole argument is gibberish.

Another one might say, "Because God would want to triumph over evil." Again, what is the definition of "triumph"? If God himself is the direct cause of evil, and if God exercises total and constant control over it, so that evil is always doing precisely what God designs and causes, in exactly the manner and degree that he designs and causes it, then in what sense could he ever "lose" to evil? Whatever the non-Christian says, he encounters the same problem, and it is impossible for him to establish that the love of God contradicts the existence of evil. The more arguments he offers, the more he shows his lack of intelligence and competence.

Since the Bible affirms both the love of God and the existence of evil, from the Bible's perspective the love of God does not imply that he must destroy evil or that he must have already destroyed it. Of course a non-biblical perspective may not agree with this, but again, this shows only that the biblical worldview disagrees with non-biblical worldviews, which we already know, and which is the reason for debate.

As long as the non-Christian fails to establish the premise that the love of God contradicts the existence of evil, the Christian is under no obligation to show any regard to the problem of evil as an argument against Christianity. In fact, since the non-Christian fails to define some of the key terms and to establish the key premises, logically speaking no one can even understand the argument. There is no actual objection. There is no intelligible argument for us to answer.

If we stop here, we will have already refuted the so-called problem of evil, since we have demonstrated that there is no such problem at all. However, so that the discussion can continue, we will now temporarily grant the non-Christian's premise. That is, for the sake of argument, we will pretend by force that the love of God somehow contradicts the existence of evil, while keeping in mind that this is something that the Bible never teaches, and that the non-Christians have never established.

The non-Christian argues that given the existence of evil, the existence of God is logically impossible. In response, we have shown that the non-Christian cannot establish the premise that an all-loving God must necessarily destroy evil or desire to destroy evil. In fact, in the Bible, love is attributed to a God who directly designs and causes evil. Now we will take an additional step and point out that the premises of the argument do not *necessarily* lead to the non-Christian's conclusion in the first place, but very different conclusions are possible:

1. The Christian God is all-powerful and all-loving.
 2. If he is all-powerful, then he is able to end all evil.
 3. If he is all-loving, then he wants to end all evil.
 4. But evil still exists.
 5. Therefore, *God has a good purpose for evil.*
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1. The Christian God is all-powerful and all-loving.
 2. If he is all-powerful, then he is able to end all evil.
 3. If he is all-loving, then he wants to end all evil.

4. But evil still exists.
5. Therefore, *God will eventually destroy evil.*

In a valid argument, the premises must *necessarily* and *inevitably* lead to the conclusion. However, in the argument from the problem of evil, the premises do not *necessarily* and *inevitably* lead to the conclusion. Therefore, the argument from the problem of evil is invalid.

Some non-Christians might say that if God has a good purpose for evil, then Christians must also state the purpose. But the non-Christians cannot show why the Christians must state this purpose. The debate is on whether the premises *necessarily* and *inevitably* lead to the non-Christian's conclusion. Whether or not there is a good purpose for evil, and whether or not the Christians can state this purpose, is irrelevant. The Bible indeed explains God's purpose for evil, and I have expounded on the teaching elsewhere, but it is not logically relevant to the debate.

There is more. The non-Christian argues that God does not exist because evil exists, and we have refuted this. Now we can add that the existence of God – what the Bible means by "God" – is in fact the logical prerequisite for the existence of evil. That is, evil is undefined and meaningless without an objective and absolute standard of right and wrong, good and evil, and this standard can only be God.

When the non-Christian states that evil exists, what does he mean by "evil"? He might be referring to greed, hate, murder, rape, earthquakes, floods and a number of other things. However, on what basis and by what standard does he call these things evil? Does he call these things evil just because he disapproves of them? Any definition or standard of evil that he asserts without appealing to God and the Bible will be unsuccessful and easily defeated.

If the non-Christian claims that murder is wrong because it violates the victim's right to life, why does the victim have the right to life? Who gives him this right? And why must anyone acknowledge this right? Who says that there is anything as a right in the first place? Non-Christians have tried many arguments, but all of them have been exposed as stupid and arbitrary.⁵

On the other hand, the Christian affirms that murder is wrong, immoral, and evil because God forbids murder: "You shall not murder" (Exodus 20:13); "Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man" (Genesis 9:6). The Christian worldview can assert with authority that murder is evil and that the murderer must be held accountable, but the non-Christian can never justify the same claim. He cannot even authoritatively define murder.

The non-Christian claims that evil exists, and from that basis he evaluates what Christianity says about God. He uses something that he claims to be obvious to refute something that he claims to be unobvious. However, the existence of evil is not obvious

⁵ For more information, please see my writings on apologetics and ethics.

at all unless there is an absolute, objective, and universal moral standard, and we know this standard, so that we can make evaluations with it. Since the non-Christian fails to establish such a standard, and since he fails to establish how he would know such a standard, all his talk about evil is unintelligible and meaningless, and his argument from the problem of evil has no effect against Christianity. In fact, on the basis of his worldview, even he does not know what his own argument means.

One who denies the existence of God has no rational basis to affirm the existence of evil. The recognition of God logically precedes the recognition of evil. Unless God is presupposed, evil remains undefined. When the non-Christian uses the problem of evil to argue against Christianity, he becomes an intellectual terrorist, so that he hijacks the moral absolute of Christianity even as he argues against Christianity. However, he cannot refer to any natural or moral evil without implicitly acknowledging a standard by which to judge something as evil. If he acknowledges the existence of evil, then he must first acknowledge the existence of God, but if he already acknowledges the existence of God, then the argument from the problem of evil is pointless.

Of course, the non-Christian may not immediately surrender, but he will probably try to offer some workable definition of evil to rescue his argument. We cannot consider all the possible definitions that he might propose, but I have provided enough material here so that anyone should be able to refute any non-Christian definition. If the Christian will persistently demand justification for the unbeliever's claims and definitions, he will frustrate any attempt to construct an argument against Christianity based on the existence of evil.⁶

Some non-Christians have come to realize that the argument from the problem of evil is invalid, so that although they continue to challenge the Christian faith based on the existence of evil, they have softened their claim. So they say that although the existence of evil does not logically contradict the existence of God, the existence of evil at least provides strong evidence against God's existence, or against the probability of God's existence. Thus instead of calling their argument a logical case against God's existence, they call it an evidential case against God's existence.⁷

But this is nonsense – it is just a dishonest way of saying that they have no argument. All the problems that I raised about the "logical" case remain in the "evidential" case. The argument still fails to establish that the love of God contradicts the existence of evil, or that the love of God requires him to destroy evil, or to have destroyed evil. It still fails to define the crucial terms. What is love? What is evil? In fact, the argument makes things worse for the non-Christians by adding the idea of "evidence" to the debate. Now I demand from them several additional things: a definition of evidence, a standard for determining what constitutes evidence toward or against something, a standard for determining the relevance and force of the alleged evidence, and an epistemology for discovering the things that are used as evidence.

⁶ The argument will become a broad presuppositional debate. For more information on this, see my *Presuppositional Confrontations*.

⁷ Some people use different terms to make this same distinction.

Along with the "evidential" case, some people include the claim that there is too much "gratuitous" evil, and that this is evidence against God's existence. But again, what is evidence? And who decides what is "gratuitous"?⁸ By what standard of necessity do we decide that an evil event is unnecessary? And unnecessary for what? And why does evil have to be necessary in the first place? In the biblical worldview, when God does something, it is justified just because he has decided to do it. Thus the non-Christian cannot argue against the Christian faith by appealing to unjustified events, since he must first refute the Christian faith before he can show that these events are unjustified. So the non-Christian argues against the Christian idea of God by using non-Christian definitions of love, evil, evidence, necessity, and other key terms. Then why not also argue against a non-Christian idea of God and leave us out of the debate altogether? The argument from the problem of evil is best used by non-Christians against non-Christians.

OTHER WORLDVIEWS

There is no reason for lengthy explanations and repetitions, since the matter is as simple as it appears. The argument from the problem of evil is one of the most irrational arguments ever devised, and it is used by the most stupid individuals, but it has deceived and troubled many people because of its emotional appeal. In response, the Christian must not only neutralize the argument, but he must pursue and attack the non-Christian on this topic.

Perhaps because the problem of evil is most often used as a challenge to the Christian faith, many people forget to consider whether non-Christian worldviews and religions can provide adequate and coherent answers about the existence of evil. Can non-Christians provide an authoritative definition of evil? Does their definition of evil contradict what

⁸ On this point, even some professional philosophers stoop to an appeal to popular opinion. They claim that "everybody knows" that certain things are evil, and that certain things are gratuitous evil. In another context, these same philosophers would blast such an appeal to popular opinion to establish a pivotal premise. The fact that they resort to this tactic here shows me that they are stupid and desperate. The most obvious response is that it is fallacious to think that something is true just because many or even most people think that it is true.

Some philosophers argue that if most people think that there is gratuitous evil, then the burden of proof falls on the Christian to show that there is no gratuitous evil. Although I disagree that the burden of proof falls on me just because I contradict popular opinion, even if it does, I have shown that any evil that God decrees and causes is justified by definition, so that the burden of proof returns to the non-Christian, who must either refute this particular point or refute Christianity as a whole, and thus the focus of the debate shifts to a presuppositional one (see my *Presuppositional Confrontations*).

Moreover, even if the appeal to popular opinion is legitimate (although I deny this), I demand proof that it is indeed the popular opinion that there is gratuitous evil. How can the non-Christian establish this claim? Even if he can perform a global empirical survey, I have refuted empiricism elsewhere. In addition, I demand justification that he should limit his survey to only the present generation. If he cannot do this, then he must also show that since the origin of mankind, it has been the popular opinion that there is gratuitous evil. He must also prove that this will continue to be the popular opinion in all future generations. If he fails to do this, then I have no reason to accept his claim that "everybody knows" there is evil, or gratuitous evil. He thinks that "everybody knows," but he does not know that "everybody knows"; it is his singular opinion about popular opinion.

they claim about physics (natural evil) and psychology (moral evil)? Can they explain how and why evil began and continues? Can they suggest a solution for evil, and can they guarantee that this solution will succeed? No worldview except the Christian faith can even begin to answer these challenges.

When a non-Christian confronts you with the problem of evil, instead of being pressed into a corner, you should be able to give an invincible answer. But do not stop there. You should turn the argument against the non-Christian and ceaselessly pursue him and attack him with it (2 Corinthians 10:5). Run him off the cliff and make him regret ever mentioning it:

"I have demonstrated that the existence of evil does not contradict the love of God or the existence of God. In fact, the very concept of evil presupposes the existence of God. This God decreed and caused the existence of evil for his own glory, and every aspect and instance of evil is under his precise control, and there is no standard higher than God to judge him as unrighteous. One day he will banish all sinners to endless torment in hell, so that every instance of murder, theft, rape, and even every word that a man has spoken, will be accounted for. He will justly punish all sinners who have not trusted Jesus Christ for salvation, but his chosen ones will surely be saved through faith.

"What about you? Huh?! How do you explain evil? How do you deal with it? Given your worldview, how can you even have a meaningful and universal concept of evil? How do you explain its origin and continuation? Can you offer an effective or even a guaranteed solution to defeat evil? Can you set forth universally applicable and binding reasons against such things as genocide and racism? How can your worldview make moral demands on someone that does not subscribe to this worldview? Given your worldview, is there final and perfect justice for anyone? If not, what is your solution or explanation for that? How can you define justice in the first place? Why must a person from another nation or culture recognize your so-called rights? You questioned me. You think I cannot question you? Huh? Answer me!

"If you cannot answer these and thousands of other questions that I have for you on the basis of your worldview and your intellectual commitments without spouting self-contradictions, arbitrary and unjustified assertions, and meaningless terms and propositions, then it is evident that while the existence of evil poses no threat to the Christian faith, it means the destruction of your pathetic and ridiculous non-Christian worldview or religion. You are a fool and a hypocrite for even mentioning the existence of evil as an

objection to Christianity. You should hate yourself and apologize for wasting my time and for slandering the Christian faith."

Although many people enjoy confronting Christians with the problem of evil, the truth is that the Christian faith is the only worldview in which the existence of evil does not present a logical problem. Nevertheless, Christians are often intimidated by non-Christian arguments. This is in part because they have not learned the refutations to these arguments, but also because they sometimes agree with the non-Christians, at least on the emotional level. But the fact that something causes an emotional disturbance in people does nothing to threaten the Christian faith itself.

Nevertheless, the Bible addresses even the emotional aspect of the issue: "You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you" (Isaiah 26:3). And Psalm 73:16-17 says, "When I tried to understand all this, it was oppressive to me till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny." Only by embracing the Christian worldview can a person come to a rational position on the existence of evil, and only by entering "the sanctuary of God" can the topic cease to be "oppressive." Only those who draw close to God can understand the reality of evil and retain emotional soundness. The Christian faith is true and is the only way to God and salvation. It is immune to intellectual attacks. It cannot be successfully challenged, but only studied and obeyed.

If the non-Christian is so disturbed over the existence of evil, he can ask a Christian how to trust Jesus Christ for salvation. Or he can commit himself to a psychiatric ward where he may remain miserable under professional care. Oh non-Christian! You are stupid. You are depressed. And you are going insane. Still, you do not come to Jesus Christ for salvation, but you lash out against him in desperate rebellion. Look how far humanity has fallen, that it would produce a piece of garbage like you! But there is hope in Jesus. Come to him now. Call upon him in repentance, and he will save your foolish and wretched soul.