

A Christian View of the Problem of Evil

By Michael A. Sosa

“The heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is judge!”

-Psalm 50:6, ESV

A popular argument that atheists like to wield against Christian believers is what philosophers call the 'problem of evil.' The argument is both ancient and compelling. The Greek philosopher Epicurus said it this way thousands of years ago:

“Is 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?”

On the surface level the argument seems to have weight. If God is there and He is all-powerful, loving, and all knowing, why do evil things occur in this world? The answer lies beyond the surface level.

Firstly, when atheists say that humans are innocent victims of evil, they assume that humanity is innocent. But within the atheist worldview, there is no sin and thus the atheist cannot consistently say that a person is innocent or guilty. Without the goodness of God's character to refer to as a universal standard any statement about evil and the innocence of humanity is arbitrary and groundless. That is to say, in the atheist's universe there is no character of a moral creator to serve as a base for judging the good or evil of events or persons. To be consistent the atheist must admit there is only the impersonal universe with nothing behind it except meaninglessness. What happens to us in this world is likewise meaningless, just a random, cosmic event like when asteroids crash in space. So what if we feel pain? Why is that wrong? Everything that occurs in the pretend universe of the atheist is just a natural function of that universe. The 'wrongness' of death by earthquakes must be consistently be viewed the same as the 'wrongness' of sunspot activity.

The Bible's view of man and the universe is totally different. From the Bible's perspective evil is not a natural part of the random phenomenon that merely happens. It is an aberration that is the result of sin. Thus to see certain things that happen in the world as 'wrong' is to be consistent with the living God's revelation about the world and history.

Secondly, the Bible's view of man is consistent with the sadness and outrage that we feel when a loved one dies or when a child suffers. This is because a child's tears are more than a biological chemical reaction. In fact, when a child cries from pain it is the reaction of a person who is made in God's image and experiences the consequences of sin.

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

-Psalm 139:13-14, NIV

But the outrage that we understandably feel when we experience pain should not be directed toward God. It is we who bring the wrath of God upon ourselves because of our sin. We are the sinners and accordingly we are to blame for our truly tragic condition. Our condition is indeed lamentable. But the proper response is not to blame God or disbelieve in His existence. The answer, according to His revealed word, the Bible, is to repent; which is to turn away from sin (*the source and cause of evil*).

Thirdly, if the God you're talking about is the God of the Bible then it is possible to make sense of evil in the world in light of God's total goodness. As a Christian who is learning to think his thoughts after God's Word, I look at the world and the evil things that happen and must interpret them in light of the Bible. Just as I look at the evidence of Creation and see the

result of God's awesome and creative mind, I must do the same thing with the events that happen in His creation.

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge..." -**Psalm 19:1-2, NIV**

Accordingly from a Christian's perspective, when I see death and suffering I must see the justice of a holy God upon not so innocent sinners. Although this viewpoint might be personally offensive to someone who looks at the world and considers religious belief from a non-Christian perspective, it is not illogical and it is consistent with God's objective self-revelation in the Bible.

"...O Lord, you have appointed them to execute judgment; O Rock, you have ordained them to punish. Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong."
-**Habakkuk 1:12-13, NIV**

"For the wages of sin is death..."
-**Romans 6:23, NIV**

Fourthly, this method of interpretation also applies to a proper view of humanity and our alleged 'innocence.' According to the Bible none of us are without sin, even from birth. The only innocent victim in history was Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is because He is the only person ever born into the world without sin and who was therefore the only innocent person ever born. He was in fact, more than innocent. The Son of God came into our world to take our sin upon Himself.

"Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: Who being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even death on the cross."
-**Philippians 2:5-8, KJV**

That point in history was a testimony to the actual non-innocence of the human race and the perfect love and goodness of God. The true God surrendered His Son to die at the hands of sinful humanity that they might live in Jesus through His resurrection. Because the God of the Bible is the God of justice and is always true to His character, He must punish sin. Because He is the God of love and mercy, He made a way for sinners to be pardoned when He poured infinite justice and wrath upon His eternal Son in their place.

"For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." -**2 Corinthians 5:21, NJKV**

Lastly, God could and does have a sufficiently moral reason for allowing and even ordaining that evil things should happen in the world (*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter...Proverbs 25:2*). He has given us the best example in the historic death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In that real historic moment, God used the greatest act of evil ever committed, the completely unjust murder of His infinitely righteous and divine Son, to accomplish the greatest act of good in history-the redemption of sinners in order that they might be saved from the problem of evil and receive the free gift of eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." -**John 3:16, NIV**

In a manner of speaking, God, in His perfect wisdom, righteously dealt with the problem of evil through the problem of evil. Consequently, there really is no problem for the Christian who

views reality through Christian glasses. From the Christian perspective the only thing that the existence of evil disproves is the innocence of humanity. The real problem is what Christian philosophers call the noetic effects of sin, which is just a fancy way of saying that sin colors how we think and look at the created world. As the Bible says, because we are sinners we suppress the truth about God in unrighteousness (Romans 1:18-19). That is to say, we look for excuses to deny the truth of God's existence in spite of our better knowledge. We all know God. We just don't like the fact that God is there because we want to retain our autonomy (our independence from God). In other words, all of us, from the college professor to the local mailman-would rather be the god of our own lives and do whatever we want instead of submit to the true Creator.

Atheists and skeptics are correct. The god who they imagine should have done things their way does not exist. The God of the Bible, however, is there. This God, the one who created us and currently governs us, rules all things for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28) His plan will completely prevail over evil in His time. God is a God who keeps His promises. History testifies to this fact. It tells the story of Jesus Christ, who was crucified for our sins, rose again from the dead, and appeared to hundreds of eyewitnesses (*1 Corinthians 15:4-7*); exactly as God promised hundreds of years earlier through the prophet Isaiah.

“But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.” -**the ancient prophet Isaiah, circa 700 B.C. (Isaiah 53:5, NIV)**