

## 1 **The Problem of Evil:**

### **The Experiential Problem**

- Module: Philosophy
- Lesson 17

## 2 **The Experiential Problem**

- When our actual personal encounter with evil or suffering is so potent that our hearts cry out for something more satisfying than an intellectual answer provides.
  - Why is God allowing this to happen to me/them?
    - Questioning God's love for me personally, or his active presence in my life, or suspecting he is angry with me for some reason.
  - This evil/suffering is so great, so overwhelming, I can't believe a good God would allow this.
    - Sometimes this may be an honest confusion over how such a God could exist.
    - Sometimes it may be a means of angrily retaliating at God, of getting even with God, by denying his existence.

## 3 **The Logical vs. Experiential Problems of Evil**

- The logical problem is an intellectual problem, a problem of the mind.
  - It calls for an apologetic that addresses the intellect with logic and reasoning.
- The experiential problem is an emotional problem, a problem of the heart.
  - It calls for an apologetic that addresses the heart with understanding, compassion, and patience.
- Note: An individual may be wrestling with both aspects of the problem of evil simultaneously, and in varying degrees.

## 4 **Jesus Confronts The Experiential Problem: John 11**

- "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." (John 11:21 [Martha], 32 [Mary])
  - The nearly universal struggle: Where is God when I or a loved one is suffering?
  - The struggle: What God could have done, but didn't.
    - The unbeliever's struggle: if there is such a God as Christians profess, how could he allow this suffering?
    - The Christian's greatest struggle typically is not if God could have intervened, but why He didn't.

## 5 **When Words Don't Help**

- Jesus' words to the women did not, at the moment, appear to help at all.
  - (Though they have provided millions of Christians comfort since.)
- Job's friends were full of words, but they failed to help Job in his crisis.
  - Note: The primary failure of Job's friends when speaking with Job was their attempt to account for or explain why Job was suffering.
- Words are not always our best resource when helping someone with the experiential problem of evil.

## 6 What Jesus Did

- Mary and Martha wanted Jesus' presence. They sought him out even though they were disappointed in him, and even though their brother was already dead.
- The love of Jesus was manifested in his participating in their grief— "Jesus wept."
  - "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep." Rom 12:15

## 7 What Can We Do?

- When someone experiencing evil is questioning the existence of God, we can be the presence of God by simply being with them and entering into their suffering.
- When someone experiencing evil is doubting the love of God, we can be the love of God to them.
- All of this can often be done with few, if any, words.

## 8 There is a Time for Words

- Though words are not always what's needed, there is a time and a place for them. Jesus spoke words of truth to Martha and Mary.
- We need to be extremely careful and thoughtful in the words we use and their timing. Remember Job's friends.
  - Weigh carefully what we say.
  - Weigh carefully when we say it.
- Many a person's suffering has been made worse by well-meaning people saying something foolish or inappropriate, or by saying something true in an untimely manner.
  - Our own suffering can help us learn how and when to speak to others in their suffering.
  - "...God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God." (2 Cor. 1:3, 4)

## 9 Evil from the Eternal Perspective

- The Biblical view of evil is unmatched in any other worldview:
  - In naturalism—evil simply is, just deal with it.
  - In pantheism—evil isn't, just realize it.
  - In Islam—evil is inexplicably decreed by God, just submit to it.
  - In the Bible—evil is defeated, overcome with good and unrivaled glory.
    - (Following the example of Scripture, the Christian should be motivated to also work to overcome evil with good.)

## 10 A Lesson on Evil: Joseph

- Joseph suffered many years unjustly.
  - His mother's death while he was still young

- Persecuted and kidnapped by his brothers
- Torn from his father
- Sold into slavery to a foreign land
- Falsely accused of attempted rape
- Unjustly imprisoned for years
- Forgotten by those who might help him
- 13 long years of suffering in Egypt

#### 11 **A Lesson on Evil: Joseph**

- From his suffering, immeasurable good resulted.
  - In his own life:
    - Deliverance from slavery and prison
    - Promotion to second highest position in the land
    - Great wealth
    - Prestige
    - Power
    - Reconciliation with his brothers
    - Reunited with his father
    - A wife and children

#### 12 **A Lesson on Evil: Joseph**

- From his suffering, immeasurable good resulted. (cont.)
  - In his family's life:
    - His brothers brought to repentance.
    - His father saw his family restored, united, and preserved.
    - Assenath (Joseph's wife) joined to the people of God and is given two sons.
    - Joseph's extended family's lives saved and provided with the best of Egypt.
  - In his contemporary world (Egypt and surrounding nations)—untold numbers of lives preserved from famine and starvation.
  - All the nations of the earth enjoy the provision of salvation through the salvation of Joseph's family.
- Something to ponder: If Joseph had known beforehand all the good that his suffering would bring about, would he have willingly agreed to undergo it?

#### 13 **A Lesson on Evil: Paul**

- Paul experienced unimaginable and prolonged suffering (2 Cor. 4:8, 11):
  - “Afflicted in every way.”
  - “Constantly being delivered over to death.”
- “Are they servants of Christ?—I speak as if insane—I more so; in far more labors, in far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have spent in the deep. ...

#### 14 **A Lesson on Evil: Paul**

- ...I have been on frequent journeys, in dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren; I have been in labor and hardship, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. Apart from such external things, there is the daily pressure on me of concern for all the churches. Who is weak without my being weak? Who is led into sin without my intense concern?” (2 Cor. 11:23-29)

#### 15 **A Lesson on Evil: Paul**

- Seen strictly from the present, Paul’s suffering appears to be an overwhelming burden.

#### 16 **A Lesson on Evil: Paul**

- Paul’s perspective (2 Cor. 4:16-18):
- “Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal.”
  - Paul viewed his suffering as a “momentary light affliction.”
  - How?
  - By comparing it to the coming eternal weight of glory.

#### 17 **A Lesson on Evil: Paul**

- Seen from an eternal perspective, Paul’s suffering pales compared to the greatness and duration of the glory to come.

#### 18 **A Lesson on Evil: Paul**

- Two points from this verse:
  - There is an eternal weight of glory that is being produced by the suffering.
  - Paul habituated himself to look at the unseen, but eternal, and not at the easily seen temporal.

## 19 **A Lesson on Evil: Jesus**

- The horrific suffering of his Passion —
  - The terrible injustice of his betrayal, arrest, and trial, and abandonment by many of his closest friends.
  - His physical suffering. (All the brutality of his scourging and crucifixion.)
  - His internal anguish. (His sense of separation and abandonment from his Father.)
- Yet Jesus did not view his immense suffering, allowed by his Father, in isolation.
  - “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” Hebrews 12:2

## 20 **The Triumph of Good**

- All evil will eventually lead to a greater good. (This is the perspective of Scripture and accounts for God’s choice to allow evil.)
- In the end, all evil will be shown to be a “momentary light affliction” in comparison to the “immeasurable weight” of the massive and eternal good that is realized.
- Given the amount and kinds of evil in the history of the world, this should give us just an inkling as to the overwhelming goodness to come, which scripture tells us will be “incomparable” in its greatness to the evil it overcomes and replaces.
- This is the perspective of evil and suffering which Joseph, Paul, and Jesus (not to mention countless other saints) all exemplified, and which we, as children of God, are called to imitate and share with others.

## 21 **Next Lesson**

- Introduction to Worldviews