

Chapter 8. Problem of Evil

“That feeling of over-due bills, of bills coming due, of accounts overdrawn, of tradesmen unpaid, of general money cares, is very dreadful at first; but it is astonishing how soon men get used to it. A load which would crush a man at first becomes, by habit, not only endurable, but easy and comfortable to the bearer. The habitual debtor goes along jaunty and with elastic step, almost enjoying the excitement of his embarrassments. ... But then, at last, the time comes when the excitement is over, and when nothing but misery is left. ... If a man could only think of that, as he puts his name to the first little bill, as to which he is so good-naturedly assured that it can easily be renewed!”¹

¹Excerpt from Anthony Trollope, *Framley Parsonage*, (Vol. 1) New York, NY.: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1911, 182-183.

Session overview

- Contrast pain, suffering, and evil
- Compare atheistic-based solutions to the problem of evil with theistic-based solutions
- Explore biblical insights related to the problem of evil
- Review selected Christian's experiences with evil, including the apostles and Horacio Spafford

Key passages

- Human liberty: **Genesis 1:31, 3:1, and 3:12**
- God's ways: **Exodus 33:18-19, Psalm 115:1-3**
- God is holy and accounts to no one: **Job 23:1-7, Job 38:1-5, Job 42:1-6**
- Paul knew and was not ashamed: **1 Timothy 1:12b**
- Jesus' followers will suffer: **Mark 8:34**

Human liberty

Genesis 1:31, 3:1, and 3:12

³¹And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. ... **3** ¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?” ... ¹²The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.”

God's ways

Exodus 33:18-19

¹⁸Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” ¹⁹And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

Psalms 115:1-3

¹Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory, for the sake of your steadfast love and your faithfulness!
²Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” ³Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

God is holy and accounts to no one

Job 23:1-7

¹Then Job answered and said: ²“Today also my complaint is bitter; my hand is heavy on account of my groaning. ³Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat! ⁴I would lay my case before him and fill my mouth with arguments. ⁵I would know what he would answer me and understand what he would say to me. ⁶Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; he would pay attention to me. ⁷There an upright man could argue with him, and I would be acquitted forever by my judge. (See also **Job 31:35-40**.)

Job 38:1-5

¹Then the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said:
²“Who is this that darkens counsel by words without
knowledge? ³Dress for action like a man; I will question
you, and you make it known to me. ⁴“Where were you
when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have
understanding. ⁵Who determined its measurements—surely
you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

Job 42:1-6

¹Then Job answered the Lord and said: ²“I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted. ³‘Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?’ Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know. ⁴‘Hear, and I will speak; I will question you, and you make it known to me.’ ⁵I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; ⁶therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”

Paul knew and was not ashamed

1 Timothy 1:12b

But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

Jesus' followers will suffer

Mark 8:34

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

Pain, suffering, and evil

- Pain is the “physical suffering or discomfort caused by illness or injury,”²
 - Every worldview admits the existence of pain
 - Pain is very useful as it deters us from many activities
 - From the poorest to the richest among us, everyone experiences pain

²*New Oxford American Dictionary*, provided on Mac computer.

- Suffering is “the state of undergoing pain, distress, or hardship”³
 - Every worldview admits the existence of suffering
 - Our human existence to some degree, long term or instantaneous, entails inherent suffering
 - If you have not suffered greatly yourself, then you know someone who has
 - Suffering takes many forms, including both physical and mental
 - Financial choices often lead to suffering

³*New Oxford American Dictionary*, provided on Mac computer.

- Evil is “profound immorality, wickedness, and depravity, especially when regarded as a supernatural force.”⁴
 - Evil is distinctly different from pain and suffering
 - Suffering due to financial choices freely made is not evil
 - Many worldviews deny the existence of evil
 - One immediately is confronted with the problem of the criterion
 - If a particular worldview asserts that a particular action is evil, then immediately we are confronted with some opposite action being good
 - Hence, there must be a criterion to decide and we are off and running with the problem of the criterion

⁴*New Oxford American Dictionary*, provided on Mac computer.

Atheism and the problem of evil

- Atheistic-based worldviews must deny the existence of evil even though it is all around us
- By definition, the atheistic-based worldviews declare life's imperative as vacuous
- You cannot measure progress if you have no idea where you are going

Premise 1) If evil exists, then good exists lest you not know the difference

Premise 2) Evil exists

Premise 3) Good exists

Premise 4) Premises 2 and 3 imply measurability

Premise 5) Measurability implies an objective basis for moral law

Premise 6) Moral law implies a moral lawgiver

Conclusion) Therefore, evil exists implies God exists ⁵

⁵See Session 3 for an introduction.

Theism and the problem of evil

- A genuine concern for seekers and even Christ-followers is that if God is all-powerful and all-good, then why is there evil?
- Moreover, if God is all powerful, omnipotent, able to do anything, why does evil persist?
- If God is all powerful, then God can do anything, including removing evil.
- David Hume notes that Epicurus' ancient questions remain unanswered. "Is he [God] willing to prevent evil, but not able? then is he impotent. Is he able, but not willing? then is he malevolent. Is he both able and willing? whence then is evil?"⁶

⁶See <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/4583/4583-h/4583-h.htm>. David Hume, *Dialoges Concerning Natural Religion*.

- One solution to this dilemma is to introduce another attribute of God—God is all-knowing—and now we have a trilemma
- If God is all-knowing and we are not, then surely God has a very good reason for not removing evil at this time
- From trilemma, we could move on to a quadrilemma—God is all-wise. If God is all-wise, then from His deep wisdom, evil serves a valuable purpose perhaps in displaying God's beauty.
- From quadrilemma to quintilemma—God is perfect in justice. The process could continue with all the known attributes of God.

- From a Christian worldview, we learn that God is the very standard for His own actions and in no way owes us an explanation
- As we do have the precious gift of the Bible, there are many insights to be gained regarding the problem of evil from examining what has been revealed

Biblical insights on the problem of evil

- God's creation was very good
- Yet in God's sovereignty, He allowed a tempter to approach humans
- Humans were given the freedom to choose to obey God's simple law

Genesis 1:31, 3:1, and 3:12

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- God behaves in ways that offend the values held by some people

Exodus 33:18-19

¹⁸Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” ¹⁹And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

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²Why should the nations say, “Where is their God?” ³Our God is in the heavens; he does all that he pleases.

- When we demand that God give an account of himself, it usually goes unanswered

Job 23:1-7

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when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have
understanding. ⁵Who determined its measurements—surely
you know! Or who stretched the line upon it?

- God is holy and is accountable to no one and God's holiness leads us to repentance

Job 42:1-6

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- We have no right to complain against God
- God does not have to give us intellectually satisfying answers to the problems of evil
- God's sovereignty is not to be questioned related to the problem of evil, rather to be underscored
- God's Word and His truth is altogether reliable
- God is holy, just, and good

Christian experience

- John Stott summary of a world in deep pain, suffering and obvious evil
- The cross of Jesus Christ is key (John Stott quote)

“I could never myself believe in God, if it were not for the cross. The only God I believe in is the One Nietzsche ridiculed as ‘God on the cross.’ In the real world of pain, how could one worship a God who was immune to it? I have entered many Buddhist temples in different Asian countries and stood respectfully before the statue of the Buddha, his legs crossed, arms folded, eyes closed, the ghost of a smile playing round his mouth, a remote look on his face, detached from the agonies of the world. But each time after a while I have had to turn away. And in imagination I have turned instead to that lonely, twisted, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, limbs wrenched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, mouth dry and intolerably thirsty, plunged in Godforsaken darkness. That is the God for me!

He laid aside his immunity to pain. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and death. He suffered for us. Our sufferings become more manageable in the light of his. There is still a question mark against human suffering, but over it we boldly stamp another mark, the cross that symbolizes divine suffering. 'The cross of Christ ... is God's only self-justification in such a world as ours' 'The other gods were strong; but thou wast weak; they rode, but thou didst stumble to a throne; But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak, And not a god has wounds, but thou alone.'''⁷

⁷See John R. W. Stott, <http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/416309-i-could-never-myself-believe-in-god-if-it-were>. Original in *The Cross of Christ*, ???.

Fate of the apostles

- Judas Iscariot – hung himself after betraying Jesus
- Simon Peter – crucified upside down by Nero in Rome around 64 AD
- Andrew – crucified by Patras around 60 AD
- James – killed with sword by Herod in 44 AD (**Acts 12:1-2**)
- John – banished to the island of Patmos, died of old age
- Philip – not sure, perhaps beheaded, stoned, or crucified upside down around 80 AD
- Bartholomew – martyred, not sure how, and perhaps in India
- Thomas – killed by spear in Mylapore, India on July 3, 72 AD

- Matthew – killed by being burned, stoned, stabbed, or beheaded perhaps in Africa, 60 AD
- James son of Alphaeus – beaten with a fuller's club and stoned in Ostrakine, Egypt
- Jude – killed with an ax in Syria
- Simon the Zealot – likely a martyr by crucifixion or by saw, location unclear
- Matthias (appointed after Judas' betrayal) – likely stoned or beheaded, location unclear
- Paul – not one of the original twelve, but considered an apostle, beheaded by Nero, 68 AD

Horatio G. Spafford

- Horatio G. Spafford wrote the lyrics of the well-known Christian hymn, *It Is Well With My Soul*, in 1873⁸
- He was a successful lawyer in Chicago and had invested heavily in Chicago real estate
- He also served as a Presbyterian church elder
- The great fire of Chicago in 1871 destroyed most of his real estate investments
- Two years later, law duties kept him from joining his wife and four daughters on a ship to England
- On November 22, 1873, the ship was struck by another ship and sank in 12 minutes killing 226 people, including his four daughters

⁸See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Horatio_Spafford and references therein.

- Anna Spafford telegraphed her husband simply, “Saved alone.”
- Horatio then traveled to meet his wife shortly after receiving news from Anna
- He wrote most of *It Is Well With My Soul* lyrics as his ship passed near where his daughters had died

It Is Well With My Soul
Horacio G. Spafford, 1873

When peace, like a river, attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to know,
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Refrain:
It is well, (it is well)
With my soul, (with my soul)
It is well, it is well, with my soul.

Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,
Let this blest assurance control,
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.

My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!
My sin, not in part but the whole,
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!

For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:
If Jordan above me shall roll,
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.

But, Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul!

And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,
Even so, it is well with my soul.

Original handwritten draft of It Is Well With My Soul



BREVOORT HOUSE,

ON THE EUROPEAN PLAN,

Madison Street, between Clark and La Salle Streets,

H. M. THOMPSON, Proprietor.
W. H. GRAY, Chief Clerk.
W. K. STEELE, Cashier.

Chicago, 187

When peace like a river attendeth my way,
When sorrows like sea-bellows roll, -
What then my lot, then best taught me to know
It is well, it is well with my soul -

Though Satan should buffet, - though trials should come, -
Let this blest assurance control, -
That Christ hath regarded my helpless estate,
And hath shed his own blood for my soul -

My sin, - oh the bliss of this glorious thought, -
My sin, it is not in fact but the guilt, -
Is nailed to the cross, & I hear it no more, -
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, Oh my soul -

My God,
And lead, back to the day when the faith shall be right, -
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll, -
The trump shall resound, & the Lord shall descend, -
- a King in the night, Oh my soul!
To watch, at the watch, my soul

- During a June 7, 2020 sermon, Pastor Alister Begg noted that in the third line in the original lyrics, Spafford uses the word “know” and not “say” (common today)
- The power of a personal relationship with Jesus Christ is more than just a coherent worldview that corresponds with reality. It is a growing, life-transforming, tactile experience where you “know” your Savior. The Apostle Paul expresses this same deep level of knowledge.

1 Timothy 1:12b

But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted to me.

- After traveling to England, the Spafford's had three more children where his only son died of scarlet fever at age four
- They moved to Jerusalem to serve the poor
- Horatio experienced significant business loss as well as significant emotional pain. He did not live an easy life and suffered greatly.

Enduring financial loss

- Is it possible to invest in risky financial instruments or other financial opportunities and never suffer loss?
 - If your numeraire is currency units such as US dollars, then the answer by definition is no
 - Like boxing, you will suffer punishing losses if you choose to step into the ring
 - If your numeraire is enduring eternal wealth, then the answer by definition is yes indeed!
 - For example, investing in a business startup will statistically most likely fail
 - If, however, the business startup is founded on biblical principles and centered on glorifying God and human flourishing, then during the season that the business existed, the business was generating enduring returns

- Many Christian businesses are deeply involved in making disciples of Jesus Christ
- If the business was instrumental in the Christian maturation process, then clearly even after the business fails, the disciple is continuing the process of making other disciples
- Jesus promised that those who follow him will suffer

Mark 8:34

And calling the crowd to him with his disciples, he said to them, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

- Thus, if the business foundation is based on solid biblical principles, then financial failure is not to be feared
- Further, the future of the venture is ultimately in God's sovereign hand so we do not need to be anxious
- We can focus solely on serving a faithful manager of God's resources and leave the results to Him.

Summary

- After defining pain, suffering, and evil, we compared atheistic-based solutions to the problem of evil with theistic-based solutions
- We explored biblical insights related to the problem of evil
- We review selected Christian's experiences with evil, including the apostles and Horacio Spafford
- Finally, we explore financial loss

Questions?

Case Study #1:

“My financial suffering must have been caused by the horrible finance industry that enticed me to take on too much credit card debt.” Appraise.

Case Study #2:

Don, an atheist acquaintance, was complaining about evil corporations paying their executives way too much while not paying their unskilled employees a living wage. For example, Don quoted the *Wall Street Journal* to indicate an energy company CEO made over \$300 million dollars last year.⁹ How should a Christian respond?

⁹Energy CEO that rescued a company by coming out of retirement. He chose to receive \$1 in salary and options on 10,000,000 shares of stock. He successfully rescued the company, grew the company stock from \$3/share to \$33/share over the next five years. No jobs were lost and every stakeholder's life was improved.

Case Study #3:

“Christians have an advantage as business entrepreneurs given their different numeraire.” Explain.

Your feedback will help improve this material.

Robert Brooks

(205) 799-9927

www.robertebrooks.org

rbrooks@frmhelp.com

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