

## The problem of evil part 2 Various Evangelical responses

### 1. Review

- a. Defending the faith...
  - i. Why this class???
  
- b. Where we have been?
  - i. Cosmological
  - ii. Teleological
  - iii. Moral argument
  - iv. Resurrection
    - 1. FEAT
  - v. Supernatural nature of scripture
  - vi. Experiences we have!!!
  
- c. Where we are going
  - i. Objections...
  - ii. Problem of evil one... (last time)
  - iii. Problem of evil two...

### 2. Introduction.

- a. Review from last time.
  - i. So much evil in the world!!!
    - 1. War
    - 2. Rape
    - 3. Poverty
    - 4. Oppression
    - 5. Heart disease
    - 6. Cancer
    - 7. Sex trafficking
    - 8. Etc...
  
  - ii. **So, what exactly is the problem of Evil?**
  
  - iii. It is often framed like this-
    - 1. If God is good and...
    - 2. If God is powerful...
    - 3. Why is there evil in the world?
    - 4. The existence of evil means that God is not good, or God is not all powerful, or he simply does not exist.
  
  - iv. At first glance this seems like an exceedingly difficult problem for Christians, but I think it is a bigger problem for Atheists.
    - 1. The problem with the problem of evil....

2. Expand on this...

b. We must vary our tactics based on who we are talking to.

- i. The wounded sinner
- ii. The hardened skeptic
- iii. The Christian doubter

c. How did Christians usually respond to the problem of evil?

- i. In this next section, we are going to map theodicies
- ii. A theodicy is a response to the problem of evil.

d. There are at least six ways that Christians have responded to the problem of evil.<sup>1</sup>

i. **The Free Will defense.**

- 1. This is currently the most prevalent defense.

ii. **Greater-good Theodicy.**

- 1. “God has multiple purposes for evil in the world. Out of such evils come greater goods that could not otherwise come.” (Christensen, 6)

iii. **The Natural Law Defense.**

- 1. “God designed orderly, repeatable, predictable laws to govern the world, and good and bad consequences can result from the proper or improper use of these laws. Therefore, it is not God’s fault when we misuse such laws.” (Christensen, 6)

iv. **Soul-Making Theodicy.**

- 1. Pain and misery cause our souls to mature.

v. **Best of all possible worlds defense.**

- 1. A good God would create a world that was the best of all possible worlds. Somehow God uses evil and suffering to bring about good leading to the best of possible worlds. (Similar to the greater good theodicy).

vi. **Divine-Judgment Defense.**

- 1. Pain and misery are the result of God’s judgment on sinners. God’s judgment is good because it leads to deterrence, societal protection, retribution, and several other positive outcomes. The hope of final judgment redresses the suffering of the innocent. (Christensen, 6)

e. We are going to look at the two most common theodicies.

- i. The Free Will Defense.
- ii. The Greater Good Defense.

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<sup>1</sup> What about Evil? Scott Christensen, 5-7.

## 1. Free Will Defense-

### a. Proponents-

- i. Alvin Plantinga
- ii. William Lane Craig
- iii. Norman Geisler
- iv. Etc...

### b. Argument-

i. Free will is regarded as a cherished feature of humanity, without it we could not be responsible for our actions.

ii. This version of free will is called

1. "Libertarian free will"

2. It is also called "The power of contrary choice."

a. "If Sam chooses one course of action (A), his freedom of will gives him the power to equally choose a contrary (alternative) course of action (not A) in exactly the same set of circumstances." (Christensen, 87)

3. Libertarian free will can be defined as follows,

a. "Each of us, when we act, is a prime mover unmoved. In doing what we do, we cause certain events to happen, and nothing—or no one—causes us to cause those events to happen." (Christensen, 86)

b. In regard to salvation "Libertarian Free Will" means that the "unaided human will can equally decide to receive Jesus or to reject him. At the point of decision, nothing in the person's past, present, or future, and no divine influence, impinge upon the will to such a degree that they influence it to make its decision. The person's will is autonomous in its decision making." (Wright, 40Q, 67)

c. Libertarian free will believe that human decisions must be made apart from God's sovereign intervention (Wright, 67)

d. With that said...

i. Both Arminians and Calvinists believe that human beings make real choices that have real consequences.

ii. Both believe that we are responsible for our choices.

iii. We are not robots or lemmings that are forced to do things that we don't want to do.

iv. But this is where the agreement ends.

4. Reformed theologians reject this notion of free will in favor of freedom of inclination and compatibilism.
  - a. They believe that God controls every decision we make.
  - b. Furthermore, they believe that our will is profoundly affected by our nature, circumstances, and life experiences.
  - c. More on this later...

**iii. This theodicy sees the preservation of free will at all costs as vital...**

1. Without it, God is blamed for evil
2. We are robots
3. But with it evil comes into the world.
4. The allowance of evil is worth the risk, to preserve human free will.

**iv. The central issue is whether God controls the decisions of humans???**

1. Libertarians says that human freedom of choice is not compatible with divine sovereignty, whereas compatibilist say that it is. (Christensen, 86)
2. Said another way, the reformed view of meticulous providence, does not leave any room for Libertarian free will.

**v. There are at least three reasons for the free will defense.**

1. It supposedly grounds responsibility for evil with humans.
2. It seeks to exonerate God from evil that humans do.
3. It teaches that without free will loving relationships are impossible.

**vi. “According to most free-will theists (e.g., Arminians and open theists), this means that God must restrict what sovereign powers he does possess.” (Christensen, 89)**

1. But this means that our free will results in both good and evil outcomes.
2. God is so concerned about maintaining free will, that he is willing to allow humans to choose evil over good. The word “allow” is not the best word, because according to this view, God does not allow anything, he gives humans total freedom to choose evil.
3. “The apologetic benefit of such an approach is that moral evil is rooted in the autonomy of humans. God is off the hook. Natural evil, however, becomes more problematic, since it does not appear to be caused by the free action of agents...” (Groothuis)

**c. Problems with the Free Will defense**

**i. Caution**

1. Some really great scholars, apologists, and thinkers on this side of the discussion... (mostly Arminian)

2. Credit Christensen for this section and Wright's 40Q's about Calvinism.
- ii. Libertarian free will lacks biblical support in general.
1. What the Bible says about human agency seems to strongly support the compatibilist perspective.
  2. The Bible nowhere says we have libertarian free will...
  3. It says the opposite, our wills are in bondage and God controls all things.
  4. Robert Reymond writes,
    - a. "(People's) moral choices are also determined by the total complexion of who they are. And the Bible informs us that men are not only finite but are now also sinners to boot, who by nature *cannot* bring forth good fruit (Matt. 7:18), by nature *cannot* hear Christ's word that they might have life (John 8:43), by nature *cannot* accept the Spirit of truth (John 14:17), by nature *cannot* be subject to the law of God (Rom. 8:7), by nature *cannot* discern truths of the Spirit of God (1 Cor. 2:14), by nature *cannot* confess from the heart Jesus as Lord (1 Cor. 12:3), by nature *cannot* inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50), by nature *cannot* control the tongue (James 3:8), and by nature *cannot* come to Christ (John 6:44-45, 66). In order to do any of these things, they must receive powerful aid coming to them ab extra (i.e., from outside themselves). So there simply is no such thing among men as a free will that can always choose the right if it wants to." (Reymond, quoted by Wright, 40q, 72).
- iii. Libertarian free will is not compatible with meticulous providence.
1. **Ephesians 1:11 (ESV) — 11** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,
  2. **Proverbs 21:1 (ESV) — 1** The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.
  3. **Proverbs 16:33 (ESV) — 33** The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD.
  4. **Proverbs 19:21 (ESV) — 21** Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the LORD that will stand. (20:24)
  5. **Proverbs 16:9 (ESV) — 9** The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.
- iv. Libertarian free will undermines biblical anthropology.

1. Our wills are in bondage to our nature...
  2. **Romans 8:7–8 (ESV)** — 7 For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God, for it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. 8 Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.
  3. **Ephesians 2:1–3 (ESV)** — 1 And you were dead in the trespasses and sins 2 in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— 3 among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.
  4. **John 3:3–5 (ESV)** — 3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” 4 Nicodemus said to him, “How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter a second time into his mother’s womb and be born?” 5 Jesus answered, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.
  5. **John 6:44 (ESV)** — 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him. And I will raise him up on the last day.
  6. **John 6:65 (ESV)** — 65 And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”
  7. **2 Corinthians 4:4 (ESV)** — 4 In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.
  8. Romans 1:18-32
    - a. Everyone hates God 1:30
    - b. No one seeks God 3:11
    - c. No one does God 3:12
  9. Only God’s efficacious grace can overcome our enslaved and stubborn wills.
  10. The human will is not some autonomous thing unconnected to the rest of our bodies. The will is intimately bound up and affected by our nature and our desires or affections.
  11. We are free, when we do what we want to do!!! Bottom line!!!
- v. If libertarian free will is necessary for real loving relationships, why doesn’t God have it?
1. God does not have the power of contrary choices, he can only make good choices, his choices are limited by his nature.

2. The most beautiful bond of love to ever exist is the love between the members of the trinity, and they can't choose otherwise...
- vi. Libertarian free will does not exist in heaven...
1. All Christians agree that it will be impossible to sin in heaven.
  2. In other words, are wills will not be free in heaven. Said another way, there will be no power of contrary choice in heaven.
  3. "Thus, the greatest plane of existence contains no hint of the unhindered libertarian free will that free-will theists argue for in this world." (Christensen, 98)
  4. Remember—free will theists argue that libertarian freedom is absolutely necessary for loving relationships...
    - a. Yet, if libertarian free will is so important for genuine loving relationships how do we explain its absence in heaven?
  5. "If libertarian free will is not necessary for freedom to exist in the greatest Being (God) or in the greatest place (Heaven), then how could it be necessary for human freedom and responsibility in the here and now?" (Christensen, 98)
- vii. Libertarian free will stumbles over divine foreknowledge.
1. If God knows all things about the future, then all our future decisions are fixed...
    - a. If God knows that you will have Wheaties for breakfast tomorrow, is it possible for you to have cheerios for breakfast tomorrow? No...
  2. According to libertarian free will, we can always choose differently... but not if God knows what we are going to choose.
  3. Jesus knew that Peter would deny him three times (Matt. 26:34). Considering this fact, was it possible for Peter to choose to deny Jesus only twice or four times? No!!!
  4. "The future cannot change the fixity of God's past knowledge. Therefore, the future itself is fixed, not merely because God foreknows it, but because he has foreordained it (Eph. 1:11). And what God foreordained, he foreknows." (Christensen, 99)
- viii. Libertarian free will hamstring God's providential care.
1. How does God respond to horrible evil?
  2. According to Libertarian free will,

- a. “God sits in heaven, wringing his hand in utter dismay, lamenting, ‘Oh!, How I wish I could do something to stop this horrific atrocity! But alas, free will is an intrinsic feature of my gift to humanity, and I am powerless to stop its exercise.’” (Christensen, 109)
3. Or he says,
- a. “Sorry, my dear child, unfortunate victim of senseless violence. The only way I could stop this from happening would be to violate the greater good of human freedom I have given to the perpetrators of this violence.” In this case God could prevent evil, but he simply would not. (Christensen, 109)
4. Imagine a cop watching a thug steal an old lady’s purse... he just watches. Then the oldy lady says to him, “why didn’t you stop the thug?” He responds by saying, “I did not want to violate his free will.”
5. God controls evil but he is not responsible for evil...
- a. Acts 2:22-23
  - b. Acts 4:27-28
- ix. Logic and experience must not guide this discussion.
- 1. Rather, the Scriptures must guide this discussion...
- x. Summary...
- 1. We looked at the free will defense.
    - a. Defined it
    - b. Discussed some of the problems it raises...

## Potential stopping place for lecture one...

### 2. From last week

- a. Summarize the free will defense...
  - i. For relationships to be real and loving we have to have free will....
  - ii. Libertarian freedom (our choices are not constrained by our nature, circumstances, or God’s providence)
- b. List the six/seven objections...
- c. Key terms
  - i. Freedom of inclination verses libertarian freedom
  - ii. Compatibilism
  - iii. This really all boils down to one’s view of humanity and one’s view of sovereignty...
  - iv. How far does God’s sovereignty stretch????

### 3. The Greater Good Defense-



a. Proponents

- i. Tim Keller
- ii. D. A. Carson
- iii. R.C. Sproul
- iv. John Piper
- v. John MacArthur
- vi. John Frame
- vii. Wayne Grudem
- viii. Etc...

b. Basic argument-

- i. “Good has multiple good purposes for evil in the world. Out of such evils come greater goods that could not otherwise come. These goods outweigh the evils that they overcome. Some good purposes are ascertainable, and some are not. The fact that some purposes remain hidden does not soundly argue against their existence.” (Christensen, 6)
- ii. This does not solve every problem related to evil, but it does help resolve the issue of why evil exists in the first place.
- iii. The greater good defense makes some crucial assumptions.
  1. “God’s ultimate purpose in freely creating the world is to supremely magnify the riches of his glory to all his creatures, especially human beings, who alone bear his image.
  2. God’s glory is supremely magnified in the atoning work of Christ, which is the sole means of accomplishing redemption for human beings.
  3. Redemption is unnecessary unless human beings have fallen into sin.
  4. Therefore, the fall of humanity is necessary to God’s ultimate purpose in creating the world.” (Christensen, 7)
- iv. The Greater good defense is rooted in the doctrine of compatibilism.
  1. “Compatibilism is the belief that two seemingly contradictory truths are in fact compatible with each other.” (Wright, 40q, 83)
  2. D.A. Carson lays out two important and seemingly contradictory truths
    - a. God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in such a way that human responsibility is curtailed, minimized, or mitigated.
    - b. Human beings are morally responsible creatures—they significantly choose, rebel, obey, believe, defy, make decisions, and so forth, and they

are rightly held accountable for such actions; but this characteristic never functions so as to make God absolutely contingent (i.e., dependent on something outside himself). (Carson, HLOL, 201)

3. Packer writes,
  - a. “Man is a responsible moral agent, though he is also divinely controlled; man is divinely controlled, though he is also a responsible moral agent. God’s sovereignty is a reality, and man’s responsibility is a reality too.” (Packer, EATSG, 23)
  
4. Extremes
  - a. Hyper Calvinism does not emphasize our real choices enough.
  - b. Arminianism does not emphasize God’s sovereignty enough.
  - c. Both attempts are logical, not biblical attempts, at solving the problem.
  - d. “The irony is that often Calvinism is disparaged as being logical but not biblical. The reality is that Calvinists are the ones who are willing to hold together the full scope of the Bible’s teaching.” (Wright, 40q, 88)
  
5. Is compatibilism in the Bible?
  - a. Yes...
    - i. **John 6:35 (ESV) — 35** Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.
    - ii. **John 6:37 (ESV) — 37** All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.
  - b. Sovereignty
    - i. **Ephesians 1:11 (ESV) — 11** In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will,
  - c. Responsibility
    - i. **John 3:36 (ESV) — 36** Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.
    - ii. **Revelation 22:12 (ESV) — 12** “Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense with me, to repay each one for what he has done.

d. Both ideas in one text

i. **Acts 2:23 (ESV)** — **23** this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.

ii. **Acts 4:27–28 (ESV)** — **27** for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, **28** to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.

iii. Passage after passage after passage in the Bible simply assume compatibilism.

6. Carson wants to guard this teaching (Compatibilism) with five truths.

a. First, no one completely understands how these truths fit together.

b. Second, God's control over good and evil is asymmetrical.

i. God directly brings about good.

ii. God indirectly brings about evil through secondary causes.

c. Third, we must rightly understand human freedom (it is bound by our natures)

d. Fourth, the God the Bible is supremely personal, yet he is immanent.

e. Fifth, many of our problems with compatibilism are rooted in the fact that we don't fully understand the nature of God. (Carson, HLOL, 214-218)

v. The greater good defense has a much better handle on the human will.

1. Describe freedom of inclination...

2. What is the Calvinistic or reformed approach to the will?

a. Calvinism teaches that people possess real freedom.

b. We always do what we most want to do.

c. Plus, the Bible makes it clear that we make real choices with real consequences.

d. Yet the Bible also makes it clear that our choices are profoundly affected by our nature.

e. We cannot and will not choose to do something that is inconsistent or contrary to our nature.

3. Great summary of the Calvinistic view of freedom.

a. "Calvinists teach that people have real freedom, a freedom to do exactly what they want to do. But their 'wants' are always determined by who

they are and by their motives at the time of their choosing. Scripture, not our sense of freedom, must determine how we interpret and understand our freedom as well as the freedom of unbelievers.” (Wright, 40q, 80)

- vi. This is known as compatibilist freedom or freedom of inclination not libertarian freedom.
  - 1. Libertarian freedom denies that our nature controls our choices.
  - 2. Libertarian freedom denies that God controls our free choices.
  - 3. Compatibilist freedom teaches,
    - a. “Even if every act we perform is caused by something outside ourselves (such as natural causes or God), we are still free, for we can still act according to our character and desires.” (John Frame, DOG, 136)
  - 4. Even God only acts according to his nature, yet he is free.
    - a. God will never lie, cheat, or steal, because it goes against his nature to do evil.
    - b. “His perfect freedom is bounded by his perfect nature.” (Wright, 40q, 76)
  
- vii. This approach is sometimes referred to by a Latin phrase *Felix Culpa*.
  - 1. This can be translated as fortunate fall.
  - 2. The fall of humanity was terrible in itself, yet it was a good or fortunate because it ultimately led to the maximum display of God’s glory in the cross.
  - 3. Illustration
    - a. “Imagine a commando in World War II who is dropped behind enemy lines posing as a German officer so he can get into a concentration camp and destroy the gas chambers. Imagine next that as he mingles with other officers, he sees a soldier preparing to execute a prisoner. This is an evil he could stop by simply shooting the soldier, but at what cost? He might save one person, but his mission is to save many. More lives would be lost in the long run if he prevents an individual death. On the other hand, more lives will be saved if he allows an individual death.” (Story of Reality, 89, Koukl)
    - b. “So now we are back to our original question. Might a good person allow something evil, even though he could stop it? Clearly, the answer is yes.

Even a good person might allow evil if he had a good reason to do so. He might (as we have seen in our example) allow a lesser evil if doing so would prevent a greater evil.” (Story of Reality, 89, Koukl)

viii. The bottom line-

1. The fall of humanity was not a mistake.
2. It did not catch God by surprise.
3. Nor was it the result of Adam and Eve’s free will, as most understand the term free will.
4. The fall was planned by God because it would eventually bring about his greatest glory.
5. No better world seems possible than the world that brings maximum glory to God through the cross and resurrection.
6. This perspective takes very seriously the Bible’s grand story of creation, fall, redemption, and recreation.

ix. Dr. Ware’s position

1. Freedom of inclination
2. Meticulous providence
3. Compatibilistic middle knowledge...
4. Story of Joseph...
5. God’s control of good and evil is asymmetrical...

c. Summary-

i. Speaking of the greater good defense, one author writes,

1. “It upholds the meticulous sovereignty of God, it is radically theocentric—God is squarely at its center. The problem of evil is resolved by focusing attention not on some ill-directed notion of human freedom and autonomy, but on how God’s actions in creation and providence serve to maximize his own glory. While we shudder at the shameful of Adam’s sin that thrust our world into a dark place, paradoxically we can cry out, *O Felix Culpa!* O Fortunate fall! That occasioned the need for a great Redeemer to display the riches of God’s glorious grace (Eph. 1:6).” (Christensen, 9)

ii. Explaining how God is going to use evil ....

1. “In Paul’s doxology in Romans he exclaims, ‘Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out.’ (Romans 11:33) These unsearchable paths of God—the thick, dark, heavy mysteries of Providence—are not absurdities; they are not meaningless. Their meaning is, however, largely opaque to us now. The morally sufficient reasons for these evils may be inscrutable, but they are not gratuitous.

Nevertheless, God promises his redeemed children that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28). (Groothuis)

#### 4. Application

- a. There are probably three groups of people present this morning...
- b. **The skeptic-** Maybe you are not convinced but what I have said! I would encourage you to keep looking into the issues. May I suggest Tim Keller’s book *The Reason for God*? May I also challenge you to look into what the other world views have to say about evil... and then compare their teachings with the Bibles.
- c. **The sufferer-** What can you do to escape evil and suffering? Look to Jesus and repent of your sins and trust him to come and dwell inside of you. Being a Christian does not mean that your life will be easy... but when you suffer you have someone to lean on and someday you have the promise that all your suffering will end.
- d. **The Christian-** What if you are a Christian how should you respond? Follow Christ’s example and look for ways to eliminate the suffering you see around you by loving, serving, and caring for those who are suffering and in need.

#### 5. Conclusion:

- a. “The problem of evil is a vexation not only for Christianity but for every worldview. While mysteries partially cloud our understanding of God’s governance of a corrupted self and cosmos, the Christian worldview better explains the meaning and end of evil than does any alternative perspective. It not only explains evil but gives rational hope for meaning amid suffering and hope for a better world to come.” (Groothuis)
- b. Just after the climax of the *Lord of the Rings* Samwise Gamgee realizes that his good friend Gandalf is not dead but alive. He says, “I thought you were dead! But then I thought I was dead myself! Is everything sad going to come untrue?” The answer that the Bible gives is a resounding yes... for Christians everything in this life that is sad will become untrue when Jesus returns. Let’s pray...