

Chapter 13:

Thinking About the Problem of Evil

This chapter considers four perspectives on the problem of evil. They are designed to contrast different views of God, origins, responsibility, as well as different views of evil, whether explaining it or dealing with it practically. The ideas below are simplified and summarized.

One word, descriptive but not official, has been chosen to identify each of the four perspectives.

1. Naturalist

- ♦ Entirely natural origins.
- ♦ No God and No religious text.
- ♦ The past and the future, along with all human choices are determined by the ongoing and consistent natural laws and processes.

2. Humanist

- ♦ Entirely natural origins.
- ♦ No God and No religious text.
- ♦ The past and future have not been determined; humans freely make choices.

3. Sovereign

- ♦ The universe and all life are created by God.
- ♦ Believe and base their lives on their Holy Scriptures.
- ♦ God is in control on the earth.
- ♦ Human choices, and everything that has happened and will happen, have all been determined by God according to His unchangeable purposes, or in His foreknowledge of a future that cannot change.

4. Delegated

- ♦ The universe and all life are created by God.
- ♦ Believe the Bible literally.
- ♦ Humanity is in control on the earth, because God delegated that authority.
- ♦ From the beginning to the present, people have freely made choices and continue to choose freely, now and into the future. Specific events have not been determined, even while God has unchangeable purposes that will be accomplished on the earth.

This book promotes the delegated perspective, and challenges the idea that the Bible teaches the sovereign perspective of God's control over the earth.

This chapter also challenges determinist ideas that human choices are determined: 'set in stone,' as in the Naturalist and Sovereign perspectives.

As beliefs become more personal and eclectic, and as religions diversify, modern groups or ideas become more difficult to place into one of the above perspectives. Those who seek a belief that matches our God-created reality, are on their way to the delegated perspective of the Bible.

Expanding the naturalist and humanist perspectives slightly:

- ♦ The initial origins exist but their sources are unknown – no God is needed.
- ♦ No law of the universe ever changes.
- ♦ Everything in the universe, and life on earth has evolved naturally.

The Origins and Expressions of Evil

1. On evil, the naturalist perspective is that

- ♦ 'Evil' and 'good,' with their human and natural expressions on the earth, also have their origins in the evolution of the universe.
- ♦ Every expression of both 'evil' and 'good' has been predetermined, because the natural laws controlling and ordering the universe do not change, and the direction they are taking the universe does not change.
There is no freedom of choice anywhere in the universe.
- ♦ There is no real way to identify 'evil' or to differentiate it from good. We cannot know whether we can or should deal with or correct the 'evil' in our world, however it is defined, and we cannot even know if 'evil' can or should be eliminated, since even our desires or attempts to correct 'evil' are determined.

2. On evil, the humanist perspective is that

- ♦ Evil has its origin in the evolution of the universe, somewhere in the evolutionary development of human life, intellect, and morality.
- ♦ In contrast with the naturalist, evil expressions on the earth have not been determined, since human choices are not predetermined.
- ♦ For the humanist, evil can be differentiated from good. There is natural evil, such as harmful disease, weather, or tectonic events, resulting from natural processes at work in and around our planet. There is also moral evil, such as slavery or murder, that exists because humans make bad choices.
- ♦ The humanist has hope in the evolutionary future that human choices will improve and be more responsible so that 'moral' evil will be reduced. There is also hope that future humans, by choices and by technology, will be able to limit the occurrence and impact of natural evil.

3. On evil, the Bible-based sovereign perspective is that

- ♦ The Good God created everything, and it was all very good.

- ♦ The originator of evil is generally believed to be Adam or Lucifer. The good God is not responsible for the existence of evil.
- ♦ Since God has determined everything, and allows evil to exist, both natural evil and moral evil owe their continued existence to God's own wise purposes, some of which He is working out in humanity and on the earth.
- ♦ Some of God's purposes deal fully with evil. In the Bible, He did this by destroying its power and authority in the work of Christ on the cross. Also, at the end of time, God will punish evildoers and eradicate evil, while providing the new heavens and new earth for His people.

4. On evil, the Bible-based delegated perspective is that

- ♦ The Good God created everything, and it was all very good.
- ♦ God created and creates evil as an option to good and as a consequence when a person chooses evil.
- ♦ Because God put humanity in charge on the earth, people freely choose badly and cause every manifestation of evil on the earth, both natural evil and moral evil, are caused by free human choice: the source of every evil that happens on the earth. God retained no direct, earthly authority to stop any evil.
- ♦ The delegated perspective generally agrees with the Biblical-sovereign perspective on how God deals with evil and evildoers.

These two, the Sovereign perspective and the Delegated perspective are both Bible-based, but they are incompatible: they cannot both be believed. One describes a determined reality and the other describes a non-determined reality. Either human choices are free, or they are not.

Practically Dealing With Evil

- ♦ For the **determinist**, for whom all events and choices are 'set in stone':
On average, the determinism of the **naturalist** and **sovereign** perspectives leads to a more passive approach to the evils of life. These are more prone to ask, "Can I really make a difference? How can I change what will happen anyway?"
- ♦ From the **sovereign** point of view, evil is a major enemy of God and is always hated. Evil is also defined and described in the Bible. Every opposition to evil is right, even if all actions are determined. Even thinking that nothing can be done to alter what will be, many still choose to oppose evil and pursue good.
- ♦ On the other hand, many **naturalists** would embrace evil as an unavoidable, even a necessary part of the universe. There is no basis for morality: nothing can be labeled good or bad since every action is determined by a disinterested universe of laws and process. Plus, each action/choice of each person is seen to be chemically determined in the brain, so that no one can be responsible and no one can be good or bad. Yet, inconsistently or not, opposing what is commonly called evil can engage the activities of some naturalists.

- ♦ For the **non-determinist**, for whom choices are free and **not** “set in stone”:
Built into the **humanist** and **delegated** perspectives are ideas that match the perceived reality that choices are freely made by responsible humans, and that these choices matter, and that they make a difference. These are more prone to ask, “How can I help correct a harmful situation?”
- ♦ From the **delegated** point of view, manifest evil is not necessary at all. Even though God created evil as a potential choice, no person is ever required to choose a bad option. In addition, humans are able to correct situations that have been characterized by evil. This is because those who believe and are led by God, also work with Him to correct evil’s effects and to prevent its potential harm. (See Chapters 11 and 12.)
- ♦ From the **humanist** point of view, the universe will always have evil. Yet, evil is seen to be bad; it is not embraced. Because real choices and actions cause evil manifestations, further consequences can be avoided by making better choices, and even be corrected or have the effects reduced.

The humanist, who sees people as responsible and freely making choices, could have an advantage over many who believe that God is in control on the earth. Such believers may hesitate to fix something because it might be God’s pre-determined will. These are careful not to presume what the Sovereign God might want. They might also expect Him to take care of problems, as He knows best. None of this will slow down the humanist who is eager to make the world better. In practice, however, as described late in chapter 7, we marvel at the multitudes of believers who are sensitive to notice needs and are eager to help as opportunities are available to them.

Although humanists accept the ‘choices matter’ reality in which we live, they neither know nor believe in the God Who created this reality. They thus have clear disadvantages. Here are four:

- 1) They do not communicate with God to find out what He wants. Some act to change their world, but without knowing God’s ways, their work could be immediately futile, or eventually undone.
- 2) They do not have the Bible, which supports communication with God, identifies much that is clearly evil and worthy of effort to eradicate, and provides instructions on how to stand and fight the powers that support evil. The Bible and God also help with obtaining spiritual strength to stand and win when facing entrenched evils, powerful enemies, or desperate wickednesses, which are harming our world.
- 3) Even if their work is in line with God’s purposes, the unbeliever does not access divine wisdom, support, tools, or resources that would make their opposition to evil more productive and of better quality.

- 4) They do not have confidence that their efforts have the support of Almighty God, nor do they have His armor or Refuge (Chapters 12,14).

The reality we all experience – it rings true inside – is that choices matter. Even so, many things are big and feel outside the control of any person or group. Two general ideas about reality, as seen by the secular world, by the Naturalist or the Humanist, are: 1) Chemical reactions have always been behind everything that happens, and determine our actions and their effects. This could be called: the 'natural-law-is-in-control,' or 2) Random natural processes are behind what happens. This is more mystical and could be called: the 'universe-is-in-control'. Is there any freedom or responsibility in either of these or in a combination of the two? There seems to be a strong impetus to find non-divine reasons to explain what happens on the earth and beyond. They include reasons in science, philosophy, religion, etc. These encompass humanity, but do not include a deity. Missing their Creator, they are limited to human wisdom.

Regardless of any explanation, the reality that we know, feel, and experience is:

1. every one of us freely makes consequential choices from available options,
2. the particular reason for each choice is our own, regardless of how we came to have the options,
3. we are responsible for each choice we make, and
4. we are in charge of our world.

Our experienced reality is that our world is neither determined nor random, as the delegated perspective describes. God revealed that He created such a world.

Using the problem of evil to reject God

Many unbelievers or atheists bring up the problem of evil as a reason not to believe in a God Who is in control on the earth. Their assumption of a divine inconsistency gives them a validation of their decision to reject the Creator, the Bible, and any God or holy book of any religion, as well as any 'divine' solution to any supposed 'sin' problem. The God they reject, however, is the Sovereign God Who has the power and desire to do something about the evil that they see and experience, but Who instead allows massive amounts of evil in our world. Unbelievers hate this evil and would prevent it ... if they could ... if they had God's power. They thus deem their personal morality to be more noble than the morality of 'that Sovereign God'.

But these have serious issues when using the problem of evil to reject God:

- ♦ Naturalists not only see no difference between evil and good, but they must also see no difference between God and non-God. Being consistent requires acknowledging that those who believe in God are determined in their belief, erroneous as it may seem, just as much as any unbeliever is determined.

- ♦ Honest unbelievers, secular or religious, must admit that they, too, have a problem explaining the existence or non-existence of evil. When comparing thoughts, ideas, and philosophies about the origin and nature of evil, including how to define it, how to deal with it, or how to find solutions for it, the Bible is shown to have the most consistent, real, and coherent understanding. This has been true while believing that God is in charge on the earth, both allowing evil and addressing/solving the issues that evil causes. This answer has not been complete, but it is far better than any found by unbelievers when they turn the searchlight inward.

Now the excuse of a good God allowing evil on the earth is eliminated.

Delegation is a new realization, which removes a major excuse for unbelief. With His act of delegating earthly authority and responsibility, the Sovereign God,

- ♦ limits His own activity on the earth, and
- ♦ has no direct authority on the earth – none – to prevent or to remove any evil.

It is no longer possible to assume or to theorize an inconsistency in the Bible's God 'allowing' evil – bad things – on the earth. People are entirely responsible. Questions about God's involvement in the existence and manifestations of evil in the earth are answered. The delegation perspective revealed in Genesis 1 gives a completeness to the Bible's explanation of evil.

The unbeliever's moral high ground is eliminated; any exalting of a personal morality that says 'I hate evil more than God' is invalidated by this truth. The Sovereign God is NOT in charge on the earth; the Creator of all gave all direct earthly authority to humanity. He is Good and Almighty, yet God's permanent delegation of direct earthly authority means that He – God – cannot stop any appearance of evil on earth without authorization from someone He put in charge. God is consistent; He waits for human authorization before He acts to advance His purposes.

Evil is Defined and Explained in God's Created Reality

All who claim to hate evil should define it as the Bible does, and see human responsibility for it, even to root it out as the Bible teaches. The truth of reality and of the Bible is that evil manifests in our world only because people have chosen badly. This replaces the illusion that God allows evil to happen or to remain on earth – it is wrong to hold God responsible for any of the evil that we see on the earth.

While the 'problem of evil' is no longer available as a reason for not believing in the God of the Bible, people still choose to believe, or not. But now the Bible's clear explanation of evil (Chapter 1) should encourage belief in the Good God, Whose existence with evil fits our lived reality. Believers are able to deal more

effectively with the evil in their world, to eliminate it, and to be consistent in life, in belief, in practice, and in understanding. God could help them – believers into Christ, who have new life and are adopted into God's family – with personal directions, blessings, and resources to live a more fulfilling life on earth.

God and Evil

- ♦ God is entirely Good and Powerful – beyond comparison with any being or with anything that has ever existed.
- ♦ God is pure in His goodness. For God, every expression in action, and every limitation of action, is always good and right.
- ♦ God does no evil.
- ♦ God chooses no evil.
- ♦ God does not impose or force any bad choice which would cause any evil consequence to happen on the earth or to oppose His purposes.

God Creates

- ♦ God created the earth and all life on it entirely good.
- ♦ God created humans, the pinnacle of His creation and in His image having the ability to choose freely from available options.
- ♦ God created and creates evil: God creates the bad options from which people can choose and the destructive consequences that happen when the corresponding bad option is chosen. Both are good creations of God. Both are necessary, since otherwise, people would have only good options from which to choose.
- ♦ God created a world in which the appropriate result happens for each choice.

God Delegates

- ♦ God put humanity in charge on the earth.
- ♦ God put everything under humanity's feet.
- ♦ At God's blessing and command, people subdue the earth and all life on it.
- ♦ By His creation of option, consequence, and choice, God gave people the free ability to change, break, correct, fix, and alter their world to be more blessed or to be more cursed.
- ♦ Thus, God made people responsible for everything that happens on the earth.
- ♦ With this delegated authority, and with the ability to choose good or evil, to fix or break, people are rightly judged for the effects of their choices and actions, and are entirely responsible for the condition of their world.

God is Good and Powerful; He delegated all direct earthly authority.

- ♦ God is not able to act on the earth without human authorization.
- ♦ God is not able to stop any person from choosing evil.
- ♦ God is not able to prevent any consequence of a wrong choice ... every effect of every choice must happen in the earth.

- ♦ God is not responsible and not to blame for any of the evil on the earth.
- ♦ God is not responsible to fix any of this world's problems.
- ♦ God does not change or fix what is broken on earth, except in participation with a human or group of humans having authority.

Summary

These lists describe the new perspective – new lenses through which to see the complete solution to the problem of evil. God has not hidden this; He has revealed much about this part of the reality He created; evil has always had a clear explanation. This truth is not accessible when believing that the Good and Almighty God exercises direct authority over the earth. In the Bible, God immediately acted to delegate in Genesis 1:26-28.

Certainly, God is God, and He acts on the earth in mighty and amazing ways, but He does so within the scope of human authority over the earth. By His choice, direct authority over the earth is not His, so if we want Him to stop evil, or to fix it, or to judge it, then we work with Him. Because He is good, and because evil is bad, we think that He should act against it ... but that is not enough. He will act, when working with a person or group having authority on the earth.

His delegation to humanity is complete and entire: *over all the earth*. If God had reserved even a small right to intervene without regard to the authority He delegated to humanity, all of the problematic questions remain valid, such as, “Who really has responsibility or authority?” and “Why does He not fix the entire mess?” These questions do not, however, respect the way that God created the world to work, as He revealed and confirmed in His Word.

So we embrace the fact that humanity is in charge on the earth. The Creator established this reality immediately after creating the first human. We are each responsible for our personal world, and other big or small worlds, as God directs. Each of us has the necessary authority and dominion to protect and to fix our world; this is our God-created reality. If we do not believe this, how can we confidently take charge of our world(s)? Certainly, believing this detail gives us new challenges, but we believe all of God's written revelation to us.

God is wise. He knows what He did. He never wrings His hands about how poorly people handle their dominion over the earth. He does not intervene or otherwise overrule the authority He gave to humanity, and neither does He withdraw as the strict Deist would say. In the Bible, and every day throughout history to the present day, God has been and is active on the earth. We need Him to be. We have allowed evil here and have made a mess on the earth, but in relationship with God, His people receive His wisdom and resources to exercise earthly authority properly, and to bless this planet.

Chapter 14:

A Protected Place

Actively pursuing God's plan for our lives, we find and fix the evil that has assaulted us (Chapter 12 of this book). In relationship, we receive His wisdom and His resources. For this, we need and we have His armor, which we wear for personal protection. We also have spiritual weaponry and an amazing shield.

But there is more: God also provides a safe dwelling place. Book 1: Chapter 11 considered several types of evil mentioned in Psalm 91, and considered God's provision of deliverance from evil as well as the protection available in God as our Refuge. This chapter focuses on our protection in God.

Much is considered, and it is organized under three main headings:

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| I. God's Provision of Sure Protection. | Page 201 |
| II. What Kind of Protection do we have? | Page 210 |
| III. How do we Access this Protected Place? | Page 216 |

I. God's Provision of Sure Protection.

We need this place. We remember the blameless Job, who was blessing his world in every good way, and was being blessed abundantly; we remember that even this Job lost almost everything.

- ♦ Protected, while being blameless makes sense.
- ♦ Protected, as a part of being blessed makes sense.
- ♦ Protected, while serving God makes sense.

Yet, even though all three were true of Job, Satan took almost everything from him. Book 1: Chapters 4 and 10 describe how Job was at fault. For a long time, Job's family and possessions and ministry were secure; he may not have asked for this security, or expected it, or even known that he was protected, but later he was unprotected: God told Satan that Job was vulnerable since he was overwhelmed with the fear of losing all of his blessings (Job 3:25).

Four lessons:

1. Protection is not certain for those who are blameless,
2. Protection is not guaranteed to come with any other great God-given blessing,
3. Protection is not assured by a life of constant service to God, and
4. Protection is precarious for a person gripped by fear, which, in fact, almost guarantees loss ... according to the fear.