

# THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

## INTRODUCTION

A lot of bad things happened during the year 2001; the terrorist attacks of September 11, the murder of Sir Peter Blake and the Panmure RSA killings where three people were murdered. Out of this has emerged what many are calling the word of the year. It is a word that has been brought to the fore by President George Bush. This word is even found in the Lord's Prayer. That word is the word "evil". It is a terrible word really, that can be used in no other way. It is amazing to notice that if you reverse the word "evil" you get the word "live". The opposite of life and all that is worth living is the word "evil".<sup>1</sup>

It has been my experience that on the majority of occasions that when I talk to a person who has not yet accepted Christ as their personal savior concerning salvation. The conversation inevitably leads to the question "why if there is a loving God does He allow human suffering?" Following the events of September the Eleventh, members of my family asked me "why God allowed such suffering?" This is the main reason why I requested that a paper on Apologetics be included in my degree plan in the first place. Having completed the essay above whose basic structure has been derived from Josh McDowell's Book "The New Evidence That Demands A Verdict" I believe that the question remains unanswered and so I would now like to go on to explore the area.

As Kreeft and Tacelli point out the topic is very important for several reasons.

1 The problem of evil is important in that evil is universal and people all over the world wonder why bad things occur. The very fact that we find evil abhorrent actually points to the fact that we have all been created with a sense of morality, a sense of right and wrong. This sense points to a moral God.

2 The problem of evil is not merely a dry academic intellectual question but an intensely practical question that every human being who has ever lived has cried as they look at the condition of the human race.<sup>2</sup>

Steve Kumar expresses the urgency of the question in these words.

"Nothing disturbs our existence more than the tragic reality of evil. Indeed, the trouble that troubles humanity is trouble. No one escapes it or can ignore it. The reality of evil touches every level of our lives. Its existence staggers our minds and moves our hearts. Pain, cruelty, calamities, injustices, and death disturb us and leave us helpless. How frequently one hears statements like, "I believed in God until my child was killed in an

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<sup>1</sup> Pastor Tak Bhana Sermon 27 January 2002 10:45 am

<sup>2</sup>Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Page 123 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

accident.” “Why do people suffer?” “Why are babies born blind and many maimed for life?

If there is a God, why did he allow Hitler, Stalin, Idi Amin, and Pol Pot to murder the innocent? If God exists, how could He allow these tragic wars? These are pressing questions which every reflective and sensitive mind frequently ponders –questions which we must face both intellectually and existentially”<sup>3</sup>

In a commentary of Ecclesiastes Chapter 8, Warren Weirsbe observes sooner or later that any thinking person has to encounter the problem of evil face to face. King Solomon certainly did. For a person who does not believe in God the only entity that they can blame for the presence of evil in the world is mankind but to do so is to admit that mankind has sinned, to deny a loving God who provides for salvation once this has been admitted is to face an eternity without any hope. Such people “become either agnostics or atheists, but in so doing, they create a whole new problem: “Where does all the *good* come from in the world?” It’s difficult to believe that matter *alone* produced the beautiful and enjoyable things we have in our world, even in the midst of so much evil.”<sup>4</sup>

On the other hand if one does not believe in a loving God then one must answer the question “why if there is a God who loves why does evil exist?” Solomon, widely portrayed in ancient literature as the wisest man who ever lived, was one who was willing to honestly face the problem. How did he do so?

“Solomon didn’t deny the existence of God or the reality of evil, nor did he limit the power of God. Solomon solved the problem of evil by affirming these factors *and seeing them in their proper perspective*. We must not forget that one major sources of evil in this world is fallen man and his “many devices,” both good and evil, that have helped to create problems of one kind or another (7:29, NASB). God certainly can’t be blamed for that!”<sup>5</sup>

The word “evil” is used to describe such people as Osama Ben Liden, Adolf Hitler, Joseph Stalin and countless others. However we do need to go to Europe, America or the Middle East to find evil. Evil is present in our own country, New Zealand. Evil is even closer than that. Evil lies within the human heart, within me and within you. The word “evil “ is used over six hundred times in the Bible; regretfully the word “evil” is frequently used in association with people. Paul in Romans 7 vividly describes his own inner struggle with evil. Matthew 7: 11 shows the Lord describing the people of Israel generally as evil. Lest we think that this does not apply to us, how many of us when we were younger deliberately knocked something that someone else had built, a castle or a pack of cards. How many of us have knocked down someone’s reputation in order to

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<sup>3</sup> Kumar page 39

<sup>4</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, Ec 8:1 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1990).

<sup>5</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Satisfied*, Ec 8:1 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1990).

establish our own? Most of us at some point in time have been guilty of doing these things.

The seed of evil that knocks down what other people have built is similar to the evil that brought down the twin towers. It is the same desire to destroy and destruct. However there is a difference. The difference is that the seeds of evil that permitted the terrorists to take down the twin towers was that the seeds of evil in the terrorists was permitted to grow. Those seeds were permitted to grow and to mature until finally they permitted a horrific act. But the root of the deed started as a seed that was unchecked. The seed was never confronted or removed.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Pastor Tak Bhana Sermon 27 January 2002 10:45 am

## WHAT IS EVIL?

Geisler and Bocchino “consider evil to be a real lack or privation in a good thing. Evil is not a substance, but a corruption of a substance. Just as when we turn off a light in a room darkness appears, so too does evil appear when good is not where it ought to be... Evil can only exist in something as a corruption of what ought to be there.”<sup>7</sup>

The Hebrew concept of evil is that of spoiling, breaking into pieces, something been broken in such a way that something of former value becomes worthless. It describes something that is “essentially what is unpleasant, disagreeable, offensive. The word binds together the evil deed and its consequences.”<sup>8</sup> In the Old Testament the English word “evil” translates the Hebrew word “ra”.<sup>9</sup>

In the New Testament the English word “evil” translates the Greek words “*kakos*”, “*poneros*”, and “*phaulos*”. These words describe the essential quality of evil in terms of the hurtful effects and influence of evil. Clearly evil is a word that is wider in its definition than sin, which refers to missing the mark or standard. Evil is the consequence of missing the mark. Evil can be thought of as the devastating result of original sin. “Much physical evil is due to moral evil: suffering and sin are not necessarily connected in individual cases, but human selfishness and sin explain much of the world’s ills. Though all evil must be punished, not all physical ill is a punishment of wrongdoing (Lk.13: 2, 4; Jn.9: 3; cf. Job).”<sup>10</sup>

Kumar traces the historical routes of our understanding of evil.

“Historically, evil is understood in terms of the Latin word *negatio*. Evil is defined in negative terms, e.g. ungodly, unrighteous, unhappy etc. To know what is ungodly we have to understand “godly”. Evil is meaningful only with the good, it is contingent and dependent, an absence of good: not a positive quality but a negative. Evil is not a being but a parasite of being. Hence evil is a bad relationship between good things.”<sup>11</sup>

## COMING TO TERMS WITH THE NATURE OF THE PROBLEM

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<sup>7</sup> Geisler and Bocchino page 234

<sup>8</sup>D. R. W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. /, Page 348 (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

<sup>9</sup>James Strong, *Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, H7451 (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship, 1996).

<sup>10</sup>D. R. W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. /, Page 348 (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Kumar page 52

Geisler and Bocchino distinctly state the problem before us. Christians claim that God is all-powerful, all-intelligent, eternal and supremely good being.

“Yet it seems to be the case that if this God created all things, and if evil is something real, then he must be the author of evil. Therefore, when we consider that this God is infinitely powerful and He could stop evil, and that He is infinitely good and He should stop evil, it appears to make no sense that evil exists. In fact the perceived quandary becomes more intense in light of the Bible’s claim that God is all loving and just. If so, why doesn’t He stop evil?

The existence of evil seems to contradict the Bible’s description of the nature and attributes of God. Consequentially, it is our task to show that the Bible correctly affirms both the existence of evil and God, and accurately describes both the nature of evil as real and the nature of God as all-powerful, good, loving and just. So, if this God exists, as theists claim, then why is there evil? And if there is evil, where is this theistic God when evil is running rampant, and why doesn’t He do something about it?”<sup>12</sup>

Any apologists or theologian who does not to attempt to address this question has made a serious mistake, this is because their apology or theology falls short of addressing the one universal cry of the human heart “Why do I hurt so?” If this question cannot be addressed and answered satisfactory our theology and apologetic defense remains confined to the philosophical world of ideas and idealism, not of truth and reality. Christianity then becomes a mere religion just like any other without substance and legitimacy, something that is impractical and unviable. As Kumar states, “if we avoid these questions, then we have nothing to say to a troubled world.”<sup>13</sup> Yet on the other hand if we as apologists and theologians can demonstrate that the Biblical explanation of evil and of a Supreme God, who is all loving, all intelligent, all powerful and always present is valid then the Gospel becomes the most powerful essential and life giving message on this planet. In short the Gospel becomes the only hope for mankind because it alone describes the way reality actually is and we must not shrink from powerfully proclaiming its message.

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<sup>12</sup> Geisler and Bocchino page 230

<sup>13</sup> Kumar page 41

## **APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEM OF EVIL**

There are a number of approaches to the problem of evil.

1 Atheism believe since there is evil there is no God. “The presence of evil in the world is not compatible with the nature of God.”<sup>14</sup>

Kreeft and Tacelli argue that the problem of evil challenges three central tenants of the theology of God.

“There seems to be a logical contradiction built in to affirming all four of the following propositions:

- (1) God exists.
- (2) God is all-good.
- (3) God is all-powerful.
- (4) Evil exists.

Affirm any three and you must deny the fourth, it seems.

If God exists, wills all good, and is powerful enough to get everything he wills, then there would be no evil.

If God exists and wills only good, but evil exists, then God does not get what he wills. Thus he is not all-powerful.

If God exists and is all-powerful and evil exists too, then God wills evil to exist. Thus he is not all good.

Finally, if “God” means “a being who is both all-good and all-powerful,” and nevertheless evil exists, then such a God does not exist”<sup>15</sup>

Kumar points out that Christians have responded to this line of argument in a number of ways.

- 1 God is good. Satan exists and he is responsible for evil.
- 2 Evil exists, but God will finally defeat evil and demonstrate that He is All-powerful.

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<sup>14</sup> Kumar page 42

<sup>15</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Pages 128-129 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

- 3 Suffering does occur but it is a means of bringing about understanding of God's nature.
- 4 Redemption only makes sense in the light of evil's existence.

It has been my experience that none of these arguments is fully satisfactory to the atheist and leads only to further questions. In order to satisfactorily answer the atheist we must understand their line of reasoning.

Atheists argue that since evil exists, God does not exist. Kumar points out that the atheist argument is faulty for the following reasons. The argument is self-refuting. The atheist argument misses the truth at several key points. Firstly the idea of evil does not disprove the existence of God. The statement can be asserted but no proof can be found to confirm its validity. "The point of the matter is that evil has nothing to do with the existence of God. In reality the problem of evil questions God's character not his existence."<sup>16</sup>

Secondly the atheist argues that evil is abhorrent, in doing so they make a moral statement. We have to ask the atheist where does morality come from. It should be remembered that an atheist is one who believes in a pluralistic society in which there are no absolutes. Since there are no absolutes everything is relative. If everything is relative then there can be no absolute standard of morality. If one denies the existence of a good God then one does away with absolute standards of morality and every man is free to do that which is good in his own eyes. Thus Hitler is able to exterminate millions of Jews because he considered that to be good. Did you notice how preposterous and abhorrent that previous statement appears? Yet that sentence is the logical extension of a society that rejects an absolute standard of morality.

"Atheists stand on a moral principle and charge God for breaking the principle. The point is, where did this principle come from? Not from society, for what is society but a group of individuals, and we don't get principles and values just by approaching them. We don't determine truth by counting noses. If society can produce absolute moral standards, then who could argue against Hitler's society for killing the Jews? Philosopher Richard Purtill correctly observes

"If our rationality and morality do not come from God they come from chance permutations of some basic stuff or from the working of mindless forces. In either case, they have no validity."<sup>17</sup>

The atheistic view of evil is totally inadequate in the light of reality. It is subjective, arbitrary and meaningless "<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Kumar page 47

<sup>17</sup> Kumar page 46 Richard L Purtill Reasons to Believe (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans 1974 ) page 96

<sup>18</sup> Kumar page 46

J L Packer commenting on the fact that God has chosen to reveal himself generally to all mankind alludes to the danger of the atheist position.

“Scripture assumes, and experience confirms, that human beings are naturally inclined to some form of religion, yet they fail to worship their Creator, whose general revelation of himself makes him universally known...

Scripture explains this state of affairs by telling us that sinful egoism and aversion to our Creator’s claims drive humankind into idolatry, which means transferring worship and homage to some power or object other than God the Creator (Isa. 44:9-20; Rom. 1:21-23; Col. 3:5). In this way, apostate humans “suppress the truth” and have “exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles” (Rom. 1:18, 23). They smother and quench, as far as they can, the awareness that general revelation gives them of the transcendent Creator-Judge, and attach their ineradicable sense of deity to unworthy objects. This in turn leads to drastic moral decline, with consequent misery, as a first manifestation of God’s wrath against human apostasy (Rom. 1:18, 24-32).

Nowadays in the West people idolize and, in effect, worship secular objects such as the firm, the family, football, and pleasant feelings of various kinds. But moral decline still results, just as it did when pagans worshipped literal idols in Bible times.

Human beings cannot entirely suppress their sense of God and his present and future judgment; God himself will not let them do that. Some sense of right and wrong, as well as of being accountable to a holy divine Judge, always remains. In our fallen world all whose minds are not in some way impaired have a conscience that at some points directs them and from time to time condemns them, telling them that they ought to suffer for wrongs they have done (Rom. 2:14ff.); and when conscience speaks in these terms it is in truth the voice of God.

Fallen humankind is in one sense ignorant of God, since what people like to believe, and do in fact believe, about the objects of their worship falsifies and distorts the revelation of God they cannot escape. In another sense, however, all human beings remain aware of God, guiltily, with uncomfortable inklings of coming judgment that they wish they did not have. Only the gospel of Christ can speak peace to this distressful aspect of the human condition”<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology : A Guide to Historic Christian Beliefs* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House, 1995, c1993).

2. According to Kumar, it is a common feature of eastern religions to deny the reality of evil. Buddhism and Hinduism both consider evil to be a mere illusion. “With its concept of monism that all diversity is mere illusion and ultimate reality is both One and Good, eastern religion denies the reality of evil.”<sup>20</sup> “Christian Science and much new age thinking,” states that “evil is an illusion of unenlightened human consciousness.”<sup>21</sup> We must ask the idealist to explain why evil seems so real if it is merely an illusion.<sup>22</sup> The Holocaust was not an illusion. The slaughter of millions during Stalin’ rule in the Soviet Union was not an illusion. The hunting down and subsequent murder of innocent aborigines in Australia was not an illusion. Apartheid was not an illusion. Perhaps we are justified in stating that to believe that evil is an illusion is to believe in an illusion without substance or reality.

Kumar takes evil to its logical conclusions. “If evil is an illusion, it is pointless to try to improve the conditions of life. Hence the destitute would be left to starve, the sick left to die, there would be no need to have hospitals, schools and universities. Learning would cease and a new dark age would descend the earth. Thus we reject this view as inhuman and impossible.”<sup>23</sup>

3. “Finally, biblical theism... affirms all four propositions and denies they are logically contradictory. In order to understand the Theistic perspective it is necessary to clearly define certain Key words. These terms are *good*, *evil*, *all-powerful* and *happy* are used ambiguously; regrettably they are frequently used in ambiguous ways.<sup>24</sup> Kreeft and Tacelli suggest that words like good, evil, all-powerful and happy are all terms that have more than one possible meaning and people frequently use these terms in different ways when debating the question of the problem of evil.

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<sup>20</sup> Kumar page 47

<sup>21</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Page 129 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

<sup>22</sup> Geisler and Bocchino page 231

<sup>23</sup> Kumar page 48

<sup>24</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Page 129 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

## UNDERSTANDING THE BIBLICAL LANGUAGE ASSOCIATED WITH EVIL.

### Evil

People make two common errors concerning evil. Either we tend to perceive evil as a being or get confused between physical and moral evil. Augustine reached the conclusion that evil is not a being. Augustine argued that God was good; anything he made would therefore inherently be good therefore he could not create an evil being. Some are quick out that Satan is a created being. However it should always be remembered that the Bible informs us that even Satan was created good, the extent of his present moral corruption is an indication of the extent of his fall.

Kreeft and Tacelli then ask where does evil exist and respond?

“Augustine defines evil as disordered love, disordered will. It is a wrong relationship, non-conformity between our will and God’s will. God did not make it; we did. That is the obvious point of Genesis 1 and 3, the stories of God’s good creation and humanity’s evil fall.

The point, once seen, is so simple and obvious that we take it for granted. But without it, we would very likely embrace one of two popular heresies: either (1) the idea that we, not God, are the creators of good, the denial of Genesis 1, or (2) the idea that God, not we, is the creator of evil, the denial of Genesis 3. (New Age pantheistic idealism combines both of these heresies”<sup>25</sup>

The question still remains, “where did evil come from?” Some say Adam and Eve but where did they get it from? Some say Satan, but where did Satan get it? Does this imply that God created evil? Satan was created Lucifer one of the highest Angels God created he was permitted to dwell in the very throne room of God. Isaiah 14:12-15 shows that Satan started off as someone who was beautiful and good. This passage has been used by many scholars to suggest that Satan allowed evil to come into being when he said in his heart that he would ascend to heaven and set up his throne above God’s stars. Satan desired to climb to the highest heaven and become like God. John 8:44 describe Satan as the father of lies.

The question has to be asked where did the pride that would eventually lead to Satan’s rebellion come from. Colossians 1: 15-16 informs us that God created all things for Him and His glory. If we were to think of evil as a thing this verse would imply that God created evil. However throughout Genesis chapter one it is stated that God created everything good. Is it conceivable that God would call evil good? The answer is obviously no. Evil therefore cannot be a thing since God created everything good. Evil is obviously not good so where did evil come from?

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<sup>25</sup>Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Page 133 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

Pastor Tak Bhana suggests that evil arises when God's created beings taking the good that God has created beyond the boundaries for which it was created. Satan was created as Lucifer the shining one, but went beyond the boundaries and desired to become like God when he did this he rebelled against God and was cast out of heaven. That which was created good became evil when taken across its boundaries.

When God created man he was given a boundary not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. When Adam and Eve crossed this boundary and ate from that tree evil entered into the heart of man.

Now let us make this more practical, let us look at some specific areas of life.

1       Pride. Pride is an emotion that was created good. We can be proud of our families or our careers. However when we take that pride and begin to compare ourselves against others in such a way that we put down others and exalt ourselves then it becomes a source of evil.

2       Killing. Killing in itself when used within the boundaries that God intended is not wrong. There are certain times when killing is permitted; we are permitted to kill to provide food. However God put a boundary on killing, we were not to kill people.

3       Sex. Sex is very good when observed within the marriage context. Outside of the marriage boundary, sex becomes sinful and abhorrent to God.

4.       Anger. Anger is not something that is wrong in itself. The Bible portrays God as getting angry, we are told in Ephesians 4:26 that we are permitted to get angry but we are not to let that anger cause us to sin. Anger is okay but becomes evil when taken beyond its boundaries.

5       Sleep. Many of us love sleep. Sleep is good, however when taken beyond the boundaries sleep becomes sin. Slothfulness and laziness arise when we desire too much sleep and rest.

6       Food. Many of us enjoy eating. When we eat too much it becomes sin.

7       Greed. Greed arises from a desire to have good things like having nice things in the home and things that will bless the family. It is healthy natural and proper to desire good things but the desire for good things crosses the boundary when we want too many good things. Covetousness and greed arise when the desire for good things becomes excessive.<sup>26</sup>

So God did not create evil. God created good things that He wants us to have and enjoy. Evil arises when we take our desire for the good things that God has created beyond the boundaries for which He intended.

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<sup>26</sup> Pastor Tak Bhana Sermon 27 January 2002 10:45 am

It can be argued that the sins I have mentioned above are on an individual scale and not on a national or international scale. It should be remembered that world leaders who are still basically human but whose position and circumstance enables them to influence the world on a much larger scale. However the inner desires and motivations that lie within them are the same that are within each one of us.

James 1:13-14 tells us that God is not the source of temptation. However each person is tempted, when by his own evil desire he is dragged away and enticed. When the desire is surrendered to it gives birth to sin, sin when full-grown gives rise to death.

This suggests that the chaos we experience in life arises when we yield to the desire to sin.

We have seen that God is not the author of moral evil but can it be said that God is the author of physical evil. Unless we can prove that there is a direct connection between physical evil and sin we have to respond in the affirmative.

In addressing the question of the relationship between moral and physical evil we have to remember that our bodies are not separate from our souls, inner personality or psychological make up. This is what is meant by psychosomatic unity. Once this has been accepted, it is logical that if our inner most persons become alienated from God because of sin, then it follows that our bodies will also become alienated from God and experience pain and suffering as an inevitable consequence of sin. Note the principle of psychosomatic unity is preserved in that both our body and soul become separated from God but both are still intact as one unit. The inner torment that sin brings in our inner selves is projected onto the physical world through physical suffering.

If the above is to be the true explanation of physical evil then the crucial thing about Genesis 3 is not how we interpret the chapter but rather did the account historically happen. Kreeft and Tacelli explain

“For if the modernist is right and Genesis 3 is only a fable that teaches that each of us sins, and that Adam and Eve are only symbols for Joe and Mary, then we have two terrible consequences.

First, if there never was a real time of innocence, then God did not make us good, as Genesis 1 says he did. If from the beginning we were sinners, then we can trace sin back to our beginning; and “in the beginning, God.” Thus God is to blame for creating sinners.

Second, if the fall is only what each one of us does, why have none of us ever resisted the forbidden fruit? ...

There are two powerful arguments for the historical truth of Genesis 3.

First, nearly every tribe, nation and religion throughout history have a similar story. One of the most widespread “myths” (sacred stories) in the

world is the myth of a past paradise lost, a time without evil, suffering or death. The mere fact that everyone innately believes the same thing does not prove that it is true, of course; but it is at least significant evidence...

A second piece of experiential evidence for a historical time of innocence and a historical fall are the four most salient facts about the human condition:

1. All desire perfect happiness.
2. No one is perfectly happy.
3. All desire complete certainty and perfect wisdom.
4. No one is completely certain or perfectly wise.

The two things we all want are the two things no one has... The fact that we gloriously and irrationally disobey the first and greatest commandment of our modern prophets (the pop psychologists)—that we do *not* accept ourselves as we are—strongly points to the conclusion that we must at least unconsciously desire, and thus somehow remember, a better state.<sup>27</sup>

Having established a rational basis for the biblical account of the fall, Kreeft and Tacelli point out that there is a close connection between the fall and the corruption that is evident in our present experience of the created world.

“To help understand creation and the fall, the image of three iron rings suspended from a magnet is helpful. The magnet symbolizes God; the first ring, the soul; the middle ring, the body; and the bottom ring, nature. As long as the soul stays in touch with God, the magnetic life keeps flowing through the whole chain, from divine life to soul life, body life and nature life. The three rings stay harmonized, united, magnetized. But when the soul freely declares its independence from God, when the first iron ring separates from the magnet, the inevitable consequence is that the whole chain of rings is demagnetized and falls apart. When the soul is separated from God, the body is separated from the soul—that is, it dies—and also from nature—that is, it suffers. For the soul’s authority over the body is a delegated authority, as is humanity’s authority over nature. When God the delegator is rejected, so is the authority he delegated. If you rebel against

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<sup>27</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Pages 134-135 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

the king, his ministers will no longer serve you. Thus both suffering and sin are traced to man, not God.<sup>28</sup>

We have now established that when originally man sinned he became alienated from God. That alienation affected not only the human physical body but also the whole of creation.

The New Bible Dictionary has the following to say concerning the origin of evil.

“Sin was present in the universe before the Fall of Adam and Eve (Gn. 3:1f.; cf. Jn. 8:44; 2 Pet. 2:4; 1 Jn. 3:8; Jude 6). The Bible however does not deal directly with the origin of evil in the universe, being concerned rather with sin and its origin in human life (1 Tim. 2:14; Jas. 1:13f.). The real thrust of the demonic temptation in the account of the Fall in Gn. 3 lies in its subtle suggestion of man’s aspiring to equality with his maker (‘you will be like God ...’, 3:5). Satan’s attack was directed against the integrity, veracity and loving provision of God, and consisted in an enticement to wicked and blasphemous rebellion against man’s proper Lord. In this act man snatched at equality with God (cf. Phil. 2:6), attempted to assert his independence of God, and hence to call in question the very nature and ordering of existence whereby he lived as creature in utter dependence upon the grace and provision of his creator. ‘Man’s sin lies in his pretension to be God’ (Niebuhr). In this act, further, man blasphemously withheld the worship and adoring love which is ever his proper response to God’s majesty and grace, and instead paid homage to the enemy of God and to his own foul ambitions.

Thus the origin of sin according to Gn. 3 ought not to be sought so much in an overt action (2:17 with 3:6) but in an inward, God-denying aspiration of which the act of disobedience was the immediate expression.”<sup>29</sup>

### **The problem of mans free will**

God is completely free from evil and sin; there is no way in which a God who is holy, loving, just and merciful in His essential being can be responsible for evil.

“God created human beings with the potential and the capacity to choose good or evil. He created the possibility of evil but not the reality. Thus God is not the author of evil...In essence, sin is the abuse of free will, the misuse of what is good.”

Immediately we read this we feel compelled to ask why could not God make man without the possibility of evil. To do so would be to create something less than man, for man has been created in the image of God with the ability to choose. To create man without the ability to choose is to create something that is not man but a robot or an android. To

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<sup>28</sup>Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Pages 134-135 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

<sup>29</sup>D. R. W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. /, Page 1106 (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).

create man requires choice, choice logically requires “the existence of things to choose between.”<sup>30</sup>

Norman Geisler and JY Amanu point out that

“Without free choice, neither good nor evil could be chosen. Hence, if man is ever to choose the good, he must have the freedom to choose evil, as well. Therefore since free will is the cause of evil, imperfection (evil) can arise from the perfect (not directly, but indirectly through freedom). In other words, whereas God created the *fact* of freedom, man performs the *acts* of freedom. God made freedom possible, creatures make it actual.”<sup>31</sup>

Determinists argue that hereditary factors and environmental conditioning determine human action. Christianity argues that this not the case although hereditary and environmental factors condition our actions they do not determine what we do. What determines what we do is determined by the exercise of our free will. At times our free will choices will be conditioned by our hereditary and environmental conditioning but this need not be so.

The clearest evidence that we are created with free will is the vocabulary we use to encourage and assign blame to one another. We use words to morally shape one another; such words would be foolish if we were to use them to address a machine or computer. We still need to ask the question why did God create humans with free will as part of their make up. The simple answer is that if we were born without the capacity for free will we would be less than humans we would be mere animals or machines. God did not create us as animals or machines but humans who in exercising our free wills have the capacity to relate not only to one another but also to God Himself.

### **Don't Christians say that God is all- powerful**

Christians maintain that God is omnipotent. To say that God is omnipotent means that God is all-powerful. However this seemingly gives rise to a problem. For many people find it incomprehensible that a God who is all-powerful would create a world with the possibility of evil. This becomes the question of why did not God create a world without sin.

“The answer is that he *did*, according to Genesis 1 and 2. Evil's source is not God's power but man's freedom. Then why didn't God create a world without human freedom? Because that would have been a world without humans, a world without hate but also without love. Love too proceeds only from free will. Animals cannot love, they can only like, or be affectionate. But isn't a world with free human beings but no sin possible? It is indeed. And God created just such a world. But such a world—a world in which no-sin is freely possible, is necessarily a world in which sin is also freely possible. And if there are human beings at all, that is,

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<sup>30</sup> Kumar page 53

<sup>31</sup> Geisler and Amanu page 241

creatures with free will, then it is up to their free choice whether that possibility of sin is freely actualized or not...

At first, God's omnipotence seems to contribute to the making of the problem of evil, for there seems to be a contradiction between evil and an omnipotent God. But in reality, omnipotence contributes to the *solution* to the problem of evil, by enabling God to providentially bring good even out of evil, to make all things work together for a good end for all who love him, who freely choose to enter his plan (Rom 8:28)... God's solution to evil is like a fairy tale; he "writes straight with crooked lines." In his painting, each dark shadow contributes to the overall light; in his plot, every terrible event aids the wonderfulness of the end. We are not yet at the End, so this cannot yet be seen or proved. But it can be believed and lived, as the "theological virtue" of hope"<sup>32</sup>

### **If Evil exists, why do Christians say that God acts for our good?**

This leads us to the question of what is goodness. Goodness must be distinguished from kindness. To be kind is to exercise the will to free one from pain and suffering. However we all know that in order to be kind may not necessary lead to the good of the person we are concerned with. Witness a patient in a dentist's hand, the kind thing may be to avoid the pain but this would not help the patient. We may argue that the dentist is not kind, but no one would argue that the dentist is not acting for the patient's benefit. Yet some people reverse the logic when it comes to God. They argue that a kind God would remove all pain and suffering, since he does not remove immediately all pain and suffering He is not good, so they refuse to have anything to do with him.

We who are parents know that we have to go beyond kindness. We can afford to be kind to a neighbor's children but if our own child does what we would allow a neighbor's child to get away with are we not more demanding on our own children. If an animal is intense pain, we may put the animal to permanent sleep but if our child is in pain do we act in the same way?

"We have higher hopes for humans: we hope not just for freedom from pain but also freedom from vice and ignorance and sin. God allows suffering and deprives us of the lesser good of pleasure in order to help us toward the greater good of moral and spiritual education. Even the pagans knew that: the gods teach wisdom through suffering. Aeschylus wrote:

Day by day, hour by hour,  
Pain drips upon the heart  
As, against our will, and even in our own despite  
Comes Wisdom from the awful grace of God.

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<sup>32</sup>Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Page 138 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

God let Job suffer not because he lacked love but precisely out of his love, to bring Job to the point of the beatific vision of God face to face (Job 42:5), which is humanity's supreme happiness. Job's suffering hollowed out a big space in him so that a big piece of God and joy could fill it. Job's experience is paradigmatic for all saintly suffering.

A further question is whether any suffering would have been necessary for us if we had not fallen. Would we still have to have suffered to be trained in wisdom? Is the explanation of suffering as "soul-making" limited to a fallen world, where sinners have to learn "the hard way"? If Adam had not fallen, would it still have been painful for him to sacrifice his will to God's will? We do not claim to know the answer (though we suspect it is no). In either case God is "off the hook." He allows only the evil that can work for a greater good for us. Not all that we do is good, but

All that God does is good, including *not* miraculously interfering to deliver us from all evil. That would be like parents doing all their children's homework problems for them."<sup>33</sup>

### **What does it mean to be happy at more than a superficial level?**

Finally we must distinguish between a shallow definition of happiness and a deeper fuller meaning of happiness. The shallow meaning of happiness is a subjective temporary feeling of happiness that is normally caused by an external event that is not directly under your control. Such happiness normally involves such things as bodily pleasures, prestige or health. Job 20:4-29 powerfully depicts the fate of those who seek shallow happiness. "Their life is brief (Job 20:4-11), their pleasure is temporary (vv. 12-19), and their death is painful (vv. 20-29)."<sup>34</sup>

The deeper meaning of happiness is "evident in the Greek word *eudaimonia*", such happiness is an objective permanent state that lasts a lifetime that is directly under our control and normally involves such things as wisdom and virtue that are acquired by experience and practice.

"Divine providence arranges our lives in light of true happiness as our end, because God is good and loving. This does not necessarily include happiness in the shallow sense. In fact, to be truly happy, we need to be deprived of much happiness in the shallow sense. For true happiness requires wisdom, and wisdom requires suffering...

Deep happiness is in the spirit, not the body or even the feelings. It is like an anchor that holds fast and calm on the bottom even while storms rage on the surface. God allows physical and emotional storms to strengthen the

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<sup>33</sup>Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Page 140 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

<sup>34</sup>Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Patient, An Old Testament study.*, Job 20:4 (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor Books, 1996, c1991).

anchor; fires to test and harden our mettle. Our souls must become bright, hard, sharp swords. That is our destiny and his design. We are not toys; we are swords. And that requires tempering in the fire. The sword of the self is to sing in the sun eternally, like the seraphim. If we could catch even a glimpse of this heavenly destiny, if we understood why we are destined to judge angels (1 Cor 6:3), we would not see a problem in the sufferings of Job. Teresa of Ávila said that the most miserable earthly life, seen from the perspective of heaven, looks like one night in an inconvenient hotel.”<sup>35</sup>

Now we are in a position to use the definitions that we have uncovered to resolve the problem of evil.

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<sup>35</sup>Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Pages 141-142 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

## RESOLVING THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

1 Spiritual evil results from sin. The consequence of sin is that we become alienated from God.

2 Since God has created us with a free will there is within all of us the capacity to exercise our free will against that of God's will, when we do so we disobey God and sin.

3 God allows sin because He has elected to preserve free will, since in order to relate to same one that person must have the capacity to exercise free choice.

4 The nature of physical evil is suffering. When Adam and Eve originally sinned mankind became alienated from God. The created line of delegated authority God to Man. Man to the physical world was broken and distorted. This break and distortion lead to a world that is out of order and in chaos hence physical suffering.

5 Physical evil is a consequence of spiritual evil, ultimately we suffer because we have all sinned and go on sinning.

6 God in his providence and goodness has chosen to use physical evil as a spiritual discipline which ultimately when the Gospel is comprehended and understood leads to ultimate maturity and eternal joy.<sup>36</sup>

From this we see that the Biblical account offers the most logical and plausible explanation of reality, including the presence of evil and physical suffering, as it really is. Modern psychology advocates that we are innocent. However this conflicts with the biblical view that each of us is guilty before an almighty God for the wrongful acts that each of us commits. Our wrongful acts have a devastating effect not only upon our inner world, but our relationship with God our immediate families and ultimately the entire world and living universe.

Pain is experienced universally, the Bible address this problem through the doctrines of original sin and vicarious atonement.

“The only two ways God could have avoided having the human race fall into this sin, which becomes hereditary and innate, would be (1) not to give us free will in the first place, that is, to create animals, not humans; or (2) to create us like angels: radically individual, not in a family, not in a hereditary oneness. The very best things in life come to us through our families, but so do the very worst.

The other Christian doctrine that addresses the problem of the unjust distribution of evil is the doctrine of vicarious atonement”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Kreeft and Tacelli page 142

<sup>37</sup> Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Page 125 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

The question has to be asked, “What do we mean by vicarious atonement?”

Vicarious atonement refers to the fact that Christ took our place on the cross, probably the cruelest means of execution the world has ever seen, paid the price of our sin and made it possible for you and I to be saved. But we have to ask on what basis? Gerhard Kittel explains

“Christ comes from God to judge and destroy sin (2 Cor. 5:21). The sinless Jesus became sin in vicarious atonement through crucifixion and resurrection. Christ can represent us because of our solidarity in sin. Thus the Christ event overcomes sin for us all. Its coming to us releases us from sin and constitutes us anew. Justified by faith, we have remission of sins (cf. Eph. 1:7). By fellowship with Christ in baptism, we are dead to sin (Rom. 6:2). Having died to it, we are free from it (6:7), we are no longer under the law (6:14), we are the servants of righteousness (6:14), and we need not continue in sin (6:1). Freedom from sin means the obedience of faith (cf. 14:23) and is expressed in love of the brethren (1 Cor. 8:12).”<sup>38</sup>

Kreeft and Tacelli explain why Jesus death upon the cross was necessary in order to solve the problem of evil.

“To love evil is to become evil, to succumb to it. But to hate evil is also to succumb to it. For it is practically impossible (1) to avoid Pharisaic self-righteousness and (2) to hate sins without hating sinners. Finally, (3) to hate at all is to become hard and dark and negative; even hating evil hardens us into haters.

Jesus’ simple answer was, in one word, *forgiveness*. Forgiveness neither condemns nor condones. It admits that evil is evil; it doesn’t say, with the bland indifference of pop psychology, “There’s nothing to forgive.” It dissolves the glue between the sinner and the sin and sets the sinner free. Repentance does the same thing from the side of the sinner. Repentance and forgiveness work together like a reverse epoxy.

It seems impossible for God to solve the dilemma of justice versus mercy, but we know from the Gospel account how he does it. The problem is that he cannot, it seems, do both; he must either exact the just penalty for sin—death—or not. Mercy seems a relaxation of justice, and justice a refusal of mercy. Either you punish or you don’t. The laws of logic seem to prevent God from being both just and merciful at the same time, just as the laws of physics prevent a body from being two different places at the same time.

God solves this dilemma on Calvary. Full justice is done: sin is punished with the very punishment of hell itself—being forsaken of God (Mt

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<sup>38</sup>Gerhard Kittel, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Translation of: Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament., Page 50 (Grand Rapids, Mich.: W.B. Eerdmans, 1995, c1985).

27:46). But mercy and forgiveness are also enacted. The trick is to give *us* the mercy and *him* the justice.

One way of explaining how it “works” that may be helpful is the following. One body cannot be in two places at once, but two different bodies can. The sinner with his sin cannot receive simultaneously just punishment and merciful forgiveness; but Christ’s vicarious atonement separates the sin from the sinner. We can only mentally distinguish the sin from the sinner; Christ really separates them. The sin receives its just punishment in his own divine person on the Cross-, and we sinners receive mercy and forgiveness in our own persons.

That is why the biblical formula for what we must do to be saved from sin is “repent and believe.” Objectively Christ accomplished salvation on the cross, but subjectively we must accept him and his separation of sin from sinner. Our repentance and faith is our yes to this; our impenitence and unbelief is our no.<sup>39</sup>

However, unless Christ’s vicarious atonement is personally appropriated it remains to us individually a mere historical event. Oswald Chambers addresses this issue when he responds to the question “How can God readjust a seared conscience and make it sensitive again?”

“He can, and it is done by the vicarious Atonement of our Lord. “How much more shall the blood of Christ . . . purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?” (Hebrews 9:14). When the Holy Spirit comes into me, my whole nature is in a desperate turmoil because immediately a man sees Jesus and understands who he is, that instant he is criticized and self-condemned. If the Holy Spirit is obeyed He will make the Atonement of the Lord efficacious in me so that the blood of Christ cleanses my conscience from dead works and I become readjusted to God. The experimental element that works this transforming mystery of the Atonement becoming my vital life is repentance wrought in me by the Holy Spirit. The deepest repentance is not in the sinner, but in the saint. Repentance means not only sorrow for sin, it involves the possession of a new disposition that will never do the thing again. The only truly repentant man is the holy man. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” To *admit* instead of *confess* is to trample the blood of the Son of God under foot, but immediately we allow the Holy Spirit to give us the gift of repentance, the shed blood of Christ will purge our conscience from dead works and send us into heart-spending service for God with a passionate devotion.

If I allow the saintly conscience to have way in me it will mean that I keep my own life steadfastly open towards God and keep steadfastly related to Him on the line of intercessory prayer for others. The clearinghouse for a

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<sup>39</sup>Peter Kreeft, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics : Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions*, Pages 127-128 (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1994).

guilty conscience is that by our intercession Jesus repairs the damage done to other lives, and the consolation to our conscience is amazing. The saintly conscience means that I maintain an open scrutiny before God, and that I carry out the sensitiveness gained there all through my life.<sup>40</sup>

The heart of the Gospel is that God loves us each individually so much that He sent His only Son to die for us in our stead but doing so the atonement Christ made not only affects our own individual destiny but also that of the physical world.

“God’s whole saving activity is directed to deal with evil. In his life, Christ combated its manifestations of pain and sorrow (Mt. 8:16–17); but the cross is God’s final answer to the problem of evil. His love was supremely demonstrated there (Rom. 5:8; 8:32) in the identification of the Lord with the suffering world as the Sin-bearer. The moral change effected in men by the gospel is evidence of the reality of Christ’s triumph over all evil powers (Col. 2:15; 1 Jn. 3:8), and therefore of the final victory of God. Evil will be eliminated from the universe, and the creation will share redeemed man’s glorious destiny. Both physical and moral evil will be banished eternally (Rev. 21:1–8).”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Oswald Chambers, *Our Brilliant Heritage* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1996, c1929, 1931, 1930). Containing also *Grow up into Him* and *As He Walked*.

<sup>41</sup>D. R. W. Wood, *New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd ed. /, Page 349 (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996).