

Overall Class Objective: To gain biblical perspective on the problem of evil for the purpose of strengthening personal faith and equipping believers to answer concerns of unbelievers.

#### Class Overview\*

1. Clarify the categorization of the nature of evil
2. Understand the issues and scope of the problem of evil
3. Identify the biblical constraints regarding the problem of evil
4. Explore the two primary approaches to the problem of evil
5. Consider the various theories of theodicy
6. Describe the concept of inscrutability as applied to the problem of evil
7. Reflect on the biblical example of the greater good theodicy
8. Explain the licensing and limiting controls of greater good theodicy in the Bible
9. Delineate what the work of Christ teaches about the problem of evil
10. Note how eschatological events of the Bible give perspective to the problem of evil

\*Acknowledgement: The general structure of this class is adapted from an essay by Greg Welty entitled, The Problem of Evil. This class is based on the belief that the Bible is true and accurate in what it says about God and the world.

#### Notes

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- I. How should we categorize evil?
  - A. "Natural" evil
    1. Natural evil is a result of the effects of nature, directly or indirectly, upon people.
      - a) Examples of this aspect of evil are seen in disease, floods, drought, famine, hurricanes, tornadoes, volcanic eruptions, earthquakes and tsunamis.
      - b) Related to this category could be human error or carelessness. These would involve actions through which suffering was directly or indirectly inflicted upon others without malicious intent.
  - B. Moral evil
    1. Moral evil pertains to the evil acts of human beings.
    2. Examples of moral evil would include assault, murder, rape, theft, injustice and dishonesty.
- II. What is the problem of evil?
  - A. The "problem of evil" is an argument against the existence of God based on these assumptions:
    1. A perfectly powerful being **can** prevent any evil.
    2. A perfectly good being **will** prevent evil as far as he can.
    3. God is perfectly powerful and good.
    4. Thus, if a perfectly powerful God exists, there will be no evil.
    5. There is evil.
    6. Therefore, God does not exist.
  - B. If it is maintained that God and evil co-exist, it is asserted that either God cannot be all-powerful (because is unable to prevent evil) or that he cannot be fully good (because he doesn't care to prevent evil) .
    1. The problem of evil is further exacerbated by the belief that God is all-knowing (omniscient) since he would be aware of the presence of all evil and know beforehand all the evil effects of anything he created or allowed.
  - C. The problem of evil is generally viewed from two different perspectives, logical and evidential.
    1. The **logical** problem of evil concludes that it is logically impossible for a omnipotent and benevolent God evil to coexist with evil.
    2. The **evidential** problem of evil concludes that the scope and quantity of evil in the world makes the existence of a good and powerful God highly improbable.
  - D. The problem of evil is a problem for everyone not just those who believe the Bible.
    1. It is common for unbelievers to refer to evil as tragic or horrible or some similar term.
    2. However, if there is no God, one should expect such a world without seeing it as a problem.

3. C. S. Lewis well describes this difficulty: "My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of just and unjust? A man does not call a line crooked unless he has some idea of a straight line."
4. If God exists, we must explain why evil is present. But if God does not exist, the skeptic must explain why he finds evil objectionable.

III. What constraints does the Bible put on the problem of evil as described in the six points above?

- A. We affirm premise #5. The Bible acknowledges, describes and records the presence of evil.
- B. We affirm premise #1. The Bible presents God as omnipotent (all-powerful) and therefore could prevent evil.
- C. We affirm premise #3. According to the Bible, God is perfect in power and goodness.
- D. We cannot affirm premise #2. The Bible does not assert that God must prevent all evil. God may have justified reasons for using evil and such reasons do not compromise his goodness.

IV. What are the two primary approaches to addressing the problem of evil?

- A. One approach is called theodicy (derived from the word for God and the word for justice). The idea of theodicy is to justify the character of God in view of the presence of evil.
  1. Theodicy seeks to demonstrate that God has good reasons for permitting evil.
  2. This approach sees premise #2 (that a good God would prevent evil) as false asserting that a good God will **not** always or necessarily prevent evil.
- B. A second approach is called inscrutability.
  1. Inscrutable is defined as "incapable of being investigated, analyzed, or scrutinized; impenetrable."
  2. This approach argues that premise #2 is unproven because no one can know enough to conclude that God does not have good reasons for permitting evil.
  3. Due to the complexities of divine providence and the limitations of finite humanity it is to be expected that we will not be able to discover the purposes of God in allowing evil in his plan.

V. In what ways has theodicy been formatted ?

- A. Two approaches to theodicy are based on speculative logic and are not directly endorsed in Scripture.
  1. Free will theodicy suggests that moral evil exists because it is a necessary correlate of freewill. In other words, to be truly free moral agents, we must have the option of making evil choices.
    - a) From this argument God is seen to be justified in permitting evil because it is necessary to provide the value of free will.
    - b) It could be noted that though God is a free moral agent, he does not have this option nor will the inhabitants of the new earth.
  2. Natural law theodicy asserts that the laws of nature are necessary to a stable environment but allow for the possibility of natural disaster which, in turn, can lead to loss of life, livelihood and property.
    - a) That God allows natural evils to occur is justified because a world without natural laws would be a worse world. In other words, God's purpose in allowing natural evil is motivated by a greater good.
- B. Four other proposed approaches to theodicy each have some biblical support.
  1. The punishment theodicy argues that suffering is a result of God's punishment of evildoers.
    - a) Gen. 3:14-19; Rom. 1:24-32; 5:12; 6:23; 8:20-21; Isa. 29:5, 6; Ezek. 38:19 Rev. 6:1,2; 11:13; 16:18
  2. The soul-building theodicy asserts that suffering leads us from self-centeredness to other-centeredness.
    - a) Heb. 12:5-11; Rom. 5:3-5 2Cor. 4:17; Jas. 1:2-4; 1 Pet. 1:6, 7 cf. Prov. 10:13; 13:24; 22:15
  3. The pain-as-God's megaphone theodicy says that pain is used by God to get the attention of unbelievers in a non-coercive ways in hopes of bringing about repentance. Luke 13:1-5
  4. The higher-order-of-good theodicy claims that some virtues cannot exist without the evils to which they are a response.
    - a) There is no courage without danger, no sympathy without pain, no forgiveness without sin, no atonement without suffering, no compassion without need, no patience without adversity.
    - b) Eph. 1:3-10; 1 Pet. 1:18-20