

EQUIPPING THE SAINTS

"...FOR THE EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS FOR THE WORK OF SERVICE..." ~ EPHESIANS 4:12

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OVERWHELMED BY THE PROBLEM OF EVIL?

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Over the years I have written and taught a good bit concerning the problem of evil. The topic is never easy, and, admittedly, there are times when the issue seems more pronounced and difficult than at other times. From natural disasters to the sheer wickedness of sinful people, we are forced to face the problem. That is to be expected. We naturally ask, "Why?" when something happens that results in so much pain and loss. How can God allow some of these things to happen when it seems so needless? From our perspective, we find this difficult to grasp and our faith is tested.

While there are many aspects concerning this issue that are significant, and we would never want to oversimplify such a complex matter, I have personally come to fall back on two primary issues in helping to keep my own faith in check. I remind myself of these, and while all the questions are not answered, I can still find peace. This does not exhaust all that should be considered, by any means, but here is what calms my soul when I begin to feel overwhelmed by the problem of evil.

1. The nature of God. I realize that the nature of God is attacked directly because of the problem of evil (how can He be both all-good and all-powerful?), but such attacks invariably miss the bigger picture. If we could but back up

and realize that God's nature is such that He fully grasps the entirety of the situation in which we see bad things happening, and if we could understand what He does, then I'm confident that we would come to different conclusions than where our narrow, limited, finite view of reality often takes us. God, as the owner of life and death, has the wisdom and knowledge to be able to do far more abundantly beyond anything we can ask or think (Eph. 3:20). This is the God of Scripture, after all, and if we are going to critique God, we need to allow for all that Scripture attributes to Him.

If my lack of understanding of total reality, with all the intricacies of how that reality connects and pans out through all events, keeps me from being able to acknowledge that God does have such wisdom and understanding, then my own ignorance and smallness is the problem. I cannot, legitimately, use my limited understanding as the final judge on God's wisdom or actions. If I try to bring Him down to my level or if I try to use evil to dismiss Him, then I have simply transferred His wisdom and knowledge to myself. The nature of God calms me because I can recognize that He knows what's happening and that He has bigger plans and purposes based upon a complete picture of reality that I could never have.

At this point I can choose to trust Him or deny Him. I choose to trust Him, for to deny Him is to grant to myself more wisdom and knowledge than can ever be warranted.

2. The defining of evil. One of the major problems that unbelievers have is in how they define evil. If there is no God, then what is the final reference point for defining and understanding good or evil? Atheist Richard Dawkins

has written, “at bottom, no design, no purpose, no evil, no good, nothing but pitiless indifference” (River Out of Eden: A Darwinian View of Life). If this is so, then defining evil is nothing more than defining preferences that have come about through mindless, purposeless, accidental, chance forces. These forces cannot be good or evil, they cannot care anything for justice, and they have no ultimate goal in mind, for there is no mind to direct anything. Saying that something is “evil” would only be saying, “I personally don’t like that.” Subjective whim would be the defining factor.

The moment, then, that I begin questioning God because of “evil,” I have to stop and ask, on what basis can I even call something evil? Unless God is there, there is no good or evil, and debating this would be a moot point. Again, I’d be arbitrarily defining evil as a personal, subjective preference, and if I think I should be able to do that, then I should allow others to do the same. Then where are we?

Evil is not a thing that we can grab and hold onto. Augustine argued that evil was the privation of the good. The truth is that we cannot define evil on its own terms, but only in light of what we see as the good. In other words, we don’t define good based on an evil standard; rather, we define evil based on a good standard. The moment we begin to think about the problem of evil, we are, essentially, forced to consider the good as the grounding point for thinking about the problem. Yet, and this is the critical point, we cannot begin to process what is good if, at bottom, there is no good because there is no God.

Thinking about the definition of evil helps to calm my soul because it reminds me that there is a good standard that evil has violated. I’m not happy about the evil, but I can

take comfort in knowing there is good. And that brings me right back to point 1: the nature of God.

Conclusion

The problem of evil can sometimes feel overwhelming, but with a few reminders we can keep our faith in check. I like to remind myself of God’s nature first. While there are reasons why evil is in this world, He still manifests Himself as a God of grace who will redeem us out of this evil. Evil has a day of reckoning.

Then I like to remind myself that evil can only be understood and defined if there is a good standard to begin with. Such an objective standard cannot exist unless God is its grounding. Otherwise, there would be nothing but pitiless indifference from mindless processes.

I choose to trust God, and this keeps me from being overwhelmed. *[Borrowed from blog.moyerpress.com]*

NOTES: _____

AM LESSON: Coping With Catastrophe		
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	PM LESSON: The Suffering Church (Revelation 4-16)	
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“GO THEREFORE AND MAKE DISCIPLES...”
(MATTHEW 28:19-20)