

A Light in the Valley

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Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

Evil and God's Love

by: Doy Moyer

One of the strongest objections to the existence of the biblical God is the existence of evil (moral, physical suffering, natural disasters, etc.). The argument is that the reality of evil is opposed to the concept of a loving and all-powerful God. If God were powerful enough and loving enough, then He would abolish evil. But since evil exists, then God is either not loving or not powerful. Either way, evil is said to disprove the God of the Bible. The Greek philosopher Epicurus (342-270 B.C.) argued this: if God wants to prevent evil, but cannot, then He is not all-powerful; if He can prevent evil, but will not, then He is not good. If He has both the power and the will to eliminate evil, then why is evil in the world?

A couple of serious issues with this view have often been raised: first, with no God, and no ultimate standard by which to call something evil, then those who bring up this problem have created their own additional problem. Let the objector define that standard by which

anything is to be judged as "evil." If there is no ultimate standard of goodness, then how can one consistently talk about evil? Second, much of what is called "evil" can be directly attributed to the free will of humankind. God could abolish evil by destroying free will, but it is doubtful that many would desire this. Yet there are other flaws to the position.

To argue that evil and God cannot co-exist, one must assume that there are no good purposes or outcomes that can be served by God allowing evil and suffering to exist. God, who not only is all-loving and all-powerful, is also all-knowing and all-wise. This is the God we are talking about, not a dumbed-down version of God who is no wiser or greater than our finite minds can allow. He is able to do far more abundantly beyond anything we can think (cf. Eph. 3:20). This means that there may be reasons of which we cannot be aware for why He might allow evil to continue for a time. We cannot cite our ignorance

of reasons as a reasonable argument to deny God. Ignorance is no argument. Who can really prove that the existence of evil and the existence of an omnipotent and omnibenevolent God are mutually exclusive? That argues what cannot be proved because it would require knowledge of all factors that may contribute to an understanding of this issue. That would make one God, and then the argument wouldn't be necessary because that one would understand.

Scripture does not ignore this issue. In fact, the whole theme of the Bible is built upon the reality of evil (i.e., God's plan for salvation). This theme culminates in

The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

(2 Peter 3:9)

God Himself entering into this world of sin in order to suffer on our behalf, and it is this very suffering that proves once and for all that God loves us more deeply than we can comprehend (cf. John 3:16; Rom. 5:8). In other words, no one can look at the cross of Christ and argue that God does not love us. He Himself has been touched by the evil in this world, and contrary to what many argue, He has indeed done something about it. The gospel is the result.

As for His power, let no one assume that God will not deal with evil in His time. People who argue that God would do something about it if He were powerful enough miss the point that 1) God has done something about it in Christ, and 2) God will do something about it in final judgment. Evil has a day of reckoning (cf. 2 Pet. 3; Acts 17:30-31).

The fact that God has not yet brought this judgment argues for His longsuffering and desire that all people be saved from sin (2 Pet. 3:9). One day that will end, but, in the meantime, we need to pay attention to the opportunities we have to be saved by His grace. Both His power and love are demonstrated in His reaching out to us in order to save us, but those opportunities will not last forever. Our lives are but a vapor.

Of course, this is a deep and serious issue, and we recommend that those who so desire pursue further studies regarding God and the problem of evil and suffering. More importantly, we need to pursue a relationship with God Himself, who loves us and has given ample time for people to repent of their sins and turn to the Shepherd of their souls.

Feelgoodism

by: Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

I know that word does not pass the spell check test. It is not even in the dictionary – but it ought to be. If Mr. Webster, or whoever is in charge of adding new words to dictionaries, wishes to add **my contribution** to our language, he can feel free to copy and paste it along with my definition:

Feelgoodism (fil-gōd-is-m) >>

The doctrine that the prime purpose of Christianity is to make its adherents feel good, especially about themselves.

This “doctrine” is very pervasive and those who teach and practice it seem to be completely oblivious to being influenced by it. Here are a few times when people show they are subtly affected by it:

1. When attendants at church services are mostly there to hear something to feel good about.
2. When preachers/teachers feel their best when their hearers feel best about themselves.
3. When one allows “feeling good” to trump plain Bible teaching.

Should Christians not want to feel good and cause others to feel good (after all, “gospel” means good news or glad tidings)? But, is that what their major goal should be?

Consider the preaching/teaching done in both testaments. “Repentance” was the recurring theme because repentance was the recurring need. Godly sorrow is a necessary ingredient in Scriptural repentance (2 Cor. 7:10). One of the reasons the apostles received the Holy Spirit was to convict the world of sin. (John 16:8). Before one can repent, he must first feel bad about himself and his condition. Satan would like nothing more than to convince us to do only what makes us feel good rather than “what saith the Scriptures.” Feelgoodism plays right into his hands.

Often we hear good people emphatically declaring how sure they are of salvation. When asked how they can be so sure, they reference the good feeling they have in their hearts – without referencing a single verse of Scripture that would justify that feeling.

People often conclude that anything that makes them “feel so good” could not possibly be wrong. They feel that God wants them to be happy and what they are doing makes them happy – case closed.

The most frequent reason that I hear for forgiving a brother who has sinned against us, without his repenting and asking, is that it makes us feel so good for having done the magnanimous thing. But, the question needs to be raised about whether it is the Scriptural thing to do. And is it in the best interest of the offending party to be forgiven without repentance?

Forgiveness before repentance presents some real problems in applying various scriptures:

Luke 17:3: *“If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him”.*

Matt. 18:16-18: *“And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear thee not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican.”* (ASV). At what point in this scenario is the offended party told to forgive him? At each juncture “if he hear” implies if he repents then forgiveness should take place with the matter settled. The idea is to hold him accountable until he hears (heeds) the rebukes rather than washing our hands by going ahead and forgiving him anyway.

1 Thessalonians 3:6: *“... withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly...”* How do you withdraw from him if you have already forgiven him?

No doubt, part of the problem is that folks confuse **deferring** forgiveness with an unforgiving spirit, grudges, and hatred. Nothing is further from the truth. As we seek to bring one to repentance so he can be forgiven, we must sincerely **want** to forgive him, harbor no grudges, and love him even as we love ourselves. And when he does repent we will forgive and rejoice with the angels in heaven.

Let us measure every facet of our lives as Christians by what the Bible teaches rather than how good or bad we may have come to feel about things. Hope can make us feel really good. So can false hope. We need to learn the difference by growing in our knowledge of God’s word.

May we always remember how deceptive our feelings can be: *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?”* (Jeremiah 17:9 KJV)

The Separation of God's People

by: David Hartsell

The Lord is pure, "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (1 Jn. 1:5). His righteousness only highlights man's sinfulness. Our Savior's love outshines man's sins by washing them all through the blood of His precious sacrifice (Rom. 3:23-26). Each person accesses the forgiveness of sins through the special faith God provides; one that obeys, it doesn't just talk (Jas. 2:19-24). This purity of heart makes people God's children (Matt. 5:8). He wants saints to remain His own special possession.

One way the Lord keeps His disciples close to Him is by separating them from the impure influences surrounding them.

Obviously Noah would be one of the first to be separate from evil influences of the world. He lived during a time when every thought of men's "heart was only on evil continually" (Gen. 6:5-6). God isolates Noah and his family on an ark that floated above a titanic flood which destroyed that wicked world.

The same Lord commands Abraham to leave his idolatrous father, Terah, and move to a land that would one day belong to his descendants, Israel (Gen. 12:1-5 and Jos. 24:2). Obedient Abraham became the "father of the faithful." When Joseph brought Jacob, his father, and his family into Egypt he understood they could not be immersed into the Egyptian culture because of the spiritual dangers that involved. Joseph, second in authority only to Pharaoh, instructs his family to state clearly to Pharaoh their lifelong occupation, shepherds.

The Egyptians saw shepherds as unclean to them and separated Joseph's family into the Land of Goshen (Gen. 46:31-34). The Lord knows that when His people openly reveal their staunch faith in Him evil people will often avoid them. They will separate godly people from themselves. Sadly throughout Israel's history they spent much of their time compromising their convictions and losing their relationship with God.

It's not surprising God's message for Christians is the same in relation to having close fellowship with evil people. "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14) Some things are clearly wrong, like the Corinthian brother who was living with his father's wife. The apostle Paul commands the church to withdraw their fellowship from him that he might be ashamed and turn away from this sin (1 Cor. 5:1-13). Christians also work to keep themselves out of compromising circumstances which might involve a wide variety of good things: marriage, work, dress, entertainment, and other similar practices. Saints' real home is in heaven and they reflect this by the way they live their lives on earth (Heb. 11:13-16). Are you separate from the world?

Faith That Cannot Save

by: Kris Brewer

As I study the Bible with people of all religious backgrounds, one recurring theme usually enters into the discussion: “We are saved by faith alone!” This is an idea that stems from the aversion that so many people have developed to the idea that God expects us (as His creation) to actually do something before he extends his gift of salvation. The question is, does the Bible actually teach that we are saved by faith alone, or does it teach that there is something more that is required by the Lord?

Perhaps the best place to begin our inquiry is with the only passage in the New Testament in which the words “faith only” appear together:

You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only (James 2:24).

It seems the question of whether works are required for salvation should be authoritatively answered by the writing of James in that one verse! However, that is not all that James had to say on the matter. In fact, James speaks of some who do possess faith, but will not be benefited by it:

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! (James 2:19)

The demons had faith only! Certainly, James was not indicating that these demons were going to be saved. They had a faith that could not save. By looking at the context of this passage, we can see that the faith of the demons was non-saving faith because it was an inactive faith. That is, they had faith alone.

What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, “You have faith, and I have works.” Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? (James 2:14–20)

James makes it clear that faith cannot be separated from works. He makes it clear that a person cannot be saved by “faith alone.” After all, if anything else is needed, then faith is not alone. James shows quite clearly that faith must be accompanied by works! James continued to explain this point:

Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do

you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. (James 2:21-26)

Faith, when alone, cannot do anything for the one who holds it. It takes works for one to be justified. Abraham could have all the faith in God, but until he did what God commanded him to do, he was not justified. Rahab could

believe that the spies were indeed sent by God, but that faith did nothing for her until she acted in the way that was pleasing to God. In the same way, to be justified today, we must do what the Lord commands of us. Those advocating for "faith only" would be like an Abraham who refused to offer his son on an altar and a Rahab who refused to give the messengers of God assistance.

A Faith That Can Save

As we have seen, faith by itself does nothing to save the soul. Faith must be accompanied by obedience to the instructions that God gave. One can consider the conversion of Saul (later called Paul, who was an apostle). Ananias was sent to him to proclaim the gospel message. After Saul came to intellectually believe the word proclaimed by Ananias concerning the Christ (he had faith), he was told by Ananias:

And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.' (Acts 22:16)

Saul, even after having believed, and even having prayed, was still in his sins. He would continue in those sins until he was obedient to the instructions that came from the Lord: he had to be baptized to wash away his sins! No matter how much faith Saul had in the Lord, or the instructions given to him, he would not be forgiven (and thus could not be saved) unless he actually did what he was commanded to do.

A saving faith is faith that is working, faith that is active. It is also a faith that reflects obedience. That is, the work that is done is not at the prerogative of the person performing the action, but rather in accordance with the instructions given by God in His word.

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman
1023 E Baxter Ln
Bozeman, MT 59715

Everyone Welcome!

Daily Bible Reading

October 2017

October 2	Galatians 1	October 17	Philippians 1:1-18
October 3	Galatians 2:1-3:9	October 18	Philippians 1:19-2:11
October 4	Galatians 3:10-4:7	October 19	Philippians 2:12-3:11
October 5	Galatians 4:8-31	October 20	Philippians 3:12-4:23
October 6	Galatians 5	October 23	Colossians 1
October 9	Galatians 6	October 24	Colossians 2:1-3:11
October 10	Ephesians 1:1-2:10	October 25	Colossians 3:12-4:18
October 11	Ephesians 2:11-3:21	October 26	1 Thessalonians 1
October 12	Ephesians 4	October 27	1 Thessalonians 2
October 13	Ephesians 5:1-21	October 30	1 Thessalonians 3-4
October 16	Ephesians 5:22-6:24	October 31	1 Thessalonians 5

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