

## **The BIG QUESTIONS about Christianity**

### ***The Problem of Evil***

**12-19-10**

#### **Scripture Reading - Lamentations 3:21-41**

It goes without saying that **there is a problem with evil in our world.**

Violence, destruction, and disaster, war, terrorism, and turmoil, racism, sexism, and classism, crime, cruelty, and injustice, perversion, manipulation, and greed, disease, famine, and death are everywhere. They always have been, and they always will be, until Jesus comes again.

No one is unaffected by evil, but for some people it seems like nothing in life ever seems to go right. For some people, it seems as though their entire existence is a long series of one disappointment after another. They feel as though they are constantly drowning in their own circumstances, *many of which are completely out of their control*, and they wonder if they will ever be let up for air.

With all the evil all around us, a very natural question to ask is **where is God in it all?**

Four common conclusions are these...

- 1) There is no God
- 2) God is hands off
- 3) God is impotent
- 4) God is evil

Though it is easy to see how people could come to these conclusions, I want to assure you today *that none of them are Biblical, and therefore none of them are true.*

The Bible clearly teaches the following...

- 1) God does indeed exist and that He always has and that He always will
- 2) God is NOT hands off - God is totally hands on and absolutely sovereign over and all things, both good and bad. Nothing ever happens that is outside His plan and control
- 3) God is NOT impotent - God is *omnipotent*, all mighty, all powerful, and therefore nothing is impossible for Him

- 4) God is NOT evil - God is absolutely and in every way totally and completely good and is entirely incapable of doing evil of any kind

So if all that's true, then why is there so much evil in the world? Why doesn't God stop it? Why does He allow it to go on? What is His purpose in it? *Where is God in it all?* These are the questions we will be seeking to answer today.

The way I want to answer these questions is this. I want to show you four very important truths about God's relationship to evil from the Bible. The first three will be foundational and the fourth will be the answer to our questions. We'll move quickly through the first three and spend most of our time on the fourth.

### **Four truths about God's relationship to evil from the Bible**

- 1) Evil was not a part of God's original intent for creation
  - a. **Genesis 1:1 (ESV)**  
<sup>1</sup>In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.
  - b. **Genesis 1:31 (ESV)**  
<sup>31</sup>And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was *very good*. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.
  - c. **Genesis 2:16-17 (ESV)**  
<sup>16</sup>And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, <sup>17</sup>but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, *for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*"
  - d. **Revelation 21:1-4 (ESV)**  
<sup>1</sup>Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup>And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup>*He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more,*

*neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."*

2) God is not evil and never does evil

a. **1 John 1:5 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup>This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that *God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.*

b. **James 1:13-15 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup>Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God," *for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one.* <sup>14</sup>But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. <sup>15</sup>Then desire when it has conceived gives birth to sin, and sin when it is fully grown brings forth death.

c. So although God allows and *even ordains* many evil acts throughout the Bible as we will see, He is never the *direct cause* of any of them and is never held responsible for them. Instead, it is always the direct cause, the person who does the evil, the person who commits the crime, who is held responsible for it.

3) God is absolutely and completely sovereign over all things including evil

a. **Colossians 1:15-17 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup>For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all *things were created through him and for him.* <sup>17</sup>*And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

b. **Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup>He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and *he upholds the universe by the word of his power.*

c. **Ephesians 1:11 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup>In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works *all things* according to the counsel of his will,

d. **Matthew 10:28-31 (NIV)**

<sup>28</sup>Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can

destroy both soul and body in hell. <sup>29</sup> Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? *Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.* <sup>30</sup> And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. <sup>31</sup> So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.

e. **Lamentations 3:21-38 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:...<sup>25</sup> The Lord is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him...<sup>31</sup> For the Lord will not cast off forever, <sup>32</sup> *but, though he cause grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love;* <sup>33</sup> for he does not willingly afflict or grieve the children of men...<sup>37</sup> *Who has spoken and it came to pass, unless the Lord has commanded it?* <sup>38</sup> *Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that good and bad come?...*

- f. In other words, *nothing* comes to pass either good or bad unless God has commanded or ordained it. *Nothing* is outside of God's control. *Everything* that happens, both good and bad, is a part of God's good plan for His creation.

4) God uses all evil for His glory and the good of those who love Him

a. **God uses all evil for the good of those who love Him**

i. **Romans 8:28 (NIV)**

<sup>28</sup> And *we know* that in *all things* God works for *the good* of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

1. "we know"
2. "all things"
3. "those who love him"
4. What is the good that God is talking about?

a. **Romans 8:29 (NIV)**

<sup>29</sup> For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.

ii. Two other texts that teach the same thing

1. **Hebrews 12:5-11 (ESV)**

<sup>5</sup> ... "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. <sup>6</sup> For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." <sup>7</sup> It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? <sup>8</sup> If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. <sup>9</sup> Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? <sup>10</sup> For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, *but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness.* <sup>11</sup> For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

a. Discipline = Loving fatherly child-training

2. **John 15:1-8 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. <sup>2</sup> Every branch of mine that does not bear fruit he takes away, and *every branch that does bear fruit he prunes, that it may bear more fruit...* <sup>8</sup> *By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples...* <sup>11</sup> These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, *and that your joy may be full.*

iii. King David, who the Bible calls "a man after God's own heart", is a great example of someone who God molded and shaped through

trials, many of which were from the hands of others, but some of which were from His own

1. **Psalms 32:1-5 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. <sup>2</sup> Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. <sup>3</sup> For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. <sup>4</sup> For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. *Selah* <sup>5</sup> I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the Lord," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. *Selah*

iv. Isaac's son Joseph is a great example of God working evil for good, not only in his life, but in the lives of many others as well

1. **Genesis 50:20 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today.

v. What about those who *don't yet* love God and *have yet* to be called according to His purpose? How is God using evil in their lives?

1. For the good of those around them who *do love God*

a. Unbelieving spouse's job loss or illness

2. To righteously judge them and call them to repentance

a. **Romans 1:18 (ESV)**

<sup>18</sup> For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

b. **Romans 2:2 (ESV)**

<sup>2</sup> We know that the judgment of God rightly falls on those who do such things.

c. **Ezekiel 18:30-32 (ESV)**

<sup>30</sup> "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways, declares the Lord God. Repent and turn from all your transgressions, lest iniquity be your ruin. <sup>31</sup> Cast away from you all the transgressions that you have committed, and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit! Why will you die, O house of Israel? <sup>32</sup> For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Lord God; so turn, and live."

d. **Revelation 16:8-11 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> The fourth angel poured out his bowl on the sun, and it was allowed to scorch people with fire. <sup>9</sup> They were scorched by the fierce heat, and they cursed the name of God who had power over these plagues. *They did not repent and give him glory.* <sup>10</sup> The fifth angel poured out his bowl on the throne of the beast, and its kingdom was plunged into darkness. People gnawed their tongues in anguish <sup>11</sup> and cursed the God of heaven for their pain and sores. *They did not repent of their deeds.*

b. God uses all evil for His glory

- i. Why did God allow evil to come into being in the first place? Why didn't He prevent Adam and Eve from sinning and stop the chain of events that led to the debacle we live in today?

- ii. Some would say it's not because He values our freewill above all else.
- iii. But I would say it's because He values *His glory above all else*.
  - 1. God does all that He does, "That we might know that He is the Lord" (time and again in Ezekiel)
  - 2. **Isaiah 42:8 (ESV)**  
<sup>8</sup> I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.
  - 3. **Isaiah 43:6-7 (ESV)**  
<sup>6</sup> I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, <sup>7</sup> everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."
  - 4. **Isaiah 48:11 (ESV)**  
<sup>11</sup> For my own sake, for my own sake, I do it, for how should my name be profaned? My glory I will not give to another.
  - 5. **Isaiah 66:18-19 (ESV)**  
<sup>18</sup> "For I know their works and their thoughts, and the time is coming to gather all nations and tongues. And they shall come and shall see my glory, <sup>19</sup> and I will set a sign among them. And from them I will send survivors to the nations... afar off, that have not heard my fame or seen my glory. And they shall declare my glory among the nations.
- iv. How does God bring glory to Himself by allowing sin and evil to exist?
  - 1. Think about all the attributes of God that wouldn't exist if sin and evil didn't exist
    - a. Grace, mercy, compassion, forgiveness

2. Think about all the other attributes of God that are magnified because sin and evil exist
  - a. Holiness, righteousness, justice
  - b. Lamb in a field verses lamb in a freshly fallen snow
  
3. Think about all the opportunities God has to deliver us and show Himself mighty because sin and evil exist
  - a. **Psalms 116:1-19 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> I love the Lord, because he has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy...<sup>3</sup> The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. <sup>4</sup> Then I called on the name of the Lord: "O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!" <sup>5</sup> Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful...<sup>8</sup> For you have delivered my soul from death, my eyes from tears, my feet from stumbling...<sup>12</sup> What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits to me?...<sup>16</sup> O Lord, I am your servant;...<sup>17</sup> I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving and call on the name of the Lord. <sup>18</sup> I will pay my vows to the Lord in the presence of all his people, <sup>19</sup> ... Praise the Lord!
  
4. Think about how much God is glorified when we can praise Him even in the midst of sin and evil.
  - a. When we praise Him when life is good, God is glorified a little. When we praise Him when life is bad, God is glorified A LOT.
  - b. **Job 1:20-22 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the

ground *and worshiped*.<sup>21</sup> And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. *The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*"<sup>22</sup> In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.

c. **Job 2:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup>Then his wife said to him, "Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die."<sup>10</sup> But he said to her, "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. *Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?*" In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

5. Think about how much more thankful we are for our salvation because sin and evil exist
  - a. If there were no such thing as sin, evil, death, and Hell how thankful would we be for having been delivered from them all?

**Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate example of God using evil for His glory and the good of those who love Him**

- **Isaiah 53:10 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup>Yet it was the *will of the Lord* to crush him; *he* has put him to grief;...

- **Acts 4:27-28 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup>for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel,<sup>28</sup> *to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.*

