

Podcast Companion

The Problem of Evil & Suffering

What do we do about suffering and evil in the world? How do we as Christians respond to the idea that a perfectly good, totally powerful God created a world in which there is so much suffering?

I must admit, this is not a problem I have ever personally struggled with for any extended period of time, but this is definitely the single most powerful argument *against* a belief in God for most people.

In the following weeks, we're going to take a deep dive into this issue and begin to work out what the Bible says about this, how God's character relates to suffering, and a defence to the existence of suffering and evil.

So, in this session we're going to keep this super brief, just an introduction to the issues and the argument, then next week we'll begin to break it down!

Current climate

I think this series has come at the perfect time, quite honestly – we've just wrapped up learning about things like meaning, purpose and value, objective morality, and the value of humans!

From this we've learned:

- Life has purpose, meaning and value based on the existence of God and the real possibility of eternal life – what you do in your life has everlasting effects
- Standards of good and bad (i.e. good and evil) exist, because the moral perfection of God sets the standard by which all other actions are measured
- Human life has value because we have been set apart by our creator and have rational souls that no other being has

All of these things come into play when you consider suffering in the world.

If life has no purpose, then suffering and evil are simply meaningless – there is no redeeming qualities to these things! If God does not exist then suffering is not used for our betterment or accomplishment of His plans – we just suffer and die, meaninglessly.

If God does not exist, objective morality does not exist – there is no way to discuss 'evil' without the appealing to a standard of some kind (evil being a deviation from or further from that standard).

Remember all of this, because it will be something we keep coming back to over the following weeks.

On top of that, we've just gone through the Easter season, in which suffering and God's purposes come to a head in human history at the cross of Christ, where salvation was assured for us.

Additionally, we're currently experiencing a worldwide pandemic that comes with fear, suffering and sickness, aka evil.

COVID-19 (Coronavirus) is currently causing mass panic, pain, suffering, sickness and death across the world. As of the time of looking into this, there are currently 2,408,160 confirmed cases in 203 countries and territories, with an estimated 165,105 deaths. This obviously won't be correct anymore by the time you hear this, but that's what it was when I looked it up.

I don't tell you this to scare you or make you worry, after all, we do not have a spirit of fear (2Tim 1:7)! I'm just making sure I get across the reality of what is happening at the moment – global suffering, which is being caused by a virus. You may state that the seemingly meaningless deaths and suffering being caused by the virus is pretty evil!

When suffering happens and evil things occur, people have two options (in my opinion):

1. Turn to God for meaning, purpose and solace
2. Turn away from God due to bitterness, anger and confusion

Both are legitimate responses to the evil and suffering we observe, and I don't think it's a coincidence that the amount of hits on the church website has risen exponentially since we all went into lockdown.

People are searching for meaning in the suffering, because if there is no God then this is all there is – pointless, painful suffering.

But why does it seem to be this way?

There are two different reasons someone might turn away from God in the face of the existence of evil & suffering – one is intellectual, the other is emotional. Both will seem the same upfront, but they need to be treated very differently.

Let me introduce you to the intellectual argument that stems from the problem of evil & suffering, which will be either explicit (they will state it in this manner) or implicit (this is the reasoning behind an objection to God's existence, whether they realise or not).

Similarly to the moral argument we looked at recently, there are premises and a conclusion:

P1. It is logically impossible that an all-loving & all-powerful God and evil can co-exist

P2. Suffering & evil exist

C1. Therefore, God does not exist

Does this seem like a good argument to you? Does the conclusion necessarily follow from the premises?

I think that if the premises are true, then the conclusion would also be true, yes.

However, do we know that the premises are true?

Is it logically impossible that an all-loving and all-powerful God could co-exist with the existence of evil in the world?

We won't deal with the issues this poses until next time, because it does take some time to go through, but for now let's just look at it on the bare face.

Consider it this way –

If God is all-loving, then He wouldn't want people to suffer. Suffering is bad for people, the thinking goes, therefore a loving being wouldn't want people to suffer.

If God is all-powerful, He would be capable of making sure people didn't suffer. If God can 'do anything', the thinking goes, then He would be able to do something to stop people being evil or having to suffer.

Hopefully, those of you who have been in the sessions we did on God's attributes (specifically His being all-good and omnipotent) can start to unpick this a bit, but that's where I'm going to leave the issue of evil & suffering for today – with more questions than answers!

Sorry, but my reason for that is this – I want you to consider how you would work through this logical problem of evil. Does that argument work? Is there really an issue here? Is there something missing to make it work?

Let me know on WhatsApp or Instagram @chawnyouth!

So, we're leaving that there for now and we're moving to our weekly scripture!

Romans 8:18 – *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us”*

So, why might this be the scripture of the week?

I'm hoping it's fairly apparent, but just in case it isn't – Paul here is discussing exactly what we've been looking at for weeks now! This present time has suffering, as we've discussed today, but he believes we should take heart in the suffering, because from an eternal perspective it isn't meaningless! It's *meaningful*! When you compare some relatively short-term pain and suffering with the eternal life and salvation offered by Christ on the cross we can be pretty happy with the trade-off! In fact, Paul even says that, in comparison to the glory of Christ, suffering isn't even worth the time of day.

As we look into the problem of evil & suffering, particularly in this tough time, we must keep our eyes on the salvatory works of Jesus Christ and the eternal life we will inherit – this all has *meaning*. This all has *purpose*. In time we will find the *value* to this, personally or corporately.

Keep your eyes fixed on Jesus, and when you feel like anxiety or fear is creeping in, just compare this small temporary trouble to the eternal life you've inherited.

It won't look quite so bad.

Finally, as always, our question of the week, which I've already alluded to:

Does the logical problem of evil & suffering work? If so, why? If not, why not?

So, that about wraps this up!

Here's a couple of good resources for you to prepare with, if you're interested, before next week:

- [This is a short-ish video](#) by Reasonable Faith on the problem of evil
- Or [this short Zangmeister video](#) on the moral argument, as this will feature at some point in the future

The future sessions will go back to a more normal run of play for this companion though, so look forward to that!

Remember, as always we can be chatting on the youth WhatsApp group, in the Thursday night Zoom bible studies, with me personally if you like, and also engage with us on Instagram @chawnyouth. Have a great week, pray for each other, look after one another, build the community, and read your Bibles!

Speak to you next week.