

The Creation Narrative and the Problem of Evil

This workshop conducts an inquiry into God's moral justification in allowing so much horrific evil in this world. Realizing that everything on this earth is allowed by the all good, all powerful God, the question often asked is: If God could stop all the evils in this world or at least the worst of evils, why doesn't He. In light of this probing question, it is suggested that an understanding the structure of creation will yield helpful information to answer this question.

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- I. The larger narrative (Zoom out)
 - a. There is a prevailing overarching order to Creation which provides the arena where humanity can make real choices (Gen 1-3)
 - i. Physical order---there is stability to reality (Gen 1)
 - ii. Uniqueness of man---humanity has a special relationship to God (Gen 1:26)
 - iii. Moral order ---there are moral laws that govern humanity's free choices. (Gen 2:17)
 - iv. It is within and by this arrangement God interacts with His Creation by which human history is meaningful and intelligible.
 1. This we will call Creation Order

- b. God respect this order and the uniqueness of man.
 - i. This is what makes human history more than a piece of theater.
 - c. God's providential dynamic involvement within Created Order allows human choices to make a difference, but those choices cannot defeat God's purposed end (Is 46:10; the book of Revelation).
 - d. Man (humanity) has been made in the image of God with a real mind that can love God which is the highest function of humanity.
 - i. Jesus said: You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind, this is the first commandment and the second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matt. 22:37-40)
 - e. Man has freedom where he is a causal agent and his choices have true consequences (Gen 2:17; Deut 29: 9-29; Jn 3:16, 36).
 - i. Obey God and there is blessing
 - ii. Disobey God and there is judgment
- II. The creation narrative provides the larger context for understanding our world—Creation Order.
- a. The spirit world a factor as part of human history.
 - i. It is intellectually dishonest to remove one's understanding of evil from God's larger work in time/space

- ii. Part of the world as we know it involves a spirit world interacting with human history (Book of Job; Eph 6: 12).
 - 1. There is a roaring lion (I Pet 5:8)
 - a. However God intimately cares for us (I Pet 5: 6-7)
 - b. God works providentially within the limits of his own created order
 - i. This is seen throughout the Old and New Testament.
 - c. God has provided the power of prayer to make requests of Him
 - i. Ps 46: 1-3; Habakkuk 3: 17-19); Heb 4:16
 - d. When He allows suffering, it is not because He lacks the power or desire to stop the suffering. It is because He honors the structure He has created.
 - i. He honors the choices man makes as God made man in a way so he could make choices.
- III. We must see the evil in light of this larger narrative where man has freedom making him a causal agent. .
 - a. Augustine– “better to have a run away horse than a stone.”
 - b. Real choices are what make history what it is, especially our personal history.
 - i. “When proponents of meticulous providence suggest that God prevents or eliminates all gratuitous evil, they (perhaps unwittingly) place constraints on the type of human freedom that makes possible the most praiseworthy human actions.” (Ronald Nash, Faith and Reason (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), p 218.

- IV. In this way, we see that we live world (fallen) where real choices have real consequences.
- a. God has not promised to take bad things and make out of them good, but He has promised never to leave or forsake us. (Heb 13:5)
 - b. We live in a fallen world where bad things happen and God often allows it regardless of the consequences.
 - c. God may bring good out of some evil, but it is in spite of the evil, not because of the evil.
 - d. There may not always be some good purpose for allowing a particular evil, but there is always a reason—God never allows anything to happen with a sufficient reason. Remember God has not promised good will come from all evil..
 - e. We live in a fallen world where life is messy and often unpredictable—it is most fragile.
 - i. We must be prepared to die
 - 1. Luke 13:1-4
 - 2. Who knows when a tower will fall on him/her
 - ii. We must avoid doing evil and work towards godliness
 - 1. 1 Thess 4:1-8
 - f. When He allows suffering, it is not because He lacks the power or desire to stop the suffering, but that He honors the structure He has created.
 - i. This means good choices compliment the created order

ii. This means bad choices disrupt the created order

V. Where is God in all of this?

- a. Heb 13:5, for the believer, He never leaves us.
- b. His Father of mercy and God of all comfort (II Cor 1:2-4)
- c. His Grace (II Cor 12:9)
- d. God is not indifferent to our suffering or the suffering of the world (Heb 4:15; Ps 56:8—tears in a bottle.
- e. Widow of Nain's son (Lk 7 :11-17)
- f. It is Jesus who stands outside the tomb of Lazarus and weeps (Jn 11: 35)
- g. It is Jesus who looks out over Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives and cries out,
- h. Oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem (Matt 23:37-39; Lk 19:41-44)

- i. When the total narrative from Creation to Restoration is considered, the matter of evil as a defeater of theism loses its intellectual power, if not its emotional power.

- j. I am reminded of what Lewis wrote in *The Magician's Nephew*. You may remember that Digory had inadvertently brought the White Witch to Narnia and Aslan tells him that he now must do something as a consequence. Digory, whose mother was desperately ill, thought for a moment that he might bargain with Aslan that he would do what was necessary if Aslan would do something for his mother. However, he realized immediately that Aslan was not the kind of person with whom one strikes a bargain. So, he agrees to do what Aslan asks. After that, he blurts out: "But please, please—won't you—can't you give me something that will cure Mother?" Up till then he had been looking at the Lion's great feet and the huge claws on them; now, in his despair, he looked up at its face. What he saw surprised him as much as anything in his whole life. For the tawny face was bent down near his own and wonder of wonders great shining tears stood in the Lion's eyes. They were such big, bright tears compared with Digory's own that for a moment he felt as if the Lion must really be sorrier about his Mother than he was himself. "My son, my son," said Aslan. "I know, Grief is great."
C. S. Lewis. *The Magician's Nephew* (New York: Collier Books Edition, 1970), 142.