

Why Does God Allow Evil?

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When writing about the “date rape” of his novel’s tragic heroine that fundamentally changed the entire course of her life to come, the English novelist Thomas Hardy tartly compared Jehovah’s indifference to a pagan Canaanite god’s: “But, might some say, where was Tess’s guardian angel? Where was the providence of her simple faith? Perhaps, like that other god [Baal] of whom the ironical Tishbite spoke [Elijah, in I Kings 18:27], he was talking, or he was pursuing, or he was in a journey, or he was sleeping and not to be awakened” (“Tess of the D’Urbervilles” (New York: Random House, 1951), p. 90). Although the tragedy of Tess Durbeyfield’s life takes place in a work of fiction, many millions of people have suffered much worse calamities in real life. In the world today and in the historical past, so many people have suffered terrible pain and death, such as from wars, genocide, earthquakes, famines, and other disasters. Many millions of people suffered not directly because of anything they did that was wrong. So then people cry out, asking, “Why didn’t God stop these terrible things from occurring to me, my family, my village, my city, my country?” After all, to summarize standard Christian theology briefly, the Bible’s God is almighty, all-knowing, and all-loving. So why didn’t He use His great power to stop evil from occurring after knowing it existed? Why would He give His creatures free will while being able to foreknow that they would do terrible things to each other after getting it? Why didn’t God have made His creatures to be like programmed robots who would never choose to do what is wrong? So then,

this essay aims to answer these questions generally, by explaining why God allows evil to exist in His creation despite He knows it exists and has the power to stop it.

A General Overview of Why God Allows Evil

First, before tackling various specifics that help to answer this basic question, let's give a general Christian explanation for why God allows evil into His creation, based on a basic Biblical worldview: God is now in the process of making beings like Himself (Matt. 5:48; John 17:20-24; John 10:30-34) who would have 100% free will but would choose to be 100% righteous. Consider in this context what could be called the "thesis statement" of Scripture in Genesis 1:26: "Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.'" Why did God make us look like Him and think like him? This is further confirmed by the statement concerning the purposes for the ministry's service to fellow Christians includes this statement: "for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ . . ." (Ephesians 4:12-13). God wants us to become just like Jesus is, who is God and has perfect character (i.e., the habits of obedience to God's law (Hebrews 5:8-9), not just imputed righteousness), yet was tempted to sin and didn't (Hebrews 4:15).

Now the habits of obedience and righteousness can't be created by fiat or instantaneous order. Rather, the person who is separate from God has to choose to obey what is right and reject what is wrong on his or her own. But every time a person does what is wrong, that will hurt him, others, and/or God. Yet God has to allow us to have free will, because He wants His created beings to have free will like He does, otherwise they wouldn't be becoming like Him (cf. Hebrews 2:5-13). God didn't want to create a set of robots that automatically obey His law, which declares His will for how humanity and the angels should behave. Robots wouldn't be like Him, for they wouldn't have free will nor the ability to make fully conscious choices. So then God needs to test us, to see how loyal we'll be in advance of granting us eternal life, such as He did concerning Abraham's desire for a son by Sarah by asking him to sacrifice him (Genesis 22). Furthermore, the greatness of the prize, being in God's Family and living forever happily in union with God, ultimately makes up for all the suffering in this life. For what's (say) 70 years of pain relative to trillions of years of happiness in God's kingdom? Unfortunately, our emotions, which normally focus on what's right before us physically, rebel against this insight, but it's true nevertheless. Furthermore, as part of the process of impressing how seriously he takes violations of His law, He sent His Son to die in terrible pain on the cross for the sins of others. God here rather mysterious decided to become just like His creatures who do suffer, and chose to suffer along with them (John 1:1-4, 14; Hebrews 2:14-18). For if his forgiveness was easily granted and given without this terrible cost paid for it, then people might not take violations of His law seriously as a

result. So then, we have the great mystery of God dying for the sins of His creatures despite they were in the wrong, not Him. God allows suffering in His creation, and then chooses voluntarily to suffer greatly Himself as a result of His allowing it into His creation, as a cost of His making creatures with free will. Therefore, since we know that God understands suffering (cf. Hebrews 4:14-15), we should never think emotionally, “God can’t understand my painful life!”

So although we may not know fully why God allows suffering and pain in His creation, or emotionally and psychologically be convinced that He has a good reason for doing so, we should trust Him and wait in faith on the matter. In this context, consider God's basic answer to Job: “You don’t know enough to judge Me!” Furthermore, many people without suffering pain wouldn't trust God to have our interests at heart when telling us to not do X, just like they didn't trust their parents when they told them (say) doing drugs or getting drunk was bad for them. Therefore, God chooses to prove it to humanity and the angels by hard, practical experience (i.e., empirically) on this earth in order to show that His way is best, not Satan's. After all, when the evil angels revolted against God, they never had experienced any pain or death, but they still mistrusted God for some reason, that He didn't love them fully. (Perhaps the Quran’s explanation, although it must be deemed to be uninspired, Christians could still ponder usefully as a speculation with something to it. According to sura 7:10-17, Satan refused to bow down to Adam despite Allah’s order to do so based on this defiant reasoning, “Nobler am I than he: me hast Thou created of fire; of clay hast Thou created him.” Indeed, an evil angel may have made sure that his reasoning against Jehovah was inserted into the Quran when “inspiring” Muhammad’s recitations. No doubt, the evil angels aren’t looking forward to being judged by saved Christians (I Cor. 6:3) and then being thrown into the lake of fire). So even though many awful things have happened historically in the world, we should trust God that He knows what He is doing.

Why Does God Let the Wicked Prosper and the Righteous Suffer?

Now, let’s turn from this general overview of why God allows evil to exist to examine various specific situations in which this problem comes up practically in everyday life. For instance, is God fair when He lets the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? Why does He let many worldly and uncalled people have financial success? Why does He allow the righteous and called undergo harsh trials and tests? Is obeying God worthless because the wicked seem to be getting away with it? Does God bless worldly people while afflicting faithful Christians? Often we’ll know co-workers, neighbors, classmates, uncalled family members and friends have better health or financial conditions than our own. But that doesn’t mean we should question God’s justice or love for us. Clearly, we shouldn’t doubt God’s fairness when worldly people prosper materially and we don’t. Are we complaining about God’s having too much mercy for sinners (cf. Matt. 5:44-45; Romans 5:6-11) when we think God should sternly impose justice right now on them instead? Of course, when it comes to our own sins, we

want understanding, sympathy, and forgiveness from God instead of getting what we deserve, right?

Let's read what David (in Psalm 37) said about how the righteous should react to the prosperity of the wicked. First of all, material prosperity, including good health, only matters for a short time in this temporary physical life. What's really important is our status in the next life and how what we do today affects that. Therefore, the prosperity and health of the wicked, or just average uncalled people, is temporary also. So why get angry? What should matter to us most of all is our status in God's sight, not what the other guy, good or evil, is doing. Instead, let's have faith, and be happy with what we do receive from God. We should obey God regardless of whether the unrepentant prosper or not. By comparing ourselves with others, we end up suffering psychologically, emotionally, and mentally. So let's focus on solving our own problems or enjoying our own successes instead. We will be proven right in the end since the wicked will be defeated in the end. But that's a matter for God's timing, not ours. God will impose justice on His timetable according to His all-knowing wisdom, instead of in accordance to our impatient desires to see our enemies suffer right now. Is it because we lack faith in God's existence or that worry that He isn't morally trustworthy that we emotionally insist on having God punish (if unrepentant) evildoers right now rather than when they are cast into the lake of fire?

For example, consider what happened to the men who ran Enron into bankruptcy. They deceived their company's investors and workers. In particular, the ex-CEO Jeffrey Skilling was sentenced to 24 years in the big house. Enron's chairman and founder, Ken Lay, avoided a similar fate only by suddenly dying first. Andrew Fastow, the former CFO, and his wife, both received jail time after agreeing to turn state's evidence and testify for the prosecution. On the other hand, some do seem to get away with murder literally. Need I mention O.J. Simpson? But whether in this life or the next, the unrighteous will suffer and have to repent also. Nobody ultimately "gets away with it" if he wishes to be saved and live forever. On the other hand, since we've all sinned (Romans 3:23), and Jesus' death and resurrection was necessary to save us (Romans 5:8-10), we all "get away with it" after we repent and are forgiven. So then, are we all that much more righteous than others who haven't repented yet, but may in this life or the next (Eze. 37:11-14)?

We should be content with what we receive in this life. Rarely are the righteous left in total misery. It's normally a matter of relative, not absolute, deprivation or poverty. If we didn't know about the wicked's prosperous condition, we wouldn't be "suffering" then! Also, God may require self-sacrifice from us to test our motives, such as through asking us to tithe, to observe the Sabbath, to keep the Holy Days, and to avoid taking certain immoral jobs (such as being a soldier and waging war, versus Matt. 5:38-48).

Asaph (in Psalm 73:16-24) felt the need to repent when he realized his complaints against God about the prosperity of the evildoers were wrong. So he chose to focus on God's greatness and glory instead. We should strive to faithfully obey God regardless of

what other people might be seemingly getting away with. Worldly people will have to repent also after being resurrected if they wish to be saved and gain eternal life. To have material prosperity and even good health are small matters compared to getting eternal life. Because God is both fair and loving to all, nobody ultimately gets away with it (Rev. 20:11-15).

How the Movie “Catch Me If You Can” Relates to the Problem of Evil

As a contemporary example of the problem David and Asaph observed, consider the plot line of the movie “Catch Me If You Can.” According to this movie (the actual history of the case doesn’t quite line up with Hollywood’s portrayal here), Leonardo DiCaprio plays Frank Abagnale Jr., an imposter who as a teenager, from 17-19, was able to successfully fake being a Pan Am pilot, a Harvard medical school doctor, and a lawyer. When first placed in a public high school just after being transferred from a private high school, he successfully faked being substitute French teacher. He also was brilliant at creating, forging, and passing bad checks. In order to help implement his schemes, he took advantage of young women’s sense of physical attraction to him. By contrast, the Tom Hanks character, the FBI agent chasing after him named Carl Hanratty, is a total drudge who lives to work. No flashes of glamour or aura of wealth are associated with him. While using the filmmaker’s technique of cutting back and forth to dramatize the contrast between the two, the movie compares Hanratty’s misadventures in doing his laundry in a Laundromat with Abagnale’s partying and consorting with a high-level, beautiful prostitute. As portrayed in the movie, Hanratty eventually caught up with Abagnale in Europe after escaping from his grasp three times before.

Later that night, after marveling at what this young crook pulled off, I opened up my Bible that night rather randomly to read, as I often do. In Proverbs, my eyes “just happened” to quickly fall upon a text that rebuked my thinking. The career of the check forger and imposter in “Catch Me If You Can” leads to the same basic questions again: Does God want the wicked and sinful to prosper and the righteous and faithful to suffer? Are we, like Job, complaining about others being blessed when we seem to be cursed? Do we doubt that God cares for us? Do we use our level of material prosperity or financial success to judge whether God cares for us? Simply put, do we ever feel that life is unfair, that God is unfair? We should not envy the evil man (Prov. 24:1; 23:17). True, the sinful may prosper in this life, at least for a while. But we Christians should remember the Eternal is a God of justice. So if the sinful neither repent nor are punished in this life, they will have to admit the error of their ways at the second resurrection, or otherwise face the lake of fire.

Do we wish we could live like the sinful (Prov. 24:1-2)? But does living a way of life in defiance to God’s law really bring benefits, at least in the long run, even in this life? Do unrepentant sinners really have mental peace? They may have money, material possessions, status, success with the opposite sex, etc., but are they REALLY happy? How happy are many successful models and Hollywood movie stars when they feel the

need to resort to using drugs and alcohol? “Catch Me If You Can” portrays the check forger and imposter as calling the FBI agent, his nemesis, on Christmas Eve, partially to ridicule him, but also partly out of loneliness. He was not at ease with himself, despite brilliantly succeeding at fraud.

The partying lifestyle, of drugs, excessive drinking, sex, and late night carousing, often looks attractive and exciting to the young, especially when raised in the church. But after experiencing it, many find it emotionally unsatisfying, and even dangerous. After all, it generates the risks from blackouts from drugs and alcohol, venereal diseases, unwanted pregnancies, bad memories from sex without commitment, and arrest and jail due to crimes perpetuated while “having a good time.” The activities of life only have ultimate significance in the context of a relationship with God since that’s the only way we’ll be allowed to live forever.

Do we ever feel like Job (21:7-26) did? Do we have the faith to endure trials? Is it a trial when someone has more than us, even when we really aren’t suffering? So many in the past often lacked enough food to live healthy lives, and were malnourished, such as for a rather high percentage of people in the pre-industrial era historically. The industrial revolution eventually ended these conditions for the masses in the Western world. The trap then is to compare ourselves with others here. It’s not that we’re suffering; rather, it’s that we don’t have as much as the next guy. It’s once again relative deprivation, i.e., envy, not absolute deprivation, i.e., true misery.

Furthermore, how much of the wicked’s prosperity merely results from their making better financial decisions than ours? We are the weak of the world, right? (See I Cor. 1:26-29). Self-inflicted misery is often the main source of our trials, especially in this country at this time (since about 1983). For example, a lot of American poverty is the result of poor personal choices. For example, a woman can nearly always avoid poverty by achieving three basic things: 1. Graduate from high school. 2. Don’t have a baby out of wedlock. 3. Get a job, any job, even if it pays only the minimum wage. If she doesn’t do one or more of these things, she is much more apt to end up in poverty, by an American definition. Is it God’s fault when people have divorces, have illegitimate births, drop out of school, and have a lack of marketable skills? Likewise, if we complain that God didn’t stop us from suffering a hangover after getting drunk, is that really God’s fault? A man recovering from drinking the night before freely chose to get drunk to begin with, a personal decision that contradicts what God commands in His holy word (Proverbs 20:1; 23:30-35). It wasn’t like God thrust that decision on him!

Do we have the faith to prioritize the next life over this one? Are we willing, for example, to tithe even if we get nothing material or physical for this sacrifice in this life? We may get spiritual blessings instead, or simply have would-be material losses prevented without us perceiving it clearly. For example, how many car accidents or diseases has God prevented among us, but we didn’t notice?

The former Detroit news anchorman, Mort Crim, once wrote: “Life is hard, and when we come to terms with that, it no longer matters.” In this light, the expectations

game becomes important: If we don't expect a lot of happiness in this life, paradoxically that can make us happier! But is life really hard, if it's merely a matter of differential levels of prosperity way above the subsistence levels? How many of us live in homes with electricity, indoor plumbing with hot and cold running water, furnaces that warm our houses without us having to fill them with fuel, cars that allow to drive hundreds of miles at high speeds, various electronic media gadgets, etc.? How about being literate? Can we read and own books? Can we use, even own, personal computers? So then we become discontent by looking at what others have when it's more than what we have, rather than being appreciative for what we do have which is so much more than most in the past enjoyed or much of the world even today has. If we (as Americans) chose to visit and live a while among the average people in a poor country (while avoiding staying in fancy hotels, all-inclusive resorts, etc.), we'll have a much better appreciation for what we've been blessed with. And what about all the spiritual blessings we have, such as knowing God's will by reading the Bible and having salvation through Jesus? Unlike the uncalled pagans of the past (cf. Acts 17:22-31), we can know God, which brings true meaning, purpose, and order to all of life's choices, decisions, and activities. Are we then emotionally discounting the spiritual blessings by taking them for granted, but then bitter over not getting more material blessings?

But now, do the wicked REALLY always get away with it? (See Psalm 37). The Tom Hanks character in "Catch Me If You Can," the FBI agent, warned the imposter and check forger that eventually his luck would run out, that the odds were that he would get caught. After eluding capture for several more years, that's exactly what happened to Abagnale Jr. in France. The prisons of this country are full of people who hoped they would get away with something, but didn't. The "Good News" magazine of the United Church of God (UCG) once had an article entitled, "Coming Calamities: Does God Offer Protection?" It's a reminder that those who seem to be getting away with it now may not for very much longer anyway, even during their physical lifetimes.

A crucial truth to focus on mentally is that this life is merely preparation for the next life. The unrepentant sinner is not preparing for it. He may often seem to enjoy life for the present, but during the time of trouble to come (Matt. 24:21) or during the second resurrection (Rev. 20:5, 11-15), he'll have to change how he lives if he wishes to live with God for all eternity. Then the rest of the world might complain that life is unfair because we in the church had the opportunity to be in the first resurrection (described in I Cor. 15:47-55; I Thess. 4:15-17) and they didn't. Then our response may be (if it fits their situation personally) they had more enjoyment than we did in their physical lifetimes (cf. the Abraham's comments on rich man's situation in Luke 16:25).

We should learn to not envy the evil man. We should be more content with what blessings we have been given. We shouldn't be constantly wishing we had more like some other guy who doesn't try to obey God at all. We should admit the amount of self-inflicted misery that may be the cause of our trials. Many of the unrepentant wicked do get caught, later on in this life. Most still alive in these last days will be swept up in the great calamities of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord to come. All of them will face the impartial court of the Eternal when the second resurrection happens, and

they have to repent or perish. So let's not think that the wicked really get away with it, for that's a mirage and a deception. In real life, Frank Abagnale Jr. discovered that a life of deception and crime didn't pay; will we Christians have the faith to realize that a life of obedience and faith will be rewarded?

Does God let Christians Who Converted Late in Life "Get Away with It"?

Now, let's consider another class of people that faithful Christians might end up begrudging or envying: People who just recently became Christians also, after having long lived a life of sin. Do we ever resent the (spiritual) Johnny-Come-Lately? Do we think those who came or returned to the faith later than us "got away with it"? So in our hearts then, do we think that being in the world and serving our own desires is better than being in the church and serving God? Now God has great mercy towards all sinners who repent, including us. So we shouldn't question God's justice in forgiving the apparently greater sins of those who come to the faith later than us. We must not use a misguided sense of justice to question God's mercy towards those who are called or who respond later than we did, as the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matt. 20:1-16; cf. 19:30) and part of the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:21-32) both illustrate

Jesus gave this parable of the vineyard laborers in order to illustrate God's mercy towards all who repent. Interestingly enough, notice that the context immediately preceding this parable concerned the young rich ruler being unwilling to give up his wealth in order to follow Jesus (Matt. 19:16-30). So Jesus had just discussed the costs and rewards for serving Him. According to this parable, all get into kingdom of God despite some served Him much longer than others. Importantly, we shouldn't focus on the parable's detail that the laborers were "paid" salvation: We can't cite a parable's story line as proof that God endorses the behavior in question or that all aspects are literally true in revealing His truth. For example, based on the parable of the unjust steward (Luke 16:1-9), we shouldn't conclude that Jesus actually approves of corrupt employees giving kickbacks to the debtors of their employer in order to get favors from them after they lose their jobs! Instead, let's determine doctrine and moral teaching based on the final conclusion or "moral of the story," not on the story's details or narrative plot.

The last hired were paid first, and the first hired paid last (cf. Matt. 19:30; 20:16): No seniority rights here! Would we complain about that? What would union leaders think? Would we say the landowner was unfair? Would we grumble about people who come into (or return to) the faith later in life, but who end up equally saved? The laborers hired first questioned God's justice: The landowner paid the same for different amounts of work. Their complaints imply God's way of life is not worth following except for getting salvation at the end: Is that true? Do people in the world overall on average really have fewer trials and pains than we do? Here we have to be wary of an expectations game, or developing an entitlement mentality that tempts believers: Do we

think that because we serve God that He should respond by serving us in the ways that we think we deserve? Do we think that since God is almighty, all-knowing, and greatly loving, we shouldn't expect to have any trials, tests, or pains in this life? Do we mistakenly think the "health and wealth gospel" is true?

The Parable of the Vineyard Gives Part of God's Own Answer to the Problem of Evil

The landowner's (i.e., God's) response to the laborers questioning His justice is part of the Bible's specific revelation concerning problem of evil (Matt. 20:13-15): "Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take what is yours and go your way. I wish to give to this last man the same as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?" So God is saying to the laborers who worked the longest: You knew and agreed to the ground rules for "employment," i.e., for serving Me and receiving salvation. You agreed to the contract, a full day for a denarius. Furthermore, this response shows we can't question God's utter sovereignty: God is all-powerful and eternal. We're limited and doomed to die. Much like Job, we don't know enough to question God's justice or fairness. God is the Creator: Since then He owns His creation, He can do with it as He wishes. If we say we can't trust Him to do right, then His response is the Cross: His sacrifice of Himself proves He loves His creatures so much that He was willing to suffer and die like they do. Therefore, we should trust Him, regardless of what pains we suffer in this life. Furthermore, we shouldn't use a misguided sense of justice to complain about God's mercy towards others. There's a tension between justice and mercy, which the Cross reconciled: If people deserve to be punished, it's fair then to inflict pain and injury on them. Do we object to when evildoers aren't punished as soon as we would like after they committed it? But then, do we request God to grant us merciful patience and understanding for our sins while also demanding that He should instantly zap others for their offenses? But if we want to have mercy, then we have to forgive and not desire to punish those who deserve it. What's merciful may not be "fair," and what's "fair" may not be forgiving. Is it fair to the righteous that the Father gives to the wicked rain and sunlight as well (Matt. 5:45, 48), as part of His love for all humanity? Out of mercy and love, God loves His enemies, and even died for them (Romans 5:10), so He wants us to love them also as He does. Is it fair to the repentant that Christ died for everyone, including the (especially) wicked, not just the (more) obedient and (more) righteous? Furthermore, some sins committed by people attending church, such as prideful self-righteousness that looks down on others can be worse than living a sexually loose life or holding down a corrupt job (cf. Luke 7:36-47; 18:9-14): If the former don't realize their sins and repent, they may not be in a better position to be saved than those who never darken the door of a church. But now notice this key principle: Nobody is truly "innocent" or "good" separate from God's giving him imputed righteousness (Romans 3:23, 4:6). God always has the option of imposing the death penalty on us at any time, but normally He doesn't, since His mercy triumphs over His judgment (James 2:13), thanks to Christ's sacrifice.

Was the Merciful Father of the Prodigal Son Wrong to Have Mercy?

Let's now examine part of the parable of the prodigal or lost son that points out the problems with the (more) righteous condemning the (recently) repentant (Luke 15:25-32). After the younger son repents, returns, confesses error to his father, the father launches a celebration about getting back his lost son. The father in the parable is very merciful, just like God the Father is. The older son complains that showing mercy to his younger brother is unfair to him, according to verse 29-30: "Lo, these many years I have been serving you; I never transgressed your commandment at any time; and yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might make merry with my friends. But as soon as this son of yours came, who has devoured your livelihood with harlots, you killed the fatted calf for him." Do we agree with him? Is God's mercy to others unfair to us who have served Him loyally longer?

At this time, let's consider the father's response to his older son's cry of injustice (Luke 15:31-32): "'Son, you are always with me, and all that I have is yours. It was right that we should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found.'" Notice in particular the father's affirmation that his remaining property will still go to his older son. Although salvation is a gift, our reward is based on our works, which is how high or low a position in the kingdom of God that we will have (see I Cor. 3:10-15; Rev. 22:12; Matt. 16:27). The responsible older brother does have more than his irresponsible younger brother still, although both are reconciled to their father, and thus equally "saved" by extension. Interestingly enough, as an aside, the parable's characters fit birth order theory's generalizations: Firstborn children normally tend to be more responsible, achievement-oriented, and uphold their family's traditions and honor. They are also correspondingly more apt to be perfectionistic and thus judgmental. By contrast, lastborn children are more likely to be irresponsible and to rebel against their families and/or society's standards/traditions.

We should celebrate when people join or return to the faith, not begrudge it. We should celebrate when what's lost is found as if we got it for the first time (Luke 15:3-10). Again, we shouldn't question God's mercy out of a misguided sense of justice. And don't we want the church to grow? Don't we want more people following God's truth, not fewer? We have to accept more brothers and sisters in the faith on God's terms, not our own: God does the calling, the picking and choosing, and those individuals do the responding, not the rest of us. So unlike the older brother or the vineyard laborers who worked all day, we shouldn't question God's justice when He acts mercifully. If we really believe God's ways are better than the world's ways, we shouldn't complain that sinners who repent later than we did then "got away with it" when God forgives them. For if God was always "fair," we would all be executed for our sins regardless of how much we've served Him, since salvation is a gift based on God's grace. For as James explained (2:13), "Mercy triumphs over judgment."

Did King David “Get Away with It”?

Let’s now consider specifically how the problem of evil bears upon our reaction to King David’s life. Over the years I’ve heard at least three people in the Church of God who were critical of King David’s high position in God’s sight (Acts 13:22; I Sam. 13:14; cf. Acts 7:46). That is, they felt at some level that he was allowed to get away with actions that we as Christians today wouldn’t be. How could a man who (say) engaged in polygamy or waged war or had Uriah the Hittite killed in order to cover up an adulterous pregnancy be a man after God’s own heart? Suppose, for example, that after Uriah himself was resurrected and found out the plot behind his death complained to God, “How could You make David the king of Israel during the millennium?” (See Ezekiel 37:24-25). How would you respond to his reasoning?

Is this perspective legitimate? Are we allowed to judge God for judging King David to be an especially righteous man? Are we in a position to be able to know King David’s heart, let alone anyone else’s besides our own? What are the specific implications of David’s life for the general problem of evil? Let’s consider why we shouldn’t think God is being unfair to us when He says King David was an especially spiritual man. In this context, the problem of evil rears its ugly head once again. Often the problem Normally about why (say) God allows famines, earthquakes, cyclones, wars, etc., that kill thousands or millions of people. When individualizing it, another variation is to doubt God’s love for ourselves when don’t get enough material blessings in this life.

Of course, King David had a dubious record in many regards. In order to cover up his committing adultery with Bathsheba, David had Uriah, her husband, murdered with the connivance of Joab by using the swords of the Ammonites (II Samuel 11:1-12:15). Because he waged war and thus was a bloody man who had killed in battle many men, God did not allow him to build the Temple (I Chron. 28:3). He had at least 8 wives and other women as concubines (see I Chron. 3:1-9; 14:3; II Samuel 2:2; 3:2-5, 13; 5:13). After Satan provoked him, David took a census that implied that he was pridefully taking credit for the increase in the numbers of people under his rule (I Chron. 21:1). After fleeing from Saul, he faked madness to Achish, the Philistine king of Gath (I Samuel 21:10-15). He later lied to his Philistine lord by saying he was raiding areas of Israel when he was actually attacking various Canaanite nations instead (I Samuel 27:7-12). He then feigned loyalty to Achish when would have had to fight with the Philistines against Israel (I Samuel 29:2-11). Indeed, King David’s record of craftiness in relationship to Achish comes to resemble that of the pagan Greek Homer’s epic hero, Odysseus. So is this the record of a man after God’s own heart?

Let’s consider this now in reply: It’s our job to live righteously and faithfully for God. We shouldn’t focus on what other people, in the church or in the world, seem to be “getting away with” if they are abusing God’s grace. Let’s work on our own problems first, and leave to God to judge other people’s overall levels of righteousness. As already discussed above, was it “fair” for God to give the same level of reward to all the laborers in the vineyard despite they worked a different number of hours? (See Matt. 20:1-16,

especially verses 12-15). Likewise, is it “fair” for God to offer the few called now the opportunity to be in the First Resurrection, and most of the presently uncalled end up in the Second? True Christians have more trials for now, but will have higher positions in the kingdom of God (Rev. 20:6). Similarly, God has used Israel as a model nation for the world first (Deut. 4:6-8), before working with gentiles more directly spiritually under the New Covenant (Acts 15; 17:30). He offered Israel great material blessings if they obeyed Him, but serious curses if they didn’t (see generally Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28). They have greater privileges, but also greater responsibilities correspondingly compared to gentile nations. From our very limited base of knowledge, are we able to morally condemn God for setting up these trade-offs in life? Furthermore, even under man’s laws in America we know it’s possible to treat everyone equally can produce unequal results when people aren’t actually equal.

Next, let’s take in account the problem of progressive revelation. God doesn’t reveal all of His ways to humanity all at once, or else they would be blinded by the light (cf., the changes for the law of divorce in Matt. 19:7-9). Hence, polygamy and waging war were allowed under the Old Testament, but Christians today should avoid both (cf. I Timothy 3:2; Matt. 5:38-48). God doesn’t reveal everything all at once in any one dispensation, which is clear even when the Old Testament alone is considered: Noah knew more than Adam, Abraham knew more than Noah, Moses more than Abraham, and Isaiah more than Moses. David was not held to same standard that we are since we know more than he did. Is that unfair to him? Or unfair to us? Or both? God doesn’t wish to overwhelm people all at once with the truth. God doesn’t always agree with or apply the sentiment of the German philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804): “If the truth shall kill them, let them die.” There will come a day for that (II Thess. 1:7-10), but it isn’t yet. If God has more patience and makes more allowances for those who are more ignorant spiritually than other people in this regard (cf. John 9:40-41; 15:22), shouldn’t we do so also?

Can we really know David’s mental and spiritual state? Well, know, we can’t read his heart, now can we (I Samuel 16:6-7). God can, but we should admit we can’t. Did he really repent? In Psalm 51, he certainly says he did. Did he commit adultery again? No. So then his actions did back up his words. Furthermore, we have to consider how much he loved two of his worst enemies (Saul and Absalom), and didn’t want to kill either of them. Now appearances can deceive even a spiritual man like Samuel in judging another man’s character. Then consider this much more recent case: If Princess Diana had had a plain physical appearance, like (well) Camilla, would have England mourned her passing so much? We’re so easily blinded by physical beauty and appearances, and discriminate foolishly in favor of the beautiful or handsome when their character is weak.

Furthermore, David suffered a serious punishment for his sins during his lifetime and afterwards. Absalom’s revolt and losing a total of four sons was a consequence of what he did after committing adultery with Bathsheba (II Samuel 12:5-7, 10-14). David’s sins also are written down for all the world to read about, in the most commonly printed book in the world’s history. Indeed, a key proof of the Bible’s inspiration is that

it objectively discusses the sins of the chosen people, Israel, and its heroes so much, rather than concealing or minimizing them. By contrast, fortunately, our sins aren't so public! Because of David's high position in God's sight, his greater responsibilities came with greater penalties for failure as well as greater rewards for success. Once again, we shouldn't think this trade-off to be unfair to others.

Fundamentally, we need to focus on solving our own problems, instead of worrying about whether God is letting someone else "off" or not. We need to realize that God doesn't reveal all at once to everyone, so we're more responsible for knowing more than King David did. We should also be wary of thinking we know others' spiritual status in God's sight when it involves matters of attitude and belief. If God lets us all off for our sins, greater or lesser (Romans 3:22-26), who are we to condemn God for His treatment of King David?

Why Does God Let Satan and the Evil Angels Tempt and Harm Humanity?

Now, why does God let Satan and the evil angels tempt men and women (Eph. 2:2-3; Rev. 12:9; Matt. 4:1-11; Genesis 3:1-5)? Much of the meaning of the Day of Atonement concerns the binding of Satan so the whole human race can be reconciled to God (compare Leviticus 16 to Revelation 20:1-3). Why did God let Satan set up a longstanding rebellion against Him that included millions of formerly holy angels? Why didn't God just instantly "zap" him (and them)? Why didn't God nip this revolt all in the bud, instead of letting their rebellion blossom forth and spread even to mankind? Obviously, this problem is closely related to the general reasons why a good God still allows evil to exist in His creation.

Unlike Job in his worst moments, we need to have faith that God knows what He is doing. Since His power and His knowledge are so much greater than ours, we have to stop complaining to God about our trials as if we know the full story behind them. We need to have patience and faith about why God allows Satan to tempt us and the entire world at this time. For Satan's present power (II Cor. 4:4) and the problem of evil are only temporary, so we need to have the faith and patience to let God resolve them on His timetable, not ours. We shouldn't think that just because there is a time delay between sin and the corresponding punishment for it that we or someone else "got away with it" or that God doesn't care about justice.

Let's consider three basic points on this subject. First of all, this season of temptation likely will not last that much longer. It may well end in our would-be natural lifetimes, depending on when Christ returns. Second, the reward of participating in the first resurrection and receiving the gift of having eternal life are so large that they greatly outweigh the pains and trials we suffer temporarily now. Trillions of years of glory and pleasure (Ps. 16:11) easily outweigh whatever wretchedness anyone suffered in the here and now for (say) 70 years. Since God controls our destinies, and is the only source of

eternal life, we have to surrender completely to Him if we wish to avoid the Lake of Fire. Third, we should admit like Job (see 40:3-5; 42:1-6) that we don't know enough to condemn, criticize, and curse God. That's why we need to have patience and faith, unlike Job's wife, who counseled him to defiantly curse God and die (Job 2:9).

Consider this as a serious possibility: The event foreshadowed by the Day of Atonement concerning the chaining of Satan (in Rev. 20:1-3) could literally occur within the next two or three decades. Of course, we shouldn't fix dates. But consider such prophetic developments such as the growing political unity of Europe, the economic development of Asia that makes sending a 200 million-man army east physically possible, and the increasing resentment much of the world has against the U.S., Israel, and Britain stemming from recent events in the Middle East. We shouldn't repeat prior generations' mistakes in setting specific dates, of course. But this time it is likely not a false alarm to think Jesus may come before a third of this century has passed. So then, if we fall away from God, because we're resentful that He has allowed Satan to tempt us or for the general evils permitted to happen in the world, what good would that do then? Do we really think it's that much longer?

Notice the great reward we receive for endurance in this life, as part of the first fruits (Rev. 20:6). Our lives now may be harder because true Christianity isn't compatible with the world's culture (I John 2:15-17). We may be persecuted or otherwise just simply mistreated by others in the world, such as in our physical families, coworkers, or neighbors. God allows those living at the end of the millennium to be tested also, just like those who lived at this time. Notice how quickly so many who will have had it so easy compared to those living today will fall away then (Rev. 20:7-9).

Do we wish to end up in the same place as Satan Himself (Rev. 20:10)? Let's make sure that we won't be. It's a dangerous to be called in this life, during our first lives (Rev. 20:14). This dreadful fate we must aim to avoid (Matt. 24:51; 25:30), and instead embrace eternal life, but we only can have it on God's terms. So, have faith and obey, or die. We should remember this when we we're tempted to spit in God's face verbally.

Why Did God Let Job Suffer?

In this context, let's now consider Job's trials and response to them. After all, if we want to learn something about the problem of evil, Job is the one book of the Bible dedicated to answering this question. In Job 1:8; 2:3, God holds up Job as an admirably righteous man, not as a terrible sinner deserving punishment. In response, Satan accused Job of serving God only for material gain and good health (Job 1:9-11; 2:4-5). God wished to prove otherwise. Knowing Job's character, God allowed a supremely awful set of trials to strike him. For He knew Job wasn't being tempted beyond his strength (I Cor. 10:13), as hard as these trials were. By God's pointing out Job's sterling example of righteousness to Satan, Job admittedly had a bull's eye painted on his back. God almost

surely knew what Satan's reaction would be to His challenge. But Job's admirable response to the first round of trials that destroyed most of his family and his material prosperity allowed God to virtually taunt Satan about Job's continued loyalty to Him (Job 2:3). Notice that God could still say Job was righteous despite having such a set of truly awful trials inflicted on him by Satan.

Now despite all this sore testing, Job did not curse God. Satan had predicted this, but it never happened. Job rejected his wife's advice to do exactly this. Job initially maintained a good attitude despite such severe pain (Job 1:22; 2:3, 10). Are we doing as well as he did? Do we have a similar level of self-control? Or are we complaining far more about much more trivial trials than his were? I've known people even in the Church of God who have cursed God or questioned God's love and righteousness for trials far less severe than those that Job endured. Do we react as Job's wife did to trials (Job 2:9)? What we get in this life really isn't ours, but is from God conditionally and temporarily, as Job confessed (Job 1:21). We are not our own. So we shouldn't walk around with some kind of entitlement mentality complaining about life's unfairness to us or others. In this same context, the Bible commentator Matthew Henry says (p. 658, on Job 1), quoting Scripture in part: "In all our comforts, God gave us our being, made us, and not we ourselves, gave us our wealth; it was not our own ingenuity or industry that enriched us, but God's blessing on our cares and endeavours. He gave us power to get wealth, not only made the creatures [farm animals] for us, but bestowed upon us our share."

Why did God allow Job to be so tested by Satan? That question really isn't answered here. God's fundamental response to Job's later questions comes near the end of this book, when God confronts Job out of the whirlwind. And what was Jehovah's reply? God said that He has so much more knowledge and power than we do that we shouldn't be harshly questioning or criticizing Him. We should have faith that He knows what He is doing. Jehovah's Witnesses, in their Bible dictionary, have a good point when they say: "He [Job] was also mistaken in insisting on receiving an answer from God as to why he was suffering" ("Insight in the Scriptures," vol. 2, p. 83). Are we like Job, by insisting that God should satisfy our curiosity before we will obey Him? But who has the power here? Who makes the terms of the contract? It's our duty to believe and obey even if we aren't fully intellectually satisfied by the response, "I know more than you do; trust Me for now." Since He created us from nothing, and we know little by comparison, God has the right to demand obedience before understanding, much like a parent with a toddler. We should have faith then that God knows what He is doing and that He has our best interests at heart, much like a conscientious father does with his child.

Now while suffering through trials and tests like Job, we should not think God has to tell us why we're going through them now. We should be faithful and obedient to God despite being ignorant about the causes of our suffering and pain. Let's use this example, based on an incident Philip Yancey described in his book, "Disappointment with God" (p. 203). One time a swimmer swam far into a large lake. Suddenly, a thick, freak fog moved in that evening. He didn't know where the shoreline was! For a half hour, he alternated between half panicking, by splashing different directions back and forth, and forcing himself

to remain calm while floating to preserve his energy. But then he heard someone speaking faintly but steadily near the shore. Then he could he swim his way back to safety. Like this lost swimmer, do our trials and tests in life make us feel that we that we're lost at sea? Do we doubt that God cares? Do we wonder what the purpose of our tests and trials are? Didn't Job wonder the same? Anyone going through trials and tests should consider reading Philip Yancey's book, "Disappointment with God: Three Questions No One Asks Aloud." The same goes for anyone concerned about the problem of evil in general. This book is generally written at a very simple, basic level. But its emotional effect can be profound in helping us become more content while suffering in this life. Much of it examines the Book of Job, which is why it's quoted in this context.

Consider now this fundamental point about Job's trials: Did Job himself know why he went through the trials he did? Job knew nothing about Satan's challenge to God in the first two chapters of the book named for him. But God allows just mere average readers to have that revealed to us. Yancey (pp. 163-64) compares these two chapters of the Book of Job to the director of a play giving us a sneak preview to a mystery play or "whodunit" detective story. He tells us the plot, the main characters, their actions during the play, and why they did what they did. So what's the only real remaining mystery?: "[H]ow will the main character respond? Will Job trust God or deny him?" Then the curtain rises: Job and all his friends know nothing about what happened in heaven, but we the readers do. We know Job did nothing wrong to deserve what happened to him.

Job 1:6-12 describes what Yancey calls "the wager" arises between God and Satan. What was wager about?: "The Wager was, at its heart, a stark reenactment of God's original question in creation: Will the humans choose for or against me?" (Yancey, p. 171). Satan claimed this man only serves God for what he gets materially from God. Yancey (p. 172): "Is faith one more product of environment and circumstance? The opening chapters of Job expose Satan as the first great behaviorist: Job was *conditioned* to love God, he implied. Take away the rewards, and watch his faith crumble. The Wager put Satan's theory to the test." God challenges Satan on this score by allowing him to harshly attack Job. God thinks this man will still freely choose to obey Him despite being left totally ignorant as to the causes of his awful trials. Under the same circumstances, would we do better or worse than Job himself did?

Job holds to God faithfully. God throws this fact in Satan's face. Satan retorts by claiming Job would deny God if Job lost his health also. But as already mentioned above, Job doesn't choose to curse God and die. (See Job 1:21-2:10). Note that neither God nor Satan says anything about Job being self-righteous, like the Pharisees were centuries later. His personal problem in this area only shows up later. Self-righteousness can't be called properly the "cause" of Job's trial. God didn't mention Job as being in any way sinful, but said he was truly righteous. God wasn't deliberately allowing Satan to punish Job for any particular sin.

Job and his three friends then spent long hours debating and thinking about the causes of his trials. But they knew nothing about this scene in heaven, as described in the prologue to the book. At the end of the book, God doesn't explain any of this to Job

either. Ironically, we as average ordinary people reading this book of the Bible can know more about why Job went through these trials than Job did himself! Thus, most mysteriously, God lifted the curtain veiling heaven more for us than He did for Job. After all, what was God's basic response to Job?: "You don't know enough about the universe to judge Me." (See Job 42:1-6 for when Job admitted this to God, which we'll examine more below).

So now, here comes a key point taught by the Book of Job: If we're going through trials and tests, can we still obey God while not knowing why we're going through them? The answer is obviously "yes." Do we have to know the purpose of our sufferings and disappointments in order to stay faithful to God? The answer is obviously "no." We should stay obedient and faithful to God despite our ignorance of why we're suffering may equal Job's. True, we may suffer for all sorts of self-inflicted reasons, such as making poor financial decisions, marrying the wrong person by mistake, and eating the wrong foods and drinks for years. It also may be God is working at correcting some character flaw or sin in our lives. But even if we don't know and can't know the causes of our suffering, we should still obey God anyway while in our fog of ignorance anyway.

Like when Job wanted an "umpire" to judge between God and him, do we ever try to turn the tables on God? Do we ever imagine being the judge and jury and putting God in the dock as the accused criminal? Do we ever judge God? Do we ever condemn God? Do we know enough to be the judge of God? Are we righteous enough to condemn God for (say) allowing suffering among the faithful? There's a deep folly in emotionally wanting this role reversal, which allows humans to judge and condemn God. Of course, we don't have the power to implement the role reversal, which makes this all a wild fantasy anyway. For as shown by the book of Job, humans can't judge or condemn God when we suffer because we don't know enough to do so and because God is so much greater and mightier than we are. Job ultimately had to accept the utter sovereignty of God, just as we do, if we wish to live forever.

Suppose our pets could judge us? What would we say in reply? What would be our response to "Fido," a puppy undergoing house training, if he could complain about how we're treating him? Or suppose "Fluffy" the cat could condemn us for receiving a shot of water from a squirt gun after she dug her claws deep into our upholstered couch? Wouldn't we point out how misguided and ignorant their complaints are? But don't we realize that the difference between God and mankind greatly exceeds the difference between us and our pets?

Let's examine Job's errors in Job 23:2-16 in particular. Do we make similar mistakes? Do we demand that God would explain why we're suffering during a trial? Do we cry out, "Why me?" Of course, since many people in the world or even the church have worse trials than us, we could ask equally, "Why not me?" Why do other people have Parkinson's or multiple sclerosis instead of us? It's presumptuous of us to demand answers; it requires faith to wait until one day the answers may be given to us. As the classical Bible commentator Matthew Henry explained: "The reason why we

quarrel with Providence is because we do not understand it; and we must be content to be in dark about it, until the mystery of God shall be finished.” This becomes the main point of God’s direct reply to Job. Jehovah is so much greater and more glorious in power and knowledge than us. We are in no position to judge Him morally. Job was certain about his innocence. True, he was not guilty of anything in particular when his sore trial hit him. But during the debates with his so-called “friends,” it became obvious he was judging and condemn God, including for letting the sinful and wicked get away with it while not being punished.

Job’s brave words (see Job 40:1-15) eventually received a direct response from God Himself. It’s always easier to think about or say to others the strong things we’ll say to someone we have a dispute with before softening or abandoning them during the actual confrontation, right? Of course, Job had to admit his insignificance relative to God’s. Job simply couldn’t take on this role that God has. And God’s creative power shows why he has power over both Job and Behemoth. Then, at the beginning of the last chapter of his eponymous book (Job 42:1-6), admitted to God’s great power as the Creator, which was the main point of the prior four chapters. Job also admits he didn’t know enough to judge God. He acknowledged God’s great power, knowledge, and glory. Likewise, are we willing to similar admit sin and error if we’ve been guilty of judging God for allowing us or others to suffer? Most interestingly, God was merciful to Job after he repented despite he criticized Him, as the Bible commentator Matthew Henry observed. God restored Job to his prior status.

A Christian Response to Shelley’s “Frankenstein” on the Problem of Evil

God isn’t subject to anyone’s will but His own. He doesn’t have to explain the specifics about our trials in our own lives. God has a great plan; it’s our job to figure out where we fit in it as we follow his revealed word in the Bible as the Spirit helps us. God may have higher priorities than increasing our personal happiness at this time when more important goals need to be reached. Although most people are far more familiar with “Frankenstein” as a movie and TV icon than with its text as a novel, Mary Shelley’s work makes arguments relating to the problem of evil that deserve some direct attention by Christians. In particular, the novel considers the responsibilities of the creator (i.e., Dr. Frankenstein) for his creation (i.e., the monster). For example, focusing on his desire for a mate, the monster complained to Frankenstein (p. 96): “I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile to my natural lord and king if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. . . . Remember that I am thy creature: I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.” Shortly thereafter Frankenstein admitted (p. 98), “For the first time, also, I felt what the duties of a creator towards his creature were, and that I ought to render him happy before I complained of his wickedness.” Much later in the novel, after the monster had taken

repeated acts of vengeance against him, Dr. Frankenstein explained the higher priority behind why he didn't make his creature happier (p. 226): "During these last days I have been occupied in examining my past conduct; nor do I find it blamable. In a fit of enthusiastic madness I created a rational creature and was bound towards him to assure, as far as was in my power, his happiness and well-being. This was my duty, but there was another still paramount to that. My duties towards the beings of my own species had greater claims to my attention because they included a greater proportion of happiness or misery. Urged by this view, I refused, and did right in refusing, to create a companion for the first creature." Of course, Dr. Frankenstein here confessed the pride-driven folly in playing God by creating the ugly monster that rebelled against him and killed those closest to him when he didn't obey its wishes. Victor Frankenstein's scientific hubris ultimately destroyed him. In his case, he foolishly created a creature for no good or specific ultimate purpose, but merely as a means to demonstrate his knowledge and mental abilities. Furthermore, Victor Frankenstein not only had a bad motive for creation and a bad purpose for his creature (i.e., basically none, for he abandoned him initially), his level of knowledge only marginally exceeded his creature's. After all, he didn't know the purpose of life either. Hence, the law of unanticipated consequences kicked in, and ruined him. By contrast, the actual omniscient and loving Creator, when designing a physical universe of any kind, did know to the nth degree all the variables involved, and could choose its attributes and characteristics exactly as would be best for His purposes (as they emanate from His essence and identity) that also would serve the ultimate self-interest of the creatures He would make for it.

Now let's examine more closely the error in Mary Shelly's sympathetic presentation of the monster's complaint against his creator, that happiness necessarily leads to obeying the Creator. But to have a state of steady, earned (i.e., not drug induced) happiness, including a lack of alienation, requires the conscious intelligence in question to believe the truth and to follow the laws of its surrounding real world that indeed would produce for it happiness. Indeed, good character creates happiness rather than happiness creating good character (i.e., the habits of obedience to God's law). In order to have happiness forever reliably, we have to have self-imposed discipline and the faith to obey God's law as what's good for us. To explore and go off to find our own way morally in life means we'll learn the hard way by experience instead of avoiding pain by obeying revelation from God about what's good for us. The Eternal warned Israel that material prosperity (i.e., one source of happiness that the Creator can give us) often leads to people not obeying their Creator (Deut. 8:11-14, 17): "Beware that you do not forget the Lord your God by not keeping His commandments, His judgments, and His statutes which I command you today, lest—when you have eaten and are full, and have built beautiful houses and dwell in them; and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and your gold are multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied; when your heart is lifted up, and you forget the Lord your God . . . then you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gained me this wealth.'" Furthermore, even to know God's law doesn't mean people will obey it, as Israel's history under the old covenant demonstrates (Deuteronomy 5:29; Jeremiah 31:31-34). People need to have the Holy Spirit given to them in order to transform their evil human nature into something that will instead produce happiness for themselves and others after they have God's law

written on their hearts (Hebrews 8:7-11). The monster assumed having a mate would make him permanently happy, a folly that still afflicts so many unmarried people who think marching down the aisle is enough to remove all pains in life and to transform their evil human nature. After all, how many people have mates, but are still miserable, or are miserable precisely because they do have mates? Perhaps, after a year or two of dealing with each other's selfishness, bad tempers, heated arguments, etc., the monster would have thought Dr. Frankenstein cursed him instead of blessing him by giving him a bride. Or, perhaps when they would have first met, the lady monster would have looked at him, said, "Ew!," and rejected him! Where would he have been then? Instead, to have a happy relationship in marriage isn't an automatic process, but it takes a lot of work, careful consideration, and self-sacrifice. The fundamental error in Shelly's reasoning is to sympathize with the monster's implicit reasoning that lasting happiness can be obtained without self-discipline and self-sacrifice, merely as an arbitrarily bestowed gift given regardless of the actions of the creature, that would require no special efforts on the creature's part to obtain through dedicating itself to transform its very nature into something that can have happiness.

But now, can we humans admit the folly in playing God when we judge God? So if we're like Job, and experiencing severe trial(s), we must avoid the temptation to judge or condemn God. First, we don't know enough to do so. How we react to our suffering may be a necessary part of God's plan to build holy righteous character in us, if we react to our trials correctly. Second, since God is so much more powerful and glorious than we are, we are utterly incapable of reversing the roles anyway. It's a wild fantasy to imagine ourselves judging and condemning God. It's best to give it up out of utter realism. It may be a hard truth to accept this when we, loved ones, or masses of people in the world we don't know personally, but hear about in the news, suffer. But Matthew Henry was right to observe: "Let us leave it to God to govern the world, and make it our care, in the strength of his grace, to govern ourselves and our own hearts well."

Can we be like Joseph, and see good ultimately coming out of our trials and tests, at least for others, whether in this life or the next? After all, much like Job, Joseph was severely tested. Joseph's trial lasted for many years, since his brothers sold him into slavery in Egypt out of jealousy and envy. He even got falsely accused and imprisoned after resisting the sexual advances of Potiphar's wife. After hearing his brothers' concerns that he would take vengeance on them after Jacob died and their asking for his forgiveness, Joseph replied: "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? You intended to harm me, but God intended it for God to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children" (Genesis 50:19-20).

Most importantly as the reason for why evil came to exist, God allowed His creatures free will, or free moral agency. The angels received this freedom also, not just men and women. Since God's creatures doubt that He has their own best interests in heart, He decided to prove it to them by letting them suffer from their own hard experience when they disobey His law. He wanted to prove that He wasn't keeping something good from us when He issues negative commands. It's said that fools only

learn from experience. Likewise, since neither Lucifer nor Eve would take God's word for it that disobeying Him would be bad for them, He let them choose badly. Why didn't He "zap" either of them instantly? Well, this issue was going to keep coming up, with His creatures through endless billions of years having questions about whether God's ways really were best for them. So God decided to prove to them by their own empirical experience: Their pain, most ironically, would prove He and His ways could be trusted. And to prove it more, He decided to suffer in pain Himself, by dying so awfully painfully on the cross for His creatures. So if we creatures had had faith in God to begin with, most or all of this pain and evil could have been avoided. But both Lucifer (Isaiah 14:12-14; Ezekiel 28:12-19) and (later) Eve (Genesis 3:6) had other ideas.

Do We Have the Faith to Sacrifice in This Life in Order to Gain in the Next?

More than 20 years ago, I was reading the novel "The Fountainhead" by Ayn Rand. I came across a Biblical quote (on p. 300), which she put in the mouth of the leading villain of the novel, Ellsworth Toohey. I was initially skeptical that it was in Bible. But later on, when reading the Bible (then using the RSV) through for the first time, I found it. I then checked it in the King James Version to make sure it was exactly the same quote featured in the novel. Since Ayn Rand made it a central point of her philosophy to deny the need for self-sacrifice, this particular Scripture made a point to which she heatedly objected. But this text's main point is central to Christian ethics, so we're going to pay it some close attention. One of our lives' central questions is this: Are we willing to give up things in this life to have things in the next? Do we have the faith to deny ourselves pleasure now in order to have pleasure in the next life? What do we really value the most? Ultimately, we Christians need to be willing to give up happiness in this life in order to have eternal life if God requires that of us.

Let's consider carefully now John 12:23-25, which concerns the purposes and results of Jesus' own sacrifice and what He wants Christians to do likewise: "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and also dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain. He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (NKJV). Now notice that self-sacrifice in Christianity has a transformative, ultimate goal, unlike what Ayn Rand thought. Self-destruction isn't done merely for the sake of self-destruction. Instead, God wants something positive accomplished by our self-sacrifice as an outcome. Here, Jesus' own sacrifice makes our salvation possible, the "fruit" (the literal translation for the Greek word translated "grain") in question. We pledged ourselves at baptism to be willing to die rather than deny Jesus as our Savior.

Did Howard Roark in "The Fountainhead" Sacrifice Himself for His Beliefs Like a Christian Would?

Now in Rand's novel "The Fountainhead," she had her hero Howard Roark hold to his artistic integrity at all costs. At a crucial point of his career early on, he refused to do design work on a major building that would require him to compromise on his beliefs in modernist architecture. Giving up a lot of money as a result, he instead chose to close his architect's office and eventually ended up working in a stone quarry as a mere workman. By manipulating the definition of the word "sacrifice," Objectivism argues that what Roark did wasn't a "sacrifice" (thus commendable) but what Christians do when serving God is a "sacrifice" (thus condemnable). That's because Ayn Rand and her band of Objectivists reckon that holding to one's rational beliefs isn't a sacrifice even if one has to give up fame, fortune, friends, etc., to follow them. But when a Christian dies as a martyr for his beliefs, or even just gives money to the poor out of a sense of duty to God, that's considered "evil," or sacrifice as an end in itself, for which nothing else good can come. Of course, Rand assumes when making this argument that Christian beliefs aren't rational, that there is no God, that the Bible is false, and that there is no afterlife. As she would see it, since there's no God to reward the people who are faithful to Him unto death with eternal life and a position in His kingdom, there's no way giving up something in this life for the next life could possibly result in a greater value rather than a lesser value. Hence, Christians die for nothing since there's no God, but Roark's self-imposed demotion to blue-collar status was for something true since the real world's moral absolutes favor modernist architecture esthetically over other architectural schools of design. The manipulation of the meaning of the word "sacrifice" in this context should be obvious to all objective parties who aren't Objectivists. Thus Objectivists really do believe in "sacrifice" (i.e., giving up material success if necessary in order to follow their beliefs), based on any normal definition of the word, but they refuse to call it such.

So when Christians choose martyrdom and follow in Christ's footsteps, they embraced suffering in the world in order to gain more in the next life with God. To illustrate, let's consider a few historical examples here. The Roman emperor Trajan had Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, a very early exponent of worshiping on Sunday, condemned to be eaten by the lions, around 110 A.D. He said at the time: "I am God's wheat, ground by the teeth of beasts, that I may be found pure bread." To Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, who upheld observing Nisan 14 and the Passover instead of Easter, the Roman governor said: "Swear, and I will set you free: execrate Christ." In response, Polycarp stood his ground: "For eighty-six years, I have been His servant, and He has never done me wrong: How can I blaspheme my King who saved me?" During the time of Marcus Aurelius (161-180), a Roman persecution campaign in Gaul (modern France) occurred. Some who had denied Jesus later affirmed him when questioned again, thus ensuring their own deaths. (The Roman citizens among them were beheaded, and the rest were handed over to the beasts). According to the early Catholic historian Eusebius: "These were individually examined with the intention that they should be released, but they confessed Him and so joined the ranks of martyrs." So these faithful Christians sacrificed pleasure in this life in order to gain in the next life with God. When faced with enduring harsh trials in this life, including making such an ultimate sacrifice for God, Christians should accept in faith the deep truth of Romans 8:28: "And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose." Much like when God tested Abraham about sacrificing Isaac

(Genesis 22), we should not angrily complain to God should one day we be asked to make the ultimate sacrifice of our earthly lives. Instead, we should accept that outcome in faith, believing that God knows what's He's doing, that proving our faithfulness to the death is more valuable to Him and ultimately to us than our continued physical life on earth is to Him and to us.

Now suppose someone advised teenagers to uphold Christian values by using this kind of argument, "You will get more happiness in life if you don't get drunk than if you get drunk and then suffer a hangover the next morning." This could be called the "hedonistic calculus" argument for obeying God's law: Obeying God's law will ultimately give you more pleasure long-term rather than less if you obey it during this life. It can be readily applied to doing drugs and having sex outside of marriage as well. But since it isn't always true in all cases, its limitations should be admitted. For example, suppose someone has to give up a good-paying job or career in order to keep the Saturday Sabbath or the Holy Days listed in Leviticus 23. Or consider the divorced man or woman who can't remarry lawfully (Matt. 5:32; Luke 16:18), but has to live without a mate until his or her former mate dies or otherwise acts in a way (such as by committing adultery) to break the marriage bond in God's sight. Are we willing to still obey God then, despite it doesn't help us in this life, but hurts us? Do we have the faith to believe the next life really exists then? Those considering baptism should keep in the mind the deadly serious issues of the faith required for obeying God's law out of self-sacrifice.

We as Christians have to be willing to sacrifice ourselves as Jesus did. We must be willing give up pleasure in this life while obeying God's law when God requires this of us. It could be in a spectacular test in the years to come when we may face the Beast power's evil dictates when it tries to impose its mark on us: God may require us to die at the hands of the government if it demands that we deny Jesus as our Savior (Acts 5:29). Or the trial could be a long, nagging, life-long test in which some earthly goal that would give us happiness can't be had by us lawfully if we wish to obey God. True, He might not require such a sacrifice of us. But we had better be ready if He does! Christians must not condemn God should such trials and evils fall upon us.

How Does Jesus' Suffering Relate to the Problem of Evil?

What are some of the general implications of Jesus' suffering for explaining the problem of evil? When arguing with skeptics on this matter, it's absolutely vital for Christians to avoid sounding like generic theists who uphold beliefs about God that Jews, Muslims, and philosophical Deists would defend as well. Instead, a Christian defending the faith should always confront atheists and agnostics who question the goodness of God with the cross and the suffering of God on behalf of and along with His creatures. Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of the Christ," brutally emphasizes the suffering of Jesus during His trial and crucifixion. The film portrays graphically the Roman soldiers inflicting a savage scourging on Jesus, a raucous city crowd watching Jesus' carrying the cross to Golgotha, and finally the brutal procedure for crucifying this Man. Jesus is

systematically beaten to a bloody pulp before our eyes. The stretching of Jesus' second arm to reach the other already drilled hole in the cross's crossbeam is a particularly gruesome touch. The Roman soldiers flip over the cross upside-down with Jesus attached in order to pound downwards the points of the stakes. Then they turn it back over before lifting it up by ropes before dropping it into the hole already dug into the ground. Thud! Imagine what that action would do in causing the nails to tear at your flesh. The general accuracy of the film's depiction of the violent gore and pain of Jesus' death can't be doubted. It fits well Isaiah's description of the Messiah's appearance, that He would be marred and disfigured (Isaiah 52:14; 53:3-8).

True, some cautions about this movie are in order: Because of all the brutal violence, it certainly isn't recommended for anyone under 13. It plainly deserves its R-rating. Nor is it always accurate historically, such as in certain added scenes not found in the Gospels. For example, the Virgin Mary uses a towel to wipe up her Son's blood on the pavement around the site Jesus was scourged at after all the soldiers had left. The movie plays up some Mary's role during the Passion, which fits Mel Gibson's very conservative Catholicism. But she did see her baby tortured murdered before he eyes (John 19:25-27), even if He was 33 years old by then. In addition, when Pilate talked to Jews, including Jesus, he presumably used Greek, not Latin, since it was the local lingua franca. The place of the crucifixion, Golgotha, likely wasn't on a hill, although it makes for more dramatic movie-making pictorially. Although the "cross" may not have been shaped like a cross, the exact shape of the piece of wood used to kill God isn't of great importance intrinsically. Because Jesus is God, and the movie is a picture of God, it does violate the Second Commandment, which prohibits making graven images (Exodus 20:4). Would it be wrong then to watch the movie? Let's make an analogy based on what the Amish do concerning using 20th century technology: They can ride a motorized bus despite not allowed to drive it, fix it, or manufacture it using electricity. So likewise, Christians shouldn't make graven images, which this movie is full of, but this "bus" they may wish to get "on."

The utterly awful and terrible pain Jesus suffered during the last 12 hours of His life leads us to an important issue: Why? That is, suppose you were God. You are planning to create a universe with creatures like yourself in it, made in your image (Genesis 1:26). Why do you choose to die for them if they violate your law, your will? After all, they're the ones in the wrong, not you. So let's examine the theory of atonement, and why Jesus had to die for our sins. Why did God allow evil to exist, and then choose to die for His creatures' evils? Why did God allow pain into His universe, but then take such an awful share of it for Himself?

The great reality of God's general master plan for the universe was that the Creator signed His own death warrant by creating the human race (cf. Hebrews 9:15-18, 23-28). At the barest minimum, God knew Adam and Eve likely were going to sin. But He went forward with His plan nevertheless. Although there's ambiguity in translating the Greek of Rev. 13:8, that isn't really very important since God's foresight makes this a necessary truth. Furthermore, the alternative translation turns salvation into a matter of predestination, "every one whose name hath not been written from the foundation of the

world in the book of life of the Lamb that hath been slain” (ASV). That’s enough to rule out this translation since it would conflict with other texts that reveal that people have free will (Deut. 30:19-20; Acts 17:30; Romans 6:20).

But why did God choose to die for His creatures’ violations of His will? A great mystery always overhangs this issue. Why couldn’t God the Father just look down, and say, “You all are forgiven if you repent”? Why must there be a blood sacrifice as the basis for the process of granting forgiveness for His creatures’ violations of His law? Why does the process of atonement require the innocent Creator to allow His creatures to inflict such pain upon Him? Why does God think that He had to allow His creatures acting from evil motives to inflict evil upon Him? Why must atonement require pain’s existence for reconciliation to occur?

If we can answer these questions, we can understand why Jesus had to die, and why He had to die so painfully. After all, if atonement requires death to be effective, why must the death require such enormous agony to be effective? Why couldn’t Jesus have been (say) simply beheaded? By tradition, that’s how Paul died, for example, since being a Roman citizen gave him certain rights. Why couldn’t Jesus have been given the hemlock to drink, like the ancient Greek philosopher Socrates had to drink when the city of Athens executed him?

There must be a reason why God decided not merely to die, but to die a very painful and protracted death by crucifixion, in order to save us. Ultimately, part of the reason why has to be His need to impress upon all his intelligent, conscious creatures, both angelic and human, that His love for them is boundless. The agony of Jesus during His passion, during the process of being beaten, mocked, scourged, and crucified, which He undertook to give us eternal life, shows we shouldn’t doubt His love for us. He also suffered incredible emotional pain as He was separated from God the Father as the Father turned away from Him, as all the sins of the world were transferred onto Christ, which the Father must not be touched by. Similarly, Jesus’ pain also is the basis for being physically healed by God’s spiritual power (Isaiah 53:5). But why make this the basis for healing, other than to teach us a lesson also? So we should have faith in God’s goodness and we should not condemn God for allowing evil to exist when He allowed such terrible pain to be inflicted upon Himself.

Philosophical skeptics with a historical frame of mind can ask, “Why did God let the Holocaust, the Ukrainian terror famine, and the Cultural Revolution happen?” Average folks may think, “God, if you loved me, or mankind in general, why did you allow this terrible thing X to occur to me, or them?” This thinking is ultimately very shallow, although that may be very hard to admit emotionally and psychologically. We shouldn’t allow an ultimately mistimed sense of compassion that might seem very good in the short-run to cause us to judge God concerning how He manages His overall plan for the history of the world. What looks good in relieving pain to our fellow human beings would cause far more pain ultimately in the long-term if God intervened directly and clearly in His creation to stop any given awful atrocity to occur in the here and now.

Furthermore, such reasoning simply doesn't recognize the utter agony of Christ, which Mel Gibson's movie so successfully drives home.

Why Did God Have to Sacrifice Himself Also Instead of Just Forgiving Repentant Sinners?

In this context, consider the story of Zaleucus as a way to explain why the theory of atonement required God's own death. He was an ancient Greek ruler of a city in southern Italy. He had severe laws, enforced them rigidly. His own son broke a law. The stated penalty was to be made blind for violating it. As a result, Zaleucus's roles as ruler and father now conflicted when he had to judge the case. He wanted to have mercy on his son as a father. But as a ruler, he knew if he let his son off lightly, others would say he was unfair, playing favorites, and thus be encouraged to violate his laws in the future. And this was despite the people he ruled now were asking him to be merciful to His son. So how did he reconcile justice and mercy? How did he bring together his roles as both ruler and father? He devised a means of atonement: Two eyes were still to be blinded, but he had one of his own eyes blinded in place of one of his son's! (For the story of Zaleucus, see Miley, "Systematic Theology," Vol. 2, p. 182. See Miley also for a general explanation of various theories of Atonement, including the "Governmental theory," which is overall the best of the theories he lists).

God so rated the violation of His own law as such a serious issue that a heavy penalty had to be inflicted. This was done to prove to every created intelligence who could question His fairness that His laws had to be obeyed in the future. But if the penalty of death was justly inflicted on the violators of His law (Romans 3:19-20, 23; 4:15; 7:4-25; I Cor. 15:56), there would be no way they could be reconciled and made at one with their Creator. God reconciled justice and mercy by inflicting the penalty for the sins of His creatures upon Himself. God allowed evil to exist, as He gave us free will, but then allowed an incredible amount of pain from allowing it to directly hit Himself from their choices. Therefore, we shouldn't doubt God's love or the goodness of His general plan for humanity even when we don't fully understand why he allows all the specific trials and tests we and others have had to endure in this life. We should have faith in God's general goodness and we should not condemn God for allowing evil to exist when He accepted such terrible pain upon Himself.

Now again, what is God's purpose in creating the universe and populating it with intelligent creatures to begin with? God is in the process of making Beings like Himself (cf. Genesis 1:26; Eph. 4:13; Hebrews 2:5-18). To do this, He has to be reconciled to them yet not let them off the hook lightly when they break His law. Otherwise, they would be encouraged to violate it in the future (cf. Deut. 13:11; 21:21; Eccl. 8:11). The pain God took upon Himself is designed to deter future acts of evil by His physical creatures when (eventually) they are made divine and part of His family as spirit beings. For man to become God (John 17:5, 20-24; 10:30-38; Ps. 8:5; Matt. 5:48), God had to make sure human beings would choose to become totally righteous and to never want to

violate His law in the future. God doesn't want a repeat of Satan's revolt among the angels, who obviously questioned God's justice and love even when nothing evil had yet occurred. Christ died, and died so painfully, so we wouldn't want to be like Job, and question God's fairness in the eternity ahead of us.

The graphic and brutal realism of Mel Gibson's movie, "The Passion of the Christ," drives home the utter agony and pain Christ suffered on the day he was crucified. Christ's pain and death for our sins so that we could live forever shows we should never doubt God's love and fairness to us. Consider seeing this movie to impress on yourself how high a price God paid for us to be reconciled to Him. It's time to stop griping and complaining about God's lack of love when he allowed some bad thing to happen to you, a family member, a friend, or the anonymous millions of the past in such awful atrocities as the Holocaust of Hitler or the Ukrainian Terror Famine under Stalin. True, God allows such crimes as women getting raped and men getting murdered, but then He allowed Himself to be murdered. It's time to have faith that God knows what He's doing, and so commit ourselves to Him fully, including by being baptized if we aren't. The pain Jesus endured on the day He died shows we have no right to condemn God or question God for allowing evil to exist. We should let Christ's crucifixion drive a stake through our doubts about His love and His fairness in allowing evil to enter His creation.

What Does the Bible Itself Reveal about the Problem of Evil?

Why do bad things happen to seemingly good people? Why does a good God allow evil to exist? After all, if He were good and almighty, wouldn't God have the desire and the power to stop evil? We humans could come up with our own ideas about why God allows natural disasters, grinding poverty, and terrible crimes to occur. But what does the **Bible itself** say about the problem of evil? High-level theologians and philosophers will use human reason to figure out reasons why God is temporarily allowing evil in His created universe. But they may be devising clever theories that have no real truth or foundation. Their formal term for this intellectual process is "theodicy." According to Webster's, it means a "defense of God's goodness and omnipotence in view of the existence of evil." But instead of using human reason alone without the aid of revelation, we should use what the Bible itself teaches about why a good God allows evil to exist. Atheists and agnostics who complain about God's allowing evil to exist shouldn't be allowed to get away with attacking a generic "God" of their imaginations, such as one built by a consensus whose minimalistic attributes Christians, Jews, Muslims, and philosophical Deists all can generally agree to. Instead, if they are arguing with Christians, they should be confronted with what the Bible specifically itself has to say about the causes of pain, suffering, and evil.

Now what did Jesus Himself say about people who were killed by events beyond their own control? What did He say about how we should respond to such tragedies? Jesus told people to repent, regardless of what happened to others for whatever reason, in order to save themselves (Luke 13:1-5): "There were some present at the very time who

told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate [the Roman governor of Judea] had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.'" As Jesus explained, everyone is going to die, whether or not for reasons under their own control. These people suddenly had their lives ended early without warning. However, everyone who doesn't repent is going to die anyway. True, some very unlucky people just happened to exit this life before we do. But in general, what are we going to do about death and trying to avoid it? We all have to repent to gain eternal life. That's because we're all sinners (Romans 3:23), and sin brings upon us all death (Romans 6:23), which Jesus' sacrifice cancels if we accept it by faith.

Mankind's "Existential Dilemma": We All Know We're Going to Die, So What Can We Do to Avoid Death?

Suppose then the problem of evil deeply disturbs us, such as from a loved one's death, a divorce in our the family, or because of some terrible disaster or war striking thousands or millions of people somewhere else in the world, past or present. It's still illogical to reject God's existence on that basis after we've proven Him to exist on another basis, such as the arguments for intelligent design based on universe's complexity. A fundamental truth of the human condition is that we're all alive now, but know we're going to die. With apologies to the philosophical skeptics Sartre and Camus, let's call this man's "existential dilemma." So then, what are we going to do about it, if anything? Is there any way to live forever? Can we do anything to preserve our individual lives permanently somehow? Is there a God? If so, that's not enough to solve this problem: Someone, such as Voltaire, can believe in God, but think he doesn't care about humanity much. Does that God grant human beings eternal life? How can we satisfy that God so that our lives don't end after (say) 70 years on earth and our bodies are lowered inside an oblong metal box into the cold dark earth? Under what conditions does He grant it? So then, is John 3:16 our escape hatch, or exit, from our existential dilemma?: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." Christianity says this is the only way to live forever (John 14:6; Acts 4:12), but that requires accepting certain truths by faith, which can't be fully proven by human reason. It also requires making a formal commitment that requires the believer to change his or her life from the path of sin to the path of obedience (i.e., to confess sins and to repent, as per Acts 2:37-38). Regardless of what we may think of God's allowing of evil and suffering, if this is the only way out of mankind's "existential dilemma," let's personally accept it, in order to live forever. For if I were told that I could gain eternal life by walking on my hands once a day as that condition, I would figure out how to do it.

Now God asserts that He has the right to take the life of people who sin by violating His law (Romans 6:23): "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." He also reveals, through Paul (Romans 3:23) that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." But as Romans 6:23 also shows, He offers eternal life to people through accepting Jesus' sacrifice and by His Son's resurrection (Romans 5:8-9): "But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him." So then God provides a solution to the problem that we all die, which requires us humans to humble ourselves before Him, by obeying Him and having faith in Him.

So because death will come to us all, we must repent. Preferably we should do this before any harsh trial occur in our personal lives. We should not be like ancient Israel, which normally only repented when Jehovah punished them for their sins by letting them come under oppressive foreign rule. Or will we repent only when something disastrous happens to us? We shouldn't be "fair-weathered friends" to God, and only pray to Him when we have to be saved from some terrible event or problem in our personal lives. After all, death will come to us all; unexpected natural disasters or crimes merely speed up the end for some. Just because bad things happen to others doesn't mean we shouldn't repent because we think, "What happened to them is unfair!" It's our duty to repent and reconcile ourselves to God regardless of what happens to others to get our lives right with God before we die. It's cutting off our nose to spite our face for us to reject God because others have had bad things happen to them.

Do We Know Enough to Condemn God?

Does mankind have the standing to judge God? What did Isaiah (45:9-10) say?: "Woe to him who strives with his Maker! Let the potsherd strive with the potsherds of the earth! Shall the clay say to him who forms it, 'What are you making?' Or shall your handiwork say, 'He has no hands'? Woes to him who says to his father, 'What are you begetting?' Or to the woman, 'What have you brought forth?'" (Compare Romans 9:20-22). So then, do we know enough to condemn God's actions that we don't like? Are we competent to judge Him?

According to Scripture, God is "bringing many sons to glory" (Hebrews 2:10). ("Glory" is a defining attribute of God, which He also promises to give to mankind. See Isaiah 42:8; 48:11; Romans 5:2; John 17:5; Phil. 3:21; Luke 2:9; Hebrews 2:7, 9). Well, if God is our Father, as our parent He may do things that we the children aren't happy about. His parents may punish children for their good, since he doesn't know enough yet to know what is in his best self-interest. For example, it's correct to punish a young child for running into the street while chasing loose basketball. The child may cry and complain, but his complaints are without merit. Similarly, I once had a pet cat named "Sheba" who repeatedly scratched chairs, a couch, a bed, screens, etc. Since this natural behavior served no useful function in an artificial environment, she didn't know her own

destructiveness. I would use various methods, such as double-sided sticky tape, the chemical “Don’t Scratch,” and squirt guns to try to get her to stop. Can we admit that the intellectual and moral differences between God and us are far bigger than the differences between even parents and children, let alone people and pets? As the Bible reveals: “My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the Lord loves He chastens, and scourges every son whom He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with son; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten? . . . Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live? For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness. Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:5-7, 9-11). Hence, even when God directly punishes us, it’s in our self-interest in developing the habits of obedience that compose good spiritual character. We shouldn’t doubt He has our best interests at heart, when considering witness of the cross.

The Fundamental Reason for God’s Allowing Us Free Will: Character Development

God’s fundamental purpose for us in this life is to develop character like His while freely morally choosing to be like Him. To have pleasure and to avoid pain are secondary priorities by comparison in God’s present plan for humanity on earth. James explains why trials can be good for us (James 2:2-4): “Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. And let endurance have its perfect result, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” Endurance is one attribute of having solid, Godly character, which means developing the practical habits of obedience to God’s law such that we’ll choose the good and avoid evil when making moral decisions. Paul agrees with James concerning the basic purpose of trials and tests in this life as a means for improving our character (Romans 5:3-5): “We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us.” Jesus Himself endured severe tests and trials. If even Jesus Himself mysteriously taught Him to be more obedient to God (Hebrews 5:8-9), why should we expect to be any different and thus escape this process?: “Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became to all those who obey Him the source of eternal salvation.” So although all these trials, tests, and tribulations may be terribly painful at times, we should have the faith to believe good comes ultimately comes from them overall in God’s master plan for Christians (Romans 8:28): “And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.” Unfortunately from our limited perspective, we might be among those designated in God’s great master plan for

the world to play a dull, boring, repetitive musical part for our instruments while others lead the orchestra in playing a stirring symphony. Do we have the faith to continue playing our assigned parts them, even when it's painful to do so?

Should Christians Expect Not to Have Trials in This Life Because of Their Faith in and Obedience to God?

Should Christians think that God will bless them such that they won't have any trials? Obviously not, for the Bible says Christians will have trials (I Peter 4:12): "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you." Peter even then goes on to so boldly say: "But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy." Now, it's very hard to have that perspective on our trials while experiencing them. Because we feel pain during the trial itself, we can't have joy then, such as (say) over the death of a family member. But it's the product of the trial in improving and strengthening our characters that we should rejoice over, as per the perspective that James and Paul both reveal. This is a distinctly unpleasant truth. But consider the old simplistic maxim of body builders in this context: "No pain, no gain." Or then, more colorfully, the atheistic German philosopher Nietzsche (1844-1900) once said something like, "What doesn't kill me makes me stronger." When we endure harsh trials, such counsel sounds glib, emotionally superficial, even calloused. But we have to look at the fundamental purpose of life as being an experience that is supposed to build holy righteous character within us (or others) so long as we react correctly and spiritually to whatever trials are sent our way. And holy righteous character is the one thing that we can take from this life; we weren't put here on earth to always be happy.

We have to dismiss from our minds the so-called "health and wealth gospel" that some Christians teach. Just because we obey and have faith in God doesn't mean He'll take away all our trials and tests, whether in health or financially. Paul was a very faithful man of God after being struck down on the road to Damascus. But God let Paul have a thorn in his flesh, perhaps a health trial related to poor eyesight, despite his faithful obedience (see II Cor. 12:7-9). Paul also suffered from appalling trials while preaching the Gospel, which he mentioned in detail (II Cor. 11:23-27). Many of the most faithful prophets of God, such as John the Baptist, met awful ends. Think of the listing in Hebrews 11 of the men and women of faith, and the trials so many of them had (see especially verses 35-39). They shouldn't have doubted that they were serving God truly in the path of life they were in, even if they would have sinned from time to time, like Abraham, Moses, and David did. And, of course, Jesus had both perfect faith and perfect obedience, but still suffered many tests and trials before dying on the cross to redeem us from sin. (That leads to the observation that God died to free us from the evils that resulted from His giving us the free will to choose or not choose).

We also have to admit that God has the power, not us. God made this very clear to Job (40:1-5, 6-10). God holds all the cards; we hold none. Complaints that insult God

don't change that reality any. We are in no position to issue demands towards or launch threats against God's throne. We're the ones who are going to die unless we comply with His will. God will live forever regardless of what we do or don't do. We depend on God; God doesn't depend on us. Satan holds us captive (Hebrews 2:14); only God may set us free. The boss is the boss, and the Lord is the Lord. We can't fire the boss, nor can we knock the Eternal off His throne, and install some other god more to our liking.

The Bible both directly and indirectly comments on the problem of evil and the purposes for pain in God's world. We are all going to die, one way or another, if left on our own. Therefore we should repent regardless of what happens to us or others. The Bible also teaches that we don't know enough to judge God about why he allows bad things to happen. Since God is Almighty and the Ever-Living, He doesn't have to comply with our wishes. Since we're in no position to choose another god to replace the Eternal, it's our job to comply with the God who is there whether we like it or not. Many sad things happen to people in the world, and even in our own lives. They shouldn't keep us from building a good relationship with the true God through repentance and faith despite He allows evil things to happen for His own purposes.

Most importantly, God didn't directly create evil, but He permitted angels and people to do evil. When Satan, the leader of the evil angels who became demons, rebelled, there hadn't been evil in the world before he sinned (Ezekiel 28:15-17). According to the Apostle John, God has no evil in Him (I John 1:5): "This then is the message which we have heard of Him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all." When God recreated the world in Genesis 1, He said it was all good: "And God saw everything that He had made, and behold, it was very good" (verse 31). Instead, we need to consider why God freely allowed Satan, the demons, and mankind to violate His law after creating them with either a good nature or a neutral nature that didn't automatically rebel against Him.

God Wants Us to Choose to Obey Him

God has chosen to respect our free moral agency and to give us the power to reject obeying Him even when we're called. As Jesus declared (Matt. 20:16), "For many are called, but few chosen." God has enormously unfathomable power, but He's chosen to limit it for His high purposes. Despite its longstanding as a major school of Christian theology, classical Calvinism's central error is that men and women are wind-up toy soldiers who make only predetermined choices about their lives' ultimate outcomes. God chose freely to give man's will a freedom rather similar to His own, although it is perverted by an evil human nature acquired since birth from the continuing influence of Satan (Eph. 2:1-3), his demons, and this world's civilization. By gaining the Holy Spirit, conscientious, converted Christians slowly have much of this negative influence removed or at least restricted (Romans 8:4). Much like during Jesus' incarnation during which God chose to restrict His power (Matt. 24:36), God also has chosen to restrict His power in calling and converting people today. He still wants us to obey, but He wants us to freely

choose to do so (Deut. 30:19-20): "I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life, that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and cleaving to him." Unlike Calvinism, the other leading school of Christian theology among Protestants, Arminianism, maintains there's a certain level of drama and uncertainty, even from God's viewpoint, concerning how many will be ultimately responsive to His calling and election.

Evil Is Only a Temporary Intruder, Not a Permanent Resident, in God's Creation

We should also realize that evil is only a temporary intruder in God's creation. The present world is not the best of all possible worlds, so we don't have to reconcile ourselves to its present level of pain forever. It isn't permanent, as Rev. 21:4: "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." God promises that there will be a restoration of all things after Jesus returns and sets up His kingdom, which will fix all the world's present problems (see Acts 3:19-21). So we need to have deep patience to wait on God to expel evil from the world. For presently the whole creation groans in pain, but it will be delivered from it (Romans 8:18-22).

God clearly believes in and practices capital punishment, which is contrary to the present fashion in Western Europe. As the Creator of life, He may also take it. Now when people execute the guilty or the innocent, they can't restore their lives. In contrast, since God can resurrect the dead, He can give them their lives back. When He resurrects them at the end of the millennium (Rev. 20:5, 12-13), during the thousand years when Jesus will rule the earth, all these people will receive a chance to be saved then (Romans 11:25-26; 37:11-14). This miraculous power helps to explain why He would (say) have Sodom destroyed when not even ten righteous people could be found living there (see Genesis 18:22-33; 19:24-25). These people were living such a sinful and personally harmful way of life that it was better for them to be put to death rather than to remain living that way. Hence, it's hard to look upon the people in Sodom and Gomorrah, the people drowned in the great flood (Genesis 6:11-13) that Noah lived through, and the Canaanites that God had killed by Joshua's army as "righteous" or "innocent," due to their crimes of violence, idolatry, etc. In particular, God chose to execute all the people on earth outside of Noah's family by sending the great flood because of humanity's general wickedness (Genesis 6:5-7): "The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, 'I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them.'"

Notice that Jesus predicted that many would be killed again when He returns like it was in the days of Noah (Matt. 24:36-39).

Therefore, since God is the Creator of human life, we humans are in no position to claim He's inconsistent when He takes the life of those who break His law. He made human life for particular purposes of His own. If we don't fulfill those goals, He has the right to terminate our lives at His discretion. We have to respect the utter sovereignty of God, as Job ultimately learned, although that isn't a fashionable idea in the world today. God is in charge, whether we like it or not, so we humans just have to get used to it and get with the program. For we're all going to die, whether we like it or not. If God provides us a way out, a way to get eternal life, we should accept it and the conditions involved, especially if they are for our ultimate best good.

Does God Sometimes Directly Punish Christians Because of Their Sins?

Does God directly cause His people to suffer or to get sick? The whole problem of evil greatly frustrates many believers and unbelievers, and bad health as a sign of sins is merely a subset of that general issue. God sometimes does punish people, directly or indirectly, for their sins by inflicting diseases on them (see Deut. 28:58-60). He also will let the wicked prosper in this life for a time as well, along side the righteous (notice Matt. 5:45), perhaps out of a sense of mercy and giving them a chance to repent. (We have to avoid the spiritual trap of thinking that if we do something sinful or questionable, and no immediate punishment comes, it's OK in God's sight . . . the punishment could well come years later, or in the afterlife. The delay, the time element between taking action and any possible punishment, doesn't mean God approves of our actions). This level of selectivity by God will trouble people. It may seem unfair that the wicked prosper and the (relatively more) righteous have trials. But God also knows what's best for us individually and what's best for His master plan for dealing with the whole human race down through all history, in which we individually and our problems fit one way or another. This obviously requires faith and the acceptance of God's mysterious ways. God's response to Job basically came down to saying, "You don't know enough to judge me." So then, does our perplexity concerning the problem of evil tempt us to become guilty of judging God, not merely our sick and/or sinful neighbors? We as Christians have to resist this impulse.

For example, consider the general history of ancient Israel. God frequently would allow them to go into national captivity or domination by foreign powers (such as Babylon, Assyria, the Philistines, Midian, etc.) Why? Because they sinned by worshipping false gods using statues, by breaking the Sabbath, by neglecting or mistreating the poor, by crimes of violence and sexual sins. He would punish them for their unfaithfulness when in the Wilderness, such as when they (so infamously) worshiped the Golden Calf while Moses was away on Mt. Sinai getting the tablets for the

Ten Commandments from Jehovah (Exodus 32). He kept them from entering the Promised Land for 40 years after they believed the bad report 10 of the 12 spies sent to scout out the Promised Land had given (Numbers 13-14). So we have a huge record in such great detail that God punished His chosen people for their sins, which certainly caused enough suffering. Consider also the long list of curses, much longer than the list of blessings, in Deut. 28 and Leviticus 26. Notice that He would even punish them with various diseases should they break the covenant they signed with Him, such as boils (Deut. 28:35).

Does God today still sometimes punish his chosen people today of another category? Are Christians, the Israel of God (Gal. 6:16), regardless of ethnicity, ever punished for their sins? Little change between the two Testaments apparently occurred in this regard. For example, some of the Christians who didn't discern the Lord's body correctly during the ceremony often called "communion" or "the Lord's Supper" became sick and/or died (I Cor. 11:29-32). But since Christians aren't a single nation that can be punished collectively by military conquest by another nation, it's harder to prove conclusively God punished any of them. An important principle to consider here overall is that the world's perspective on pain isn't necessarily right. Can good things come from pain, from suffering, from sickness? The world wants to simply eliminate pain and suffering as completely useless, and just maximize pleasure while reducing pain. But that isn't God's perspective, which concerns preparing His people for the next life through character-building trials. Pain can be valuable in causing people to repent from their sins, and to avoid doing evil or bad things. People can learn how to endure and develop the habits of obedience and righteousness (or character) while suffering. John Paul II apparently put his suffering with Parkinson's (or whatever else) on display before the world to teach it something about endurance and humility while still going about regular activities that he believed His office required of him. Even non-Catholics should respect the way he tried to live in this regard, instead of hiding it or resigning from his office as Pope or trying to end His life artificially quickly.

Notice that God says His people shouldn't be discouraged when then suffer pain directly from His hands even (Hebrews 12:5-11). This remarkable Bible quote should be read twice. Notice the analogy between the physical discipline that human fathers inflict is compared to what our heavenly Father will sometimes do to us so that we may learn good things as a result later on. Pain can be a good teacher.

Now God doesn't directly cause all suffering to Christians or people in the world endure. Balance is needed here. Much of the pain from (say) natural disasters is something God allows, not directly causes presently. However, these may be a consequence of humanity's prior sins that caused the fall (Genesis 3:17-18) and/or the lingering effects of the Flood. He also allows people and evil angels to have free will, which causes a lot of pain also, such as from wars, crimes, and simple general selfishness, which isn't directly God's doing. He allowed Satan to torment Job terribly before restoring his position and possessions, and increasing them beyond what he had had before.

Apparently the sins of prior generations can cause health problems for future generations (cf. Exodus 20:5). But since that isn't always the case, we shouldn't be dogmatic about it in any one particular case. This issue is another subset of general problem of evil that this essay deals with: "Why does a good almighty, all-knowing God allow evil to exist?" That is, we know that sometimes God will punish the wicked or sinful in this life and reward the righteous. But on the other hand, even the (relatively) more righteous have to learn from trials and tests (James 1:2-4), and so develop holy righteous character (Romans 5:3-4; Heb. 12:5-6, 11; II Cor. 4:16-17), which is the one thing that you can take with you past the grave. Even rather mysteriously Jesus, although He was God in the flesh, was perfected by the sufferings He went through in the physical life He had on earth (Heb. 2:10). So whether our problems result from God's punishment or just character-developing trials isn't always obvious, such as shown by the trials of Job and how his three friends messed up in analyzing the causes of his plight. (They often tended to think that if you have trials in this life it must have been because you had sinned yourself, that it had to be that God was punishing you because of their thought there was a mechanical relationship between sins committed by sinners and trials sent from God as a punishment in response). If God does punish us directly, it is for our good (Hebrews 12:6, 10). Furthermore, God can allow us to suffer by the natural outcome of our own actions, and doesn't have to specially intervene to "zap" us. For example, if we get drunk and suffer a hangover, or we smoke for decades and get lung cancer, God didn't have to directly intervene to cause us to become sick. Rather, the natural order He has set up as Creator has its own built-in causes and effects, which we as humans have to learn to work within, and thus avoid its penalties and negative consequences.

Sin Does Not Cause All Sickness and Disease

Now, in the case of the man born blind that Jesus healed, He specifically denied the interpretation that his particular plight was caused by his sins or his parents' sins (John 10:2-3): "And His disciples asked Him, saying, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?' Jesus answered, 'It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents; but it was in order that the works of God might be displayed in him.'" That is, Jesus was going to heal this particular man during his ministry on earth, so he was born blind decades before this planned miraculous event so Jesus could prove to others by a public witness by one more miracle that He was the Messiah, the Savior sent by the Father into the world. (It should be noted that the Pharisees interpreted this man's plight as a result of sin also, like Jesus' own disciples had--verse 34).

Yet, on the other hand, it's certainly possible people will be punished for the sins of their ancestors, including even by bad health. Consider in this light part of the explanation of the Second Commandment: "You shall not worship them or serve them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God [that is, One who demands exclusive devotion, and rejects divided loyalties--EVS], visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the

children, on the third and the fourth generations of those who hate Me" (Exodus 20:5). It could well be that the sins of a prior generation are visited upon a later one through (say) birth defects or other diseases. This isn't as unfair as a committed liberal secular humanist may believe it to be. After all, the children and grandchildren of people often will mechanically follow in the religious and other footsteps of their parents and grandparents even when the family religious and moral tradition is wrong, such as by worshiping false gods by using idols. Unquestionably following a family tradition can be very unwise, which can be one way the sins of a prior generation are visited upon a later generation. After all, when it comes to one's own ultimate spiritual destiny, that's up to each one of us individually after we're called, for "the son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear punishment for the son's iniquity" (Ezekiel 18:20).

We have to admit that spiritual sins can cause illness. For example, Jesus healed a paralyzed man by the pool of Bethesda who had lain there 38 years. Notice that He warned him, a little while after healing him: "Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse may befall you" (v. 14). It's a scary thought to think that one's spiritual sins could inflict a physical health penalty worse being paralyzed for 38 years! Similarly, notice how Jesus closely related being miraculously healed from bad health and having spiritual sins forgiven in Luke 5:18-24. He spiritually forgave this man, and also healed him physically, both as an outcome of his faith. Jesus' own suffering was prophesied by Isaiah to bring both spiritual and physical healing (Isaiah 53:5). But since this isn't always the case, we should be wary of being judgmental. It's not obvious that one average Christian's greater or lesser level of sins have anything to do with their levels of prosperity or good health in this life. After all, we know the wicked will sometimes prosper in this life also, at least for a time (Ps. 37:35-36). The Microsoft billionaire Bill Gates has his pluses and minuses in character, but I wouldn't want to think his great fortune is proof that he's so much more righteous than everyone else in America! Hence, we should normally avoid mentioning to a loved one who's sick about their personal sins or mistakes in taking care of their physical health (like not getting enough exercise, not eating right, smoking, etc.) when they are laying sick in a hospital bed.

By learning to think about the positive blessings in our lives (cf. Phil. 4:8), it can become easier to not think about the things that have gone wrong in our own lives or in the world. Admittedly, that is a stoical exercise in selective perception, but it makes us much happier when we have the self-discipline to do it. Much of life is about not our problems, but how we react to them: Do we dwell on past hurts, and then seek revenge or excuses to do nothing? Or after getting dealt a bad or indifferent hand in life, do we actively make decisions in the present to make for a better future for ourselves? We likely can't have much influence on what the world does to us, but we can control our emotional reactions to it.

Did God Build Evil Intrinsicly into Nature?

Is evil built into the morally defective behaviors and ill-constructed anatomy of plants and animals? Let's introduce the problem of evil as found in nature itself through a personal experience of mine. One day when I walking near the Michigan State campus by a fraternity many years ago, I spotted a cat who had caught a squirrel. The cat allowed the poor squirrel to walk away some, and then pounced on him again. Then the cat let him to move away once more, just to jump on him again. So, why should I mention this incident in this essay?

Charles Darwin, the modern father of the theory of evolution, wrote what might be the second most influential book ever written, "On the Origin of Species" (1859). The influence his theory has had on our society is massive and inescapable, for he made it possible for the people who run America and other Western countries to ignore God when making political and personal decisions. We wouldn't be discussing gay marriage today, for example, if Darwin's theory had been rejected. What emotionally helped to provoke Darwin to come up with a theory that basically denied God had to be the Creator? As we'll see, he had a major problem emotionally and morally with God's letting animals to prey on each other, such as cats cruelly playing with mice before killing them. He saw the problem of evil as intrinsic to nature, thus making him question God's goodness and wisdom as the Creator. Evolutionists generally have followed in his footsteps philosophically ever since.

So how should Christians respond to Darwin's philosophical problem here? Did God intend from the moment of creation that some animals would feed upon others? Did God make some physical or anatomical structures of animals somehow less perfect than others? Do these imperfections prove God doesn't care or isn't almighty or didn't know what He was doing? Was God an incompetent Creator, as evolutionists think?

In reality, God created a world in which all was good, but then cursed it due to human sin. The apparent evils and imperfections in the animal world that scientists have used to argue for the theory of evolution are only temporary intruders, not permanent residents, and God intends to eliminate them one day (Rev. 21:4). That is, all His handiwork reflects inescapably at some level His character and His power (cf. Genesis 1:26-27), even in its present generally damaged and fallen state before its restoration (Romans 8:19-21): "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the glorious liberty of the children of God." Let's consider this problem of evil in nature more detail and why it matters to us Christians.

Was It Wrong for God to Allow Animals to Prey on Each Other?

Darwin had a real problem with nature's imperfections. He reasoned that an almighty, all-knowing, all-loving God couldn't have made the world's animals as we find them. In particular, he had an emotional problem with animals being predators on other animals. "I cannot persuade myself that a beneficent and omnipotent God would have designedly created [a species of parasitic wasps] with the express intention of their feeding within the living bodies of caterpillars." He had a similar problem with cats playing with mice they caught before killing them, as already mentioned above. These kinds of arguments are actually philosophically crucial to the theory of evolution because evolutionists often attack some idea of God they have in order to support their theory that rationalizes their explanations that blind chance as directed by natural selection ultimately created the incredibly complex biological world from random chemical reactions.

But is their idea of God correct? Is it Scriptural? Evolutionists here actually are attacking a God of their own imaginations, not the God of the Bible. Their God is actually the stripped-down rationalistic, modernistic God of liberal Christians who didn't take Scripture very seriously. They didn't like much a God who punished, got angry, or who did miracles. They didn't like an intervening Jehovah. Nor do they much like the idea that God died on the cross for the sins of humanity. So once we show that the God of Scripture is different from the one they are attacking, their arguments lose much of their force.

Consider the results of the punishment God inflicted on Satan, humanity, and the earth as revealed by Genesis 3:14-19. A conflict was to occur between man and beast (and snakes in particular), although the words of v. 15 also prefigure the Messiah's victory over Satan. Women, as descendents of Eve, suffer from her sin physically today when they give birth, so today their bodies aren't perfect. Hence, nature as we see it today is not perfect or ideal, yet evolutionists, in their arguments, assume the Biblical God would have made it perfect as we see it now. The Bible contradicts that metaphysical/theological assumption: God cursed the ground/earth as a result of Adam's sin, which is one reason why work for so many is unpleasant in part. Furthermore, the physical world around us still hasn't recovered fully from the great Deluge, with which God punished humanity with because its sins so filled the earth (Genesis 6:5-7, 11-13).

Will God Always Let Some Animals Eat Other Animals?

Let's consider specifically what the Bible has to say about carnivores, or animals that eat other animals. Will they always do this? Isaiah 11:6-9 shows that they won't, since one day the lion will eat straw like the ox. During the millennium, God will restore His creation to being more like it was originally intended to be. Animals preying on each other won't be a permanent condition of His world. The Edenic curse will start being removed. God necessarily didn't intend there to be predatory animals in his creation had plan "A" been followed by Adam and Eve. But when they sinned, and default plan "B" was activated, various animals had this potentiality activated, such as the cute kitty who

sits on your lap at home, purrs, and licks your hands, but turns into a vicious killer after spotting nearby mice and rats. (Of course, we could argue that predatory behavior is functional from the viewpoint that there's a "balance of nature," since predators prevent the overpopulation of the plant-eating animals, but that raises other issues). We should also consider this: Is animal death morally significant, except in the context of teaching human beings moral lessons? Is nature an end in itself, or is it mainly a teaching tool for humanity? For example, because there won't be any seas on the earth after the New Jerusalem arrives on earth (Rev. 21:1-2), God didn't intend that there would always be whales! We should be wary of reading our own moral reasonings into other conscious but not rational creatures. This is a key flaw in the reasoning of environmentalists who demote mankind's importance while simultaneously exalting nature's value so much that they start to lapse into philosophical or even religious pantheism. (Consider what the mystically inclined could do with the "Gaia hypothesis," for example).

Evolutionists who complain about God creating imperfections or evils in nature should argue with the Christian God, not some generic deistic God of the philosophers, a god who doesn't get angry and who doesn't do miracles, certainly not a God who died to save humanity from its sins. Our God died on a cross because of the evils we committed out of our free choice. God paid the cost for allowing evil to exist: His Son, who was God, died for all the evils men have committed against each other. So God allowed evil, true, but then paid the ultimate price for doing so.

Why Is It Scientific to Make Arguments Against God based on Nature's Flaws, but Unscientific to Make Arguments for God based on Nature's Wonders?

Is it scientific to make arguments against God based on nature, but unscientific to make arguments for God based on nature? This is a key inconsistency of evolutionists philosophically. For evolution is really about philosophy, not science. Evolutionists complain about natural theology being used to prove God, but use it to disprove God. An evolutionist can't both say, "It's wrong to use a complex biological structure to prove God's existence since only a miracle could create it," but then turn around and reason, "There's no God because of this or that defective or Mickey Mouse anatomical structure (like the Panda's hand). The experimental method, for example, can't be used itself to prove the experimental method is the only or best way to discover truth. That's a matter for philosophers to examine, not scientists so much.

Regardless of what we think about God allowing evil to exist, it's our job to repent or else perish, as Jesus' words in Luke 13:1-5 reveal. We like to think we can act like Job, and judge and convict God because of bad things that have happened to us or others. But actually the shoe is on the other foot: God has all the power and knowledge, not us, so we had better learn to conform.

Although God has allowed evil to exist in nature, it's only a temporary condition that soon will end. If we question God and doubt him because He has allowed evil to exist, let's suppose Jesus could stand before us right now while He was being crucified. Suppose He was asked, "Why did you allow all these evil things to happen?" Suppose He responded by pulling a stake out of his wrist or ankle, and said, "If I as God am dying for you, won't you have faith in my ultimate love for you? Do you really know enough now to judge and condemn Me? Repent, wait, and have faith, and you will be rewarded."

Did God Create Animals and Plants with Structural Flaws or Inefficiencies?

Is nature full of evil? Does it contain structural flaws or inefficiencies? If so, how could an almighty, all-knowing, all-loving Creator have brought such a flawed creation into existence? The evolutionists, as they cavil about the physical world's defects and evils, are reasoning back from the effect to the cause: Since the effect (i.e., the world) is full of evils and imperfections, therefore, the cause couldn't be God, but some kind of random natural process instead. For example, the evolutionist David Hull reasoned that because nature produces millions of sperm and ova (eggs) that never result in a fertilized zygote, and that an estimated 95% of DNA in plants and animals has no function [based the present level of research then extant], "The God implied by . . . the data of natural history . . . is not the Protestant God of waste not, want not" (cited from Cornelius Hunter, "Darwin's God," p. 156). Likewise, Darwin himself thought the existence of animal predation contradicted the existence of a loving, almighty Creator, such as cats playing with mice or (yuck!) parasitic wasps feeding within the bodies of living caterpillars. Of course, the God that Darwin and his evolutionist offspring are criticizing here isn't the One of Scripture, who by cursing the earth as a result of Adam's sin (Genesis 3:14-19), made the world around us deliberately not perfect as far as we humans are concerned. But at the time of the restoration of all things (Acts 3:21), there will be no more curse (Rev. 22:3). The fact that animal predation will be ended during the millennium (Isa. 11:6-9) shows that it wasn't a permanent part of God's plan for the earth. The creation, made subject to futility, groans now from corruption (Rom. 8:19-22), but will soon "be delivered . . . into the glorious liberty of the children of God." Natural evil is a soon-to-be eliminated temporary intruder, not a permanent resident, of this world. (Of course, it could be argued that animal death isn't intrinsically morally significant except in relation to what it teaches people about relations among themselves and with God by analogy, but that raises a whole other subject!)

Let's consider a similar argument, once run by Steven R. Heideman, a Michigan State University physiology associate professor, in the student newspaper The East Lansing State News (7/6/87):

He [Eric Snow] claims that the similarity of bone structure of various vertebrates is not evidence of descent but rather of design. If so, the "designer" should be fired. The reason these similarities are evidence of

descent with modification (i.e., tinkering with what already exists to get a new job done) is that they make no sense as design—they don't work that well. The human backbone is an excellent example. In order to walk upright, the backbone of a four-footed ancestor was modified by bending into an S-curve. This adapt[at]ion has a great many limitations giving rise to the human tendency toward hernia, lower back problems, very painful births and cut-off circulation to the legs during pregnancy (milk leg).

But do the (perceived) imperfections in the human backbone really prove evolution? Heideman is engaged in negative natural theology, and assumes God has to make all His creations totally physically perfect from a human viewpoint. Would that mean, for example, He should have made us (say) naturally immortal in the flesh? Could an atheist cavil against the Creator, complaining that because he is mortal, not immortal, that He doesn't exist or doesn't care? Would the God of the Apostle Paul agree with this reasoning, when (Rom. 5:12) “just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned”? Only by assuming a certain view of God a priori, and then knocking down that straw man by this or that anatomical structure's purported defects, can such arguments be deemed convincing. But then the evolutionists have refuted a God of their imagination, not the God of the Bible, who punished Eve (and correspondingly much of womankind) by multiplying the pain of childbirth after she ate fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 3:16). (Incidentally, if someone upholds fideism (the belief God's existence should only be accepted by faith and not proven), he would have to reject all arguments based on nature's imperfections for evolution made against God on this basis, not just those arguments based on nature's complexity made for God's existence and/or particular characteristics He has).

Furthermore, such arguments assume we really could have done a better job than God did using our existing medical knowledge without knowing any possible unanticipated consequences from doing things differently (i.e., “fixing” one problem may cause others!) We should be wary of the conceit involved in saying we could have done a better job than the Creator, especially when mankind so often historically has mismanaged nature one way or another (such as by introducing mongooses into the West Indies to fight snakes or bringing rabbits into Australia). Arguments like Heideman's appear to be nothing more than complaints that would be made regardless of how God made the world since the human mind could always make itself believe something it observes is imperfect somehow. Hunter (p. 47) observes, against Darwin, that though he “did not know how the design of the crustacean or the flower could have been improved, he believed there must have been a better way and that God should have used it. God . . . would not have made the brain or the bat that we find in nature, though [Darwin] had little idea about how they actually worked.” Consider the implications of the law of unanticipated consequences for these kinds of skeptical arguments, since our ignorance even today is so much greater than our knowledge concerning biological structures. For example, to give a bigger brain to human beings may sound like a good idea . . . until it's realized that babies with bigger brains still have to be born through the same size birth canal, all other things being equal. The same sound that male crickets use to attract

females (i.e., to reproduce themselves) also alerts predators to their presence (i.e., at the risk of being eaten). The fur coat of long-haired cats may seem to be more functional than that of short-haired cats in colder climates, until taken into account the physical problems caused by hair balls and poorly self-groomed fur coats! A structure that's seemingly in thought experiments an aid to survival or to claim one creature is more "fit" than another may not actually be more functional in the natural world until tested by actual empirical experience. The presumptuousness of the evolutionists brings to mind God's reply to Job: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?" and "Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it. . . . Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me. Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?" (Job 38:2; 40:2, 6-8).

Are the anatomical structures of plants and animals optimal? Evolutionists will find imperfections in nature to argue that a perfect Creator couldn't have made them. Darwin thought "There is no greater anomaly of nature than a bird that cannot fly." How is Darwin's statement here scientific rather than (gasp!) metaphysical? Why should we expect all feathered creatures to fly, and (as a presumed correlate) all furry creatures to walk? Hunter (p. 105) alertly pounces on such reasoning:

Though Darwin and his peers did not understand nature's inner workings, they were bold in their pronouncements about what virtues nature should and should not exhibit. And nature's failure to fulfill our ideals and expectations was considered clear proof of evolution. All birds should fly, but since some don't, there must be a crude law of nature rather than a Creator behind such incompetence.

Likewise, could the presence of a vitamin C synthesis gene in all mammals except primates and guinea pigs could be deemed a "manufacturer's defect" for the latter two groupings, especially when a look-alike but nonfunctional pseudogene exists in both of them? This lack sometimes subjects humans, other primates, and guinea pigs to getting the deadly vitamin-deficiency disease called scurvy. Terry Gray ran a negative theological argument based on these facts by skeptically rejecting the arguments that "God's inscrutable purpose . . . placed that vitamin C synthesis look-alike gene" in these two groups. Similarly, the argument that vestigial organs contradict special creation is based on the assumption that God wouldn't install such useless structures in His creatures. Of course, the list of vestigial organs has shrunk over the decades to almost or totally zero because organs previously assumed to have no function have been discovered to have one. As Hunter observes (see pp. 98, 113), just because we humans in our ignorance may not have discovered a function yet for a given physiological structure (such as the appendix, which actually does have a function) doesn't mean none exists, for this depends on the current state of scientific knowledge. Parker (What Is Creation Science?, pp. 62-63) notes the historical problem with this pro-evolutionary argument: "Essentially all 180 organs once listed as evolutionary vestiges have quite important functions in human beings." He also explains that tonsils, which help to fight disease, used to be commonly removed from children in part because they were seen as useless

evolutionary vestiges. And this assumption slowed down scientific research on them (!) since: “If you believe something is a useless, nonfunctional leftover of evolution, then you don’t bother to find out what it does.” Furthermore, just because nature isn’t in the habit of producing useless structures doesn’t mean it never does (e.g., arguably from massive mutations a priori). But as Philip Johnson remarks (see Hunter, p. 155), evolutionary biology should be posing scientific questions in place of questioning the motives of God if it is to be regarded as science instead of as a branch of philosophy.

Can Moral Relativists Complain about the Problem of Evil?

Can morally absolute ideas of evil be used to prove there’s no God? But if evolutionists attack and eliminate God’s existence from their consideration based on His allowing evil in nature to exist, they can’t then say evil doesn’t exist. That is, they use a system of moral absolutes to eliminate God, but then (almost always) erect a system of moral relativism for people after getting rid of Him. But if indeed all is relative, and there are no moral absolutes, they can’t complain about parasitic wasps eating the living bodies of caterpillars or about cats playing with mice as “immoral.” If indeed all is relative, and no evil therefore exists, they can’t condemn God for allowing evil to exist.

The inescapable dilemma skeptical evolutionists face in deploying the problem of evil against the existence of God stems from where the origin of our sense of morality, of right and wrong, comes from. As Cornelius Hunter (“Darwin’s God,” p. 18) expertly summarizes the problem (his emphasis): “*The existence of evil seems to contradict God, but the existence of our deep moral sense seems to confirm God.*” For if we believe all is relative, that there are no absolutes, in a world without God, how can we condemn God for (say) allowing the Holocaust, the Cultural Revolution, or the Ukrainian terror famine? We can’t judge God unless we believe we can derive some kind of system of moral absolutes separately by human reason without recourse to Him or religious revelation. Hunter (p. 154) penetratingly exposes the evolutionists’ moral conundrum, after citing Richard Dawkins’ comment about the universe having no design, purpose, good or evil, “nothing but pointless indifference” thus: “Since there is no evil, the materialist must, ironically, not use the problem of evil to justify atheism. The problem of evil presupposes the existence of an objective evil—the very thing the materialist seems to deny.” If we can’t derive natural moral law separately from God by human reason, if we can’t get an “ought” from an “is” without reference to religious revelation, we can’t condemn God for allowing evil, now can we? If indeed all is relative, and one person’s good is another’s evil, such as for (say) female genital mutilation or Chinese foot binding, which traditional societies affirm(ed) but feminists condemn, on what basis can we criticize God for being a permissive libertarian about the actions resulting from His creatures’ freely chosen moral decisions? If indeed there are no moral absolutes, the ideologies that led to gulags and concentration camps are just as ethical as the ideologies that eliminated them. Hence, our innate moral sense, although it may manifest itself differently from culture to culture and person to person, constitutes intrinsic evidence for something beyond the material world. Otherwise, a fist hitting someone’s face in the

street is no more or less morally significant than two rocks hitting each other in the wilderness, since all are composed of atoms in motion coming in contact with each other. True, various philosophical attempts to derive an “ought” from an “is” exist, such as the differing arguments of James Q. Wilson (“the moral sense” that has a psychological/mental/behavior origin in our human natures), C.S. Lewis (“the Tao” or way, of cross cultural ultimate similarities show traditional morality is a kind of irreducible primary), and Ayn Rand (“living entities intrinsically need certain values to sustain life”) show. But unless atheists and agnostics discard their moral relativism, they can’t use the existence of evil to discard God.

Of course, atheists and agnostics aren’t necessarily neutral or objective when they raise the problem of evil: They may be using it in order to discount God’s existence and what the Bible reveals as His law governing their behavior so they can go out to commit the evil THEY wish to do, such as (say) fornication and adultery. Aldous Huxley, the British atheist intellectual who wrote the novel "Brave New World," admitted towards the end of his life the non-rational motives he had for his skeptical position: "I have motives for not wanting the world to have meaning; consequently assumed that it had none, and was able without any difficulty to find satisfying reasons for this assumption . . . For myself, as, no doubt, for most of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially an instrument of liberation. The liberation we desired was simultaneously liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our sexual freedom."

Do the Sins of Atheists Refute Atheism?

Can the sins of Christians refute Christianity? Do the Crusades and the Inquisition prove God’s nonexistence and the Bible’s falseness? So then, if crusades refute Catholicism, do jihads refute Islam? If Pope Urban VIII’s persecution of the great Italian scientist Galileo refutes Catholicism and/or theism, do Joseph Stalin’s political attacks on Soviet scientists upholding Mendelian genetics in the name of Lysenkoism (i.e., evolution by acquired characteristics) refute Marxism and/or atheism? So suppose someone said, "Because atheists (meaning, the communists) slaughtered 100 million people in the 20th century, their bad behavior proves God's existence." That reasoning is just as sound a priori (before experience) as saying, "Because Catholics launched the Crusades and the Inquisition, there’s no God."

So can we reject a belief system based upon the bad behavior of those upholding it? In reality, bad behavior by atheists or theists can't logically prove or disprove the existence of God or the truth or falsity of any philosophical position or religion. The Crusades, the Inquisition, Western Imperialism, the transatlantic slave trade, the Irish Troubles, the Thirty Years War, etc., can't ultimately prove the falsehood of the Bible or of belief in God. The Bible could be perfectly true, and Jehovah could exist, yet people who believe in it and Him would have an evil human nature that causes

them to fail to love others of their faith or outside of it. The utter ubiquity of this bad, emotionally driven argument among people, whether academics or average folk, merely proves the shoddiness of their reasoning processes when it comes to searching for a way to disbelieve in the Bible's God because he makes moral demands of them that they wish to evade. A good example would be, "Because minister X committed adultery and/or theft, Christianity must be false, God's laws on sex and/or property don't exist, so then I can freely commit adultery and/or theft myself." Atheists have emotions and self-interested reasons too, and thus will rationalize their own position as justified.

But could a powerful reason for God's existence ultimately arise ironically from the sins of atheists? As C.S. Lewis argued in "Mere Christianity," our moral sense is derived indirectly from God even when we aren't believers in the Bible, as part of our created human nature. (See his "Abolition of Man" for more on this specific subject. His "The Problem of Pain" is an excellent basic book on the general subject of why God allows evil). We can't condemn others' actions without believing in moral absolutes. But almost all atheists and agnostics deny moral absolutes. (Ayn Rand and her band of Objectivists are an interesting exception to this generalization, but since they deny the need for self-sacrifice for other people, we Christians would see their moral system as distinctly minimalistic at best). So how can an atheist condemn a past or present sinning Christian if he believes in moral relativism? Someone could always claim, while using atheists'/agnostics' moral/cultural relativism back at them, playing the Devil's advocate to expose the folly of their ethical position: "Well, slavery, the Crusades, the Inquisition, jihads, Apartheid, Jim Crow, female genital mutilation, Chinese foot binding, suttee, female infanticide, gulags, concentration camps, genocide, nuclear wars, imperialism, racial discrimination, poison gas, landmines, sexism, neglecting the poor, Social Darwinism, lying, stealing, alcoholism, drug addiction, intolerance, hate speech, gay bashing, etc., etc., etc., may be wrong for you, but they are fine for us! So now you can't condemn us!" If the atheist/agnostic says the Christian is being hypocritical, by violating his own revelation's moral standards, that doesn't prove the unbeliever's own moral position intrinsically since he rejects God and the Bible's inspired truth. He should not commit what Ayn Rand herself would call the fallacy of the stolen concept, or assuming some idea while attacking its derivative. Therefore, because atheists' bad behavior is a logical consequence of their belief system's lack of a good source of moral absolutes, it's actually a better argument to say, "The sins of atheists refute atheism," than to say, "The sins of theists refute theism"!

Conclusion

Above many of the basic reasons for why God allowed evil to enter His creation have been surveyed. Fundamentally, like Job, we are in no position to judge God's actions and plans for the universe because we don't have enough knowledge to do so. It's better to believe, obey, and wait in faith while serving God instead of following the advice of Job's wife, to curse God and die, since death naturally will come to all regardless of what we think about God. Most importantly, the Christian God chose to suffer and die a terrifying painful death in order to demonstrate His love for His

intelligent creatures and the importance of obeying His law, so that both men and angels will respond in love and obedience for all eternity. In this light, when constructing theodicies, Christians must avoid the philosophical trap of defending a generic Deity instead of confronting skeptics with the intervening Jehovah of the Bible who died on the cross for the sins of humanity. Furthermore, once we truly realize the reasons why God created humanity according to His inspired revelation, it becomes much easier to understand why God allowed pain and death into the world and why He gave us free will despite the dangers in doing so. Since God is in the process of making beings like Himself, who would both have 100% free moral agency and 100% holy righteous character, He has to test them by a relatively short experience in physical reality to observe empirically if they would remain loyal to Him and obey His law (moral will) for all eternity. Although God is omniscient, He most mysteriously said after Abraham would have sacrificed Isaac (i.e., his heir by Sarah, who He valued more than anything else in the world) (Genesis 22:12): “Now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me.” Likewise, if we strive to have faith and to obey God despite our physical lives can be appallingly brief, frustrating, and/or painful, we will be granted a glorious, spiritual existence that will so overwhelmingly compensate for the pains of this life that we shall willingly cry out to God (Revelation 4:11; 5:12, 13): “You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created . . . Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing! . . . Blessing and honor and glory and power Be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!”