

THE223 Christian Narrative 1 Creation and Fall

Unit 6a God and the Reality of Evil

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Welcome back. Today we're going to look at God and the reality of evil. And so here's our main teaching point for today. The reality of evil is not in fact inconsistent with the goodness and sovereignty of God. So today we're going to dip a bit into philosophy. Now, we'll stay well-centered in the Scriptures, but what we've got to wrestle with is the reality that around us exists evil. Many of us who follow the Lord Jesus have had, at one point or another, someone ask the question, "How can a loving God allow evil to exist in our world today?" And so my hope is that through this lesson, you'll be better prepared to answer that, or perhaps that if you're wrestling with that yourself, we'll find the path that logically and biblically helps us understand the reality of evil and why it does not in fact impede at all on God's goodness or his sovereignty.

Now, we also have to see that evil is not an eternally existing power similar or equal to God himself in power. If you will recall, a few sessions ago, we talked about an incorrect view of God is one called dualism where God is good or light, and then there's this evil or dark force that is equally powerful to God, and that these forces of good and these forces of evil are stuck in a cosmic and eternal battle. That's simply not true. Yet if we were to assert that evil is equally powerful to God, then we are slipping back into this concept of dualism, and we can't do that. What we have to see, in fact, is that Scripture talks to us at great length about the idea that God is in fact sovereign. Here we have Jeremiah 32:17. "Ah, Lord God! It is you who have made the heavens and the earth by your great power and by your outstretched arm! Nothing is too hard for you." If God is in fact sovereign, then he is more powerful than any form of evil or sin that exists in the world.

We must also argue that God was not in fact surprised or challenged by sin. Here we have Job 37:16. "Do you know the balancing of the clouds, the wondrous works of him who is," in fact, what? "Perfect in knowledge." God is not the source or the cause of sin, but neither was he surprised by its entrance or challenged by its entrance into the world. We'll talk more about how sin came to be both logically and biblically, but we have to recognize that God was not left wringing his hands at the presence of sin. It didn't catch him off guard. And one of the things that we must see about God that makes him God is that he can use the circumstances that surround sin, even those circumstances, to bring glory to himself. Yet God was not surprised, nor is he challenged by sin.

Next, we also have to say that God himself did not sin, nor should he be blamed for sin. Again, James 1:13. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God,' for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one." So here we have to understand that God is absolutely holy and perfect. Again, we've said this before, but it is worth repeating that if God himself were to sin, he would cease to be holy. If God ceases to be holy, he would cease to be God. God cannot not be God. It's an illogical idea. So we must grasp this idea that God himself did not sin, but neither should he be blamed for sin. It is not his fault. James 1:13 tells us God does not tempt us to sin. Rather, it has to be something else that is leading us towards sin. It is not God himself. So, so far, we've looked at these kind of several ideas of what it isn't to be. God himself did not sin. God shouldn't be blamed for sin. God is not the cause of sin. Let's consider one thing we should argue for.

So now we come to this particular statement. God did ordain that sin would come into the world. It's a positive statement. We have to argue that, in fact, sin is under the sovereignty of God, and this point allows us to do that. So here we have Daniel 4:35. And what I really want us to focus on is the last part of that verse, but let's read it in context. "All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the

earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” None can stay his hand and none can say to him, “What have you done?”

Jonathan Edwards, the American theologian, talks about the idea that God is both the permitter of sin and, at the same time, a disposer of the state of events. These two ideas can help us understand Daniel 4:35 very well. None can stay his hand. God is the disposer of the state of events. What we have to confess is that God is in every action. God is sovereign over everything. There’s nothing that surprises God or that’s out of his control. And as we read through the Scriptures, we discover that God is superintending events in such a way as to bring about his will on earth. Yet at the same time, God is the permitter of sin. We’ve already said he’s not the cause. He’s not the source. He is not sinful himself nor is he to be blamed. We’ve said all of those things. But at the same time, he does allow for or ordain or permit sin to be a possibility. But at the same time, what Daniel 4:35 says here is “What have you done?” is not a question that we have as creation permission to ask the Creator. It is outside our will to be able to ask this question in a manner that is permissible.

Why then does evil exist? From some of the things that we’ve just talked about, let’s try and lay out a logical map for ourselves. First, let’s see that God created all things and then determined what is good. We read that in Genesis 1. God creates and God tells us that what he created was good. We read it in Genesis 2. From this then, we say that God created man as morally free agents, that part of what it meant to be made in God’s image was to be morally free. Now, they don’t choose what is good, but they choose how to live in a world where things that are good have been declared good. So now man has to exist as a morally free agent. And in order for good to be accomplished by morally free agents, the potential for evil must exist for the opposite of moral good is moral evil. Good cannot exist without the potential of its opposite being present.

So then we come to this point. When Adam and Eve sinned, they in fact actualized evil in that they brought into being sin through a morally evil act, an act which was not morally good. So here we have these four points that kind of build on one another, and now they’re all laid out for us, right? God created all things and determined what was good. He set the course for creation and goodness. And he created men as morally free agents within this world, which he both created and deemed good. And in order for good to, in fact, be accomplished, good acts to be accomplished by morally free agents, that is, man and woman, the potential for evil had to exist because the opposite of doing what is good is doing what is evil. So when Adam and Eve sinned, they took evil from being a potential to being a reality. They actualized that evil in that they brought into being sin through a morally evil act. And this act, in fact, was not morally good. So this is then why evil exists in our world today. God has permitted it. Even though he is the causer, he is the mover of events in our world, and in the midst of that, creating morally free agents, Adam and Eve chose to do what was not morally good, thus actualizing evil.

So then let’s turn our attention now to understanding to a better extent what is sin. So like we did when we were talking about some biblical and logical ideas, let’s kind of lay out some bullet points with some Scripture to kind of help us understand what sin actually is. First, let’s see that sin is the result of a free but evil choice of man. And we won’t reread Genesis 3:1-6 there, but we need to understand that that’s one of those first moments where we see that act of evil being chosen by man. We read in 1 John 3:4, “Everyone who makes a practice of sinning also practices lawlessness; sin is lawlessness.” We can read on. Isaiah 48:8, “You have never heard, you have never known, from of old your ear has not been

opened. For I knew that you would surely deal treacherously, and that from birth (and even before that) you were to be called a rebel.” Evil choice. Sin is the result of a free but evil choice.

Romans 1:18-32, while a little bit long, gives a great introduction to the concept of sin being the result of free but evil choice. There it reads, “The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Therefore, God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error. And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.”

I don't think we can find a more powerful or a more potent passage to talk about the idea that sin is the result of a free but evil choice of man. The passage talks to us so clearly about the idea that it is mankind who chooses to do this event, this evil event, and that sin is the result of their choice.

Next, we see that sin is also a specific kind of evil. Particularly, it is a moral evil. In the beginning, God had created and deemed what was good. But what we see is that from this place of God defining what is good, God also defined what was not good. If we put it in the positive, God said to Adam and Eve it was good for them not to touch the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. However, they chose to do a moral evil by choosing for themselves what was good. They said, “No, we are going to disagree with what God has to say and, in fact, choose our own good.” But in fact, they weren't choosing good. They were choosing to do evil. They were choosing to do that which was opposite to God's will for their life. So sin is specifically a moral evil.

Now, it's also a positive kind of evil. And I don't mean by positive as good or lighthearted or this is what we want. But what I mean is it is a real kind of evil. You see, what the Bible tells us is that humanity cannot stand in a position of moral neutrality. Nor can humanity look at themselves as being more or less good, or more or less evil. We are either good or we are evil. And the Scripture really backs that up. We can read in Matthew 10:32-33, “Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” Left, right. In, out. Good or evil. Matthew 12:30. “Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.” In, out. Good, evil. James 2:10.

“Whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.” Not degrees of goodness and degrees of evil, but all good or all evil. Sin is a positive kind of evil, and humanity cannot stand in a position of moral neutrality, nor is humanity good by degrees or evil by degrees.

Also, sin is only understood in its opposition to God and his will. Sin is only understood in its opposition to God and his will. Romans 1:32, “Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them” as well. There's this idea that says sin comes into focus when we understand that it is what is in fact standing in opposition to God and his plan in our lives. Romans 2, starting in verse 12, “For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law.” Sin is understood in relationship to God's will. And if you take it apart from God's will, it doesn't make sense. It is only understood as what stands in opposition to what God calls us to do.

We also see that sin resides in the soul of man. Here we have Matthew 5:28. “I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her.” Where? “In his heart.” In his very center, in his soul. Galatians 5:17, “For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do.” Sin takes root not in our body per se. We experience the effects of sin on our body, but it resides truly in the soul, in the center of who we are. So then sin strikes against these three things: what is right, what is moral, and what is rational. In other words, sin strikes against the truth, sin strikes against the good, and sin strikes against that which makes sense. It is fundamentally untrue, sin. It is fundamentally evil. And what we have to see is it's fundamentally nonsensical. It is irrational at its core because how can something oppose an absolutely all-powerful and sovereign God? It simply cannot. And so sin is irrational at its core. But as we've looked at all of what sin is, how sin came to be, and how we are to understand God's relationship to sin, we come to this point again that the reality of evil is not inconsistent with the goodness and sovereignty of God. God is the permitter of evil and the architect of the events that surround us. And as such, he is able to bring great good from moments of great evil in our life without, at the same time, being the one who has caused or to be blamed for that evil. The reality of evil is not inconsistent with the goodness and sovereignty of God.