

EVIL IN THE WORLD: "WHY?" (PART 2)

In Part 1 (January 2014), we considered the intellectual dilemma: how can an Almighty and loving Living God tolerate the evil that is in the world, rather than stamp it out?

We learned that God taught Job, who was distraught by the dilemma with regard to his personal distress, and teaches all of us today that the matter — intellectually and rationally a vexing dilemma indeed — is only the fruit of spiritual ignorance.

God never offered an intellectual response to Job's request for a justification; rather He chastened Job at length for being trapped by such a dilemma:

Job 38:1–4 *Then the Lord answered Job from the whirlwind: 2 "Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? 3 Brace yourself like a man, because I have some questions for you, and you must answer them. 4 Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you know so much." [NLT]*

Why is it spiritual ignorance and why is the Lord's lesson a spiritual lesson? Because:

John 4:24 *"God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth." [NASB]*

And not only God is spirit,

John 6:63 *"It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life." [NASB]*

God is spirit and His words are spirit: spirit, Who is life. Hence, what was spoken from the whirlwind to Job was a spiritual lesson. In conclusion, Job's request — spiritually — was silly, ignorant and arrogant, according to God's words.

The apostle Paul reminded the church at Corinth of the incompatibility between natural intellect and spiritual understanding:

1 Corinthians 2:14 *But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. [NKJV]*

Furthermore, the search for a justification of God's actions is more than just a demonstration of spiritual ignorance.

When we ask for a justification or an explanation of those actions of God, which we dislike or with which we disagree, we are really seeking a general law or a principle, which ought to inspire or

motivate God's actions, which would then be justified, because they conform to the general principle — a principle to which we would subscribe, as being "right."

This is tantamount to seeking to make God an obedient servant to our judgment, which selects the appropriate principle. That is pure and simple idolatry: the bowing to a "higher" principle, which would bestow legitimacy on God's actions.

Such idols, which we "make for ourselves," are what God warned we "must not bow down to" and not even "make" in the first place:

Exodus 20:2–5b, *"I am the Lord your God, who rescued you from the land of Egypt, the place of your slavery. 3 "You must not have any other god but me. 4 "You must not make for yourself an idol of any kind or an image of anything in the heavens or on the earth or in the sea. 5b You must not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God who will not tolerate your affection for any other gods. [NLT]*

Such a higher principle, which is invoked to justify (or explain) God's actions is none other than our own judgment — our judgment of what is right and wrong — our knowledge of good and evil. Where was this heard first?

Was it not in the Garden of Eden?

Genesis 2:16–17 *And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, "You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, 17 but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." [ESV]*

The desire to do our own independent evaluation of God's decisions and to judge them is the very characteristic of our carnal nature: it is the original sin.

We may appreciate this by reflecting on what the serpent said:

Genesis 3:4–5 *But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die; 5 for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." [NRSV]*

The insinuation was that there's a reality, which is accessible to you, if you just stop obeying God naively but rather apply your brain to the situation: "Dare to be a thinker, independent of God."

Let us now remember that Eve did not just rush into disobedience. Hers was a thoughtful, deliberate and intelligent process to evaluate the situation, not a casual, desultory sin: the fruit looked attractive, tasted good and made one wise.

Genesis 3:6 *So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. [ESV]*

Hence, theirs was a very logical and responsible decision, but deadly. Surely, their logic was a winning one: wouldn't God want them to be wise and smart; how could God possibly wish otherwise?

How can it be that this careful decision was wrong? This seems not to make any sense.

Precisely. That is the test of faith: do I trust my mind or the living Lord? I have to choose.

The original sin replaced the obedience commanded by God with one's own "better" judgment.

Therefore the search for God's hidden reasons not only is silly and arrogant spiritually, as God indicated to Job: it is a succinct reenactment of the original sin and hence abhorrent to the Lord.

If we choose to trust our minds, God won't stop us (as He did not stop Adam and Eve), but we shall bear the consequences of not having believed the Son of God; if we choose to trust Him, we won't worry that God seems to be acting in a direction contrary to our common sense, because we trust Him.

John 3:18 *"There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son." [NLT]*

Are we not called "children" of God? That means that our relationship to God must be that of good and obedient children.

Matthew 18:3 *and said, "Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. [NRSV]*

God seeks obedience: He seeks little children, who are obedient; He does not seek judgment independent of Him.

As He told us:

John 12:36a *Put your trust in the light while there is still time; then you will become children of the light." [NLT]*

As little children trust their parents, because they believe that the parents know better what is good for them, so can we trust the Lord, Who knows everything perfectly and knows perfectly what is good for us.

God is indeed love and He lavishes His love on those who obey Him, as He explained through Moses:

Exodus 20:6 *But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands. [NLT]*

God deems obedience to be so critical to our lives that even Jesus — God Incarnate — learned it and thus became perfect.

Hebrews 5:8–9 *Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; 9 And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him; [KJV]*

Perfection is born of obedience.

This however, does not mean at all that we have to abandon our brains and behave as mindless fools: not at all, rather "we trust the Lord and use our brains" to do His commandments; rather than "trust our brains and use the Lord" to pursue our goals, our desires and our lusts.

Then let's not want or ask that God justify Himself to us, but let's recognize His supreme authority and remember that we really do not need to know the "why" — if we trust Him and know that His love for us is unlimited.

Thus the question: "Why does God (allow evil in the world)?" is the fruit of an apostate mind and contrary to a heart, who trusts the Lord, believes in Him and loves Him.

In His love, God wants us to be His children, who do not need to know the "why"; because we have decided to submit our own judgment to His will.

Therefore, as we grow up into greater spiritual knowledge, we seek to understand not the "why," rather the place that obedience to God has in His Kingdom and in our life.