

24-0828wc Transcript

24-0828wc - Christian Apologetics, p70, Tom Freed

This transcript transcribed by TurboScribe.ai

See a detailed summary: [Detailed Summary HTML](#) - [Detailed Summary PDF](#)
(Detailed Summary by ChatGPT)

24-0828 Wed. Class - Christian Apologetics, p70

Transcript (0:04 - 23:47)

Transcript

Teacher: Tom Freed

Good evening. We got halfway through Defeater 5 last week, which was, I can't believe in God because there's so much evil and suffering in the world. The total of seven Defeaters we're going to look at before this chapter is done, and then we'll have one chapter left.

There is no perfect answer for that Defeater, but the Christian worldview has the best explanation, in my opinion. It's hard to explain to someone whether a child died at a young age from cancer or a loved one got hit by a drunk driver, or maybe a lot of evil and suffering in the world. It's hard to come up with a perfect answer for it.

Suffering and death are experiences that cast a shadow over everyone's lives, no matter what their worldview. Even if you aren't a Christian, it's not like they have an answer. But the Christians do have the best answer, I think.

So it could be helpful to first start on the inside of the unbelievers' frameworks with their distress over suffering, and then move outside of their framework by exploring the various explanations for how we should view suffering and what we should do in response to the wrongs in the world. This will provide them with a broader context and give you an opportunity to help them work towards Christianity. Contrasting the Christian vision with the other views is a good way to make a case for how Christianity best explains common human experiences and provides the strongest resources for living in the midst of suffering.

Last week we looked at a bunch of traditional worldviews and what points to affirm and what points to challenge. We looked at the evil as illusion view, which is a prime example of this view. Buddhism admits that there is suffering in the world, but claims that evil is based on a broader illusion.

The fatalistic view, or Stoic, this view is common in the ancient Greek and Roman cultures and is still prevalent in many forms today. A person cannot outrun fate, so they must endure what evil

befalls them in a Stoic sort of way. There's still a lot of Stoicism beliefs out there and people who enjoy that view.

The moralistic religious view is whenever someone suffers, it's because they have committed a corresponding evil action. A person's lot in life is directly related to the actions they have taken in this life or a previous life, and they receive exactly what they deserve. I know that contrasts with the Christian view, where not everybody is punished that deserves it.

The cosmic conflict view is a dualistic view, sees the world locked in a conflict between good and evil forces. Neither of which is ultimately sovereign. I'll give you the example of Star Wars where there's a good and evil force fighting each other.

The secular pessimistic view is there is no meaning, no purpose, and no morality in the universe. God is dead and so is meaning. One day we all cease to exist.

We are the accidental byproduct of a mechanistic universe that is generally hostile toward life. That's what some people view today, you know, the atheistic view, which is pretty depressing. No wonder people are on drugs and committing suicide and all this other stuff.

You know, the atheistic view, the pessimistic, is definitely a world not really worth living in. On the other hand, the secular optimistic view is a little better. This view affirms that because there is no transcendent meaning in the world that we can discover, we are left to create our own meaning.

The gospel of secular optimism is that we have been liberated from conforming to some external source of truth or meaning and are free to determine what is good and meaningful for ourselves. But, you know, they're making meaning, you know, like family, friends, work. You make your own meaning in life.

That's what a lot of atheists also, their worldview is. There's a lot of worldviews that compete with Christianity, and we'll be looking at the Christian view tonight. So for Christians, suffering and death should be neither sought after nor avoided at all costs.

Instead, living well requires us not to attempt to ignore the universal experiences of suffering and death, but rather to think deeply about them. Unlike the various forms of secularism, suffering is not only meaningful, it can teach us and transform us into something magnificent. 2 Corinthians 4, 17.

That's a good point. Suffering can be beneficial to the Christian. You know, a lot of these other worldviews, it's not beneficial.

Like today, people don't want to suffer. They don't think there's anything good that could come out of it. They just want pleasure and joy.

As C.S. Lewis famously puts it, for Christians, God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains. Christianity understands pain and suffering, not as a sign that the world is meaningless and arbitrary, but rather that it is not the way it was originally intended to be. Because humans turned away from God, the giver of life, the result was a distorted creation and the invasion of death.

Evil is not an illusion. It is very real. It cannot simply be defined by relative personal or cultural preference.

Evil is anything that stands against God and his plan for creation. So you can see that there's a good explanation. You know, the world was perfect.

God made it perfect until Adam and Eve sinned. And then you had chaos, death, and all sorts of evil things. The Christian message is that God, in the person of Jesus, is redeeming this fallen world and will one day usher in justice and eternal peace.

While Christians can agree with secularists that we should fight for justice and peace, we must be sure to assert that these categories are not just a matter of our own cultural preferences. Christians have a much more stable basis for philosophic causes and relativistic cultural ideals. That's true.

You know, the Christians have a reason to help others. We have a reason to fight for justice and peace. You know, they have the social justice warriors, all these people crying about all the wrongs in this world, but really they have no basis to complain.

If it's only the strong survive, then the world, you know, you can't look on anything. If you just have your own morals, who's to say what is right and wrong? In other words, while we can agree with the secular friends that we should fight to end things like sex trafficking and injustices against women, we ought to ask them, how can these things be considered anything more than mere cultural preferences? The justification Christianity provides for activism is far stronger because it is based on inherent worth of humans made in God's image. The divinely given vocational calling to care for creation and the moral obligation all humans have to their creator.

The Christian story also provides powerful motivation absent secular views for making sacrifices and enduring pain for the sake of justice and goodness. For in Christianity, justice and goodness have transcendent meaning. They matter to God and will matter for eternity.

We do have a better reason for doing good, for going through suffering and pain. You know, the atheists don't. They have no reason.

In his poignant work, *A Lament for a Son*, former year old philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff reflects on Jesus' words. Blessed are those who mourn. And then asks, who then are the mourners? He concludes that the mourners are those who have caught a glimpse of God's new day, who ache with all their being for that day's coming, and who break out into tears and confront it with its absence.

The mourners are aching visionaries. The secular visions of justice struggle to kindle such deep commitment to this world alongside such hope for the future. Consider, for example, the Stoics, who said that in facing life's challenges, we should steal ourselves and seek to empty ourselves of emotion.

Be calm, disengage yourself, neither laugh nor weep. But Jesus in stark contrast tells us be open to the wounds of the world. Mourn humanity's mourning.

Weep over humanity's mourning. Be wounded by humanity's wounds. Be in agony over humanity's agony.

But do so in good cheer, that a day of peace is coming. Luke Ferry refers to this as a seductive promise of Christianity. A promise the longstanding and personal pagan view of eternity was no match for.

It is true, we do have a seductive promise as Christians. We have a promise for heaven. We have a promise that everything will be better.

Most people of the other worldviews have no hope. They have no reason to do anything good. Because Christians know they are saved by and into an eternal love, they can rest in the assurance that the life of their loves will not come to an end with earthly death.

Look at the logical problem. Despite the rich resources Christianity offers for responding and living with suffering, those with a secular perspective will often object. I don't care if Christianity helps deal with the reality better than the other major worldviews.

It doesn't mean it's true. The problem I have with Christianity is that I don't see how a good and all-powerful God could allow suffering and evil in the world. If God were good, knew about all the evil and suffering that's going on in the world, and could do something about it, then he would.

He allows suffering when he could do something about it. He is not really good. And if he allows suffering because he can't do anything about it, then he's not all-powerful.

Christianity's conception of God has a major logical problem. In responding to this objection, we will need to point out how there are certain cultural assumptions bound within it and stack the deck against Christianity. I don't know if I've seen that brought up before that point.

If God is good, why did he allow all this suffering and evil? If he's all-powerful, we knew he'd suffer and have a horrible life. Why did he create us? So we'll look at the secular problem of good and evil. Secularists have no clear basis from which to judge something as good or evil.

Categories of good and evil are a problem for the skeptics. The false assumption that needs to be exposed is that one can just assume such categories. Christianity provides an obvious grounding for morality.

Nazistic viewpoints do not. Secularists who try to argue for moral obligation rather than just subjective moral feelings have a steep uphill climb awaiting them. A lot of these people just go off their feelings.

I just saw a podcast the other day where these people were arguing and the one person was arguing from a Christian standpoint and said, you know, he follows the Bible and that's where he gets his morality from. The other person were basing all their moral decisions on just their feelings alone. That's all that basically the atheists can go off of is their feelings.

Oh, I feel that's wrong but they might feel something else is right. They have absolutely nothing to base their morality on. You know, if we're just animals there is no God.

Who's to say what's right and wrong? You know, they basically borrow Christianity's morality and then try to use it against us. But for other critics the argument is that it does not make sense on its own terms. They try to avoid making an argument about whether good and evil actually exist.

And yet experience and intuition teach us we cannot actually live without making moral judgments. So in response to these two positions we ought to ask do you believe in good and evil? If so, what ground? What do you ground such categories in? And if you deny the reality of good and evil is that denial livable? God's infinite knowledge and wisdom Christian theology acknowledges mystery. In this world it is impossible to exhaust a reason for an infinite God to allow suffering and evil.

At this point it is important to recall from previous chapters some of the cultural changes that occur during and after the Enlightenment. Many in our current culture assume what Charles Taylor refers to as imminent frame which gives them the sense that the universe they live in in all social and ethical orders in it can be fully explained in their own terms and don't need to be conceived as dependent on anything outside on the supernatural or the transcendent. The modern self has a heightened view of what it can understand about the world through its own reason.

While previous societies wrestled with the experiences and questions of suffering this did not normally lead to the disbelief in God until as Taylor recounts human confidence in their own ability to analyze and draw conclusions became dominant and our sense of mystery faded from social imagination. It is exactly this confidence in our ability to understand the world comprehensively that the Bible challenges. When we allow for a watered down understanding of God and enhanced view of ourselves we are playing into the hands of those who base their objection of God on the existence of suffering.

The part of responding to the logic of this objection is to help a person see the problem with their confidence and their own reasoning capabilities and to cast a grander vision of God. Your response might go something like this You are right to say that Christianity teaches that God is both all powerful and perfectly good but your picture of the Christian God is too simplistic and does not correspond well with what Christians have long believed about Him. According to the Bible God has revealed Himself so that He can be known personally but He has not revealed Himself exhaustively.

We can know Him but because He is the Creator and we are His creatures we have creaturely limits. He is infinite and we are finite. You cannot see or understand all the reasons He has for what He does and what He allows.

So while you are correct to say that God is omnipotent and good it is important that you also include His infinite knowledge and wisdom as you consider the evil and suffering in the world. In other words this objection only stands if you accept the principle that if God had a good reason for allowing evil I would know what the reason is. Yet this principle fails to be self-evident and contradicts the picture of the God in the Bible.

To enable you to help us better understand we might compare our ability to see the reasons that God allows evil and suffering with our ability to see and to see no-see-ums which are a small bug that is barely visible to the naked eye. If I claim there was a giant dog in the tent and you opened it but could not see it you would be right to claim I was wrong. However if I claim there was a no-see-um bug in the tent you wouldn't be able to know if it were in the tent or not.

Similarly if God is a God presented in the Christian scriptures we as philosophers Stephen John Boxer has put it have good reasons to think that if there were God-purposed goods for suffering these would often be beyond our understanding. We might also compare our ability to understand

God with an infinite ability to fully understand His parents. The author Josh can remember when he and his wife took their young daughter and their first their first vaccination shots.

Had she been able to articulate her feelings she would likely question why are these two people who have noted on and diligently cared for me allowing this stranger to cause me so much pain. At that point in her maturity the gap between our reasons for allowing her to experience the pain and her capacity to understand was too great. As she grew up there were many familiar situations in which she asked which we asked her to trust our wisdom and judgment even if she couldn't fully understand it.

And yet some might object to this. But it's not just that there is evil in the world. It's a sheer amount of evil in the world that leads me to believe there can't be anything that justifies it.

However this objection does not negate the point because it still makes the mistake of underestimating the majesty of God as he is presented in the Christian scriptures. Even in the widespread suffering it remains reasonable to trust in God who has reasons for allowing it that are beyond our understanding. The cross is God's response to evil and suffering.

Others may object but the analogy of the parent and child breaks down. Over time an ideal father would give his daughter more reason to trust him in the evident care he shows for her. That's not how it is with us and God.

He doesn't show us that sort of evident care. However this is exactly what Christianity claims God has shown us and does show us. God publicly entered into the world in the person of Jesus Christ and suffered with us and for us.

He bears the mark of evil and pain. When looking at the cross no believer can wonder does God care. He cared so much that he sent his son to hang on the cross and die for us to make things right.

The incarnation and death of God's son the centerpiece of the Christian story gives us reason to trust that God cares. It is when we look at a crucified Jesus that we come to understand what it means to be that God is compassionate. That God is a God that suffers with us.

A literary example an excerpt from Jesus of the scars. The other gods were strong but thou was weak. They robed but thou didst stumble to the throne.

But to our wounds only God's wounds can speak. We can see that maybe we don't have a perfect explanation for suffering. We do have some explanation that we did sin that God did make the world perfect but Adam and Eve sinned and brought on suffering and evil in the world.

But overall we don't have every answer to sin and suffering. We don't know why God allows us to suffer the way he does sometimes. But in the end he did send his son to die for us.

He does have a solution to our problems and our woes. And eventually we will we won't suffer anymore in heaven. So one the class today we're done with that the feeder.

We have two more left on the class of the prayer. Thank you Lord for this day the time to study your words study about apologetics. Thank you for everybody who made it here.

For those who couldn't make it watch over us through the week and answer our prayers and help the sick and suffering. Help us through our daily struggles. Watch over us and forgive us of our sins in Jesus name.

Amen.