

24-0918wc - Transcript

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24-0918 Wed. Class - Christian Apologetics

Transcript (0:04 - 23:43)

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Teacher: Tom Freed

Good evening. We finished with Defeater 5 last time. There's three left, they're pretty, they're shorter.

Probably get done with those in a couple weeks and be on the last chapter. Well, Defeater 5 was, I can't believe in God because there's so much evil and suffering in the world. Has anybody heard that before? That's a big one that they bring up.

There's too much evil and suffering. We don't have all the answers. We do know there is pain and suffering because of human sin.

The world was created perfect, but Adam and Eve, they sinned against God. You know, it was a utopia, everything was perfect. They could have, I don't know if they would have lived forever, but possibly there would have maybe been no sickness and death.

But after they disobeyed God, they brought forth the fallen state of the world. We're suffering, and we're suffering pain and eventually death. We went over a bunch of different worldviews, finding points we could agree on and ones we can challenge.

Last week we looked at the Christian view. 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. As C.S. Lewis famously put it, for Christians, God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains.

Sometimes it's pain and suffering. Also, that brings us to God. I know if my life was perfect, I wouldn't have become a Christian.

I became a Christian because I was in a hard time in my life. I wasn't going through the worst things in the world, but for me it felt pretty low. 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's 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. 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. The one secular argument is, if God were good, knew about all the evil and suffering that goes on in the world, and could do something about it, then he would.

If he allows suffering when he could do something about it, then he's not really good. And if he allows suffering because he can't do anything about it, then he's not an all-powerful God. So you ever hear that argument before? You know, he should do something about suffering.

Secularists have no clear basis from which to judge something as good or evil, though. You know, they go off of the Bible's morality a lot of times, and then they try to judge God against it. Secularists, they have no reason to believe in right or wrong, good and evil.

Everybody's just animals, you know, the strong survive. Christianity provides an obvious grounding for morality. Naziistic viewpoints do not.

So in response to their position, we ought to ask, do you believe in good and evil? If so, what do you ground such categories in? If you deny the reality of good and evil, is that denial livable? So that's a great question. What do they ground their belief in? They have absolutely nothing to base their morality on, folks. They don't believe in God.

God's infinite knowledge and wisdom, and wisdom Christian theology acknowledges mystery. In this world, it's impossible to exhaust the reasons for an infinite God to allow suffering and evil. According to the Bible, God has revealed Himself so we may know Him personally, but He has not revealed Himself exhaustively.

That's a great point. We know enough about God. He gave us a lot to know about Him, but we don't know every single thing, you know.

There are mysteries still. Even if you read the whole Bible and know everything in it, there's still mysteries that God, you know, has kept to Himself. He is infinite and we are finite.

We cannot see or understand all the reasons He has for what He does and what He allows. So while you are correct to say God is omnipotent and good, it's 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, if God had a good reason for allowing evil, I would know what the reason is.

That's pretty arrogant on our part as humans to think, well, we should know the reason if God allows it. You know, it's not always true. We don't always know the reason.

God is so much higher above us. His thoughts are so much higher than our thoughts and His ways higher than our ways. Yet this principle fails to be self-evident and contradicts the picture of the God in the Bible.

Even in the face of widespread suffering, it remains reasonable to trust in God who has reasons for allowing it that are beyond our understanding. And He has allowed pain and suffering, but He's

also provided a solution in Jesus. We have, you know, for our pain and suffering, for our sins, He has a way out.

And one day, you know, we have the promise of heaven where there will be no pain and suffering. So we'll look at Zephir 6 tonight. I can't believe in a God of judgment and wrath.

So I don't know if anybody's heard that one. Well, look, certain modern institutions concerning justice and related beliefs about forgiveness offer connecting points for responding to this objection. Think back to the A and B doctrines discussed in chapter 10.

Forgiveness is related to judgment and that many lay modernists assume forgiveness to be everyone's default position, especially any deity. One approach to this Zephir then is to reframe the question about judgment. How can God be so wrathful and full of judgment with an opposite question about forgiveness? You have an issue with a God who forgives.

This may seem like a strange question to ask, but its value lies in its ability to help others begin to consider the assumptions of their own cultural location. Other more traditional cultures have no problem with a God who judges. Rather, they are offended by a God who would forgive immoral people without making amends.

That's a great point. You know, we have a problem with a God who forgave people who were evil, had tons of sin, and didn't even want to repent. In other words, you may ask, could it be that your beliefs about judgment and forgiveness are bound up with local cultural assumptions that don't mesh with any other culture? Or with who God really is? God's anger and love.

With the anthropocentric turn in the West, judgment became a problem for God rather than a problem for the unrepentant. So anthropocentric is interpreting reality exclusively in terms of human values and experience. You're just basing reality on just human values and experience.

You know, not necessarily God's. The starting point is no longer our own moral failings or our inability to fully see judgment as God sees it. Instead, the cultural assumption is that God, if he exists, is on the hook for judging us.

So we're mad that God is judging us for doing wrong. We have been cultivated to think more positively about what we deserve and less about God's holiness and true nature of his love. So the anthropocentric turn.

Charles Taylor described the anthropocentric turn by recounting four shifts in thought that occurred approximately around the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. People began to believe that, one, God does not require that we obey him sacrificially for purposes greater than ourselves. The only thing we owe him is the achievement of our own good as humans.

Two, rather than needing to rely entirely on the grace of God, humans can rise to the challenge of carrying out the divine plan by using their own reason and exerting their own will. Three, since God's purpose is for us to seek our own good, and we can discover the entirety of God's being and plan by examining nature and understanding its design, all of God's cards are, in a sense, on the table. There is no veil that humans cannot tear back, no mystery that one day we will not be able to explain.

Four, humankind is not so inherently sinful and broken, and as a result so limited in our present condition that we need God to comply, completely transform us, in order for us to develop as human beings or do good in the world. Five, because God is holy, he stands against the corruption of his good creation. Because he is loving, he is not indifferent toward the corruption of the world he loves.

God's judgment flows out of both holiness and his love. It is part of his settled and active opposition against anything that opposes the good. We love our kids.

We are deeply invested in their lives. So if one of them was to become a dreadful person, ruining their life and their family's future with a reckless, living, and destructive behavior, we would not simply be indifferent. We would be angry.

So that's a great point. You know, if one of your kids was becoming evil, sinning, doing all these crazy things, would you just be indifferent and say, well, it's loving to let you do whatever you want. No, you'd be angry.

You'd want the best for them. You would be angry at them. You would punish them.

In this way, deep love is connected to the capacity for deep anger. Indifference toward destructive behavior in someone you claim to love will call into question the sincerity of your love. The Bible says if you love your child, you'll discipline it.

You know, those who aren't disciplining their child, you know, refuse to spank or do anything to their child, the Bible says they don't really love the child. You know, discipline goes along with love. Of course, analogies have their limits.

Human love is different from God's love. But this illustration could help a person struggling with God's wrath to begin reflecting on how even in our finite experiences, love is not the opposite of anger. The two are deeply connected.

Another perspective on condemnation in the New Testament is that God in judging is giving people over to what they want. Romans 1, 18-32. In other words, God punishes people who want freedom from Him by giving it to them.

Apostle Paul paints a verbal picture of how when detached from God's authority, people spiral deeper and deeper in their own narcissistic, idolatry, and destructive behavior. Like a drug addict who refuses help and continues to binge on the drug that is destroying him, our insistence on idolatry leads us to devastation. From this perspective, judgment is essentially saying, essentially God saying, okay, you can have what you want.

Well, this is not the only perspective on God's judgment offered in the Bible. It can help a person begin to think more deeply about human culpability. That's another great point.

God's way of punishing us sometimes is letting us have and do what we want and go away from Him. And when we do that, especially when you're once a Christian, you can find out how much worse off life is, even if you get all the sin you want. You know, I've seen that in my life when I strayed from God's word for pleasures of the world, and I found that I'm way more miserable, even if it is fun for a little time.

And at the end, you know, when we die, we'll have eternal separation from God. God's not going to force us to love and be with Him if we don't like Him. You know, He's going to let us go our own way.

Look at forgiveness and justice. Forgiveness is a popular sentiment in late modernism. Many people still long for idealized worldwide peace and reconciliation.

This longing is beautiful, and it's something we should affirm. However, it amounts to nothing more than a cheap sentiment. Why can't we all just forgive each other and get along? That lacks substance or realism.

Well, that's true. I mean, these people are, oh, have world peace, just forgive everybody. We all live together.

I mean, it sounds great, but it's not realistic at all. In a culture that promotes individualism, personal rights, and self-activation, the sacrifice that forgiveness requires is difficult, if not altogether unbearable. What worldview can give us the resources we need not to just cope with evil, but to live lives of peace and love towards others? Why would anyone actually forgive the corrupt cops who use fake evidence to get them arrested? Or the coworker who slanders them out of jealousy? Or the genocidal leader who murdered their people? Should we just have forgiven Hitler or Stalin for all the murders of millions and millions of people they, you know, slaughtered for no reason? Would that be loving and acceptable? Would that be easy to do? On the other hand, can people even be held responsible as moral agents for such acts? Not only do we instinctively sense that the actions described above are wrong, but we also recognize that they are difficult to forgive.

And this is only intensified if we assume, as do many late moderns, that our lives are fundamentally about pursuing our own interests and comforts. What reason is there for me to forgive anybody? Who would it benefit me? Or how would it benefit me? That's a great point. If you're just living for yourself, there's no God, there's no morality, why should you forgive anybody? Why should you care? You're just living for yourself.

You know, you put yourself first, so... These people who claim world peace and all this loving and forgiving, that don't believe in God, they have no reason to do that. Besides, doesn't a strong sense of justice, which late moderns tend to have, dictate that I obtain justice for my grievances? Christianity not only provides a substantive foundation for forgiveness, but also gives us the assurance that justice will be done in the end, which frees us up to live our lives of peace. Theologian Miroslav Volf, a Croatian who experienced cruel violence in the Balkans, asserts that forgiveness is only possible because of God's justice.

Volf explains, it takes a quiet suburban home from the birth of the thesis that human nonviolence corresponds to God's refusal to judge. In a scorched land soaked in blood of the innocent, that thesis will invariably die. And as one watches it die, one will do well to reflect about many other unpleasant captivities of the liberal mind.

That's a good point. It's easy for us to say to people in these ivory towers in this country, that haven't experienced what some of these other countries have gone through, to say, oh, you know, we should just forgive everybody. You know, if God wasn't so judgmental, you know, there wouldn't be so much violence or something to that effect, you know.

But if you live in a war-torn country where people are slaughtered innocently, you know, you might have a different view of judgment. You know, the liberals, a lot of liberals in this country have all these great, fantastic thoughts, but it's not grounded in reality. Our hearts desperately want justice to be served.

We want the guilty to be punished. We correctly desire for things to be made right. This is why Wolfe even goes as far as to assert that if God does not bring people to justice, if he does not make a final end to evil, then he is not a God who is worthy of our worship.

If, however, there is no God who will ultimately bring a final judgment, then why shouldn't we obtain justice for ourselves? In contrast, the Christian view offers two powerful reasons for us to forgive others. A belief in divine judgment serves as a restraint. We are not to seek vengeance, but it is God's prerogative, not ours.

God will see the justice done in the end. Two, belief in human sinfulness calls us to recognize that we ourselves have done things that make us guilty. By trusting in God, who not only promises that justice will be served, but who secured forgiveness by suffering for us as a human, we are declared to be no longer guilty and are also freed from the stranglehold of bitterness we feel towards those who have wronged us.

That's true, too. I mean, a lot of people, it's better to forgive, because if you don't, you know, it will eat us up. Even if somebody has wronged us, if we hold on to that grudge, think about it constantly, it can destroy our lives.

It's better to forgive and know that God is going to take vengeance. We are able to offer true forgiveness as people who have experienced true forgiveness. Jesus not only taught his followers to love their enemies and pray for those who persecute them, he also forgave his enemies as he hung on the cross for them.

Christianity, by tying justice, judgment, and love together in a way that makes sense, offers forgiveness and gives reasons to forgive. Well, that's the end of Defeater 6. We'll get to Defeater 7 next week. The Bible is unreliable and cannot be taken seriously.

So, you know, the book makes great points here about forgiveness. You know, about a God who judges, too. You know, it's good to have a God who judges.

If he didn't judge, he wouldn't be God. If he allowed evil to rule, then he wouldn't be God. I mean, he does punish evil because he is perfect and sinless.

But he's also giving us a way out. And that's why, you know, we love God. One of the reasons he sent his son to die for us.

He is a merciful and fair God. More than fair. Well, I'm here.

I'll end with a prayer. Thank you, Lord, for another day, another day to look at your Word, to go over this study, learn more about you. Watch over those who are suffering and have sickness in the congregation.

Help Mike with his hip and help the rest of the congregation with their issues and problems. Watch over us, Lord. Give us safe travel home.

Be with us, Lord, for the rest of the week. In Jesus' name. Amen.