

Here Where Dogs Bite and Bees Sting: Part One

And predators eat prey. Tornadoes destroy. Disease wastes and kills. The sun blisters. Hangnails, well, hang. And so on and so forth. Everything that lives is in the process of dying. The imperfection of nature is expressed in a hundred billion ways throughout the universe every day.

A large chunk of humankind has assumed this as all God's fault, an injustice that our supposedly good, all-powerful God is not remedying which therefore makes Him evil and/or a powerless God. There are so many things wrong with that line of thinking.

I think to fully understand it—even remotely—you must look and think closely about some biblical teachings and concepts. This three-part series will look at 1) how the problem began, 2) life with the problem, 3) and how the problem will end. It will not be a thorough look at the issue. Not even close. The subject is way too complex for that and has been the subject of whole books. Rather this is mainly a general overview.

It all started when the free will of man and pride met to create the biggest human moral problem in the universe. Although this article is not specifically looking at the problem it created in the human heart, the human moral problem is where the whole issue started so we will look at that first.

The Corruption of Free Will

So about this thing called free will. Like everything else, God created it to be a good thing. But also like everything else it can be made into a bad thing. C.S. Lewis says "If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad...Why, then, did God give them [us] free will? Because free will, though it

makes evil possible...makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having" (Mere Christianity, 48).

The big baddie himself, Satan, was good once but may have been the first to warp God's gift of free will. God created and made him the top angel in His kingdom, but this wasn't good enough and he chose rebellion. And then he later convinced Adam and Eve on behalf of humankind to choose to rebel too. And evil has since infected all of mankind.

Evil comes in many guises. It does not always look evil or self-centered. In fact, it can be born of a desire to do something good. Tolkien commented on this very thing. Tolkien was not only one of the greatest Fantasy writers who ever lived, but he was also a very great Christian thinker who was instrumental in converting Lewis, his best friend, to Christ.

Tolkien believed that evil is good in its originally created form. In a letter to a prospective publisher, Tolkien related how he viewed evil: "...frightful evil can and does arise from an apparently good root, the desire to benefit the world and others—speedily and according to the benefactor's own plans" (The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien, 146). Yes, evil can either look good or as previously mentioned originate in a good source. Throughout his masterpiece, The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien demonstrates his view that at one time the forces of evil were originally intended by their creator to be good. Morgoth, Saruman, Sauron, Gollum—such evil forces were created good but chose to be corrupted. And trolls, orcs, and the Nazgul were originally created good ents, elves, and men, but were corrupted by evil.

Evil is also a force both outside of man and within man. At various times in history, there have been well-meaning individuals who postulated that there is either internal evil which is evil that arises in each of us *or* there is an evil force outside of us that makes us choose evil. Tolkien said there is both. He demonstrated this dual nature of evil in The

Lord of The Rings. Through the ring, Frodo, the ring bearer, is tempted both internally and externally by the dark lord Sauron.

Frodo came to recognize, respect, and at times resist this seductive force as demonstrated in the valley of Minas Morgul in the presence of the witch-king:

"...he felt, more urgent than ever before, the command that he should put on the Ring. But great as the pressure was, he felt no inclination now to yield to it...There was no longer any answer to that command in his own will, dismayed by terror though it was, and he felt only the beating upon him of a great power from outside. It took his hand, and as Frodo watched with his mind, not willing it but in suspense (as if he looked on some story far away), it moved the hand inch by inch towards the chain upon his neck. Then his own will stirred; slowly it forced the hand back..."
(Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers, 315-316)

In all its forms, evil is evil. if it is opposite of God's expressed will, that's exactly what it is. It does not matter if any man judges something to be good. Anything that is contradictory to God is evil.

The fact that God gave us entirely free wills to either choose or to reject this evil almost makes it amazing that He was able to have a plan at all. almost. Not really, though. God is divine and all-knowing of the past, present, and future so it's actually not that surprising. In His infinite knowledge, He was able to plan the entire redemptive history of man

before creation even got started. The Apostle Paul spoke of a mystery, a hidden wisdom, that God ordained before the world began (1 Corinthians 2:7). The salvation act of Jesus Christ, God the Son who was God the Father, was the planned end result of all of this, but the free wills of man were left free. God knew what would we choose and planned accordingly.

Via God's long plan of salvation, we have been enabled to exert our free will again to begin the process of being returned to our perfect state one day. Frodo was eventually able to exert his free will to the good and thusly destroy the overpowering ring. That kind of exertion of our free will is necessary to begin the process of turning back the damage caused by the original corruption in the Garden of Eden. We'll come back to that in the last part of this series.

For now, all of mankind is burdened with evil. Adam and Eve made their horrible choice and because of it man was cursed. But their bad choice affected more than just humanity. Their error also cursed the rest of creation with imperfection. Adam and Eve eventually died in a world that was increasingly hard to care for, in a land that they had had a hand in corrupting. In the second part of this series we will look at that corruption.