

Why Is There Evil?

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R. C. SPROUL

Why Is There Evil?

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LIGONIER MINISTRIES

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© 2021 by the R.C. Sproul Trust

Published by Ligonier Ministries
421 Ligonier Court, Sanford, FL 32771
Ligonier.org

Printed in China

RR Donnelley

0000122

First printing

ISBN 978-1-64289-338-0 (Paperback)

ISBN 978-1-64289-339-7 (ePub)

ISBN 978-1-64289-340-3 (Kindle)

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Cover design: Ligonier Creative

Interior typeset: Katherine Lloyd, The DESK

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Library of Congress Control Number: 2021931271

Contents

One	The Problem of Evil.	1
Two	What Is Evil and Where Did It Come From?	19
Three	Accidents	35
Four	Providence and Suffering	45
Five	Providence and Evil	55
Six	The Case of Job	65
Seven	Suffering and Sin	75
Eight	Together for Good	83
Nine	Evil Is Not Good	93
Ten	For Those Who Love God	103

Chapter One

The Problem of Evil

Two separate but closely related problems that Christians often hear when people object to Christianity are the problem of evil and the problem of human suffering. The first problem with respect to evil is usually stated like this: How can a being who is infinitely righteous, holy, and perfect create a creation or a creature with even the possibility of sin's being present? If all things go back to the being of God, would we not have to find evil somewhere within God Himself to account for the presence of evil

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in this world? So the question of evil has to do with the integrity and holiness of God. The question of suffering is closely related, but it is not the same question. The question of suffering is, How can a benevolent God allow all the suffering that we find existing in life? These are two separate questions. The first is more of a philosophical question. The second is more of a practical question of dealing with the problem of pain, anguish, and tragedy in this world. Let's look at one at a time.

A nineteenth-century theologian stated that the problem of evil is the Achilles' heel of the Christian faith. He argued that no satisfactory explanation can be given for the existence of evil. Many skeptics and atheists have stated that if God could not have stopped the entrance of evil into the universe, then He is not omnipotent. If He could have stopped it but chose not to stop it, then He is not benevolent. So either way you look at the problem of evil, somehow a shadow is cast over the nature of God.

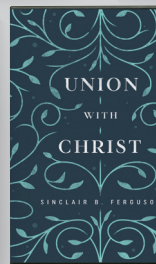
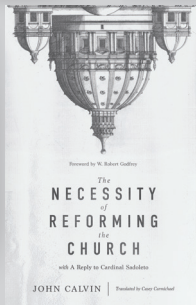
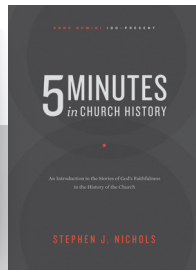
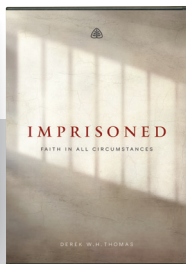
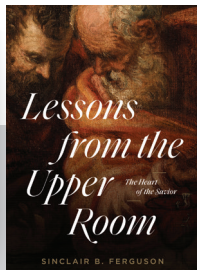
Historically, many attempts have been made to answer the question of the origin of evil from a Christian perspective, and those attempts have come to us by means of what is called *theodicy*. A theodicy—from the Greek meaning “to justify God”—is an attempt to justify God for the

existence of evil in the world. But in my opinion, no one has yet been able to adequately answer the question of the problem of evil.

The first thing a Christian must do when he's confronted with this question is to immediately say, "I don't know the answer," and acknowledge the seriousness of the question. Don't try to play games. Don't try to hide. Don't try to evade it, but deal with it head-on. It's important that people see that we Christians recognize there's a serious problem here, that we're not oblivious to it. So let's look at a couple theodicies to see how some have dealt with this problem. First, some have approached this question by denying the reality of evil altogether and arguing that evil is an illusion. In my opinion, that's a cop-out, because it does not seriously reckon with the reality that we all experience every day.

The second approach is that evil is actually a necessary prerequisite for the appreciation of the good, and so in the final analysis evil is good. Let's state it in concrete terms: For man to really experience goodness in freedom, he had to experience the problem of evil. He had to experience the reality of evil so that he might appreciate his redemption. In this schema, which has been offered many times in the

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