

Hebrews

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[0 : 00] Well, the East Coast, particularly the Carolinas, are bracing themselves for what is going to be an enormous onslaught of wind and waves and devastation and destruction.

And in the midst of all of these kind of things, thoughtful people are wondering how it is that the theodicy we are discussing today actually plays out.

The theodicy has to do with relating the realities of our world that are often contrary to man's best interests, how we are going to coincide or relate that to a benevolent, loving God who is committed to doing all things well.

And the problem of a theodicy is perhaps the most besetting area of difficulty for humanity to deal with.

I suspect that if we were going to enumerate the objections that people have to the existence of a loving and a caring God, it would have to be right up there at the top, the theodicy.

[1 : 18] How do we square the existence of evil and pain and suffering and adversity and reversals and everything to go with it? With a God whom the Bible says loves his creation and loves man that he has placed upon it.

And this love even extends to being in the triune nature, willing to surrender a member of the triune Godhead, namely the Son of God, to the consequences of the Holy Spirit, and coming down to the Holy Spirit, and coming down to this world and being born as a human being and suffering and dying to demonstrate his love and his care for humanity.

We're told in Romans, I think it's five, maybe eight, something like that. God commends or God demonstrated his love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

It's an amazing expression that is beyond anything that we can really fathom, that kind of love. So how do we square that with this same God of love allowing over 230,000 people to perish in that tsunami that hit the Indian Ocean a number of years ago?

How do we square that with God allowing Islamic terrorists to eliminate almost 3,000 people who were victims of the Twin Towers and the Pentagon and the Shanksville, Pennsylvania situation?

[3 : 11] Where is God when all this is happening? And if he has the power and the ability that he's supposed to have, why didn't he do something? Why did he allow these things?

Why does God allow little girls to be forced into an international sex trade where they are bandied about and carried about like so much cattle to serve the pleasures of evil men who are willing to take advantage of them?

Where is God when these things go on? This is the kind of thing we're talking about. And non-thinking people, non-thinking people, and there are a lot of them, never even ask these questions.

Frankly, it's difficult for me to see how anyone could live and function in the world on any kind of a daily basis without wondering about these things. How do you square these things?

And in the article that I shared with you, there's just one paragraph here that's lifted out. Theodicy. Theodicy is not simply an intellectual exercise.

[4 : 24] Abilene Christian University psychologist Richard Beck concluded in a 2008 study. Theodicy. Theodicy, properly understood, is an experiential burden.

The individual believer must reconcile his or her life circumstances with fundamental beliefs about God. Theodicy.

Theodicy. Jamie Allen, a psychologist at Wheaton College, would know this. His family moved to Mississippi just days before Hurricane Katrina made landfall and ravaged his community.

He also survived colon cancer. So, this is a big ticket item. And I dare say that it is probably the number one objection that people have to there being a benevolent God whom we described

earlier.

And we'd just like to kind of open this for any discussion, input that you may have, or any additional questions that you may have. We talked about it last night. We have a small group that meets on Wednesday night, anywhere from maybe 10 to 15 people, for just a time of informal prayer and discussion of these things.

[5 : 45] And we talked about this issue there last night as well. So, some of you who were there may recall some of the items that we put forth. But we'd like to hear from you by way of any additional questions that you may have, or any conclusions that you may have reached in connection with this issue.

The article, of course, deals with the fact that these young people were off to a Bible camp. It would take days to recover the bodies of the children who perished in the flash flood that morning. One of the deadliest natural disasters in the region of Texas, known as the Hill Country. It's anniversary would be commemorated by journalists with a humble memorial plaque and a speech by President George H.W. Bush.

For those left behind, when the water receded, the struggle was only beginning. Dreams derailed. Best friends drowned. A sweetheart buried in debris.

There may be no starker image of bad things happening to good people than children giving a week of summer vacation to worship God and study Scripture, only to be swallowed up by floodwaters.

[7 : 14] All the usual questions about God and evil would ensue. And for surviving campers, Asbury, Mara, and Chatham, one question in particular would linger over time.

When the body survives, what determines if faith will survive? There are people, numbers of them, great numbers of them worldwide, who have been so personally decimated by life that they've just completely given up on the idea of God having anything to do with it or even having existence. I think I might have shared with you quite some time ago from the book *The Question of God*. And it was a comparison of the lives of C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud, both what we would call great intellects, both of them.

Sigmund Freud and C.S. Lewis both had reasons to question the existence of a benevolent God early in their life when their mothers were taken from them.

As far as I know, these men never met each other, although they lived about the same time. But C.S. Lewis and Sigmund Freud, who is generally considered to be the father of modern psychotherapy, both lost their mothers at a very early age, and that's when their atheism developed.

[8 : 58] Because their reasoning was that the child needs the mother. And God could have, if there is a God, God could have preserved their mothers so that they would have been available to them in growing up.

But he didn't. He allowed both of them to die. And at a very tender age of no more than seven or eight, both of these men veered into atheism and just completely wrote off the idea of there being a God.

Freud was a brilliant intellectual man, completely atheistic, Jewish by the way, and he had a great deal of obstacles to overcome because anti-Semitism was really rampant in the culture in which he lived.

And he took a great deal of persecution and punishment and discrimination in his college years. But he had an intellect and an ability that enabled him to overcome that and actually establish a considerable reputation among his peers for his writings and for his insight into the human condition and so on.

[10 : 22] So much so that even today a lot of psychologists and psychiatrists consider Sigmund Freud to be their patron saint, if you will.

Despite the fact that he was a brilliant man, he was completely wrong in a whole lot of areas regarding the human psyche. And his atheism led him to some of those conclusions. Did you have a comment or question?

Two things. Let's say God does away with natural disasters, floods and tornadoes. Then there's going to be something else that's not quite as bad as that, but it's a catastrophe.

Maybe it's death of a good person. He'll get rid of those and keep going down the line. And then at some point we'll end up at a train crossing the tracks, my coming here, and it's an irritant.

Why did God let this happen? So he does away with everything. There's always going to be one more thing that will pop up that will irritate me for whatever reason. The second thing is, if God does away with all of that stuff, is there any reason for us to believe in God?

[11 : 33] Do we need God at that point? Okay. Okay. Perfect. Okay. Good point. Perfect. Other thoughts? Joe.

First of all, all these things, the way nature is and the way man is, is because the sin of man, you know, started all. I mean, in this world now, the devil is actually in control.

The God is sort of letting the devil run this world. He is the God of this world. So, the thing, and like you said, the only reason that we would go on is faith in God, that you can do something about it. And you can do something about it. And if we love God, Romans 8, 28, to me, is what I stand on and gives you the strength to go on and the optimism.

All things work together for good to those that love him. And the key there is love him. You have to love God and be, you know, and what's it mean to love him? It means to love him, to please him, to have his way, to obey his commandments.

[12 : 37] Then all these things that the devil does are going to be turned around to be good for you. And it looks like it's his purpose. God's purpose is to bring us all back to him, you know, to be Christ-like, to eventually have glory in eternity.

That's what he's bringing us back to. And that's what he's working through us. And these are all kinds of tests of our faith, you might say, that are happening. But it'll bring us back to him.

That's the end game, yeah. In the end. But the process. The process is where we are. And the process is often painful and disturbing and confusing.

So we do have Christ in us, the hope or the absolute confidence of future glory. And that's our anchor. Yeah.

Dan? On page 40. The author writes in here, when God uses them, they actually work together. Sometimes we see it. Sometimes we don't.

[13 : 40] Yeah. For the good. Another comment is made, ours is, after all, a religion of salvation. Yeah. I don't, can't figure that out.

It makes sense. Other? You need something to be saved from them. Yeah. Other thoughts, anybody? Jake? That's one thing that I've spent a lot of time on since I had my head injury about three and a half years ago.

You know, I almost died that first night. That's what the doctor told me why. But I saw a lot of people in therapy that were not getting along near as well as I did.

Yeah. And, you know, I keep wondering, why was I spared? Yeah. It's been something that's kind of, I wouldn't say it's haunted me, but it's been, you know, I wonder, why was I spared when I see other people who have had severe head injuries?

Sure. Sure. I mean, I think the doctors are left either with a lot less than I have or else they passed on. Yeah. And I just, I can't answer it except that I have a much more empathetic, I'm much more empathetic toward people and understand a little bit differently from people that have had head injuries.

[15 : 09] Yeah. I'm not trying to say I'm an expert, but I've actually used it. You know, I've wondered already, and so I've used this help that I have.

Yeah. Of reaching out to people who I know have had head injuries. Yeah. And, uh... It gave you a whole new perspective, didn't it?

Oh, yeah. Yes, it did. And that's what it took to give you that perspective. Yeah. I agree with you.

Yeah. Yeah. But would you volunteer for that?

No. No. Probably wouldn't. No. No, I didn't know. I didn't know a lot of the things I know about the way you've seen. Yeah. Absolutely. And so, I guess that's kind of been something that I feel like God wants me to reach out to people who have experienced that.

Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah. Appreciate that. You know, you might be dealing a little bit here with what they call survivor's guilt. Well...

[16 : 19] And people who go through different things like that, they look at those who didn't make it, and they almost feel guilty. Why me, you know? I didn't deserve this. And why me? Why were they taken and I was left?

Right. I definitely did. In fact, I was even a little concerned about sharing this with some people because I was concerned that some people would say, well, you know, you're lucky you survived.

Yeah. Yeah. But one of my other loved ones, they didn't survive. Yeah. Yeah. But I've been told by those people that I should tell my story at times.

Yeah. Yeah. And because I give the Lord all the praise that I can for bringing me this far.

Am I exactly like I was before? No. Yeah. There's other things I have to deal with that, you know, I feel like even this year, I can do things this summer that I couldn't do last year.

[17:24] Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I mean. Well, there is a purpose. There's a reason that you were a survivor and the Lord intends to use the experience and what you've been through to minister to others.

This is a 2 Corinthians 1 passage that we may comfort others with the comfort with which we have been comforted. And the idea is to pass it on. And it isn't to experience these things and just let it end with us.

But these experiences are intended to flow through us, not stop with us. And I appreciate very much what you had to share, Jake. Somebody else have a comment or question?

Mike. And I don't know if this is like the ultimate conundrum in theodicy. It's not a natural disaster. Why is God not there?

To me, the ultimate question, because my son, I think I said something to you about this several months ago. My son, who has always seemed on fire with the Lord, has chosen to go another direction a couple years ago.

[18:31] And his biggest issue with, I think this falls under theodicy, was, this was God's plan B, is that 80%, and he threw out a number.

No one knows the number. 80% are going to a place called hell and suffer. I know, and we all know great people who biblically appear to be headed that direction. And so his idea, I can't, that I can't reconcile that idea.

I know my brain's limited. I mean, he knows all the stuff. He knows all the biblical stuff. He was saved, and I thought. So now his issue, basically, his biggest issue is, you know, people are being, he used the phrase, sent to hell.

Yeah. You hear that? I'm sure you can. Yeah, sure, sure. Sent to hell. And a loving God does that. Forget the natural disasters. That's bad enough. Forget allowing someone to die of cancer.

Yeah. The ultimate is your eternity. Yeah. And that's a theodicy paradigm that's totally blew his mind. Logically, in my mind, I can agree with that. Yeah.

[19:41] I can hear you, and I can sense the anguish of a parent's heart there, too. And it is not at all unusual for a young person his age to experience this kind of thing.

Yeah. It's not at all unusual. In matter of fact, it's a sign of a thinking mind. There are people who, for whom these things never occur.

You know, they just, they're just tuned out of everything, and they never, they never really contemplate the big issues. They're just satisfied with three meals a day and a place to sleep, and, you know, they just never think about these things.

But we should, because there is something after this. What is it? And where is it? And this life doesn't end all.

And as regards your son, Michael, and the things that he's dealing with, we do not know, we do not know what hell actually consists of.

[20:57] And the best description that we've got is that of Revelation 20 that talks about the lake of fire. And this is a place where unbelievers are consigned.

And then theologians argue, is the fire real? Well, and if the fire is real, why are they not just burned up and consumed? And this brings forth the theological position of annihilationism, which says, yes, these people are going to be cast into the lake of fire, and they're going to be consumed entirely.

So that when they are consumed, they will be no more. They will be no memory, no pain, no suffering, no nothing, no existence. And that's called annihilationism.

And it is a popular theological tenet in some circles. We don't know about that fire. We just don't know, is it a literal fire?

Is it a figurative? And some say, well, if it is figurative, what does it figure? And we don't know. But we know this. It's negative.

[22:06] Not good. We know that. And something I want to leave with you that has been some consolation to me as regards all of this, and that is this concept, that wherever it is that anybody of humanity ends up, wherever and whatever it is, it will be entirely appropriate.

It's the best word I can think of. Appropriate. It will be for everybody. For everything and everybody. It will be appropriate.

Now, here's the question. It will be appropriate. It will be fitting. It will be righteous. It will be just.

And when I say it will be appropriate, appropriate according to whose evaluation?

Yeah. Yeah. It will be appropriate in the mind and in the eyes of the only one who ultimately matters. It will be appropriate.

It may not seem that way to us, though. No. No. It probably would not seem that way to us. But I am persuaded of this, and this is just a Wiseman opinion.

[23 : 36] When people stand before the Almighty in Revelation 20, which is referred to as the Great White Throne Judgment, there will be no believers there.

This is all for unbelievers. And they will be judged, everyone, according to their works. That means, that is the end result of God having bestowed upon his human creatures this thing that we have called volition, the will.

And there, man is going to be called into account by the Almighty as to what he has done and how he has functioned the choices and decisions that he made with the free moral will that God gave them.

That's going to be the basis of accountability, is our responsibility before him. And whatever that verdict is, whatever it is that he renders, will be fully, completely, totally appropriate.

It will be just. It will be deserved. And I am satisfied, this again is just my opinion, that there will be no defense.

[25 : 01] Every mouth will be closed. No one will be able to say, but that's not fair! I don't deserve that!

Nobody will be able to say that. Nobody will be able to charge God and say, you're giving me a raw deal. I don't deserve this. I deserve something.

Everybody will absolutely, automatically know that what they are receiving by way of a sentence, whatever that is, is absolutely, totally appropriate.

And they will know it. They will not be able to disagree with it. And, uh, whatever that consists of, I don't know.

I just, I don't know. All I know is, apparently the greatest thing that is going to make hell, hell, whatever it is, is the utter absence of God.

[26 : 06] This, uh, someone has said that, someone has said that there are a lot of people who go through life saying, in effect, not, not thy will, but my will be done.

My will be done. And, uh, and my will excludes the Almighty and His interference and anything He would have to do with my life.

I want nothing to do with Him. And, the end game of that is, God is going to give them their wish.

And God is going to say, not my will, but your will be done.

And that's exactly what man is doing. So, then again, that's one reason why there will be no comeback. There will be no disagreement. There will be no bargaining.

There will be no whining. There will be no, why me? There will be no, I don't deserve this.

Everybody will know that what they have received, whatever that is, is totally appropriate.

[27 : 17] And it is appropriate in the eyes and minds of the only one who has the righteous standard by which to evaluate. So, boy, talking about some pretty heavy stuff here.

Any other thoughts or comments? Anybody? Yeah, Don? When I read, reading that, I got to thinking about, you know, it's happened in the past. I mean, centuries. What about the Jamestown flood?

What about Galveston when thousands of people were right down by a hurricane? John, Well, something that we have not injected into this, we talked a little bit about it last night, and that has to do with the volition that God has given man, and the volition that he has given angelic beings, the volition that he has given Satan, and that to me is a very big item. We need to ask and answer the question that when Jesus Christ was confronted by the adversary, Satan, and the temptation that is recorded in the Gospels, one of the things with which Christ was tempted was when Satan said, and he showed him, and I don't know how he showed him, or how he demonstrated it, but it says that he showed Christ virtually, the planet, earth, and said, I'll give you this.

I'll give you the whole globe. I'll give you planet earth. It is mine to give you. If you will fall down and worship me, I will give you this.

[29 : 19] Now the question is, was it his to give? Was that a legitimate offer? Yeah, it was.

Because when he fell, and when he was cast out, he was cast down to the earth, and we are told that Satan is the prince of the power of the air.

this is the atmosphere. This is what you're breathing. And he is the head honcho. And when Peter said in, I think it's 1 Peter 5.8, Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary, the devil, walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.

And Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, I think it was the Thessalonians, and he said, Do not give place to the devil.

He also said, that means, don't give the devil a toehold in your life. And resist the devil, and he will flee from you. And Paul said, we are not ignorant of his devices.

[30 : 45] Satan has devices. He has a game plan. He knows how humans are. He knows our fallenness. He knows how we think. He knows what our points of temptation are.

He knows how to push our button, because he knows us. He's got your number. And believe me when I say you are no match for him. None of us. None of us is. So, if it was his to give, legitimately, and I think it was, because he is referred to in 2 Corinthians 4 as the God of this age.

The God of this fallen world. And he blinds the minds of those who do not believe, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, which is the image of God, should shine under them.

So, this is Satan's domain. This is his bailiwick. And you can go back to the Old Testament and examine the idolatry that was so rampant.

And Paul reminds the Corinthians that all of these idols that they worshipped, they were actually sacrificing to demons, not to idols.

[31 : 59] and you look at the Old Testament and there is, there are deities that surface all throughout. And Satan is behind all of them. The Baals, B-A-A-L, the Baals, a false deity.

And Dagon, the God of the Philistines. This is the one that had the huge image of Dagon. and the Philistines had captured the Ark of the Covenant and they put it there in front of Dagon, this huge statue.

And when they came back the next morning, that Dagon statue collapsed and fallen down, you know. How embarrassing that a God couldn't take better care of himself than that.

So they put it back up again. Now, this just goes to show you guys, I don't know that there is a better illustration of the flawed, skewed thinking of man's intellect.

This is a powerful thing. Very powerful thing. This means that we think and we reason and we apply logic in a warped way.

[33 : 14] And that's what enables us to reach such harebrained conclusions about a whole lot of things. About about cutting down a tree and from that tree you fashion an idol and you call it God and you bow down and worship it and from the same tree you use wood and you burn it and start a fire.

Now, if that isn't as close to insanity as you can get, what is that? And you know, listen to me, the people that do that think it is completely logical that it's the right thing to do.

And you say, how in the world can anybody think that way? Well, fellas, there's only one reason that we don't think that way and that is because we have a corrective to our thinking.

the Bible is provided to help us understand the way the world is. True. And why it is.

And it is this book that gives us the straight scoop and steers us away from warp thinking because herein lies the mind of God.

[34 : 35] and we call it the word of God and it is designed to give us straight information that is the truth. Don't? While you were talking, I thought this occurred to me.

You know, when Job, he gave him the restriction he couldn't kill him, he couldn't hurt him, he couldn't give that restriction when he gave us. I'm sorry? He didn't give that same restriction when he gave us about us.

That's true. Yeah. Yeah. John? In 2 Peter it says that God is not willing that any should perish, but all should come to repent.

So that's God's will. And also it says in Ezekiel, I have a little reference here that God has no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

Right. Absolutely. Absolutely. He's a loving God even though we don't see it and man is on the self-destructive course. And back to this volition thing, and we've talked a little bit about this in the past, but the question is asked, God of the Bible is supposed to be omniscient.

[35 : 50] He's supposed to know past, present, and future. Didn't he know well in advance what Adam and Eve were going to do? Didn't they know what Lucifer was going to do when he created him?

Why did he make them that way? And we have considered the options to this. What is the option? The option is create angels and create humans without a will.

Don't give them a volition, just pre-program them so they will automatically do the right thing and automatically be obedient.

And what do you have? You have robots. Exactly. You have robots who do what they do because they can't do anything else.

They're programmed to do that. They have no moral capacity or moral will to exercise. They just respond automatically. Now, in some respects, I think this may very well be the way that God has brought much of his creation into existence.

[37 : 05] We call this, in animals, we call it instinct. And these animals, biological life forms, are pre-programmed to do what they do.

And they do it just automatically. It is a programming thing. But we are not pre-programmed that way. We have a will. And that will can be used for good or for ill.

And animals don't have that capacity. When a lion is stalking a gazelle, and by the way, the lion is a fallen creature too.

Understand that? Because all the creation fell. Adam was installed as the federal head of all creation. And when Adam fell, everything under him came crashing down.

And nothing in this world is normal. The world is abnormal. That's why Jesus came. It is to restore a broken world.

[38 : 17] And it is in process right now. And the end game is the kingdom of heaven will come to earth and God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

But it isn't now. It isn't now. Satan is calling to shots. So, this will volition thing, if there's a third alternative, I don't know what it is.

So, when God created angels and humans, he gave them the capacity to obey him or to disobey him.

They were not programmed to automatically obey. They were given a choice. They were given a free will. And that's, so, someone says, so what you're saying then is that the problems in the world are man's fault, not God's.

That's precisely correct. Yes. It's man's fault, not God's. Absolutely. So, figure that with all of the things that we've been talking about, it all comes into play.

[39 : 24] Yeah, Joe? Yeah. Joe didn't have what we've got. Even Job, you know, God says you can't touch him, you know, you can't touch him, but all these things happen to him.

Well, we got it better than Job. Oh, absolutely. We got it better than Job. We got all these things that can happen to us, but we also are not going to die a second time, see?

We're not going to die a second time. In 2 Corinthians 6-9, chapter 5, 6-9, it says, this was Paul when he was about ready to die. Paul knew that he was about ready to die.

He was going to be what they do to him. They killed him. He needed to come to jail. He says, therefore, we are always confident knowing that whilst we are at home in the body, meaning this body, we are in this body, that whilst we are at home this body, we are absent from the Lord.

See, we're absent from the Lord. There's something better there. We are confident, I say, willing, rather, to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord. In other words, we've got both things.

[40 : 30] Life is just going to continue on, just like it is now, no difference. We're living for the same thing, because wherefore, we labor that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

And that's what our purpose and goal is to be accepted of him. Amen. Bottom line is, a believer in Christ is in a win-win situation. Yes.

Yes. Absolutely. Hey, guys, enjoy your breakfast. And I'm sure we haven't come close to solving the problem, but maybe we've just defined it a little more. So, thank you.