



The Problem of Evil

A DIALOGUE

PHILLIP KAYSER, Ph.D.



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The Problem of Evil: *A Dialogue*

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SETTING: This fictional dialogue takes place in Uganda under the persecution of Idi Amin. Daniel (the Christian) has risked his life by nursing Ysaf (the non-Christian) back to health after Ysaf has been beaten (on false charges) and left for dead. When Ysaf is almost fully recovered, both of them are caught and thrown into prison where the present dialogue takes place. The burning question is, "If there is a God, and He is good and all-powerful, how can he allow evil to continue in the world?"

DANIEL: I wish you would believe in Jesus Christ. He is in control of this situation.

YSAF: I don't see how you can say that. Everything around us says the very opposite. The world is full of evil. I have been beaten within an inch of my life, my house has been confiscated, my sister raped! Everywhere we hear of cruel torture. Even in peace time there are diseases, parasites, famine and destructive storms. It is obvious to me that if there is a God, He is evil, impotent or both. Otherwise He would stop evil.

DANIEL: All I know is that I am deserving of hell, but God has saved me, prolongs my life and pours out his goodness on me.

YSAF: How is prison good?!?! After you showed so much love to me, risked your neck and spent your money to nurse me back to health, God seems to have maliciously laughed at you by throwing you into prison and making your labors spent on me utterly useless!

DANIEL: I don't know why God has put us here, but I know from the Bible that all of these things are working together for my good and God's glory. As for you, God could have sent you to hell six months ago. Instead, God sent me to you and has given you extended life, food and clothing. I have prayed to Him daily that you would not "despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance" (Rom. 2:4). Perhaps He has thrown you in here so that you would reconsider. You will know His goodness in a new way if you receive His salvation.

YSAF: You seem to be blind to reality and appeal to God's will as if believing in a fairy tale hard enough would make reality go away.

DANIEL: Yes, I do appeal to God's will, but let me ask you, on what basis do you call these things evil and others good? How do you know they are part of reality?

YSAF: Uhh Well, these things are contrary to social customs and standards of fairness. Also, they frustrate my human values.

DANIEL: The first reason will lead one to skepticism because you simply cannot find universal standards of good, as many cultural anthropologists have found. I read in the true story *Peace Child*, by Don Richardson, that there is a tribe in Irian Jaya that considers treachery of friends to be the highest ideal. Believe it or not, the United States of America considers abortion to be a right of the mother. When I was going to the University of Kampala, I read in one of my textbooks (Carol Ember, *et. al.*, *Cultural Anthropology*, 1981, p. 162) that the Etoro tribe of Papua New Guinea considers heterosexuality to be a detestable act that is forbidden 260 days out of the year, and is completely forbidden in the house or anywhere near the gardens. That culture mandates homosexuality as the norm. Several African tribes forbid any concept of private property. Different societies have different values. Your problem is that you don't like Idi Amin to impose his social standards. However, how can you impose your desires on Idi Amin? How do you know that his actions are evil?

YSAF: Well, these things appear evil to me and I am sure that they appear evil to you too. How do you explain that?!

DANIEL: Yes there is evil in the universe and you can recognize it because you are made in the image of God and have the work of the law written on your heart (Rom. 2:15). However, the Bible says that you have evil in you too, and because of that, your ability to interpret the relation of God to evil has been distorted. If you would trust Christ, a lot of this would make more sense to you.

YSAF: Even if I can't justify my belief in evil and good, aren't you also being rather arbitrary by accepting what the Bible says?

DANIEL: In the Bible, Paul said, "I would not have known sin except through the law" (Rom. 7:7). God is the one who gives us knowledge of good and evil (Rom. 1:18-21; 2:14-16), so it makes a lot of sense to appeal to Him to answer this problem of evil. But let me point out that whereas I appeal to God's authority, you appeal to your own authority. You don't accept God's standard for right and wrong, and you don't

accept Idi Amin's standard. In effect you are making yourself the standard for all others. That is really taking the position of God. Furthermore, you take the position of God even in terms of knowledge. By saying that God is either evil, impotent or both, you are claiming that you have exhaustively examined everything in the universe relating to the problem of evil and can confidently affirm that no explanation has or will be formulated that will adequately reconcile the problem and show God to be both omnipotent and good. You are claiming to be omniscient, which only God can be. Instead you should recognize that you are created, finite and fallible, and so need to look to the omniscient Creator for the answer.

YSAF: Well, at least things are so confusing that I don't see how I can come to any answer. It's my speculation against your speculation.

DANIEL: But you can't even make that statement on adequate grounds. You have not experienced all the evidence. Therefore you cannot state so dogmatically that we can't know, or that all this is mere speculation. This inability to deal with the problem is due to your commitment to independence from God.

YSAF: Well, if you're so smart, then why don't you tell me what the answer to the problem of evil is!

DANIEL: I'm not so smart, and I apologize if I have conveyed that attitude. I am simply saying that I trust God when he gives me a partial answer, and he has given sufficient in the Scripture for me to have faith. The Bible says that God is perfect (Matt. 5:48), without the slightest taint of sin (Psa. 145:17) and not even able to be tempted by sin (Jas. 1:13). In fact, prior to creation, evil did not exist. God created the world good (Gen. 1-2) and said that everything in that world was very good (Gen. 1:31). Sin came into the world because of Satan's and man's rebellion (Gen. 3). Because of this sin, all of the judgment and suffering men receive is just, whether in history or in hell (Rom. 1:18,27,32; 2:5,8-9,16). In fact, Scripture makes clear that the only way we could avoid God's eternal judgment was for Christ to suffer and die in our place, bearing God's infinite wrath for us (Isa. 53). So suffering is understandable when we realize that there is sin that must be judged. But even in the believer suffering has a place. Suffering can be used by God as discipline for the purpose of loving restoration (1Cor. 11:28-34; Heb. 12:4-11). This discipline is administered out of love (Heb. 12:5,6), for the purpose of repentance (Psa. 32:3-5; Jas. 5:15), to promote holiness

(Heb. 12:10), an obedient spirit (Heb. 12:9) and all of the fruits of righteousness (Heb. 12:11).

YSAF: So are you saying that you are here for discipline? That seems sick to me! I haven't seen you do anything worthy of all this.

DANIEL: It may be for discipline, but I suspect in this case it is not. We may not be able to always understand how this is so, but God guarantees that He always causes all things to work together for the good of His children. Just as some examples, the Bible says that sometimes God brings suffering to promote maturity and endurance (Jas. 1:2-4), wisdom (Jas. 1:5-8), humility (Jas. 1:9-11), opportunities to provide God's rich rewards (Jas. 1:12), to prove the genuineness of our faith (1Pet. 1:6-8), to provide opportunities for witness like God has given me here (1Pet. 3:15; Phil 1:12), to teach us contentment (Phil 4:11), to manifest the fruit of the Spirit (2Cor. 4:11; Gal. 5:22-23), to prepare us to help others who suffer (2Cor. 1:3-24), to remove pride and spiritual cowardice (1Cor. 4:9-16), to demonstrate God's power in our lives (2Cor. 11:24-33; John 9:2), to vindicate the character of God before Satan (Job 1:6-12), to instruct the believer in the holy character of God (Job 42:5-6) and to teach us faithful obedience to God's will (Heb. 5:8). And He may have other good reasons.

YSAF: I wish I had faith like you do. What you have said sounds so beautiful, but I have a hard time buying it.

DANIEL: You can experience it too if you will trust in God and repent of your past attempts to run from Him.

YSAF: But I still have troubles understanding how God can do all of those things without being involved in evil Himself.

DANIEL: Well, I don't understand fully how God can do that myself, but I trust God when he says that He is sinless and that all of the blame for sin goes to the creature. The crucifixion of Christ is a case in point. That was the worst sin ever perpetrated against God, and the Bible lays the blame and responsibility firmly on the sinners involved while at the same time saying that it was predestined to occur (Acts 2:23,36). If God had not controlled that event, we could not be saved. The same is true of the selling of Joseph into slavery. Joseph's brothers were responsible (Gen. 50:20) even though God guaranteed that the event would take place (Gen. 45:5,7; 50:20; Psa. 76:10). In the case of Pharaoh's terrible persecution also, God used Pharaoh's actions to bring glory to Himself

and His righteous purposes in His people (Rom. 9:17; Exod. 14:4) while justly condemning Pharaoh (Exod. 7:3-5; 4:21-23). The way some have explained this is that God has unchangeably ordained every last thing that happens (Eph. 1:11; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6; Col. 1:16-17; Rom. 8:28) including the sinful actions of men (Josh. 11:19-20; 1Sam. 2:25; 2Sam. 12:11-12; Amos 3:6), but whereas he directly gives every good and perfect gift (Jas. 1:17), He ordains such sinful events as the crucifixion through the agency of second causes since He cannot be tempted by evil, neither does He at any time directly tempt anyone into sin (Jas. 1:13). When I pray, "lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one," I am praying that God would protect me from the temptations of the secondary agents of my flesh, the world and Satan. Satan cannot tempt me without God's permission (Luke 22:31; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6). And even my flesh and the flesh of unbelievers is being subdued by God and restrained from sinful activity that would destroy His kingdom purposes. It is not a situation of God being guilty of our sins. It is a situation of how much mercy God is showing to man by restraining sin. A. W. Pink used the illustration of a book being thrown to the ground and a book falling to the ground of its own accord. The book gets to the ground in either case, but one is by the use of the energy of my hand, and the other is solely by the energy of gravity. If gravity represents our sinful propensities, you can see how apart from God's restraining grace we would always be prone to sin just as the book is prone to fall. When God withdraws his restraining grace from Idi Amin and from you because you have spurned it so long, He is just and righteous. You didn't deserve the restraining grace to begin with, and God doesn't have to tempt you to sin before you fall, anymore than you have to throw the book to the ground before it will fall. All you have to do is remove your hand and the book will fall. All God has to do is remove His restraining hand from you, and you will fall into further and more debased sin and ultimately into the judgment of hell itself. Romans 1:25-16 says, ". . . who exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever. Amen. For this reason God gave them up to vile passions." My prayer is that God would not give you up, but that you would bow before God in repentance.

YSAF: (trembling) Oh, I see it all so clearly now!! What can I do to be saved? How could I be so blind? What must I do?

DANIEL: It is simply to trust Jesus Christ alone for your salvation. You have been doing things your own way, and thinking by your own standards up until now. God wants you to repent of your independence, to trust Him and to be His disciple. The promise of Romans 8:28 will then begin to be true in your own life. In fact, the rest of the chapter indicates that God will work through these circumstances to make you more than a conqueror through the grace of Jesus Christ, even if you die. Nothing will be able to separate you from God's love which is in Christ Jesus. Will you submit to Christ Jesus now?

Resources Available from the Publisher

- Cummings, Tim. *Ministerial Training: The Bible's Normative Pattern*.
- Davis, Andrew. *Written on Your Heart: An Approach to Extended Memorization of Scripture*.
- Elliot, Michael (Ed.). *Bible Acrostic: An Aid to Memorizing the Content of Every Chapter of the Bible*.
- Kayser, Phillip. *Biblical Romance: What Does the Bible Say About Courtship & Betrothal?*
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Throughout human history various explanations for the existence of evil have been offered. Philosophers and theologians across the ages have struggled to explain it. This booklet shows that only the Bible can provide a clear and coherent answer to which we must not add or subtract.

Founder and President of Biblical Blueprints, **Phillip Kayser** has degrees in education, theology, and philosophy. Ordained in 1987, he currently serves as Senior Pastor of Dominion Covenant Church, a conservative Presbyterian (CPC) church in Omaha, NE. He also serves as Professor of Ethics at Whitefield Theological Seminary and President of the Providential History Festival. He and his wife Kathy have 5 children and 9 grandchildren.



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