

Faith Shaking Evil

The image flashing across my television screen is of an inconsolable little girl no more than 3 or 4 years old. She is a victim of a bombing attack in the Syrian civil war and, though she is now in the safety of caring people, she trembles inconsolably as if the bombing had just happened. Her delicate nervous system has been so traumatized that she appears to suffer from something far worse than PTSD.

There is nothing like watching an innocent child suffer to challenge one's faith in God's justice. Why doesn't He intervene for little ones like this poor little girl? Why doesn't the divine hand come down from the heavens and swat the bombers from the sky?

For as troubling as this example is, it involves the moral evil of the human warriors causing all of the death and destruction. God has not created a world of puppets-on-strings, but a world of free, moral agents, (in the case of human beings). Freedom is sometimes, (often), abused, and the result is sin and evil in some form. We would not argue that the world would be better if our freedom was taken away, would we? It is, rather, the "non-moral" evils which are much more challenging: Consider events like sudden-infant-death, childhood cancer, multiple sclerosis, cystic fibrosis, and a whole host of other evils which destroy the lives of innocent children. Why does God allow this to happen?

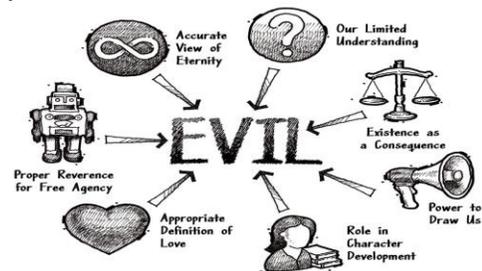
There are some logical answers to this question, but none of them are adequate to address the emotional devastation of real-life confrontations with such evils. The great C.S. Lewis is a source of some stock answers which are as follows:

Free Will: Already mentioned in this writing, *God could have created a world in which evil choices could not be made, but it is possible, as many believers have argued, that such a world would not be the best world.*

Natural Law: Complementary to the "free will argument" this argument says that *God could constantly intervene so that no evil consequences could follow from evil choices, but that would make the formation of character impossible. God could turn wooden beams into grass, turn bullets into marshmallows, and thus eliminate evil consequences, but then what would that do to the*

seriousness of moral choices? In this world, all good things have a potential for evil use or harm. Fire can be used for light, for cooking, for warmth, but it can also burn our bodies or possessions.

Soul Making: This argument can be applied more broadly over the spectrum of evils. It argues that pain and suffering has a conditioning, transforming affect on our souls. *Pain not only gets our attention, but it shatters the illusion that whatever things we have are enough to satisfy us. It is so very easy for us to divert or distract ourselves from looking at what is most important in life. When we experience even relatively minor pain, say of a toothache, we cannot do much else till we get it relieved. And, many types of pain are far greater than a toothache. However, when we are in over our heads, in the depths of despair we cry out to God in a way that we seldom, perhaps never, do otherwise. Lewis quotes Augustine to the effect that: "God wants to give us something but cannot because our hands are full— there's nowhere for Him to put it."*



Divine Providence: This argument is from a different source than Lewis, and it provides, yet, another perspective: What we see and experience is only a very small sliver of reality. We only have very limited capability to adjudge what is truly good or truly evil with respect to the things that befall us. When we pray, we often paraphrase Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, "*your will, not mine, be done.*" God is the one who "sees ahead," (pro-video): He alone knows the outcomes and faith summons us to trust in His loving kindness. He has the power to turn the darkness into light.

All of these explanations fall short when we are confronted with evil which seems to have no purpose and threatens us or someone we love. We must pray for one another in this regard, to be truly anchored in Faith and Hope.

[Italicized taken from The Problem of Evil, Dr. Art Lindsley C.S. Lewis Institute /www.cslewisinstitute.org]