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TH601

Research Paper

Dr.DeCaro

What is Wrong with the World?

Introduction

“Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned...death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who is a pattern of the one to come.” (Romans 5:12, 14 NIV)

Since the days of Jesus, and even prior to his arrival in the flesh, humanity has questioned what is the source of evil in the world. Even today, people question God’s existence because of the evil that is in this world, asking questions like “How could there be a good God if such great evils exist in the world?” From the perspective of a believer, it might seem easy to just yell out that the source of evil is sin in the world, but the idea of sin does not faze unbelievers because people want to justify their own sinful ways. Fortunately, there is a way to explain what evil is, where sin has come from, and even better, there is a way to become free of sin.

First, this paper will explain what the fall of Adam and Eve is from the biblical scriptures, this includes how it happened and who was involved. This will also include how sin has affected the world and humanity since the fall of man. After discussing the effects of sin, the paper will explain different theological ideas posited about evil in the world. To tie everything together, lastly the discussion will be about how God has already begun carrying out his plan to deal with evil, and why drawing near to Jesus Christ is the step into freedom from sin that humanity needs.

What is the Fall of Adam and Eve?

We can see the story of Adam and Eve and how they fell into sin in Genesis 2-3. The Lord gave a command to not eat the fruit from the tree in the middle of the garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16-17). Along came a crafty serpent that convinced Eve to eat the fruit, and after she ate, she also gave it to Adam to eat (Genesis 3:1-6). After eating of the fruit, both Adam and Eve's eyes were opened and they were able to tell they were naked, in which they decided to sew fig leaves together to cloth themselves (Genesis 3:7). The Lord was walking in the garden and having heard him walking, Adam and Eve hid from God (Genesis 3:8). God called out to Adam, Adam made it known that he was hiding because he was naked and God questioned how Adam knew he was naked (Genesis 3:9-11). God confronted Adam and Eve as to why they disobeyed, Adam blamed Eve for giving him the fruit, Eve blamed the serpent that convinced her, and God cursed them all and removed them from the Garden of Eden (Genesis 3:12-24).

The Origin of Sin

So where in that portion of scripture does sin come to be? Dr. Shawn Madison Kraemer wrote an interesting article titled *Adam, Eve and Original Sin in the works of Bernard of Clairvaux* which analyzed Bernard's theological findings on the fall of Adam and Eve. Kraemer actually revealed that Bernard's findings were that all of the sins committed by Adam and Eve are what plagues humanity now, and they are all evident through viewing the story in different angles;

The first observation is that in his diverse comments upon Adam and Eve, the ever-creative Bernard has managed to exegete the Biblical story of the fall in such a way as to find within it the various origins of all sin—disobedience, pride, inordinate love of worldly things, and lack of prudence or zeal for the truth. One

story, when approached from a variety of angles, has thus become universally illustrative of all our major defects and faults.¹

Those four different kinds of sin—disobedience to God, pride in oneself, inordinate love of worldly things, and lack of prudence or zeal for the truth—are what plagues humanity as a result of the sinful actions born of Adam and Eve. Much later in the scriptures, one of the apostles, John, writes his first letter that actually states these sins just with different wording. It is written in 1 John 2:15-16, “Do not love the world or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in them. For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world.” For falling into these sins, Adam and Eve cursed themselves and humanity after them.

The Consequences of Sin

Before being kicked out from the Garden of Eden, the Lord told Adam, Eve, and the crafty serpent what the consequences will be as a result of their sins. The Lord first told the serpent, “Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel”(Genesis 3:14-15 NIV). Then he told Eve, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you”(Genesis 3:16 NIV). Lastly, the Lord told Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of

¹ Krahmer, Shawn Madison. “Adam, Eve, and Original Sin in the Works of Bernard of Clairvaux.” *Cistercian Studies Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (February 2002), 3.

your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return”(Genesis 3:17-19 NIV).

An author by the name of Denis O. Lamoureux wrote about what these curses are exactly in an article titled *Beyond the Cosmic Fall and Natural Evil*, “Divine judgment for sin results in physical changes to the world. The serpent loses its legs, the woman experiences greater labor pain, the ground is infested with thorns and thistles, and the man is condemned to death.”² Due to the sins of Adam and Eve, the humanity that is born from them will experience the same consequences of those sins. The physical world and nature are also cursed due to the serpent and due to Adam. In explaining the ecological challenges that arise from the fall of Adam and Eve, Dr. George O. Folarin writes, “...the creation, represented by the snake and the ground, is enabled to rebel against human beings’ control by the virtue of the curse also cast on it by God. The outcome of this is predictable. Humanity began to exploit, drain and destroy the creation.”³ This chain reaction of how much sin has affected illustrates how serious sin is in the sight of God.

Theological Discussions About Evil

Now with the background information on the fall of Adam and Eve, the theological discussions about evil will be understood more clearly. Theologians have written extensively on numerous topics and issues of their time. One of the most renowned of such subject matter is called the problem of evil. The problem of evil—as defined by Dr. Seyyed Mohsen Eslami and Dr. Dan Egonsson, who are both professors of philosophy—is “The existence of this world, with all its evil, seems to challenge the existence of, and therefore the reasons for, believing in God.

² Lamoureux, Denis O. “Beyond the Cosmic Fall and Natural Evil.” *Perspectives on Science & Christian Faith* 68, no. 1 (March 2016): 50.

³ Folarin, George O. “From Primordial Curse to Eschatological Restoration: Ecological Challenges from Genesis 3:14-20 and Romans 8:18-25.” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 32, no. 1 (April 2011): 3.

This is the so-called problem of evil.”⁴ With this definition in mind, the ensuing information will discuss the nuances of the problem of evil through the lens of different theologians.

Suffering, Guilt—and Divine Injustice?

Dr. Heiko Schulz, a professor of systematic theology and philosophy of religion in the Department of Protestant Theology at Goethe University in Frankfurt, Germany, wrote an article titled *Suffering, Guilt—and Divine Injustice? The Nature and Forms of Evil in Their Bearing on the Problem of Theodicy*. Heiko states what the problem of evil is in a succinct manner by three irreducible premises: God exists; God is inclusively omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good physically and morally; and evil exists.⁵ He continues by explaining how previous scholars that discuss this topic most exclusively focus on the second premise of the problem of evil—God’s attributes—rather than pay mind to the existence, experience, and concept of evil.⁶ Heiko then discusses seven conceptual remarks that address the concept of evil: (1)evil must be capable of appearing, (2) evil must admit of appearing as rather not being in order to possibly appear as evil such as through ugliness, pain, guilt, wickedness, (3) the perception or experience of something as rather not being is not only necessary but also sufficient for the possibility of evil which is always real under the condition described, (4) there are typological and morphological distinctions between absolute, unconditional, relative, and conditional forms of evil, (5) evil does not necessarily entail the facticity but merely the possibility of suffering qua interpretation of something as rather not being, (6) the decisive remark of evil is that it must be able to be experienced as avoidable, and (7) the final remark of evil is that absolute evil must not only be or

⁴ Eslami, Seyyed Mohsen, and Dan Egonsson. “Progress on the Problem of Evil.” *International Journal of Philosophical Studies* 29, no. 2 (May 2021): 221.

⁵ Schulz, Heiko. “Suffering, Guilt—and Divine Injustice? The Nature and Forms of Evil in Their Bearing on the Problem of Theodicy.” *Toronto Journal of Theology* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2020): 194.

⁶ Schulz, Heiko. 194.

appear as avoidable, it must also be perceivable as something that led to avoidable consequences.⁷ Using much larger arguments from those concepts—such as talking about a deteriorating evil like cancer—as well as going to great lengths to explain the harrowing nature of evil in the world, Heiko contends that the Christian faith only provides comfort in light of the problem of evil, and even though that is a sobering reality, this speaks largely in favor of Christianity.⁸ Even though there are very difficult kinds of evil in the world like disease or human-trafficking, Christians are at least able to have comfort in their faith in Jesus whether they are direct victims of great or minor forms of evil.

Doing, Allowing, And The Problem of Evil

In furthering the discussion about the problem of evil, another notable theologian that discusses the problem of evil is Dr. Daniel F. Lim. Lim's goal in *Doing, Allowing, and the Problem of Evil* is to discuss claims regarding an assumption of God allowing evil. There are two claims that Lim is arguing against: the first is that the doing-allowing distinction exists and the second is that the doing-allowing distinction is morally significant.⁹ In order to confront these claims, Lim first argues that most influential analyses of the doing-allowing distinction deal with severe difficulties and those difficulties are only exacerbated when involving God.¹⁰ Lim proceeds to suggest that Kantian considerations give a better explanation of moral differences in paradigm cases than the doing-allowing distinction and, when involving God, effectively dissolve the moral significance of the doing-allowing distinction¹¹, and thus, the people that claim that God does evil are no worse off than those who claim God allows evil when discussing the problem of evil. Lim describes the problem of evil as being the most formidable

7 Schulz, Heiko. 194-199.

8 Schulz, Heiko. 207.

9 Lim, Daniel. "Doing, Allowing, and the Problem of Evil." *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 81, no. 3 (June 2017): 276.

10 Lim, Daniel. 277-283.

11 Lim, Daniel. 284-287.

problem for theistic belief, and then defines it by stating that it is the claim that the world contains evil states of affairs which are incompatible with the existence of an omniscient, omnipotent, and perfectly good God or makes God's existence highly improbable.¹² Another important feature that Lim mentions regarding the debates about the problem of evil is that many theologians on both the theist and atheist sides assume that it is only plausible to maintain the belief in God's existence while believing that God never actively wills-causes or brings about-evil but merely allows it. He continues further by adding:

...these philosophers assume that God could not be considered benevolent if God actively brings about evil. They assume there is a morally significant difference between God's merely allowing evil and God's actively bringing about evil; and that God's bringing about evil would be morally unpardonable while God's allowing evil would be morally permissible. That is, they assume the doing-allowing distinction exists and that the doing-allowing distinction is morally significant-doing harm is morally worse than allowing harm.¹³

Understanding the assumption that Lim continues to display that other philosophers and theologians operate through is the secondary aim to his primary goal. Conclusively, Lim elaborates that applying the doing-allowing distinction to God will always be impossible because God is infinite while all creatures in the world are finite thus making the doing-allowing distinction irrelevant to God.¹⁴ While very lengthy and weighty in explanation, it is clear that the answer of the divine context regarding the problem of evil does not involve resorting to the claim that God allows or brings about evil.

12 Lim, Daniel. 274.

13 Lim, Daniel. 275.

14 Lim, Daniel. 287-288.

God's Plan and Resolution

Different theologians have different ways of approaching and directly addressing the problem with evil. There are plenty more interactions with such a strong theological topic, but the other important question that must be answered is “What do we do in light of the problem of evil?” There are theologians, like author Glenn B. Siniscalchi, who suggests in his writing titled *No Salvation Outside the Church? Evangelical Theologies and the Catholic Church* that—in talking about the problem of evil—evangelicals switch from an exclusive soteriological outlook to an inclusive outlook like the Catholic church;

Distancing themselves from the strict exclusivism of their fundamentalist predecessors, many evangelicals have come to embrace positions that are compatible with Catholic theology...the shift that is taking place in many evangelical circles from exclusivism to inclusivism for the greater purposes of dialogue, convergence and collaboration.¹⁵

In other words, from researching and debating about the problem of evil, some Christians have switched to the inclusive soteriological outlook, which is believing that salvation can be found outside the boundaries of the institutional church. As detailed before, the world has many great evils that make hoping for a better future very difficult. Looking to God is not always the first solution that unbelievers and even some Christians have when dealing with serious forms of evil in the world.

Nonetheless, that does not eliminate what the Bible tells Christians about where their salvation from sin and death are. It is written in Romans 6:23, “For the wages of sin is death, but

¹⁵ Siniscalchi, Glenn B. 2013. “No Salvation Outside the Church? Evangelical Theologies and the Catholic Church.” *One in Christ* 47 (1): 93.

the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” In explaining how God has worked out the salvation of humanity from sin and death through his Son, John Calvin writes in an article titled *Christ Alone*, “it was necessary for the Son of God to assume our flesh. He fulfilled all righteousness for us, bore our sins—all of them—and rose triumphant for our justification. For all who trust in Christ, there are no debts left on the ledger at death.”¹⁶ To be justified by the righteous Son of God in a hopeless world filled with evil—that is the only way that anyone in the world will have eternal hope now for eternal peace when their time in this world is over. And that might provoke another question, “What about the people of Israel who rejected Jesus?” Boris Repschinki, author of “*For He Will Save His People From Their Sins*” (*Matthew 1:21*): *A Christology for Christian Jews*, writes,

The description of Jesus as the son of David and Abraham and the emphasis on the Davidic descent serve to show Jesus as a member of Israel and as having the same importance to Israel as David and Abraham had...Jesus will be taking possession of his people, and this people is Israel.¹⁷

It is to the benefit of all people in the world that Jesus Christ has fulfilled his earthly ministry. Not just for the Jews of which Jesus came from and was rejected, but also for the gentiles all around the world. Jesus himself made it clear in the scriptures that he is the only way to salvation, specifically in John 3:16-17, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”

Conclusion

¹⁶ Calvin, John, and Knox Bucer-Beza. “Christ Alone.” *Christianity Today* 53, no. 6 (June 2009): 53.

¹⁷ Repschinki, Boris. “‘For He Will Save His People from Their Sins’ (*Matthew 1:21*): *A Christology for Christian Jews*.” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (April 2006): 256.

The Fall of Adam and Eve did create dire consequences for all of humanity. Firstly, because of the sin of Adam and Eve, humanity is born into a fallen world with a sinful nature. Since then, all around the world and throughout time even to this very day, there is evidence of sin everywhere. All kinds of evil like diseases, murder, theft, adultery, human trafficking, intoxication by means of alcohol and drug addiction, and rape have sprung up and the world has not been the same as what God intended for it before the fall of Adam and Eve. In fact, the problem of evil involves the difficulty for people to look for God and believe in him, let alone a God who is so loving as the one written about in the Bible. Thankfully, there is a hope that all people ought to put their trust in—Jesus Christ, who is the only hope that Christians have in a world of great evil and sin. Through Jesus, there is freedom from sin and death, and there is eternal life and peace. Eternal peace that is so strong that the words of James R. Payton Jr says in *Keeping the End in View* rings true, “...salvation is less about what we get than about what God gets. It is about his purposes being accomplished in us...It is by his grace, for our good, to his glory.”¹⁸

¹⁸ Payton Jr., James R. “Keeping the End in View.” *Christianity Today* 52, no. 10 (October 2008): 68.

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