

Faith Bible Church

“Problem” of Evil-3: God; Evil; J.L. Mackie’s Strong Case for “problem of Evil”

Acts 17:24-28 "The God who made the world and all things in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands; ²⁵ neither is He served by human hands, as though He needed anything, since He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; ²⁶ and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined *their* appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, ²⁷ that **they should seek the God** (ζητεῖν τὸν θεόν), **if perhaps they might grope** (ψηλαφήσειαν) for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; ²⁸ for in Him we live and move and exist, as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we also are His offspring.'

1 John 5:19 We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies in *the power* of the evil one (ὁ κόσμος ὅλος ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται).

Any Questions?

**These slides are available
at <http://www.fbcweb.org/sermons.html>**

Philosophical/Theological/Doctrinal & Spiritual Foundations

Bible Doctrines

Eschatology
 Thanatology
 Ecclesiology
 Israelology
 Dispensationalism
 Doxology
 Hodology
 Soteriology
 Hamartiology
 Natural Law
 Anthropology
 Angelology
 Pneumatology
 Christology
 Paterology
 Trinitarianism
 Cosmology
 Theology Proper
 Bibliology
 Prolegomena

Broad and deep understanding of BD

The nature and importance of maturity (τέλειος, teleios).

Maturity is always related to Bible doctrine/divine viewpoint working under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit (enlightening and empowering).

Maturity is not just how you handle problems with truth. It is understanding the God-side of these truths and Reality as such.

Logos Philosophy
 ○ Logic (32)
 ○ Truth (11)
 ○ Metaphysics

John 8:32 you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Enough BD to be overcomer

1 John 2:14, "young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Lacks BD, DV

Eph 4:12-14, Baby believers have not overcome evil of kosmos diabolicus

Mature Believer – Level 3- Metaphysical Maturity

- High abstract thinking with enormous capacity for synthesis of BD—like nature of Evil
- Great capacity for BD and PLG.
- Deep and well developed worldview that he can defend.
- Developed view of metaphysics, e.g., Esse, True nature of God

Young adult – Level 2- Doctrinal conceptualization

- Synthesizes truth
- Doctrinally oriented
- Overcomer of evil

Baby – Level 1 = Basic Bible verses

- Dependent on others
- Limited to basic apprehension
- Unable to defend concepts because lack of synthesis of truths
- Limited to isolated Bible verses
- Empirically oriented
- Tends to anthropomorphize God.

Views of Truth

**Correspondence =
BIBLICAL VIEW**

Correspondence = Total Truth =
Takes both science and Scripture seriously!
Recognizes God as Author of 2 Books

1) Natural
Revelation, Rom.
1:18-20; 2:14-15
Natural power
Science

2) Special Revelation,
2 Tim. 3:16-17.
John 17:17
Supernatural power
God

Cosmic/Relative views of Truth

- 1-Coherence: it fits with my views
- 2-Pragmatic: it works
- 3-Functional: it functions
- 4-Existential: it fills my needs

Can one know truth through
someone's lifestyle?

- 2 Corinthians 11:13-15

Signs and wonders?

- **2 Thessalonians 2:9;**

Deut.13:1-3; Rev. 13:11, 13-14

Pragmatism?

- Jer. 44:17

Fragmented: Fundamentalist/Scientism

- **Bels.:** Anti-logic, anti-philosophy, and anti-science
- **Fideists:** Denigrate science and education
- **Scientism:** Rejection of Agent; No basis for rationality
- **Liberalism:** Distrust Bible
- **Mysticism:** Distrust Reality

Gethsemane

Resurrection &
the Spiritual Life
in the Epistles

A Walkthrough of the
Resurrection Narratives

★ **A Walkthrough** → ✓
from the Lord's Supper to the Tomb

Matthew 26:54 "How
then shall the Scriptures
be fulfilled, that it must
happen this way?"

✓ 'Ehyeh/Esse

✓ "Problem" of evil

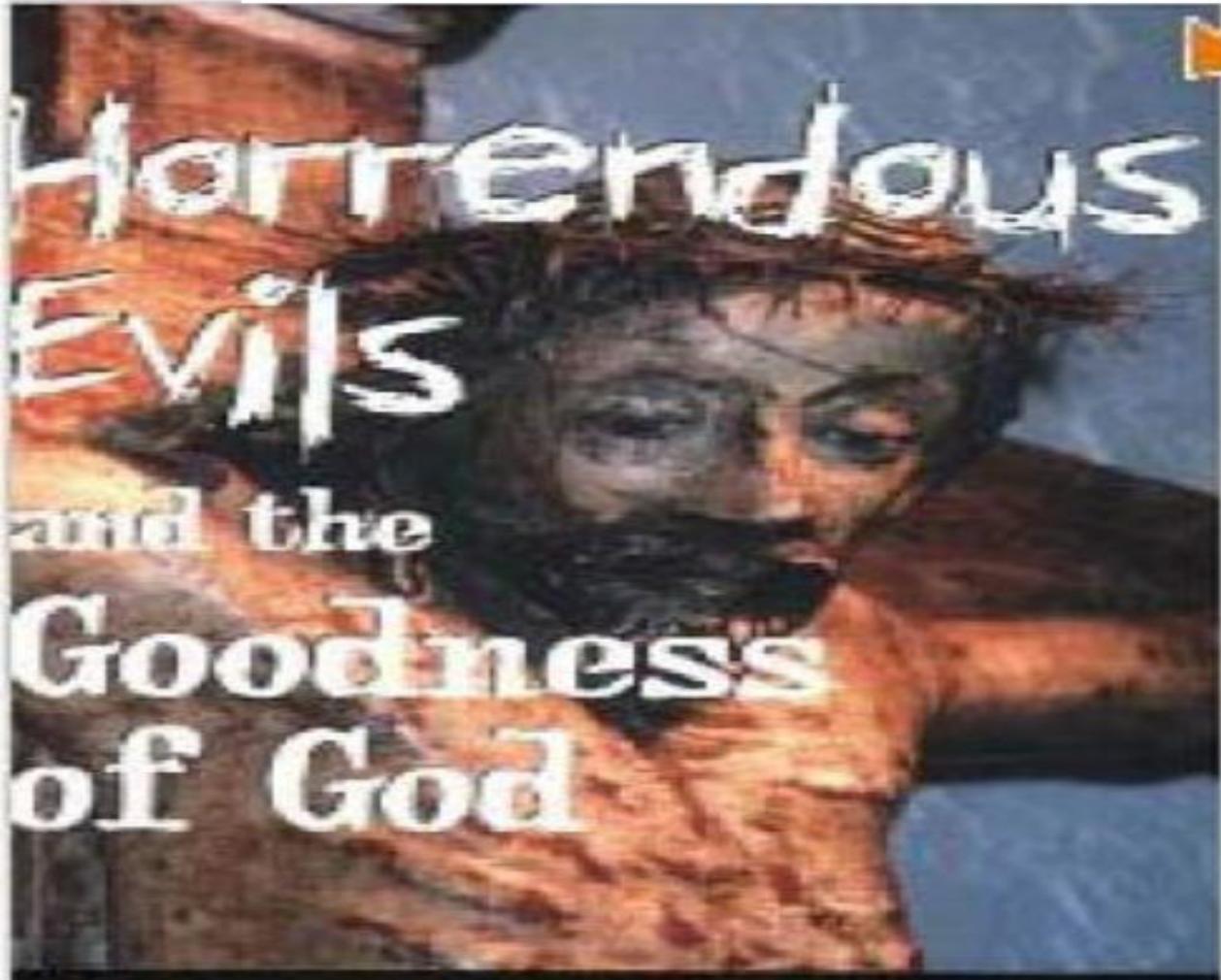
★ ★ 6 Ways of Falsifying Naturalism

★ ★ The Failure of All Alternate Theories

★ ★ Bedrock Facts: Death of JC & Multiple Appearances

★ ★ Historiography: Establishing Historical Proof
for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ

The Problem of Evil –3, Unjust Suffering



Gethsemane

Matthew

26:54 "How then shall the Scriptures be fulfilled, that it must happen this way?"

John 18:37 Pilate therefore said to Him, "So You are a king?" Jesus answered, "You say *correctly* that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice."

Problem of Evil-3, Prefatory Remarks

1. This is the most significant study I have ever done on the nature of evil and the true nature of God. I cannot overemphasize the importance of this study. This will not only shed light on life's most profound questions, but will provide enormous light on the nature and purposes of God throughout history. It will be both highly abstract as well as very concrete. This study will culminate at the Cross.

Problem of Evil-3, Prefatory Remarks

2. Evil is demonic, grim, savage, as well as found in the most sophisticated, cultured, educated settings. It is extremely difficult to grasp the true nature of evil and kosmos diabolicus. Failure of the world to recognize evil has led to such things as WWII. When Albert Speer, Chief Architect for the Nazi Party was asked about the evil, he said, “It is hard to know the Devil when his hand is on your shoulder.” Part of the power of evil is the way it insinuates itself intimately into people’s lives. The evil people live for and the evil acts go unrecognized as evil as such. Evil is horrendously blinding!

Problem of Evil-3, Prefatory Remarks

3. God and Evil. The classical theist believes that God decrees all things and yet human history is filled with horrendous evil. What is the purpose of divine history? What is God doing? From whence so much evil? Does that reflect on the nature of God? What is evil? God? Good? What does the denseness and darkness of evil teach us?
4. The basic concept of evil is privation. We will develop this later.
5. The most important thing about us, apart from salvation and our relationship with God, is our philosophy. We are all very busy philosophizing and unfortunately, all too often, evil is a part of that philosophy, and what's worse oftentimes: behind the wheel applying "Bible doctrine." Evil is in us all very deeply and subtlety.

Problem of Evil-3, Prefatory Remarks

6. Evil in all of its savagery, sophistication, and human good, and religion is extremely difficult to understand. It will take enormous effort to understand the true nature of evil. The problem of evil is the central problem today among the greatest thinkers. It is even worse among believers and the spiritual life. We need to understand these issues and how an all-knowing, all-good, all-powerful God, all-sovereign God, who hates and opposes all evil can be consistent with a world filled with so much evil. What is evil? Why is it necessary from the Fall to today?

Problem of Evil-3, J.L. Mackie

1. We begin our 5,000 year journey with J.L. Mackie (1917-1981), a philosopher from Oxford. He is what is known as a hard-headed atheist—not a skeptic. He is not an atheist in that he lacks faith in God (like Anthony Flew) or a positivist. He believes there are sound arguments which shows that God does not exist.
2. In the article “Evil and Omnipotence” he makes a positive claim that belief in the Christian God is illogical. This article is found on many atheistic websites. It is the strongest argument ever devised against the existence of God. It cannot be answered apart from development of metaphysics with respect to God, evil, and good.

Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

3. J.L. Mackie understands the implications of the Christian God better than most Christians. He also knows exactly how a Christian would respond to his arguments.
4. Mackie's thesis is that the Christian theologian is irrational because he is committed to propositions whose truth cannot be consistently maintained. He is saying it is logically impossible. We are talking about logical necessity here. Contradictions, if true, cannot be helped by future discoveries. If he is right, it is over—or you can believe for other reasons. The article:

For cleaner copy
of
Mackie article,
see
[http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/
Evil-1-Problem-
Mackie.pdf](http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/Evil-1-Problem-Mackie.pdf)

IV.—EVIL AND OMNIPOTENCE

BY J. L. MACKIE

THE traditional arguments for the existence of God have been fairly thoroughly criticised by philosophers. But the theologian can, if he wishes, accept this criticism. He can admit that no rational proof of God's existence is possible. And he can still retain all that is essential to his position, by holding that God's existence is known in some other, non-rational way. I think, however, that a more telling criticism can be made by way of the traditional problem of evil. Here it can be shown, not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational, that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another, so that the theologian can maintain his position as a whole only by a much more extreme rejection of reason than in the former case. He must now be prepared to believe, not merely what cannot be proved, but what can be disproved from other beliefs that he also holds.

The problem of evil, in the sense in which I shall be using the phrase, is a problem only for someone who believes that there is a God who is both omnipotent and wholly good. And it is a logical problem, the problem of clarifying and reconciling a number of beliefs: it is not a scientific problem that might be solved by further observations, or a practical problem that might be solved by a decision or an action. These points are obvious; I mention them only because they are sometimes ignored by theologians, who sometimes parry a statement of the problem with such remarks as "Well, can you solve the problem yourself?" or "This is a mystery which may be revealed to us later" or "Evil is something to be faced and overcome, not to be merely discussed".

In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false. But at the same time all three are essential parts of most theological positions: the theologian, it seems, at once must adhere and cannot consistently adhere to all three. (The problem does not arise only for theists, but I shall discuss it in the form in which it presents itself for ordinary theism.)

However, the contradiction does not arise immediately; to show it we need some additional premises, or perhaps some

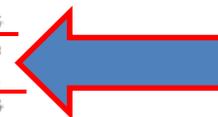
quasi-logical rules connecting the terms 'good', 'evil', and 'omnipotent'. These additional principles are that good is opposed to evil, in such a way that a good thing always eliminates evil as far as it can, and that there are no limits to what an omnipotent thing can do. From these it follows that a good omnipotent thing eliminates evil completely, and then the propositions that a good omnipotent thing exists, and that evil exists, are incompatible.

A. Adequate Solutions

Now once the problem is fully stated it is clear that it can be solved, in the sense that the problem will not arise if one gives up at least one of the propositions that constitute it. If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you.

There are, then, quite a number of adequate solutions of the problem of evil, and some of these have been adopted, or almost adopted, by various thinkers. For example, a few have been prepared to deny God's omnipotence, and rather more have been prepared to keep the term 'omnipotence' but severely to restrict its meaning, recording quite a number of things that an omnipotent being cannot do. Some have said that evil is an illusion, perhaps because they held that the whole world of temporal, changing things is an illusion, and that what we call evil belongs only to this world, or perhaps because they held that although temporal things *are* much as we see them, those that we call evil are not really evil. Some have said that what we call evil is merely the privation of good, that evil in a positive sense, evil that would really be opposed to good, does not exist. Many have agreed with Pope that disorder is harmony not understood, and that partial evil is universal good. Whether any of these views is *true* is, of course, another question. But each of them gives an adequate solution of the problem of evil in the sense that if you accept it this problem does not arise for you, though you may, of course, have *other* problems to face.

But often enough these adequate solutions are only *almost* adopted. The thinkers who restrict God's power, but keep the term 'omnipotence', may reasonably be suspected of thinking, in other contexts, that his power is really unlimited. Those



Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

5. Note the strong language in the first paragraph (200): *non-rational, positively irrational, essential theological doctrine, disproved*. He is saying that the theologian is committed to an irrational conclusion which Mackie demonstrates to patently irrational. The fideist stops here whereas the logos Christian philosopher looks deeper to get to the truth of the matter.
6. Mackie shows that it is a logical problem. This is a priori problem, not a posterior argument. No further data—like future discoveries in science—that will help. Nothing can save a contradiction. Bachelors will always not be married even a million years from now. I want you to see how strong his claim is.

Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

7. Note the common responses he anticipates (200, end of paragraph 2), “mystery . . . Something to be faced and overcome, not to be merely discussed.” But that is not the issue! Mackie understands the problem of evil better than most contemporary preachers, theologians, and believers. He does not create a Straw Man. He makes it clear that the problem of evil is not his problem. He does not have to solve the problem. He creates this massive problem that has withstood decades.

Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

8. Note 3rd paragraph on page 200. *In its simplest form the problem is this: God is omnipotent; God is wholly good; and yet evil exists. There seems to be some contradiction between these three propositions, so that if any two of them were true the third would be false.*
- ✓ Why does he write “seems?”
 - ✓ He says you cannot be right in holding these three propositions, yet all three are “essential parts of most theological positions.” He is right about them being essential parts of Christian theology.
 - ✓ He also says the theologian must adhere and yet cannot consistently adhere—on the pain of contradiction—to all three.

Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

9. Note the 3rd paragraph on page 200 how the problem is laid out. Note the strong logical language: “*must adhere, and cannot consistently adhere to all three.*” Which one shall the theologian give up? If you were good and you had the opportunity to stop evil wouldn't you?

Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

10. Top paragraph on page 201. Although Mackie's stated view of the omnipotence of God is a bit strong, he is right in that God is not limited by anything outside of Himself. That is what omnipotence means. At this point we will grant that an omnipotent being is not limited. Nothing binds His power. He is absolutely perfect. Everything He wants to do is perfect. Man's freewill does not limit God. God is not hamstrung by man's volition. God is not helpless in the face of man's volition. Note the last sentence in the paragraph—yet, the theist still has to believe in an omnipotent good God in the face of evil. God is omnipotent, not limited, wholly good and opposes evil, yet evil exists.

Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

11. Solution or admission (201)?

A. *Adequate Solutions*

Now once the problem is fully stated it is clear that it can be solved, in the sense that the problem will not arise if one gives up at least one of the propositions that constitute it. If you are prepared to say that God is not wholly good, or not quite omnipotent, or that evil does not exist, or that good is not opposed to the kind of evil that exists, or that there are limits to what an omnipotent thing can do, then the problem of evil will not arise for you.

- ✓ But this is not a solution, it is an admission that it cannot be answered.

Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

12. Next to the last paragraph on page 201, **“Some have said that what we call evil is merely the privation of good, that evil in a positive sense, evil that would really be opposed to good, does not exist.”**
 - a. Classical theists do believe that evil is a privation of good. This is the key to understanding the whole issue
 - b. He thinks that calling evil a privation is to admit that evil is not real. This is not true!
 - c. He thinks good opposes evil, but this is not true. You do not oppose evil. If evil is a privation of good then all you can fight against is the corrupted evil. Again, Evil is not a thing, but it is real.

Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

- d. There is a crucial need to build metaphysics. Technically, the evil is in the good. The true conflict is a good versus a blank-good. Good does not oppose evil, good opposes corrupted good. Huge difference. God never opposes evil.
- e. What is God doing? What is the only thing God is doing? He is pursuing the Good. So technically He does not fight evil, metaphysically speaking.
- f. Evil is not something, evil is there because something is lacking. Mackie takes evil as a positive quality as something that things have. But this is not true.

Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

- g. Evil is not something things have. Evil is there because a good is lacking.
- h. Good does not oppose a quality that something has.
- i. Evil is corruption of a good, things that should be there.
- j. If evil is not a thing or a substance, then Mackie's entire endeavor is over! This does not mean we still do not have a problem, it is just that Mackie is wrong. We do not accept his premise. I do not believe that evil is opposed to the good because I am a biblical theist!

Problem of Evil-3: J.L. Mackie

- k. In order for Mackie's argument to work you have to have an omnipotent power opposing an evil, and evil has to be something that pushes back as a positive quality. Otherwise his whole scheme does not work. It is over!
- l. With evil as a privation the only thing that good can act on is good. Furthermore, Mackie goes from evil not being a thing to being nothing. There are real entities which are not thing. Blindness is a real thing, but it is not a thing.
- m. Hence, there is no longer a logical problem, it is now what good is being accomplished by permitting the evil. No longer contradiction.

Problem of Evil-3, A Few Passages on God and Evil

- ❑ **Deuteronomy 30:15** "See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and evil (הַרְעָה);
- ❑ **1 Samuel 16:14-15** Now the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD terrorized him. Saul's servants then said to him, "Behold now, an evil spirit from God is terrorizing you. "Let our lord now command your servants who are before you. Let them seek a man who is a skillful player on the harp; and it shall come about when the evil spirit from God is on you, that he shall play *the harp* with his hand, and you will be well."
- ❑ **Romans 1:26** For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural,

Problem of Evil-3, a Few Passages on God and Evil

- Lamentations 3:38** *Is it* not from the mouth of the Most High That both good and evil go forth?
- Deuteronomy 20:16** "Only in the cities of these peoples that the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you shall not leave alive anything that breathes.
- Joshua 6:21** And they utterly destroyed everything in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword.
- 2 Thessalonians 2:11** And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, ¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.