



God-Centered Evangelism

God and Resistance to Evangelism

The Resistance to Evangelism

Ephesians 6:11-12 – Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

1) God and Satan

- God permits Satan to oppose him (a profound mystery)
- Examples where we get a glimpse of His purpose in such (stoning of Stephen & of course the Cross)
- These teach us to trust the infinite power and wisdom of God when His ways with His archenemy far surpass our finite understanding

2) God and Anti-Christian Rulers (seen throughout history and still today)

3) God and False Religions

4) God and the Unbeliever

In all this, we must trust that in some way the conflict and strife between God and Satan, between the sons of Cain and the sons of Able, between the church and her foes, God's glory will somehow be magnified and accentuated more than if these conflicts did not exist. Oh, the wisdom of our great God.

2 Problems with Religion

1. The problem with evil and suffering (how could a good and powerful God allow that)
2. The exclusiveness of religion (if you think you have the truth, the superior take on spirituality does that lead to exclusion, oppression and abuse).

Important to see that these problems with religion are themselves beliefs which have their own problems. Every problem that people have with religion – for example, I just don't believe that there are any good reasons why good would allow such evil and suffering, that is a belief. You cannot prove that. But there are problems with that belief. Every problem with religion has its own problem.

Christianity has a unique resource for each of these problems, a unique way that it addresses each of these problems. So, for each of these problems (suffering and exclusivity of truth) we are going to see that each of them has their own problems and that Christianity has a unique way of speaking into them.

Exclusivity

At least 3 ways that our culture tries to respond to this problem of the exclusivity of religion.

1. One is to say that all religions are equally true (Kantian view).
2. Another one is to say that all religions are equally false, or partial or incomplete (parable of the blind men and the elephant).
3. Nietzsche and Marx would say that all religious claims are power plays.

To say that no one has all the truth or no one has the answer, is in itself an answer, a truth claim. To say that no one has complete knowledge, we must claim to have complete knowledge to say that no one else has it. Only if you can see the whole elephant can you be sure that no one else can. The only way we can hold on to these sorts of claims is if we do not hold ourselves to the same level of scrutiny that we are applying to others. Every truth claim requires faith.

Christianity has an important resource here. At the heart of Christianity is not an abstract claim. Yes, Christianity has an exclusive claim, you must believe in Jesus. No less exclusive than, "nobody knows the truth" btw. But who is this Jesus. A man who died for his enemies, one who gave his life in sacrifice to the people who did not believe in him, a man who died asking for forgiveness for the people who were killing him. No other religion or belief has this at the center – a man laying down his life for those unworthy of so great a sacrifice.

Evil and Suffering

- The philosophical approach to this problem (or at least from modern thinkers) goes like this. If the God of the bible exists, he would not create a world filled with pointless evil. The world is filled with pointless evil. Therefore, the God of the bible can not exist.
- Blood on the Tracks illustration (2000)
- There is an assumption in the middle of this rationalization and it goes like this – I can't see any point to this (all the reporters), therefore God can't have one either.
- If you have a God that is so great, that you can be mad at Him for not stopping evil, then you have a God great enough to have a reason for allowing the evil to continue that you may not be able to discern. You can't have it both ways. If he is that great that you can be mad at him because He did stop evil, then he can be great enough to have some reason that he is letting it go on that you don't know. The only way to be sure that there cannot be such a God, is for you to be absolutely sure that you understand suffering (omniscience).
- The problem of atheism (Alvin Plantinga quote – see Appendix)
- It is a big problem to believe in God and look at all of the suffering and evil around us, but it is an even bigger problem to not believe in God and look at all of the evil and suffering around us. Afterall, if you don't believe in God, what is your basis for outrage.

A Way Through

- What does Christianity offer as the resource or way through for this problem. We always think that people in the midst of this type of suffering need answers (but frankly they are above us). Now Christianity does have some answers and the bible tells us much about suffering and I am not suggesting that we don't help people through with the truths of scripture, but in the midst of it when we are blinded by pain, often those truths sound like pad answers.
- Because of that, people in the midst of suffering really long for someone with them, they want to know that they are not alone. When you have to face horrendous suffering, at the end of the day you have to go through it alone – you always walk the last mile of pain alone.
- John the Baptist illustration
- Christianity is the only religion that says God is with us in our suffering. No other religion has the audacity to say that God knows what its like to have a son, that God himself has come into our reality and experienced suffering and injustice and violence and rejection. Only Christianity, has the audacity to say that God looked into heaven and said why have you forsaken me?
- Do you see in our limited finite nature, we need more than an answer, we need someone with us. And Jesus says, I will walk that last lonely mile of suffering with you. If you have me in your life, even when everyone else falls asleep or by the wayside, I will walk that last mile into pain with you.

A Take-away

- G.K. Chesterton put it like this “a bigot is not the one who thinks he’s right, every sane person thinks they’re right, the bigot is the one who cannot understand how the other person came to be wrong”.
- One final resistance. Most of the world rejects religion because they think religious people think they have the truth and God accepts them for it (Pharisees). But, the gospel is that God receives me simply because of sheer grace because of what Jesus did because he went that last mile for us. If we understand that, we have a problem with religion too.
- So let us have sympathy, empathy, respect even, for those who have a problem with religion or doubts (for we do too). We should seek to understand the problem on the other side who doesn’t understand our faith and help them find a way through these problems.

Appendix (Quote)

Alvin Plantinga (well-known Christian philosopher)

“It is indeed true that suffering and evil can occasion spiritual perplexity and discouragement. And of all the anti-theistic arguments, only the argument from evil deserves to be taken really seriously. But I also believe there is at least as strong an argument for the reality of God from the existence of evil and suffering. The most appalling kinds of evil involve human cruelty and wickedness. Stalin, Hitler and his henchman. But could there really be anything as horrifying wickedness if there were no God and we just evolved. I don't see how. An atheistic way of looking at world has no place for genuine moral obligation of any sort. All moral categories are either evolved or socially constructed. All strong eating the weak is natural to the evolutionary process. And thus there is no way without God to say anything is genuinely and appalling unjust and wicked. There can be such a thing only if there is a way that rational creatures are supposed to live, obliged to live. Atheism can speak of foolishness, acting contrary to what you take to be your own interest, but it cannot accommodate appalling wickedness. Accordingly, if you think there really is such a thing as horrifying wickedness, and not just an illusion of some sort, you have a powerful argument for the reality of God.”