

WORLDVIEW

Does It Matter? *Is There A Solution For Evil And Suffering?* Question #3

In this series we're examining the Four Ultimate Questions to answer in crafting our personal worldview. We've looked at the first two:

1. **Origin** Where do we come from ... who are we? Were we chosen? Or are we only a cosmological accident or the byproduct of eons of evolution? This deals with "CREATION."
2. **Problem** What's gone wrong in the world...why is there evil and suffering? We'll call this ancient turning point "THE FALL."

18th century, Swiss-born Jean Jacques Rousseau, philosopher/author of The Social Contract, espoused Utopianism, or "man is good," despite broken relationships, deception, pride and other sins. Postmodernism says, "There is no truth; there is no sin."

DISCUSSION: What's the difference between Utopianism, Postmodernism, Pragmatism and Optimism?

DISCUSSION: Can we cure our own evils? How have we tried? Has any of the following contributed to our solution: philosophy, economics, technology or religion?

DISCUSSION: Describe differences between religions. Do they stress human achievement or divine accomplishment?

Question #3: Is there a way out?

Ecclesiastes is the journal of "the Preacher," Israel's third monarch, King Solomon, who according to the Old Testament is the wisest man ever (I Kings 3:12), and the richest during his era (about 950 B.C.). He was certainly the most powerful of his day, and was THE Renaissance man 2,500 years prior to the Renaissance.

He explored all of human experience, knowledge and material possessions, concluding that all mortals die empty. As he put it, "All is vanity under the sun."

By "under the sun" he meant living solely in the temporal world, excluding the God of heaven...who is *above* the sun. This is a life without hope, leading to death and tormenting, eternal destruction.

By contrast, "above the sun" to Solomon meant living and walking with God, filled with hope, bound for everlasting life in heaven with our Creator and Savior and fellow believers.

Those two opposing perspectives face off in the lives of two European luminaries: 19th century German psychiatrist Sigmund Freud and literature professor at Oxford and Cambridge, C.S. Lewis who died in mid-20th century. (Their virtual debate is the heart of *The Question of God* by Harvard's Dr. Armand Nicholi.)

Freud grew up with secular scientists as mentors. Skeptical of his father's strong Jewish faith and weak personality, he concludes that (a) all knowledge can be scientifically proven, and (b) religion is rooted in man's desire for an exalted heavenly father, since earthly fathers disappoint us. His concept of God is Parent-in-the-sky.

He argues that religious ideas are rooted in deep-seated wishes, not in reality. God doesn't make us in **His** image; we make God in **our** image. He sees the contrast of good and evil inside humans, and feels that answers come through learning the archeology of the soul, using psychoanalysis to understand and control the unconscious which overwhelms our conscious self and intellect.

Religion, Freud says, is an archaic ritual – merely myths man created in order to cope. God and the afterlife are illusions he hopes to erase as he rescues humanity with psychological knowledge of our subconscious sexual motivations which, says he, dominate us.

C.S. Lewis was tutored by a hard, satirical atheist into being a scientific naturalist, suspicious of religion. He arrived at being an atheist himself after losing his mom, losing his best friend as they fought in World War I, and by contemplating the evil of war.

He lived with atheistic contradictions, seeking to create meaning for himself thru poetry. He wanted to be like atheists, yet was drawn to Christian authors like his contemporary, R.R. Tolkien, and John Milton because of his appreciation for beauty and imagination.

Lewis came to believe in God by experiencing the reality of deep desires. He saw "joy" not as the satisfaction of attaining an object, but as the desiring of the object. He reasoned that intense drives couldn't exist unless the object exists, e.g., hunger proves food exists; lust proves sex exists; the search for faith proves God exists.

Since we can desire the unseen, another dimension must exist – that of faith and God. He wrote, "Since man has desires that cannot be satisfied by anything on this earth, he must be made for another world." Intense longing, which he'd experienced, proves too great for any human relationship to satisfy. This becomes a sign pointing to believing in a god, or the God.

Yet, Lewis was only a theist. Awareness of his flaws, lusts, anger and especially pride sent him in search of God and a relationship with Him. He read G.K. Chesterton to encounter the personal nature of God and the solution for sin and the Fall.

The central point in his search became the audacious claims and historical life of Jesus Christ, centered in His deity and virgin birth, miracles, crucifixion and resurrection. His claims, Lewis wrote, are either absolutely true, or Jesus is a lunatic.

Nicholi says Freud and Lewis represent conflicting areas that are evident in all of us. Part of us yearns for oneness with the Source of all creation, joy, hope and happiness. But part of us defies any authority or claim to creation, deity or final accountability. Whichever part we choose will shape our approach to life, relationships, death, meaning and philosophy.

Part of us cries out for a solution from outside of ourselves. Another part of us proudly rejects any solution from outside since that would require humility to admit we can't solve our dilemma, heal our injured condition, or forgive our own sins.

Religion has historically been a path by which man has sought solutions. But with today's enlightened thinking and scientific, technological powers, many reject religion in favor of a self-directed quest for explanations and cures for death, evil and meaning.

Some say there are only two religions on earth -- *human achievement* (be it spiritual or secular -- as in work, wealth, philosophy, experience, mysticism, etc.) and *divine accomplishment* (God became man, was crucified and resurrected to free mankind from sin).

Humans gravitate to autonomy, unaccountable to any authority, but this independence leads to enslavement and death. God's answer, **the Gospel of Jesus Christ**, kills the root of man's love for autonomy, yet frees us to experience eternal life. It produces a healed relationship with our heavenly Father, and a call to justice, compassion and peace among men. Those who reject God will fight this. Ultimately it will lead to His judgment of this earth, and to the creation of a new heaven and new earth which will be home to Christ's followers forever.

Three essential worldviews seek to explain the world's big questions: **Naturalism, Transcendentalism and Theism**. There are three theisms—Judaism, Islam and Christianity. Islam is stark monotheism. Judaism doesn't reveal our three-in-one God whereas Christianity worships God as Trinity - Father, Son and Holy Spirit – in whom there is diversity, distinctness, relationship and love. Love is less evident in Judaism and is absent in Islam's Allah.

Islam's solution is autocratic, i.e., Allah's will. Judaism's solution is sacrifice (including animal blood) for human sin to satisfy a God of justice. Christianity's solution is God's own sacrifice of His perfect Son, Jesus (the Lamb of God), to atone for human sin and restore a right relationship between God and man.

Naturalism leaves man to seek his own solution to life which ends at death.
Transcendentalism (eastern religions, Hinduism, Buddhism, new age, etc) emphasizes cosmic, impersonal, spiritual unity, eternal oneness and/or reincarnation.

God-in-human-flesh (Jesus Christ) came to earth to make peace with us and to replace this fallen creation with the unending, sinless Kingdom of God. God's solution is the Good News, the Gospel. It explains that something happened by God's doing, *outside of us*, that impacts the *inside of us*, and inaugurates impact *around us*. God's solution represents His eternal Kingdom breaking into the middle of history. It is reconciliation of the personal relationship and the cosmic order that God intended before The Fall. We recognize that His Kingdom doesn't yet come to us in all its fullness, but it does free us to live differently, with the firm hope of eternal life with God.

The Gospel is preposterous! But everything else is more preposterous! The question for atheists is "Can you prove God does *not* exist?" The question for agnostics is "Have you *tried* to know God?" The question for theists is "How do you prove eternal salvation?" (Mohammed is in his tomb; Jesus is not)? The question for Christians is "Does your life prove that Christ is in you?" (Are you living a transformed life?)

Q&A from the Scriptures...

Who is the source of life and the universe itself? Isaiah 46:8-13

Was it planned? Isaiah 53:1-12

What is the different way described in Romans 3:20-26?

Did it happen? Galatians 4:4-8; I Corinthians 15:1-8

What was its impact? Romans 5:1-3; 8:1-6; 8:31-39

Who is salvation? Hebrews 1:1-4; Acts 4:11-12; Hebrews 9:24-28

What did Jesus say? John 3:3; 3:16; 10:27-31; 14:6; 11:25-26; 5:24

What did He say to do? Mark 1:15

Is it by God's grace or our effort? Ephesians 2:8-10

Can we be sure? I John 5:11-13

Is there historical proof? I Corinthians 15:1-8

What happens to us? II Corinthians 5:17-21

Zaccheus proves that a repentant life is a saved life. Luke 19:1-10

How to explain the Gospel to a skeptical culture: Acts 17:19-32

What happens to earth, heaven and hell? Revelation 21:1-8

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