

HOW CAN A LOVING GOD?

Series: "God on Trial –The Case for Christianity"

Genesis 3: 19-24 September 9, 2018

The Church of the Covenant

I served a church inside the beltway in Washington, DC when 9/11 hit; we are two days away from its anniversary. I remember how many people asking indignantly and sort of shaking their fists at heaven and remonstrating with the Almighty –“Where was God on 9/11?” They’re asking the question “How can a loving God allow this to happen?” If there is evil in the world then there could not be a loving God. This is a sermon series on “God on Trial –The Case for Christianity” and it is basically about what is referred to as “Christian apologetics” answering questions hurled by a secular world at a loving God. The Bible in I Peter coaches us to be *“ready with an answer for the hope within”* (I Peter 3: 15) So you’re sitting with a friend having a cup of coffee and basically they ask you the question –If there is a loving God why did this bad thing happen? God is always on trial. People are always hurling the question up to heaven – Where were you, Lord, on 9/11? Since evil exists, ergo there cannot be a loving God...And I as God’s preacher, advocate, lawyer and defense attorney will seek to argue God’s case today...

We did a thing called the Progressive Dinner in Alexandria, VA –the Methodists did the hors d’ouvres; the synagogue always served the Kosher dinner; the Presbyterians served dessert. And the topic the year of 9/11 was exactly the topic –“Where was God on 9/11?” The Pastors and the Rabbi were too busy to confer that year so we planned our remarks in a vacuum. So first the Methodist Pastor stole 50% of my remarks and then the Rabbi stole the other 50% of my remarks so I am walking over to our church and literally “I got nuttin’”. So I just said, God didn’t cause 9/11 the evil in the heart of humanity did. Terrorists twisted religious instincts and crashed planes into buildings killing innocent people. Evil. Pure, unadulterated evil. Where God was on 9/11 was in the ambulance teams and the people who prayed and our church deacons who sent a donut truck to help first responders. God was in the courage and God was in the care that then bound up the nation’s wounds. Humanity was evil. God was good. That’s where God was on 9/11.

So is God intrinsically GOOD or is humanity intrinsically GOOD? The story we just read from Genesis seeks to answer that question. God places Adam and Eve in a perfect paradise. They do not have to work to eat; there is no disease; there is no want; there is no death. There is just one, teeny, tiny rule –“Don’t eat the fruit of this one tree in the Garden of Eden, the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil” And we know how the story ends. Adam and Eve, beguiled by the serpent do the one teeny, tiny thing that God has asked them not to do. Set in a perfect paradise, humanity on its own volition, under its own free will, chose enmity with God over relationship with God in the Garden of Eden. Humanity left to its own devices will always chose evil. Humanity as it expresses its own free will chose enmity with God not relationship with God. Humanity is intrinsically fallen. God is intrinsically GOOD. And God kicks Adam and Eve out of paradise for their rebellious hearts. Now they must work. Now they must dig weeds because now thorns infest the ground. Now there is disease and struggle, heartache and pain. Now there is death. Before there was no death but now there is death. Now says God, “From

dust you have come and to dust you shall return". (Genesis 3: 19) Humanity inherits death because of its fallen nature and its bad choices and it loses a perfect relationship with a loving God because of its expression of its own free will. That's the story in Genesis –God is GOOD. God creates everything GOOD and declares it to be GOOD. But humanity comes along and is fallen and evil and makes wrong choices and EVIL comes into the world. Sin and disease and heartache and pain and death itself enters the world not because God is not Good, but because humanity is intrinsically evil..."ashes to ashes, dust to dust...death but life, because of the goodness of God...into the sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life in the Lord Jesus Christ." There's evil in the world because of mankind, not because of God...

Humanism is the secular philosophy that believes in the inherent goodness of humanity. There's goodness in every person and in every person's heart. We can educate you just enough that you will come to your own humanity and choose good over evil. One problem with that is "Where do standards of goodness come from?" The fact that we use a standard of good to judge something as evil is its own case that the standard itself comes from God. We have a notion of what should be, what is right and what is good. That this notion corresponds to something that is real and not just made up is evidence. There is a supreme reality out there to which human beings ascribe. Well, isn't that supreme reality, where we understand the difference between good and evil, isn't that supreme reality God??????? How did we know it was evil to plow a plane into the World Trade Center and kill people? Unless of course there is a good God...who exists quite apart from us and whose goodness is manifested in the midst of fallen, sinful humanity.

Consider this...the Nazis killed 6 to 7 million Jewish people in concentration camps in WWII. Stalin killed 20 million Ukrainians by intentionally starving them to death. Chairman Mao another 25 million. The Islamic terrorists just murdered 6,000 Christians in Northeast Nigeria, mostly women and children. And Syria has herded 3.5 million rebel refugees into one province in Syria –can poison gas be far behind? O, there's the goodness of humanism on display for all to see. There's humanism run amuck. There's what's held in the heart of darkness of human beings apart from a good and loving God. You would seek to stretch my credulity were you to suggest in light of all this evidence that somehow humanity is inherently good and somehow God is inherently evil. There's a reason why the very next story in the book of Genesis is about one brother killing another, Cain and Abel, murder most foul; humanity apart from a loving God does that...

So to some God is on trial. If there is such evil in the world then God could not be good. Its sort of humanity shaking its fist at heaven, condemning the God of creation and all the universe – Lord God Almighty IF you are Good then why don't you do something???? They have it completely backwards. Because the day will come when we stand before the judge of the quick and the dead and we better hope HE doesn't ask the same question. "STU, why didn't you do something to stop it?????"

As many of you know, my dear sweet Mother, who cradled me in her arms and from birth taught me about the love of God, she passed away this past week. Death is not nice, nor pretty,

nor good. So did a loving God cause my Mother's death? Did He cause her pain and then take her away? Where was God in the midst of it? Where were You, Lord? God was in the more than 40 get well cards sent by a loving congregation to my Mother. God was in the kind woman elder from a local Presbyterian church who visited my Mother three times. God was in the special conversations I had with my dear Mother. And on the morning she passed away I woke up early and had my prayer time out by Lake Erie. My Mother loves water birds. I prayed, "Lord, if you love my dear Mother please send a water bird." First, two cormorants arrived diving at fish. Then a small white heron arrived on the swimming and fishing pier. And then a huge blue heron swooped in. I've been going to Lake Erie since a child in the early 60's and I've never seen a blue heron. So was that just random? Did three sets of water birds show up "just because". Or is there a loving presence at work in the universe? You would stretch my credulity to believe there is not a loving hand at work. I can testify as an eyewitness. I have seen the glory of the Lord. I will never believe that a loving God caused my Mother's pain and death. The wages of sin are death. Not that my Mother was a sinner and deserved her death. No, sin and death came into the world through the fall of man in the Garden of Eden. Humanity as a whole is the cause of its own pain. But in Jesus Christ there is restoration of all that was lost in the Garden of Eden. There is to be had a restored personal relationship with a loving, good God through His Son, Jesus Christ. And the restoration of all that was lost, paradise restored, is eternal life given by Jesus, where there is no more darkness and no more pain and suffering, and no more tears nor regret. If God is a loving God then why did Jesus have to suffer on the cross and die for us who are unworthy of the tiniest droplet of His blood? Because God is a loving God.

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury. God is on trial. The jury is out. What say you? Is a loving God the cause of evil? Or is humanity the cause of its own evil? You decide. I have made my case. I have given my testimony. I have made my summation to the jury. Do you choose to believe in the goodness of God as revealed in the Lord Jesus Christ and that it towers over even death itself? Do you trust a loving God to provide a day when death itself shall be no more? Is GOD good? Or is humanity GOOD? You decide today. Amen and Amen.

*By: The Reverend Dr. Stuart D. Broberg, The Church of the Covenant, Washington, PA
IF THIS HAS BLESSED YOU, PLEASE PASS IT ALONG TO A FRIEND!*

I am indebted to the book "The Case for Faith" by Lee Strobel as background for this sermon.