

Authority & Power – Week 4 – The Problem Of Evil

Connect and review	
<p>Welcome everyone. Encourage them to share something they learnt last week.</p>	<p>Brief recap on last week. Sharing personal reflections on last week’s suggested activity, namely: ‘Prayerfully consider how you can better respond in the future to examples of abuse and misuse you encounter’.</p>
Inspire and engage	
<p>There is no set way to present this material, just go the way that suits you. Try to use most of the Bible verses.</p>	<p>The Bible teaches that God is: good [<i>Matthew 19:17</i>], righteous [<i>Psalm 119:137</i>], unchanging [<i>13:8</i>] & has all authority & power [<i>Psalm 62:11</i>]. Yet the world He created [see <i>Genesis chapters 1+2</i>] is full of evil, wickedness, sin, grief, pain, suffering, sorrow, cruelty, and injustice. How can these opposite views be reconciled [=exist together without conflict]?</p> <p>The Bible does not tell us when evil first entered the world God made, but most Bible commentators believe it was introduced by Satan, the most powerful angel God created [see <i>week 3 notes</i>], when he rebelled against God: e.g., Jesus describes Satan ‘as always a liar’ [<i>John 8:44</i>]. Satan’s power is so great the Bible describes him as the “ruler of this world” [<i>John 12:31; 14:30; 16:11</i>] and the “god of this age” [<i>2 Corinthians 4:4</i>]. But God is all-powerful and so involved in what happens in the world that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from His will [<i>Matthew 10:29</i>]. Further, He is in control of history [<i>Acts 17:26</i>], even though His part in what happens is not always easily detectable. He cannot be tempted by evil [<i>James 1:13</i>] and decides upon whom He will bestow His mercy [<i>Exodus 33:19; 34:5-7; Romans 9:14-24</i>].</p> <p>When God made angels and mankind, He chose to give everyone free wills, i.e., all are allowed individually to choose between right and wrong and good and evil, although the consequences of these choices will be judged by Him one day [<i>Hebrews 9:27</i>]. Most human suffering is the result of wrong choices by people who knew to do better but chose to do wrong and evil. Similarly, both angels and people are free to oppose or accept God’s control over this world and our lives. Where they choose to reject God’s ways, evil, suffering, etc. abound, even though NONE of this is God’s desired will, but demonstrates instead His permitted will.</p> <p>God and those who love and follow Him, i.e., angels and born-again believers, are opposed all the time by Satan and those who follow him, i.e., fallen angels [= <i>demons</i>] and unbelievers. Thus, Satan & his followers constantly seek to encourage evil, etc., to flourish. God is NEVER the One to prompt anyone to sin or commit evil nor does He ever want them to behave in this way, but He permits them to do so within the boundaries He sets for everyone.</p> <p>Sometimes we are at a loss as to why God permits certain disasters, or diseases, or atrocities and this is when we have to trust Him – we have to live by faith [<i>Habakkuk 2:4</i>] – accepting that He always knows what He is doing. This is particularly hard when believers themselves are the ones to suffer, or very young children, or the most vulnerable in our society. We should not try to explain away, or justify, God’s actions because we can never fully know His thoughts/ways [<i>Isaiah 55:8+9</i>]. Similarly, if some people choose to accuse God of being responsible for the sinful and evil actions of other people, God does not need, or expect us to ‘leap to His defence’. He is perfectly capable of “defending” Himself!</p>
Explore and apply	
<p>Try to encourage Q & A & discussion but avoid personal answers. Possible answers to the 1st question include helping the UK in the Battle of Britain in 1940 during World War II; & exposing corruption, e.g., in 1974 the Watergate scandal in the USA which resulted in the resignation of President Nixon. Possible answers to the 2nd question include prayer, discipleship, & support the police, etc.</p>	<p>Explore</p> <p>What examples can you find of God intervening to prevent further evil occurring somewhere in the world?</p> <p>Apply</p> <p>In what ways can you personally discourage and/or prevent evil?</p>
Reflect and review	
<p>This helps to show what has been learned and what may need to be reinforced.</p>	<p><i>Personal reflection:</i> Do I now have a clearer and better understanding of how & why evil occurs?</p> <p><i>Suggested activity</i> Prayerfully consider how you will respond in future to those who blame God for suffering, etc.</p>

