

## WHY DOESN'T GOD KILL THE DEVIL?

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The subject we are considering this evening is the theme and the question, “Why doesn’t God kill the devil?” We have to look first at the problem of evil in order to appreciate the nature of that question. I shared this morning the item in the newspaper this past Saturday morning. There are some things when you read in the newspaper just seem to leap out and grab you and strike your heart. Isn’t it curious you can read of tragedies, which involve hundreds and thousands of people and may not even register with you? It may simply go by as another statistic. Yet something else you read and you can immediately identify with the pathos and human suffering that is there. Very real problem of evil and destruction and accounts in the world.

Some persons don’t have a good perception of the problem of evil because life has been a bowl of cherries for them. Others have struggled with the question of evil deeply. Dostoyevsky in The Brothers Karamazov perhaps put the problem of evil before us in the starkest ways we could do it. There is a scene, which no one who has ever read the book can forget. A scene in which Ivan visits his brother in a monastery where he is a novice. He talks to him about his own inability to accept God’s world because of the terrible wickedness and suffering that is in the world. Ivan describes a number of instances of cruelty and suffering. Ivan says “I recognize that I cannot understand why the world is arranged as it is.” He understands that men have been given freedom but he asks his brother “Is it worthwhile? Is God’s purposes worth the tears of one tortured child? Even universal forgiveness and harmony in the future do not make it worth such suffering. “So he hastens to give back his entrance ticket. He says, “It’s not God that I don’t accept. Only I must respectfully return him the ticket.” And he clenches the argument by challenging his brother, “Tell me yourself. I challenge you. Answer. Imagine that you are creating a fabric of human destiny with the object of making men happy in the end, giving them peace and rest at last. But that it was essential and inevitable to torture to death only one tiny creature and to found that edifice on its unavenged tears. Would you consent to be the architect on these conditions? Tell me and tell me the truth.” The novice monk replied, “No, I would not consent.”

That’s the problem with evil. If evil somehow fits in the purpose of God, how could God as a condition for bringing good allow the suffering of even one creature? If you were the creator would you have taken that alternative?

In looking at the problem of evil I think it’s critical that we jump off that illustration and identify some of the aspects within the problem of evil. I think the first aspect of the problem of evil is the very one Dostoyevsky notes so eloquently – the problem of injustice. That there are instances in this world, many instances, where the weak have been taken possession of by the strong, where there has been cruel abuse to human beings and to animals. Why doesn’t God do something about wrong and about evil people? Why does the God in heaven allow evil to go on? Why in this past year have there been millions of Cambodians who have died of famine? Why doesn’t God do something about it?

Writers in scripture understood this problem. The psalmist writes in Psalm 110:1 “Why stand so far off, Lord. Hiding yourself in a time of need.” Habakkuk says this of God in 1:13 “Your eyes are too pure to look on evil. You cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the

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treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" The problem of injustice – God! Why don't you act?

Another element within the problem of evil is the problem simply of natural catastrophe. A tidal wave, a flood, earthquake, tornadoes, volcano eruptions. Why even within nature itself is there such exceeding violence? That without a moment's notice can snuff out the life of so many people? Natural catastrophes are an element within the problem of evil.

Another element within the problem of evil is simply the category of disease, pain and death. Something that all of us either prior to now or at some time will come to grip with – disease, pain and death. Why would a good God in a world allow these elements to go on if he had the power to correct them?

There's another problem within the problem of evil, another element. I would simply call it inequitable distribution. It is the idea that the people who sometimes deserve the best treatment get the worst. Why would a child be orphaned? Why would a good person experience trouble? Job represents that idea of inequitable distribution. A man who truly fears the Lord and is found blameless before God. Yet he experiences great suffering.

A drunken driver who kills a small child. The inequitable suffering of irreversible brain damage in famine starved children on the African, Indian and Asian continents.

A modern day author of a play on Job says "How can we believe in the justice of God in a world in which the innocent perish in vast meaningless massacres and brutal and dishonest men fowl lovely things?" Inequitable distribution. He says, "If God is God, he is not good. If God is good he is not God."

A final element that I would identify within the problem of evil – and there are many more than this – is the problem of animal pain. Granted if humans suffer because of their own sin and corruption why is it that even within the animal kingdom there is suffering? Why do animals feed on one another? Why is there such death and destruction and holocaust within nature?

This is the problem. How do people approach the problem? There are basically four options probably to the problem and they have been stated a long time ago by a non-Christian philosopher in Greece in the third century before Christ by the name of Epicurus. Epicurus was the founder of the Epicurean school of philosophy from which we derive modern day hedonism or the playboy philosophy. Except he was far more sophisticated in his philosophy than Heffner. He had four options possible in respect to this problem of evil.

One option was that God wants to remove evil but is unable. That would ascribe moral goodness to God but it would identify God as not being all powerful. If God is good and wants to do something about evil and can't then it simply says God is a good God but he's very short of power. There's something stronger than he that keeps him from action. That's option number one.

Epicurus said there was a second possible option and that is that God is able to do something about evil but he is unwilling. If that is the case, here then we have the greatness of God but don't have the goodness of God. If he can do something about it he's great. But if he won't do anything about it he can't be good.

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A third option for Epicurus is that God is neither willing nor able. One modern writer says on this point, "If men and all others in the world are created by an omnipotent, omniscient and infinitely good God [omnipotent means all powerful and omniscient means all knowing] then because he is all knowing he knew from the initiation of creation that there would be evil in the kind of world that he was creating. Because he is all powerful he could have prevented this evil and indeed could eliminate it now. And because perfectly good he would not have willed to create the kind of world in which evil would exist and he would not allow it to persist. Yet evil is rampant on the earth. So the response of this writer is God can neither be great nor good. That was Epicurus's point. There must not be a God. So Epicurus wound up saying there are no gods. There is nothing to fear at all. The two greatest fears of men are death and God. Since God does not exist why fear death. Therefore eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you may die. That's Epicurus's contribution to philosophy.

A fourth possibility that Epicurus launched but which he himself did not believe was the possibility that God might be willing to do something about the problem of evil and able to do something about it. He saw no evidence for this in the world. That God was either willing or able.

Indeed I'd like to put before you the thesis that outside the person of Jesus Christ I would think that option three would be the only option possible – God is neither able nor willing because he is not. God can only be willing and able in terms of the gospel and what it announces about the character and nature of God. We'll look more about this as we go on.

Let's spend some moments looking together at Christian confessions of faith in respect to the problem of evil.

I am not so foolish as to pretend to be a philosopher. Nor am I foolish enough to believe that through persuasive words of men's speech I can out argue anyone on the problem of evil and pain. Therefore I have deliberately called these next statements confessions of faith rather than arguments of faith. They are confessions, which the scripture teaches. I will present them as beliefs without at this moment trying to argue them or defend them. I'll simply put them forth as expressions of faith.

One expression of faith in regard to the problem of evil that is found in the scripture is that God is great and God is good. These two things go together. Do you remember the childhood prayer than many of you have prayed before meals? I prayed it all the time: "God is great and God is good and we thank him for this food. In Jesus' name. Amen." Simple little prayer. Prayed in a hundred times. Such profound confession for it said the two essential things about God. He is great and he is good.

If there is a God, we look at the universe and have to know that he is great. One writer in a book named The Integration of Religion and Psychiatry has pictured what it would be like for a child to view a parent in a sense of mankind looking at the vastness of God. The writer puts before us this analogy. "Suppose that you were an adult one year old. And you were a five foot ten inch one year old child. And you lived in a house where your parents were correspondingly in proportion – twenty-five to thirty-five feet tall. Roughly the equation that exists between a normal one year old and an adult. You lived in a house where the doorknobs were fifteen-twenty feet up in the air. And where each step was about five to six feet. And a whole flight of steps

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maybe represented a hundred feet. These peculiar adults in the world in which you lived strapped you in a chair, forced food into your mouth, forcibly took things from you, put you in a thing that you called a stockade which they called a play pen and for their own delight would on their own occasion take you in their arms, hurl you up in the air, fifty to seventy five feet, let you fall and just before you mashed your face on the ground, pick you up, cuddle you to their breast and laugh. Thinking that is funny. As a child, your parents and your environment seems to be so great in relationship to your size. What guarantees you that your parents will not let you drop on the ground? Their goodness. Their greatness allows them to pick you up and throw you, but their goodness forces them to pick you up.

When you look at the size of the universe, no one could question the fact that we live in an awesome room. If there is a God, he's got to be great to have spun all this. But is he good? The Christian confession is God is great and God is good. Jesus says of his greatness, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me." I believe that "all authority" not only represents religious authority, it represents all authority. The authority of the law of gravity. The authority of laws of thermonuclear dynamics. The authority of electric principles. The authority of atoms. The authority of everything. All authority has been given to me.

1 John 1:5 tells us the God is good. This is the message we have heard from him and declare of him, "God is light and in him is no darkness at all." God represents moral right instead of moral evil, which is pictured as darkness. Jesus confesses his greatness before Pilate. John 19:11 "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above." Pilate, you could not exercise evil. You could not perpetrate the crucifixion unless that power had been given to you from above.

The Christian confession is that God is great and good.

Another Christian confession of faith in respect to the problem of evil is that we as human beings are free. The term often is used that God created free moral agents although there is no scriptural term that says God created free moral agents but it's the understanding of scripture that he created us free. The idea of freedom is bought out in the word of Jesus 'Whosoever will may come.'

God created free people capable of decision in the sense that we would much prefer to live in a family populated by children rather than robots. Who would trade a robot for a child? There may be some times it would be rather convenient but who would simply want to receive the fellowship of a robot, which had been preprogrammed in every respect. Rather you would have the company of a child who can learn to freely respond in love and that involves risk. God could have created robots. But he choose to create people with freedom.

Suppose that this evening you were on your way down Newport boulevard and a drunk driver plowed into you. You were either hurt or killed in the wreck. What could God have done in order to preserve his greatness and goodness and preserve your freedom? Who could God do or God have done in respect to an auto accident? Lets look at the alternatives.

God if he is great could suspect at the moment of the accident the physical laws of impact so that inertia could not do its destructive work. God could simply suspend natural laws. So that when you are smashed into, instead of your body being thrown forward, it sort of just stays where it is. And nothing happens. He suspends laws, which relate to accidents.

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He could overrule the judgment and the will of the driver involved in the offending car just before the collision. He could grab that steering wheel and whip it back into the right lane.

He could, a third option, have hindered the research that produced the auto in the first place. He could have said, "Don't want the car, folks. I'm going to keep it out of the mind of the scientists. We'll never have that auto accident because the auto simply won't be invented."

Or God could instantly heal those who are injured. Guarantee you come to faith in Christ and you'll never have any problems in auto accidents. Wouldn't that be wonderful? There would be a lot of Christians in the world wouldn't there? Come to faith in Christ – guarantee. If you're in an accident you'll never be hurt. Not a bad insurance policy.

What if God exercised any one of these four options? What would be the consequences? All of these options boil down to two basic points. In order to exercise any one of them God would need to withdraw free will and direct things personally. He'd have to withdraw man's freedom in order to exercise these kind of things on a continuing basis. In order to negate the effect of evil choices.

Let me illustrate this. The writer John Hicks who imagines what the earth would be like if God intervened in auto accidents or any kind of accidents on a continuing basis. He says, "Suppose contrary to fact that this world were a paradise from which all possibility of pain and suffering were excluded. The consequence would be very far reaching. For example no one would ever injure anyone else. The murderer's knife would turn to paper. He pulls out a knife to stab you and he's got a piece of paper in his hand. His bullet would evaporate in thin air. The bank safe robbed of a million dollars would miraculously be filled with another million dollars. Without this device on however large a scale proving inflationary. Wouldn't that be wonderful? God would be in the business of printing money. Fraud, deceit, conspiracy and treason would somehow always leave the fabric of society undamaged because God would intervene and cover for it. Again, no one would ever be injured in an accidental. The mountain climber, the steeplejack, or playing child falling from a height would float unharmed to the ground. He reckless driver would never meet disaster. There would be no need to work. There would be no call to be concerned for others in a time of need or danger for in such a world here can be no real need or danger. To make possible this continuing series of individual adjustment nature would have to work special providence instead of running according to general laws which men must learn to respect on penalty of pain or death. The laws of nature would have to be extremely flexible. Sometimes gravity would operate. Sometimes it wouldn't operate. Sometimes an object would be hard and solid. And sometimes soft.

For example sometimes wood would be hard so that we could put things on it. Other times when wood is used as a club it would suddenly go soft so that nobody would be hurt when it struck them. The property would assume different qualities depending on its use.

One can at least begin to imagine such a world. It is evident that our present ethical concepts would have no meaning in it. If for example the notion of harming someone is an essential element in the concept of wrong action in our paradise there would be no wrong actions, nor any right actions. Courage and fortitude would have no point in an environment in which there is by definition no danger or difficulty. Where is the need for courage if there's no danger? Generosity, kindness, the agape aspect of love, prudence, unselfishness and all other ethical

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notions which presuppose life in a stable environment could not even be formed. Consequently such a world however well it might promote pleasure would be very ill adapted for the development of moral qualities in human personality. In relationship to this purpose it would be the worst of all possible worlds.

It would seem then that an environment intended to make possible the growth in free beings of the finest characteristics of our personal life must have a good deal in common with our present world. It must operate according to general and dependable laws. It must involve real dangers, difficulties, problems, obstacles and possibilities of pain, failure, sorrow, frustration and defeat. If it did not contain the particular trials and perils our world contains it would have to contain others instead. To realize this, to understand that this world, with all its heartaches and the thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to, an environment so manifestly not designed for the maximization of human pleasure and the minimization of human pain may be rather well adapted to the very difficult purpose of soul making.”

That's Hicks' comment. His whole view of the freedom of man is that God is involved in soul making. The making of a human personality and that cannot be made without risks and the consequences of one's actions without God always interfering.

C. S. Lewis puts it so well: “We want so much the Father in heaven as a grandfather in heaven whose plan for the universe was such that it could be said at the end of the day a good time was had by all.”

But he says this is not so. The scripture attests to the freedom of man and with that freedom there must be the operation of natural laws. And consequences.

So the confession of Christians with respect to the problem of evil is that God is great and good, man is free and the third confession on the Christian perspective and that is that Satan really exists. And is at the bottom of the pile in the problem of evil directly or indirectly. Not directly involved in all specific manifestation as evil but underneath, at the bottom of the pile directly or indirectly, he is involved. Satan really exists.

The late Catholic bishop Fulton Sheen said, “The devil is always circulating the news of his death. He is the only major world power who wants to persuade people that he's not a power at all. Can you imagine Brezhnev trying to convince the world that Russia doesn't exist? It's Satan's purpose to convince the world that he doesn't exist. To regard him as something medieval and out of the Salem witch trials or something like that.

Dr. Ruth Asher states “This is why unlike God the devil does not insist on his reality. It is rather God who wants us to believe in the devil and who cautions us against him so that we can seek refuge in God. If we don't believe in the devil he has accomplished his purpose. Only God is concerned that we believe in the devil.”

Scripture has very little to say about the origin of Satan. There are possible allusions in scripture to his origin found in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. Two scriptures which speak on the one hand Ezekiel of the king of Tyre and in Isaiah of the king of Babylon. While they are referring to historical figures there are elements within those scriptures that seem to transcend those historical persons and refer to Satan himself.

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The most clear and unmistakable testimony of Satan's fall is borne by the Lord when in Luke 10:17-18 the 70 whom he had sent out on a training mission returned to him with joy saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name." And he said to them, "Why get all excited about demons being subject to my name. I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven." Why so excited about demons? I saw the real fall. I saw Satan like lightning fall from heaven.

There is a reference of pride being the cause of Satan's downfall. 1 Timothy 3:6 "The bishop or the pastor must not be a recent convert or he may be conceited and fall into the same judgment as he devil." The implication that the devil fell into judgment because of his conceit.

Scripture though is not so much concerned about the original fall of Satan. It's far more concerned about the breakup of his regime in the end. That's where scripture has an awful lot to say.

We must remember when we talk about the devil that he is not the opposite of God. We think in terms of opposite. The opposite of light is darkness. The opposite of heat is cold. And if you said to the average person what is the opposite of God, they would say the devil.

Not so. God has no opposite. There is only one God. Only one being in all the universe who is all knowing, all powerful, everywhere present. Satan is not all knowing, he's not all powerful, he's not everywhere present. He's not the opposite of God. He's the opposite of a high angel. He's the opposite of a Michael or a Gabriel or a Rafael. But he's not the opposite of God. He is limited in time and space.

We're not to underestimate him therefore. We're not to overestimate him. Jesus specifically calls Satan the ruler of this world on a number of occasions in the gospel of John. Satan offered Jesus the rulership of this world in exchange for Jesus' worship. That's the purpose of the temptations Satan will later give his own authority to the antichrist – his power, his throne and his great authority he will transfer to an end time human figure. There are only two times in scripture where Satan is willing to give his power away. One is to Christ, which Christ refused. And the second time he gives it away his offer will be accepted by an end time figure who will be an antichrist.

The epistles all him the God of this world, 2 Corinthians 4:4, the prince of the power of the air. That is his authority is in the invisible realm. As such he is the chief among the principalities, powers and spiritual hosts of wickedness that reign. In his rule he has the power of death, Hebrews 2:14, and the imposition of sickness, Luke 13:16. Indeed as the New Testament confesses the whole world is in the power of the evil one. The ruler of this present age is Satan.

If Satan is at the bottom of the problem of evil, why doesn't God just kill him?

Let's look at the specific answer to that question for a while. My first response to that question is going to be theoretical. I don't have a proof text for it. I believe I have the evidence of scripture on my side but I don't have a proof text for it.

My first response would be this: God may annihilate matter but he does not annihilate intelligent life forms. The scriptures tell us that the world and the heavens that now exist will one day melt with fervent heat. God destroys matter and if he wants to reconstitutes it. But God, as far as we are told from the scripture, never annihilates or causes to cease to exist an intelligent life form.

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And by that I mean angels and people. Angels and people appear to be in the unique order of God's creation, which go on existing into eternity whether that eternity is with God or away from God. The eternality of the intelligent life form existence is an underlying truth in the scripture. We are told for example of Satan and his cohorts that they will be tempted day and night forever and ever. One reason, the first reason – it's not the strongest reason, it's the weakest reason. I begin with it. It's just a general point of view. God in the purposes within his mind, within creation has chosen never to annihilate an intelligent life form.

Another thing I want to put before you and it may surprise you a little bit. That is, if God killed the devil today, nothing on earth would really change tomorrow. You say, Wait a minute, pastor! Aren't Christian preachers all the time telling us that our great enemy is the devil? And you're saying if God killed the devil today, nothing would change tomorrow. How do you get away with that?

I know it may sound like heresy. Give me a chance to prove for a moment. But I want to say something very significant from the New Testament. That is I think Christians today may sometimes put too much emphasis on the devil. And not enough emphasis on the person of Jesus Christ. I read the book of Acts – 28 chapters in the book of Acts. You know how many times the devil gets mentioned in the book of Acts? He gets mentioned twice by the name "devil" which means deceiver. And he gets twice mentioned by the name "Satan" which means adversary. He is both things. An adversary and a deceiver. Four times in 28 chapters. Big deal.

It's the Lord who's in control of the Christian's life. But I said this statement: if God killed the devil tonight nothing would change tomorrow. What do I mean by that? I believe that in a fallen world people will sin without the devil. If the devil were killed his fruit would still remain. The millenium, the thousand years of peace, which are prophesied in Revelation 20, bring us to a perfect environment. People are always saying, If we could just educate people. If we could just give them a perfect environment, if we could just clear away slums, if we just had answers to the problem of disease, everything would be all right. People would live and act justly and rightly and they'd never choose evil if we could just change the environment.

The message of Revelation 20 in respect to the millenium is that for 1000 years, God is going to change the environment. He's even going to release the tension in nature so that a lion lays down with a lamb and a child plays at the den of a snake. And people are going to live long life times. Again as long as Methuselah and it's going to be an incredible season. Yet at the end of that time, what happens? Men turn against God. Because they choose to.

In the heart of man, Jeremiah has said, there is a deceitfulness and a desperate wickedness. James says each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desires.

Killing the devil would not solve the problem of my evil desires and my wanting things that should not belong to me. Because of the fact that the seed of evil has already been sown. It's in motion and killing the devil isn't going to help it any.

C. S. Lewis has rightly said, We are the best ones [that is no longer straight.]

Killing Satan is not going to help us. Others in the demonic world would simply take his place. One thing we ought to understand is in the demonic world if we understand scripture rightly is in the demonic world the rulers, principalities and powers really don't get along that well. There

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are a lot of disturbed personalities in the demonic world. Angry, hostile, selfish, grabbing spirits. If Satan were killed today somebody would arise to take his place tomorrow.

We say if destroying the devil wouldn't solve the problem – we'd still have the problem with evil and wrong choice because we're stirred up by lustful dire. Then why doesn't God simply act against all evil and wipe out all evil spirits? Just smash hell's hierarchy to bits.

I believe there is such a thing as hell's hierarchy. God doesn't need a hierarchy because he's omnipresent, omnipotent. But Satan very much needs a chain of command organization – different rankings. Since I believe Satan cannot be everywhere at one – he can only be in one place at one time – I really don't believe I'm a significant enough person that Satan has shown up to challenge my life. I think I've been tempted through his intermediary forces. I could be wrong he may think I'm more important than I think I am.

But if God is finally going to act against Satan and this will be a third reason why God doesn't kill the devil. If God is finally going to act against Satan, in order to be consistent and to be a not a rescuer of persons or intelligent life forms, God must simultaneously act against evil in all of its forms. If God is going to kill Satan then he must in one blow launch an attack totally against all evil. In one moment – the whole thing. Because taking Satan out isn't going to solve the problem. So against all evil God would have to act in order to deal with the problem.

That, by the way, in the scriptures exactly what happens in the end; because when God moves, he moves all at once. He doesn't do things, take a long time to finish up Satan. At the end of tribulation when the Lord comes, the word goes out of his mouth and bang! All the armies are defeated. At the end of the thousand years millenium the Lord again – judgment and everything is taken care of. It's all over. It doesn't take him a long time to clean up the battlefield.

When God finally acts against Satan he will also act against fallen angels and fallen man. Great! Wonderful! Why doesn't he do it?

Let's put the matter this way. Suppose God were to decree at midnight tonight, June 1, 1980, evil is going to be stamped out in the universe. Which of us would be here at 1 a.m.? If God is going to totally act against evil in the universe at 12:00 tonight, would he not have to act against us? If there was in any way evil in us? Would he not have to act totally against an evil world? Would anybody be around if God in one moment acted against all evil? Especially if one form of evil is refusing the offer that Jesus Christ has made to us in believing in him and having eternal life and forgiveness of sin. If God were to act against evil he'd have to act all in one moment. And if he acted who could stand his judgment?

The book of Revelation, by the way, in Revelation 6, presents an interesting picture of that because we often think that the ultimate fear in people is the fear of death. That's not the case at all. The ultimate fear is not the fear of death. That is not your ultimate fear. Revelation 6 at the return of the Lord Jesus Christ from heaven, those who are without Christ cry for the rocks and the mountains to fall on them and to cover them because they are afraid of the Lamb, that is Christ. What's their ultimate fear? Not death. They would prefer death to meeting Christ unprepared.

Peter therefore says, Knowing that when the Lord acts against evil he's going to act all at once Peter therefore cautions Christians who are all the time saying, the Lord has got to come today to

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rescue me out of this terrible situation Peter says, "The Lord is not slow. But is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." This is Peter's whole argument for the delay in Christ's second return. It's out of his compassion that he delays. He creates therefore this dynamic tension within Christians on the one hand of wanting the Lord to return but on the other hand of not wanting him to return so that he can exercise his compassion, so that all might come to repentance. Kind of a dynamic paradox there, isn't it?

A fourth argument against why God doesn't kill the devil. When do you want God to kill the devil? Do you want him to kill the devil on June 1, 1980? No, somebody says. Because if he killed the devil on June 1<sup>st</sup>, 1980, he'd get you too! "Out of the mouth of babes, thou has perfected wisdom."

Let's go back 100 years. Suppose 100 years ago a preacher had asked the question to his congregation, wrestling with the same problems, because all the data I presented tonight was just as real in 1880 as they are real in 1980. Suppose that that preacher and audience 100 years ago today had said, Wouldn't it be wonderful if God would kill the devil today and arc against evil in all forms today? What if God had done that?

If God had killed the devil on June 1, 1880 none of us would be here today. That's to me a good argument for why God hasn't killed him yet. Because somehow I had enough time to come along.

Back to Dostoyevsky's illustration. Because he says, If there is to be one innocent creature suffer as a consequence of God's building his temple of the universe that God would not if he were just and good erect such a temple on an instrument of pain. On June 1, 1880 if the Christian people then were to have said, Let God come today, it would have meant that I wouldn't have been around 100 years later. But it would also have meant World War I, World War II, the Korean conflict, the Vietnam conflict, all would not have happened. Would you personally trade your existence for all of those? Would you want to cease to exist if it could be guaranteed that none of those things would have happened? Probably most of you want life badly enough to say I would rather be here and alive. Maybe some of you would not.

It's easy to be an armchair critic of God. And say what we would do if we were in God's place. Let me ask you a question. Would you invent a machine if you knew that people were going to lose their lives mishandling it? How many of you would invent a machine if you knew that people were going to lose their lives mishandling it? You knew that as a consequence of people mishandling that machine, they were going to die. Would you invent it?

Would you use a machine if you knew it was going to kill somebody? Let's say the machine is going to make your life incredibly convenient. And make life better. Would you use it?

Let's go back to the turn of the century and ask the inventor of the automobile "The consequence of your invention is going to be that in the 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s and 80s we are going to have a ritual every year on a given date, we are going to gather 50,000 citizens and sacrifice them for the sake of having your invention. It's be clear then that we wouldn't invent the auto. Would we?

Why do you drive the auto that when you know that when you drive it you risk killing somebody? Or you risk being killed? Why do we use it?

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I'm not trying to get everybody to give up autos. Maybe some other things. But I'm just saying that sometimes we think that we can make very easy decisions and be an armchair critic of God when in fact we do a very poor job of moral choices on our own. We sometimes falsely assume that we have a righteousness that's greater than God's righteousness.

The very fact is, that human society has indicated the fact that we will choose the auto over human life. And if necessary we'll go to war in the Middle East for keeping our big automobiles or any automobile. If the blood of our sons and our daughters have to be spilled let it be spilled but let us protect our interest in the world and keep our industry functioning.

So in order for us to be around and the structure of the universe to continue as it is, and man to have the freedom that he has, it was necessary that the devil not be killed this day a hundred years ago.

Let me give a fifth argument, a fifth rationality for why God doesn't kill the devil. I would call this argument the Christian mystery.

It is found in Ephesians 3:10. "His intent was that now through the church the manifold wisdom [manifold means any sided] of God should be known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms." Through the church, through the body of Christ, the many sided wisdom of God should be known to spiritual rulers both good and evil in the heavenly realms.

The Christian mystery is this: the devil has already been defeated. Only it's not the end of the war. He has lost the critical battle and his doom is sure. There is a sense in the Christian gospel of a two-time effect of Satan's defeat. That once he has suffered the critical defeat in the life of Jesus Christ and in the Lord's atoning death on the cross and his physical resurrection that insured his defeat. But his doom has not yet been secured. This is coming. The one is like entering into escrow; it guarantees the outcome of the other.

How can this be? Some of you are familiar with this illustration. In World War II there was a moment which marked in the European theater of the war, the turning of the war. Effectively from that date the war was won. The date, June 6, 1944. The occasion – D Day. The invasion of Normandy by the Allied forces under the direction of General Eisenhower. Looking back at World War II we say on D Day the war was won.

Actually as you well know the war went on for another eleven months. It was not until May 8<sup>th</sup>, 1945 the war in Europe ended and that became known as VE Day – Victory in Europe Day. That is the official end of the war.

But from D Day the war had been won in reality, the invasion was successful.

The Christian gospel may be likened unto the difference between D Day and VE Day. D Day is God in the flesh in the person of Jesus exercising his authority on earth. Living a life like no other person, triumphing over all temptation and sin, dying not for his own sin as is the case of all the rest of mankind from Adam until now. But dying for our sin, the perfect one, and rising again from the dead never to be buried. There have been resurrections of people but they've all been temporary, outside of Enoch and Elijah. Jesus' resurrection is life on a new order. That's

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D day. That's when God wins the victory. That's why Christians already are saying the victory has been won in Christ.

Is the war over? No. The war is not over until the end comes and the Son of man returns.

Do you realize that between D day and VE day there were more casualties in World War II I believe than in the four years preceding D day? Yet we say the war was won at D day. But there were more casualties between D day and VE day as I understand it.

There have been many casualties since D day, the cross and the resurrection of Christ. But we are assured because the invasion has been launched that the outcome of the final victory is certain. This is the Christian mystery. It's found all the way back in the strands of redemption in Genesis 3:15 where God announces to Satan his punishment, that man will bruise your head and you will bruise his heel. The power of the snake – the enemy, Satan – is such that it can only touch us in the heel. But the power of man in Christ is such that he can stomp the enemy on the head and finish his power and authority.

The demons recognized this when Jesus came to earth. They cried out to him in Matthew 8:29 “Have you come to torment us before the time?” They are not prepared for the invasion. Matthew 12:28-29 Jesus says “If it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons then the kingdom of God has come upon you. For how can one enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods unless he first binds the strong man.” The strong man is Satan. Jesus is saying, in my acts of healing and deliverance, the strong man has already been bound.

Hebrews 2:14 says “Since therefore the children share in the same flesh and blood he himself partook of the same nature that through death he might destroy him who has the power of death, the devil.”

For the Christian, Satan is already a defeated foe whose future vanquishment is certain.

Perhaps the way of understanding this is by way of a story. It's the one Joyce Landorff tells in her book on grief, Mourning Song. She tells about her pastor who related this story in the congregation: “A young boy in the congregation was bitten by a rattlesnake while he was hiking up one of the foothill canyons back of Pamona, with his dad. The boy's father rushed him to the nearest hospital and after many hours of working the doctors were finally successful in saving the boy's life. It had been a very close call and at times the doctors felt that he might not pull through. The newspaper ran the story, printed picture of the smiling little boy sitting up in his bed with his relieved parents standing by. The pastor brought this story to his pulpit the next Sunday and gives us through that story some insight into the defeat of Satan and the fear of death.

The pastor read the article. Then when the story ended he went on and asked the audience to pretend the following scenario. We are to pretend that after the boy's life was saved someone went back to the canyon, located the ledge where the boy had been climbing and found the very same rattlesnake that had bit him. Then after catching the rattlesnake he took it to a veterinarian and had the snake's venom completely removed, making the snake non poisonous. Then a doctor or someone took the now non poisonous snake into the boys' room. It's shown to the boy and somebody explained it was harmless now and no longer deadly. Then the boy was asked if he wanted to hold the snake and keep it as a pet. [This is a scenario. It didn't really happen.] At

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this point the pastor questioned the congregation do you think any amount of reasoning or explaining could get the boy to reach out and touch that snake much less keep it? The answer is a resounding no. The boy would be still scared to death of the snake. There is no way that he would be willing to accept this particular snake because to him it would still look deadly and wouldn't look one bit changed. No one would be able to convince the boy that it was all right. The hospital would echo in his terrified screams.

There's a certain sense in which Satan or death itself terrifies people. But for the Christian the sting has already been removed. There is no more harm that he can have. Even death itself does not harm anybody. Because to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord. The Lord has already taken the fangs out of the enemy and he's already taken the sting out of death. He has won the victory in his cross and resurrection and we wait with expectancy and with faith for his final denouement from the heavens, his final arriving with power and with strength.

Therefore we hold on to our claim that God is both good and great. He has chosen to deal with Satan in a way that preserves our human freedom. And in a way that allows us to come to him not as robots but as persons of intelligent moral choice.

This aspect, this mystery of the gospel is put to us in so many ways in the New Testament. We are told by the Apostle Paul in Colossians 2 that having disarmed the authorities and powers, Christ made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. The cross is not a defeat for Christ. But is his triumph.

Colossian 1:13-14 "For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption and the forgiveness of sin." He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of his Son.

Paul confesses when he recites his call to Herod Agrippa as testimony in Acts 26:18 "God spoke to Saul and said to him, 'I am sending you to open their eyes and turn them from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God. So they may receive forgiveness of sin and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me.'" The whole purpose of the gospel is to transfer the title behind our name from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of God. Christ's victory on the cross is past. His victory is present in his triumph in our life. And his victory is future. Paul assures us in Romans 16:20 that the God of peace will soon crush Satan under our feet. Not only does he crush Satan but he gives us a chance to enjoy the triumph ourselves.

1 Corinthians 15:24 says "Then the end will come when he hands over the kingdom of God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion and authority and power for he must reign until he has put all enemies under his feet." Paul goes on to say that he has not yet put the enemy of death under his feet. But there will come time when the last enemy to be destroyed is destroyed. Then he will hand the kingdom over to his Father.

In this life we have what some philosophers call living in a death grip. Death has a hold of us. Hair falling out, a sign of death. Approaching death. Some years off perhaps but death nevertheless. When you are born bald you have hope of hair growing. When you grow bald, the end cometh. Teeth fall out or rot, decay. Our limbs are not as mobile or as utile as they once were. Death reigns in man.

If you do not know that yet get ready. It's coming. Death reigns.

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The New Testament and the gospel of Jesus Christ says and especially Romans 8 there is another principle at work in the midst of a death gripped world. I would call it instead of the death grip, the life grip. I sense it intellectually. As my body grows older my mind is becoming more alive. As my countenance takes on more age, my spirit is becoming more alive and more mature. In a spiritual sense life grip has a hold of me because through Jesus the law of the Spirit of life in him has set me free from the law of sin and death. We confess with Paul that though our body is dead our Spirit is alive. Paul assures us as a Christian apostle that if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal body through his Spirit who lives in you. The life grip of Christ.

And a fundamental way we have of coping with the problem of evil is a recognition that in the person of Jesus Christ he has begun in every life who has voluntarily accepted him, a life grip. Which assures us that in the end evil does not triumph at all. A life grip in Christ.

I trust that these thoughts have helped you look at the question, Why doesn't God kill the devil? And has given you hope and faith in the Lord.

You said, Lord, when you came into life, I am come to do the will of him who has sent me. You were sent into the world to destroy him who had the power of death and to defeat the enemy and to bring enslaved mankind to freedom. To bring entombed mankind in the grip of death into your glorious presence. To bring us out of the dark night of the captivity of this earth with its sorrow, shortness of life, futility, frailty and incompleteness. Into the glorious liberty of eternal freedom and love and responsiveness to you and to live and to everything that's around us. We confess this evening that you are the Lord. That you are God. That in your weakness on the cross, you in weakness, defeated him who had the power of death over us and destroyed his works. And that you are even now in life reigning in us. Although death reigns yet in our mortal bodies, the Spirit of life in Christ has been born within us and we are alive to you. Help us not as we look at the problem of evil from time to time to be dilettante or cavalier or to have easy and glib answers. Help us Lord, to be humble in your presence. To realize there are mysteries even beyond our knowing. But to be grateful that in your word you have given us insight to the problem which vexes so many of us. And that we're assured in you a we build our faith on the solid ground of your life and resurrection, that you do all things well. I pray especially for those friends who may be here this evening who do not personally have you living in their life. For whom the life grip has not yet begun. That the word of the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ, which we have shared this evening will find good soil and grow. And that we'll be awake and alive to you in our life and that we who were dead to you and unknowing of you and lost in our own intellectual devices and games and inventions would surrender them at your cross and plead our own need for you and confess the great wisdom that you have come to set us free and to bring us life and defeat the enemy. We praise you. We thank you. We confess in you. In Jesus' name. Amen.