

AUGUST 2007—*The Problem of Evil and the Necessity of Choice*

At some point in life, most of us have pondered and struggled with the problem of evil. The opening chapters of Genesis set the stage. Here we see God creating a good and beautiful world—free from the moral evil and human suffering we know today. However, through choices made by our first parents, God’s creation is plunged into the sin, suffering, and death that has tragically marked its life ever since. This story raises many questions, the chief of which is why God would create a world in which such a thing could happen. Was there no other option?

Like us, C.S. Lewis pondered this problem, and his insights have been helpful to many over the years.

God created things which had free will. That means creatures which can go either wrong or right. Some people think they can imagine a creature which was free but had no possibility of going wrong; I cannot. If a thing is free to be good it is also free to be bad. And free will is what has made evil possible. Why, then, did God give them free will? Because free will, though it makes evil possible, is also the only thing that makes possible any love or goodness or joy worth having. A world of automata—of creatures that worked like machines—would hardly be worth creating. The happiness which God designs for His higher creatures is the happiness of being freely, voluntarily united to Him and to each other in an ecstasy of love and delight compared with which the most rapturous love between a man and a woman on this earth is mere milk and water. And for that they must be free.

... If God thinks this state of war in the universe a price worth paying for free will—that is, for making a live world in which creatures can do real good or harm and something of real importance can happen, instead of a toy world which only moves when He pulls the strings—then we may take it it is worth paying.¹

Lewis’s insights cast helpful light on the problem of evil, but necessarily leave much unanswered. Perhaps in the world to come, God will more fully answer our questions.

But in this present evil world, the ancient challenge remains: we are not automatons; we have the freedom to choose good or evil, and our choices have real consequences for us and others. Many times each day we must choose whether we will obey God or disobey him. The love of the world, the lusts of the flesh, and the lies of the devil continuously entice us to disobedience. But God, whose gracious love has redeemed us, calls us to joyfully obey him in faith. And as we meditate often on his personal love for us, we grow in that answering love from which obedience flows as a delight and not a duty. It is through this joyful, loving obedience that God is glorified in our lives.

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 52-53.