

Studying and Interacting with the Apologetic

Teaching of Mr. Greg Koukl

www.youtube.com/standtoreason

By Aaron Wentz

Introduction: The Purpose of this Paper

The purpose of this paper was to study the teachings of Mr. Greg Koukl of *Stand to Reason*. Greg Koukl has become a very influential Christian apologist in America. Not only is Koukl smart, but he is tactful and wise as well. Combining this with his desire to reach people for Christ makes him an outstanding apologist. Christians, therefore, can gain much by listening to him explain how to defend the faith.

Being in an information rich age, Greg Koukl has put out teaching videos on *YouTube* in which he gives some excellent and simple answers to some of the hardest questions that both Christians and non-Christians deal with. The setting of his videos is Mr. Koukl talking to a camera in a interview style setting. Not only does Koukl do a thorough and unique job at getting to the heart of the question and diagnosing it biblically, philosophically, and theologically, but he does so in less than 3-4 minutes per question! Since Christians live in a sound-bite world, having a short but well-informed answer is very important.

In the evangelistic ministry that I work with, I often have to give short, well-informed on-the-spot answers to hard questions. As I listened to Koukl again and again on these questions and answers, I felt compelled to summarize what he taught and write them all down in order to consume the information personally. Then I decided to summarize what Koukl taught in my own words to make sure I had learned his material. Greg Koukl has more short videos of his teaching, but I have only chosen 20 of his video teachings for this paper. This project was very informational and beneficial to my life as an apologist and evangelist. And, I'm sure I will be using these arguments soon with Christians and non-Christians.

Part I

Greg Koukl on Christianity, Jesus, Truth, Religions, Salvation and Pluralism

Question 1: What about those who've never heard the gospel?

Koukl:

God would never judge anyone on a standard they weren't aware of. No one goes to hell because of living in a certain historical time period or even a wrong geographical location. And, God does not judge someone who is

innocent. God doesn't judge someone on a standard they don't know.

Therefore, they won't be judged for rejecting Jesus. What do people know? And, what are people accountable for?

According to Paul's argument in Romans 1-2, no one is lacking information about a God they owe allegiance. Creation shows abundant evidence for God's existence. Plus, it is evident from this that we should worship God, not His creation. Also, people know, no matter where they are, what is right and wrong (since the Law of God is written on our hearts). And, people know their behavior is going to be judged by Him. The problem is people don't want to bend the knee, so they suppress this knowledge. They know enough. People have what they need. And instead they follow false systems anyway. These are not ignorant people. God doesn't judge someone on a standard they don't know. Therefore they won't be judged for rejecting Jesus. But they will be judged for rejecting the Father and their own wickedness.

My Summary:

Koukl tactfully and immediately defuses a popular idea that God is unjust, cruel and unfair by stating "God would never judge anyone on a standard they weren't aware of." This simple statement answers the question about God's fairness and man's accountability. God is fair, but man is still accountable. Next, Koukl answers (in a different way) the age old question of: "How is God fair for sending someone to hell who hasn't heard the gospel?" The answer according to Koukl (using the book of Romans as his theological base) is people won't be

judged for rejecting Jesus, since “God would never judge anyone on a standard they weren’t aware of”...but for rejecting the Creator through the knowledge of creation, and violating a moral standard all are aware of. People reject the knowledge of the Creator by believing false ideas about God or worshipping the creation instead of the Creator. And, people rebel morally knowing what is right and wrong since the law of God is written on the hearts of all men (Romans 2:15). Koukl ends with the conviction that people may not be rejecting the name of Jesus, “...but they will be judged for rejecting the Father and their own wickedness.” In the end then, people go to hell not for rejecting Jesus, but for sin against God. And, according to Koukl, man knows this standard by which God is judging him for. Again, God is fair and man is still accountable.

Question 2: Is Christianity the only Way?

Koukl:

Christianity may be a small minority to the rest of the world, but it has never been about how many people. Truth is not a matter of counting heads, but a matter of seeing whether the claims of Christ are true or not. Why is it odd to say there is “A” way to God which excludes other ways? Most people who believe in God, or, are religious believe there is “A” way to God. This may be a different way from the Christian way such as good works, sincerity, or doing the right thing under the circumstances. However, notice that the proposition is not multiple ways but an alternate way. Everyone has “A” way or a suggestion, so the question is, which way is the right way? And, can you know it?

This answer is very un-American. There is NO fairness doctrine in heaven. Grace is un-merited favor. There is no obligation from God to give everyone a pardon. God's only obligation is to treat people with justice. Kindness or grace then is given out as He pleases. If love and mercy are given out as an obligation to sinners, then it wouldn't be grace.

Summary:

The foundation it seems for Koukl's argument is everybody has "A" way or thoughts concerning the way to God or heaven. So, to chide Christians for believing in "A" way to God is not being honest about one's own belief system. People cannot be neutral on this issue, nor can they try successfully. Though someone may have a belief in an alternate religious system, it is still "A" way. Likewise, why then can't Christians hold to that they also believe they have found "A" way to God through Christ? Koukl in the end does not answer the question directly, "Why is Christianity is the only way?", but opens the door logically through the argument above to make room for other possible arguments as to the credibility of Christianity. Koukl does seem to end on an interesting theological point; that assuming the God of Christianity is true, it is God who chooses who He will pardon and bring into a saving relationship since it would not be a relationship initiated by grace, if all mankind deserves from God is justice, not mercy.

Question 3: Why is Jesus the only way?

Koukl:

All over the world, Jesus is admired as a man of credibility. However, who He was, and what He came to do, was central to His message. Jesus actually offered a unique plan of salvation. Jesus wasn't a pluralist, but an exclusivist. Therefore based on Jesus' teachings about Himself, Christian's are a missionary religion. There's a reason for this... Jesus had the right take on the problem, and provided the singular solution. This is not a matter of sincerity here. Every human has failed to keep God's law many times over. Criminals in God's court then will be punished. The only answer is what Jesus Himself provided for the world. Jesus as the God-man becomes the sinners substitute. It is on this ground there is forgiveness. God does not look at the different religious clubs and say, "I like this one, but not that..." As an example, if someone doesn't like the Christian club, then God says literally, "...to hell with you." But God offers a pardon. Will you accept it on those terms? If so, you are safe. This is the choice set before us. Without a sacrifice, we have to fend for ourselves. We have disappointed God, but God has satisfied his own justice. These things and His miracles give me every reason to trust in what He said.

My Summary:

According to Koukl, the reason why Jesus is the only way has its foundation in the need for man's sins to be atoned for. Therefore, to answer this question Koukl gives the gospel which incorporates the bad news and the good news. Jesus had the right answer to man's problem in that man is corrupt and

sinful. Therefore, God being a holy and just God, cannot let sin go unpunished. If sinful man has no perfect substitute to pay for their crimes, then man will have to pay for their own sins which is eternal hell. However, Jesus also had the right answer to the problem. The only solution is God Himself providing a way in which He satisfies His own justice. Therefore, the eternal Son of God takes on a human nature and becomes the God-man. As the God-man, Jesus Christ atones for man's sins, so man does not have to pay for their own sins in hell. Because Jesus Himself correctly diagnosed and solved man's greatest need, He alone becomes the right and only way into an eternal right relationship with our heavenly Father.

Question 4: Why is Christianity different?

Koukl:

In religions there are lots of similar elements such as the belief in God or gods, especially in monotheistic religions. However in most religions, who God is, and who man is, is very different. In Christianity, it starts with God as a real person, not part of the creation, but set apart from His creation. Meaning, God creates something other than himself. Christianity is not pantheistic. But is God creating other personal beings distinct from Himself.

Also in Christianity, humans are different than animals. Hinduism doesn't have this clear distinction since animals and humans can transmigrate in their belief system. There is inter-changeability. But in Christianity God has made

man in His image. God sets man apart as unique and special. Not in a physical way, but something immaterial.

When we look at the world and way humans are, we see both nobility and cruelty. People create beautiful art and do great humanitarian work. But humans can be twisted and evil. This seems to be an anomaly or a contradiction. Only a Biblical worldview is helpful here. Christianity gives us the reasons how both can be true. God created man good in His image with free choice, but the good got twisted. However, there is hope because God had a rescue plan. God did not throw a teaching at us, or try and make us better, but God came down, made a sacrificial pardon and offers us grace. This is not based on any moral behavior that I qualify for. God does it graciously as we respond to that gift.

My Summary:

Koukl gets to the heart of the issue by answering this question theologically and going back to anthropology. Who is God? And, who is man? Though Koukl did not give an in-depth answer, he did touch on the fact that religions have very different beliefs about God and the nature of man. Koukl's main objective then is to form a right understanding of the nature of God and the nature of man to then show why Christianity makes sense. Man does tremendous good, but also tremendous evil. If man is God, then does God do evil? Or, if God is part of the creation, and there is evil in the world, then is God evil as well? According to Koukl, only a Christian worldview can properly answer these questions and more. Man is not God, but made in the image of God. And,

God is not the creation but distinct from the creation. Therefore, when God made man, man was given the abilities to be like God such as having personhood, intellect, morality, freedom, etc. With this freedom, man can be “like” God and create beauty, or, man can use his freedom for destruction. In the Christian world-view then, man made in the image of God rebels against God, but God takes on a human nature to rescue man. Amazingly, God does not rescue man by making people conform to a teaching or a set of rules, but incarnates Himself to bring reconciliation with God and His creation. Christianity is different because no other religion can “put together” the problems and solutions man faces logically and correctly with hope.

Question 5: Why is Jesus different?

Koukl:

Prophets and religious leaders in the past offered a teaching, and then faded away...take away the prophet or the leaders and you still have the main teachings such as the Quran ...and Allah is still supreme. However if you take Christ out of Christianity you don't have Christianity anymore. Christianity is not based on the teachings of Jesus mainly, but actually the very person of Jesus Christ Himself. Halfway through His ministry, Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say that I am?” Peter answered, “...the Christ, the Son of God.” Jesus blessed him for answering correctly. Salvation according to Jesus was not primarily based around His teachings, His behavior, but Him, the person. Jesus said *He came* to seek *and save* the lost. At Jesus' trial, He was executed for

who He claimed to be. This is different from any other religion. If Jesus is God in human form who came down to reconcile the world, then Jesus is the most unique person ever.

My Summary:

Koukl makes a very insightful and relevant point here. Salvation according to Jesus is Him alone as the Savior for people's sins, not a conformity to a set of teachings for salvation. The person of Jesus then "is" the message and Jesus must be alive to be continually saving people. However, if men like the Buddha and Mohammed were just messengers to bring a message or spiritual teachers, then the teaching in which men and women should conform to lives on without the messenger or the teacher. But if the foundation of Christianity is Jesus as Savior, then the whole "spiritual" ship goes down if Jesus is not who he claimed to be, or is not alive from the dead. Jesus is different than all other religious teachers because Jesus *is* salvation, where in all other religions spiritual founders like Mohammed only were messengers pointing the way to salvation through a teaching. If the teacher dies, salvation in other faiths can still happen through conformity to its teachings. But if Jesus is a liar and is dead, then He cannot be the source of salvation as He claimed he was.

Question 6: Is Christianity right and others wrong?

Koukl:

Our culture says to tolerate everything, so in the end everyone is equally right. In spite of this kind of tolerance, people haven't thought about it well. An example of this would be religion. Are all religions are equally right? Religious claims are contradictory. Christians say Jesus is the Messiah, Jews say no.

They can't both be right. When you die you go to heaven or hell, or become reincarnated, or cease to exist etc. You can't do it all, at the same time!

Common sense says they call can't be true. We are not taking about how many angels dance on the head of a pin, but on the most fundamental issues such as God, salvation, man, eternal life etc. And, all major religions disagree on these most important issues. The way people get around this problem is to say God doesn't care about the details, but what He does care about is morality and sincerity. But this raises on another question...How does one know that God doesn't care about the details? How do we know? We can't say, "This is the case!" and it makes it so. Most religions believe God does care about the details. This also misconstrues religions to make it sound like, "All religions are the same..." "They mainly teach the same things..." And, "God is happy with any club." Religions then are like snapshots of reality in what people think about important issues. However, some jokingly have said all religions teach the same thing except, God, sin, salvation, the nature of man, the after life etc. These are

all big important issues that contradict each other. Therefore, they can't all be true.

My Summary:

In answering the seemingly intolerant notion that Christians think they are right, and everyone else is wrong, Koukl does a superb job of taking the “teeth” out of the argument by answering it logically. A person with common sense can understand that if religions have contradictory beliefs such as Buddhists not believing in a personal Creator, but Christians do. Then someone is right, and someone is wrong. Or, according to Christians, Jesus died on a cross and rose from the dead. But Muslims deny this tenet of Christianity. Obviously, either Jesus died on a cross or He didn't. Someone has to be right, and someone has to be wrong. Koukl is correct that different religions exist because they all differ on the fundamental issues like God, man, salvation, life after death, etc. If they all differ on core doctrines, then contradictory beliefs cannot all be true at the same time.

Also Koukl points out that in our pluralistic world many teach God doesn't care about the details. Koukl astutely asks the question to the pluralists, “How do you know God doesn't care about the details?” It seems details do matter since religions are full of ideas and beliefs that are different from each other.

Question 7: Do all religions offer a piece of the truth?

Koukl:

It is possible religions offer a slice of the truth, but whether it is the slice of the truth that matters, is the question. We all could make a meal. And let's say five out of the six have arsenic. We may enjoy the meal, but once we hit the arsenic, we are dead. So saying there are good things in religions doesn't ultimately matter if there is spiritual arsenic in them. When it comes down to the things that really matter in religions like God, the nature of man, salvation etc., it's not the similarities but the differences that matter. So, ultimately it's not about the "sameness" but the differences. An example would be Aspirin and Arsenic come in tablet form, but it is the differences that matter.

My Summary:

Koukl rightly diagnoses the question by pointing out that though there may be similarities, there are enough differences in each religion to make a person question whether what each religion teaches is the truth. Since religion deals with questions such as life after death, it is very important to know whether what someone holds to be true is not a spiritual "poison." Since, in the end, what someone believes about God, salvation etc., really does matter.

Question 8: Why do so many people reject Jesus?

Koukl:

This is the questions, isn't it? The thinking behind this is we think people make decisions based on rational decisions only. If you have the better argument, then people will believe. However, this is rare. People don't always make rational decisions. People's decisions are influenced by emotional experiences, bad experiences, family connections, and prejudicial reasons. This is thinking with blinders on. It's not smart, but at least we can understand why some might choose the path they choose. Some honestly have never considered another idea outside of their own when it comes to spiritual things. Some honestly are genuinely ignorant. And finally, people are just bull headed. It is hard to bend the knee. Sometimes its just plain old stubbornness and rebellion

My Summary:

Koukl's answer to this question is helpful for Christians to ponder. Why is it that people reject such a wonderful offer of forgiveness? According to Koukl, most people don't think through their belief systems rationally. Or, many people do not even think to think about whether what they believe even corresponds to reality or not. Emotions, fear and prejudice also having a blinding effect to

objective truth found in Christianity. And lastly, for most people the reason why people won't believe in Jesus is Jesus demands allegiance. And, since man is sinful and wants their own way, the gospel becomes too difficult for most people to follow.

Question 9: Religion and works

Koukl:

We all have a sense that we need to be better than what we are. We should be good. Religions know the problem is man's rebellion, and we ought to be better. It makes sense. However...what about the crimes already committed? Just because a moral crime against God happened in the past, doesn't mean we don't still owe for those sins. Religions and good works doesn't take in consideration the crimes of the past. Thinking we are good now and should be rewarded for it, are things we should of done in past anyway. We don't get credit for keeping the law. Keeping the law now doesn't erase past sins. We ought to keep the law. And, there is no reward for breaking the law. Keeping the law is our moral duty. Some say there are more moral people in other religions than Christians. Actually, it is not being more moral that matters. What matters is...what about the crimes already committed. We can't be moral enough. We all have a rap sheet. This is not good news. However in the cross our sins are cancelled out. A redeemer came. No one can say what the answer is until we get a right fix on the problem. We know there is something wrong with

us. Why is it that we feel guilty? Jesus is the only one who solved the problem. We feel guilty, because we are guilty. Jesus solves this problem for us.

My Summary:

Koukl explains that the deficiency in religions and the idea of good works is faulty because moral behavior today is unable to erase past sins. Keeping God's law and moral behavior is expected by God. Likewise in society there is no reward for a being a moral law abiding citizen. Though someone may think they have reformed their life through a religion and are living a better life, trying to live morally now as God expects in no way has any saving effect for past sins. If this thinking does not work logically in society, how then can it work with a holy God? Moral behavior today cannot atone for past criminal behavior against God. Since religions then cannot fix this problem, religion should not be trusted for salvation. However, Jesus Christ offers a different way. Jesus cancelled the debt of not only past sins, but present and future sins. Only in Christ is there for hope for the sinner.

Question 10: Doesn't sincerity matter to God?

Koukl:

If our measure of acceptance is based upon a curve, then we have the diagnose the problem, before you get the right solution. Many think living better than the next guy is what matters. Some have told me that they know people

who live a better moral life than I do, and they're not Christians. That's not the issue here. All patients in a hospital are sick. The Ten Commandments are key here. All have broken God's moral laws and therefore all people are moral criminals. It's interesting that none of the Ten Commandments speak about pride. I'm no Hitler, but people do not live up to Jesus Christ either. We are probably more like Hitler than Jesus in comparison to the Ten Commandments.

MySummary:

Most people believe sincerity matters in order to obtain salvation. However, Koukl is correct that it is not personal sincerity or living-better-than – another-human-being that gets a person right with God. Why not? God's standard is not a self-created standard or another moral human being, but God Himself and the Ten Commandments. If a person has kept the Ten Commandments faultless, then it would seem a person has nothing to worry about. But if all people have broken even one of God's laws, then all people have become moral criminals. As Koukl said, everyone in the hospital is sick. And in a spiritual sense, all people are sick with sin, and sick people die without a cure. Therefore, though a Buddhist as an example may seem to live a more virtuous life than a common Christian in the U.S., the real question is, has both the Buddhist and the Christian disobeyed God? And since both have, both are equally guilty, and both equally need a pardon. No one is better off than other.

Part II Greg Koukl on God, evil, suffering, and heaven

Question 1: Why is there so much evil in the world?

Koukl:

All religions and people have to deal with this question, not just Christians. However, I think the biblical worldview can answer it the best. Bertrand Russell, a famous British atheist challenged theists by chiding, “How can you talk about God when you are at the bed of a dying child?” William Lane Craig said it well when he said, “What is the atheist Bertrand Russell going to say at the bed of dying child?” Tough luck? That’s the way it goes...?” An atheist has nothing to offer the child (or the parents). However in the Biblical worldview, all can be redemptive. Something good can come of it. The atheist can say nothing to the problem of evil. And, nothing good can come of a dying child.

My Summary:

Koukl’s short response to this question is powerful. Though Koukl’s answer does not sweep away or solve the issue of pain and suffering in the world, he rightly reorientates the person asking the question and the skeptic by

using Russell as an example. Using William Lane Craig's quote, Koukl rightly turns the table on the atheist or the skeptic to say, "Death is a reality for all of us. So when the end comes for all of us, which belief system can make the most sense out of death and suffering?" Both Russell and the Pope have to deal with the problem of suffering and death. Which system of belief can actually turn something bad and turn it into something redeeming and good? Only Christianity. Therefore, though Christians cannot answer all the "why?" questions in this world, Christians can offer a better belief system than the atheist according to Koukl.

Question 2: Did God create evil?

Koukl:

People are tempted to think of evil as a "thing." Kind of like a dark gooey thing that sticks on you and then you start doing something bad. If God created all things, and if evil is a thing, then God created evil. But this is not the proper way to look at evil. Evil is not a "thing."

Ever eaten a doughnut hole in a doughnut? We don't eat the doughnut hole. Why not? It's not something at all. It's the place where the doughnut is not. It does not have ontological status. It doesn't have "being." It's a word to describe where something is missing. Shadows is where light is not. This thinking is helpful with evil. Evil didn't have to be created...Evil is a hole in goodness. This is the way Augustine and Aquinas thought. Evil didn't have to be

created... God created a world good just as it was supposed to be. But human freedom was used in such a way to diminish goodness in the world. That lack of goodness then in the world is what we call evil.

My Summary:

Evil does not have ontological status, but is simply “diminished goodness in the world” brought on by moral free creatures. Therefore, God did not create evil, since evil is not made from some kind of “stuff” or matter.

Question 3: Can God create evil?

Koukl:

God cannot create evil. This is not a limitation in God or weakness in God. This is not a lack in God, but something good in God. God can never fail to do everything good. To create something evil would be a failure to do something good. And God is perfectly good, so He cannot fail in every way.

My Summary:

God *not* being able to do something does not mean God is limited or “unqualified” to be God. Because God is holy, God cannot do certain things like lie or do an act of evil. Therefore God is not limited in a negative way, such as being impotent to do something good when He wants to, but limited in a way that

would always prohibit evil coming from His desires due to his good and perfect nature. And since God is perfect, His ways will always be perfect.

Question 4: Evil and suffering equal no God?

Koukl:

The reality of evil is actually the greatest evidence for the existence of God, not against it. I was actually part of a debate that happened to be right after the Columbine shooting. We can't call what the gunmen did wicked unless there is objective good to measure it by. There must be a moral foundation. C.S. Lewis said he would not know what crooked was if he didn't know what straight was. Using words like, "...should of done..." implies a standard someone is supposed to conform to. In a world where there is no God, everything becomes just molecules in motion. Most atheist with integrity acknowledge that if you have no God, you have no standards. The problem of evil evaporates.

Indeed, the strongest argument against God is the presence of evil. But that can only be voiced if there is only real evil in the world. Two things follow from that:

1. Moral relativism is a dead end.
2. Atheist are out of play too. One can't make sense out of evil vs. good.

Evil and good only make sense in a world where there is an ultimate standard.

Eventually, this turns out to be the best argument for God, not against God.

If absolute morality exists, God exists.

My summary:

This could be Koukl's best defense yet. Instead of the existence of evil destroying God, the existence of evil (though difficult to handle emotionally) actually proves the existence of God. People complain about evil and why God allows evil to happen such as the horrible Columbine shooting in Colorado. However, Koukl makes his point clearly that if God does not exist, there is no absolute moral standard to judge any persons behavior to say what is right and what is wrong. Koukl quoted C.S. Lewis' famous words that a person knows what a crooked line is because they first knew that straight lines exist. Using words like "should" and "ought" are moral terms. If there are no absolute moral standards, then these kind of words are nonsense. Only in a world where God exists are there moral obligations. Koukl even mentions that honest atheists agree to this argument.

Next, Koukl shows how relativism is incompatible with believing or complaining against the existence of evil. Since a relativist says nothing is true, or nothing is really right or wrong, then, a relativist can't say real evil exists or evil is wrong. The moment a relativist admits to objective evil in the world, relativism self-destructs. Or, when relativists complains about evil, they are only contradicting their own worldview.

**Question 5: If God is all-powerful, why does evil
exist?**

Koukl:

The question appears to be a conflict between God's goodness and God's power. If God is good, then He wants to stop evil. If God is all-powerful, then He is able to stop evil. But because evil exists, God is either not good, or not powerful. There is a misunderstanding here. God's goodness has nothing to do with His power in this situation. It has something to do with goodness, but in a different way. God created a certain kind of world where there are morally free creatures. I think that's a good thing, which shows God is an all wise God. If creatures like humans or angels are not truly morally free, then morality doesn't apply at all. Creatures can't be good or bad. Nothing good comes from it. Humans can be good or bad. There is a potential for both when you have moral freedom. Here's the catch, power has nothing to do with it considering that scenario.

I once asked a man to bend a paper clip into a circle. He did that. I then asked him to bend it into a square. He did that. I then asked the man to bend it into a square circle. He couldn't do it. I then said, "Well, you're a big strong guy aren't you?" See the point? Some issues power can't solve. God is all powerful. But to destroy evil, He would have to destroy something good, which is morally free creatures. Moral freedom is the possibility to do something good or bad. You cannot create a morally free creature without the possibility of it going

south on you. It's like trying to make a square circle. God could of made a different universe, but it would not be a universe in which you or I would have a part.

My summary:

Koukl's argument is though God is powerful and good, God is also logical and cannot contradict Himself. Therefore if God decides in His wisdom that it is best to create morally free creatures such as angels and humans, then a morally free being can choose to obey or disobey God. Saying God has the power to make a morally free being not morally free is like saying God can make a square circle. God can do what is only logically possible. Again, this is not a limitation in God, but showing God to be logical, consistent and wise. Koukl does agree that God could of made a different kind of world in which morally free creatures would not exist. However, that would mean that everything we know about life and reality living as free persons would not exist. And most people would not want that to happen. So it seems in God's wisdom choosing a world in which morally free creatures exist beside Himself was a good choice, and the best of all possible choices; even at the cost of his creation falling away.

6. Why does God allow evil and suffering?

Koukl:

There is lots of speculation here. Probably in some situations we can't think of any reason why God would allow a certain evil to happen. The question I have to ask myself is, who has the best position to assess morally why evil exists? If we have no reasons available to us to possibly answer the "Why?" question, God doesn't look very good. But we have lots of things to draw on: the Scriptures, Jesus, and what He has done in the world. We have a lot of information. There is lot's of evidence. Because of these sources, now I can know God is there, and that He knows more than me. Therefore, I 'm going to trust him in all the things I don't know yet. This is the fruitful way to pursue this question.

My Summary:

It seems Koukl's response to this very tough question is God has provided us with some information to make it through life, but not all the information. If God *did not* provide any information for us, or, the Bible and Jesus are false, then God probably wouldn't look very good with all the evil and suffering in the world. But because God has given us some insight into why there is evil, and what He might be up to, then it is fair to say God should be trusted with our questions and doubts. Plus with all the good evidence that God exists, Koukl is right that God knows more than us, and has the right vantage point from eternity to decide what He allows. Trusting God that He has the big picture is the fruitful way to pursue the "Why?" questions in life.

Question: 7. Is God unfair?

Koukl:

The temptation in the west is to be egalitarian. God however being the Sovereign of the universe is not required to treat everyone the same. There is no fairness requirement in heaven. Is God required to rescue us from the messes we get ourselves into? Is God obliged to forgive everyone, and anyone? Even angels? If He chooses to set up a rescue operation, that is mercy and grace. God doesn't have to rescue all, or even make it available to all equally. If two people owed me a debt, and I forgave one and not the other, is that unfair? Sin is a debt. God can choose to forgive what debt He wants to. If someone has violated us or owes us a debt, we as humans have a choice to be generous as well or not at all.

What about people in Africa? Have they kept God's law? Realistically, all innocent people go to heaven. Where is the innocent person? Why should someone in a certain geographically area get a free pass? All people will stand before God based on their behavior. In Romans 1 and 2, God has given mankind enough adequate information so that we are without excuse. The evidence is enough to turn people to God or away from Him. If God gives any further revelation, it is God's choice and He is not obligated in any way.

My summary:

Another way to describe what Koukl is communicating here is this: what does God owe us? And, what is God obligated to give us? Since sin is a debt to

God, then the collector has every right to collect and not be gracious. Even if a collector chose to forgive one person of their debt, but not another, the bill collector still has that right. Since sin is a debt to God, God can forgive no debts, forgive some people of their debts, or forgive all people of their debts. History has shown God has chosen to be gracious, but only gracious to some. As Koukl said, this goes against our western egalitarian mindset. What does God owe mankind? Realistically, only justice. Therefore, if God pardons anyone of their crimes, it is an amazing gift since the offended party is not a local judge, but the judge of all the earth. So to think that God dies for the sinner and pardons some adding up to millions people, this is truly amazing. God is fair to judge or to pardon.

Koukl takes this reasoning to the next step and applies it to the those in other parts of the world who may not of heard the gospel story. Romans 1 and 2 indicate that everyone no matter where they live know in their hearts that their behavior will be judged by God. And, no one gets a free pass. God being a just God has every right to judge since people know God exists and they are guilty. In a similar way then, God judging or providing additional information so an individual or people can be pardoned in God's just choice. This may not seem fair, but according to Koukl this is the truth about the nature of God and man based on the Scriptures.

Question 8: What about pain that we don't understand?

Koukl:

I have an observation based on the problem of evil and the objections raised against it. After the Oklahoma city bombing, people asked, "Where was God?" Here's something to think about: How many people on that day were committing adultery? Adultery causes pain in the lives of people, especially in families and children. Why didn't those people committing adultery, who said, "Where was God?" say, "Where was God...not stopping my adultery that same day?" Here's why: Some evil gives people pleasure. People complain about God and the problem of evil when it comes at them directly or indirectly. People complain against God only when the problem of evil hurts them, not when they are the perpetrator of the problems and evil. The objections then against God are disingenuous. Evil comes from moral creatures and the complaint always comes about someone else. Not, "God, please help *me* stop being evil." We don't say that. The fact is, evil cannot be isolated from the person doing the evil. That's us. God, help me. Evil comes from evil persons. Are we really concerned?

My summary:

Another insightful view about the problem of evil from Greg Koukl. The point Koukl seems to make is human beings create evil, not God. But when

human beings create evil, people decide to blame God. The blaming of God comes because someone felt pain from the evil caused by another human being. However, no one seems to blame God when they themselves are the cause of pain. There seems to be a double standard here. When someone causes me pain, I blame God. But when I cause pain to someone else by my behavior, I don't blame God. The conclusion then Koukl makes is the attack against God based around the problem of evil in the world is disingenuous. Humans as free moral beings choose to cause pain, and the blame should stay where it belongs.

Question 9: Why does God allow natural disasters?

Koukl:

What is pain? Pain is a natural response to the threat of injury. Therefore, is pain good or bad? Pain is a warning. God put pain in the universe.. Is there excess? Yes, because of the fall. But not all pain is the same or necessarily bad. I believe there was pain before the fall because the fall of man didn't design pain. Adam had receptors in his skin.

Also, if I lost my house in a earthquake, an earthquake is a natural design feature. I lost a material thing which is my house, and therefore I feel bad. No

one probably likes it when they lose their house through wind or fire etc. But does it make it bad? Just because I get to own a house and then lose it, does losing a home mean something *bad* has occurred? Another example would be people in Bangladesh who needed rescue aid. When I was there, the mission agency gave them plywood to sleep on. People from the west came over and called it “wrong!” But if they didn’t have the wood to sleep on, they would be on the ground or worse. Sometimes our cultural norms wrongly decide what is tragic and what is not.

My Summary:

I think the point of Koukl’s argument here is not all things that we call “wrong” or even “evil” are really “wrong” or “evil.” People don’t like pain. So, anything that is physically painful must be wrong or evil some think. But if God designed the world with physical pain to be a warning device for our bodies, then much of our physical pain then isn’t a moral evil. Therefore, if someone suffers pain from something, is God at fault? And, was it “wrong” in the moral sense of the word? It seems Koukl in many cases does not think so.

Applying this now to natural disasters and God, if the environment acts up like wind, rain, or an earthquake and it happens to cause someone pain, is that something bad? How do we know? What is the standard to know that because I felt pain, it now became a moral issue or a spiritual issue? Koukl seems to be saying that most people answer these questions subjectively through their cultural lenses. In America, we value property so much that if it gets taken away,

even by a flood as an example, it was wrong, and maybe even God was at fault. Americans view the loss of property as a bad thing because the culture puts a high value on it due to materialism. But in a country where materialism is not king, and people don't own property through banks, the loss of property or a natural disaster and its effects are looked at differently. Therefore, Koukl's point seems again to be that it is hard to know and hard to say what is a natural disaster, and what should be called wrong or evil due to a natural disaster. How much God is involved in all the natural disasters in the world Mr. Koukl did not get into.

Question10: How did God deal with the problem of evil?

Koukl:

We can't talk about the problem of evil without first having to deal with sin. Sin is the reason why evil exists. Therefore, God deals with the problem of evil by first dealing with sin. Because sin originates with man, God became man to deal with the sin problem. Jesus as the God-man took on all the sin and hurt of this world according to Isaiah 53. Literally He took our stripes for us. Therefore God understands. He's been there. God entered into the experience of life. All this makes me feel safe knowing that God has been through it all.

My Summary:

Koukl once again takes us back to the gospel as the centerpiece of all history. The problem of evil cannot be separated from human responsibility, so God became human to our responsibility on His shoulders by carrying our cross of sin and shame up the hill to die for our sins later to rise from the dead. Evil is conquered when people have the root of evil taken away from them which is sin. And since sin leads to death, Jesus also conquered the grave making death no longer the end but a victory for all who trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior.