

MESSAGE NOTES for "The Problem of Evil"
Hope Community Church – Downtown Minneapolis
April 25th, 2020
Pastor Steve Treichler

MESSAGE NOTES:
Introduction – What's the Problem?

Two Approaches:

Philosophically
Pastorally (Practically)

VERY good resources:

The Problem of Pain, C. S. Lewis

A Grief Observed, C. S. Lewis

God, Freedom and Evil, Alvin Plantinga

Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions,
Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli

Why is this an important question?

1. This is the #1 (and best, by far!) argument for atheism.
2. Everyone is touched by evil and we always wonder, "Why?".
3. In suffering, we fluctuate back and forth from the intellectual, philosophical problem to the pastoral or practical problem.

The Problem of Evil:

- (1) God exists. DENIAL – Atheism
- (2) God is all-good. DENIAL – Pantheism
- (3) God is all-powerful. DENIAL – Naturalism (Rabbi Kushner)
- (4) Evil exists. DENIAL – Idealism (Christian Science)

Biblical Christianity AFFIRMS all four, and says they are not contradictory

Careful Definitions:

1. *Evil*
Not a "created" thing

Two kinds of evil

Genesis 3:17a

To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' Cursed is the ground because of you..."

2. *Free Will*

Genesis 2:16-17

¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; ¹⁷but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die."

Galatians 5:13

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

Heredity + Environment + FW = Human Acts

3. *Omnipotence*

Psalm 115:3

Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

4. *Goodness*

Kindness vrs. Love

James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

Testing our hypothesis: Does these ideas work as Jesus encounters the effects of evil?

John 11:1-44

The Gospel is the Answer to our Problem of Evil!

Romans 5:6-8

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Gospel Application - "Have you moved from WHY? to WHO?"

"What's your answer to YOUR problem of evil?"

John 11:1-44 (New International Version)

The Death of Lazarus

11 Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha.² (This Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair.)³ So the sisters sent word to Jesus, “Lord, the one you love is sick.”

⁴ When he heard this, Jesus said, “This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God’s glory so that God’s Son may be glorified through it.”⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.⁶ So when he heard that Lazarus was sick, he stayed where he was two more days,⁷ and then he said to his disciples, “Let us go back to Judea.”

⁸ “But Rabbi,” they said, “a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?”

⁹ Jesus answered, “Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world’s light.¹⁰ It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light.”

¹¹ After he had said this, he went on to tell them, “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.”

¹² His disciples replied, “Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better.”¹³ Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep.

¹⁴ So then he told them plainly, “Lazarus is dead,¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.”

¹⁶ Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, “Let us also go, that we may die with him.”

Jesus Comforts the Sisters of Lazarus

¹⁷ On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days.¹⁸ Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem,¹⁹ and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother.²⁰ When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed at home.

²¹ “Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”²² But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.”

²³ Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.”

²⁴ Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

²⁵ Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die;²⁶ and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

²⁷ “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.”

²⁸ After she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary aside. “The Teacher is here,” she said, “and is asking for you.”²⁹ When Mary heard this, she got up quickly and went to him.³⁰ Now Jesus had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.³¹ When the Jews who had been with Mary in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there.

³² When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet and said, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.”

³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping, he was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.³⁴ “Where have you laid him?” he asked.

“Come and see, Lord,” they replied.

³⁵ Jesus wept.

³⁶ Then the Jews said, “See how he loved him!”

³⁷ But some of them said, “Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?”

Jesus Raises Lazarus From the Dead

³⁸ Jesus, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. ³⁹ “Take away the stone,” he said.

“But, Lord,” said Martha, the sister of the dead man, “by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days.”

⁴⁰ Then Jesus said, “Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God?”

⁴¹ So they took away the stone. Then Jesus looked up and said, “Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me.”

⁴³ When he had said this, Jesus called in a loud voice, “Lazarus, come out!” ⁴⁴ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face.

Jesus said to them, “Take off the grave clothes and let him go.”¹

QUOTES:

“His Omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense. This is no limit to His power. If you choose to say, ‘God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it,’ you have not succeeded in saying anything about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words, ‘God can.’ It remains true that all things are possible with God: the intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities. It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His power meets an obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.”

~ C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*

The next question is: Why did God give us free will and allow us to misuse it? The question is misleading. One gives a polish to a table, or a pony to a schoolboy, but one does not give three sides to a triangle or free will to a human being. Free will is part of our essence. There can be no human being without it. The alternative to free will is not being a human but an animal or a machine.²

God let Job suffer not because he lacked love but precisely out of his love, to bring Job to the point of the Beatific Vision of God face to face (*Job 42:5*), which is humanity’s supreme happiness.³

More important than evil as an argument against the existence of God is evil as a broken relationship with God, a spiritual divorce. Therefore, more important than a logical answer to the problem of evil theoretically is a personal answer to the problem of evil practically. More important than an apologist is a Savior.

¹ [The New International Version](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), Jn 11:1–44.

² Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, [Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions](#) (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1994), 138.

³ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, [Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions](#) (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1994), 140.

The theoretical problem produces in us ignorance and questioning. The practical problem produces in us sin and guilt. Christ came to solve the second problem, not the first. Christ was not a philosopher.

Guilt can be removed only by God, because guilt is the index of a broken covenant with God. Shame is only the index of a horizontal, human fear or fracture, but guilt is vertical, supernatural. A good psychologist can set you free from shame but not from guilt. He can even set you free from guilt feelings, but not from real guilt. He can give you anesthetics but cannot cure your disease. Psychology can make you feel good, but only religion—relationship with God—can make you be good.

That's why God sent his Son; no one but Jesus Christ could take away our sin and guilt. Faith in his atoning sacrifice is the only answer to the real problem of evil. Our only hope is not a good answer but "good news," the gospel.⁴

⁴ Peter Kreeft and Ronald K. Tacelli, *Handbook of Christian Apologetics: Hundreds of Answers to Crucial Questions* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1994), 143–144.



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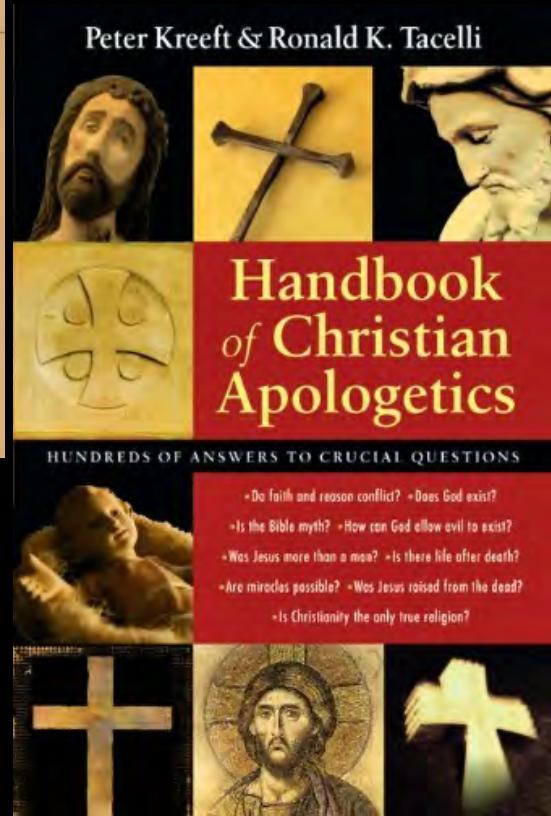
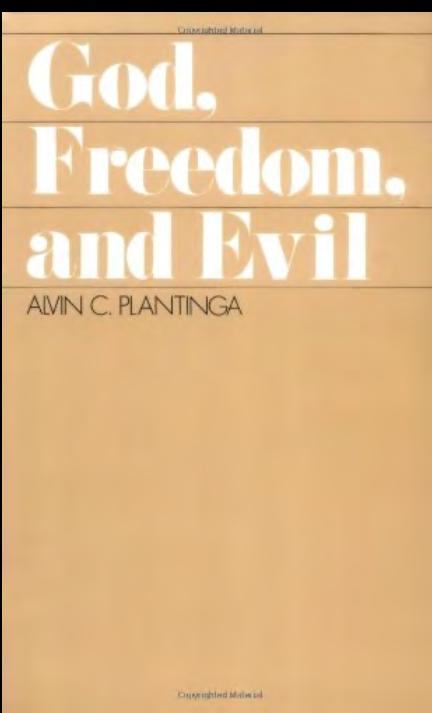
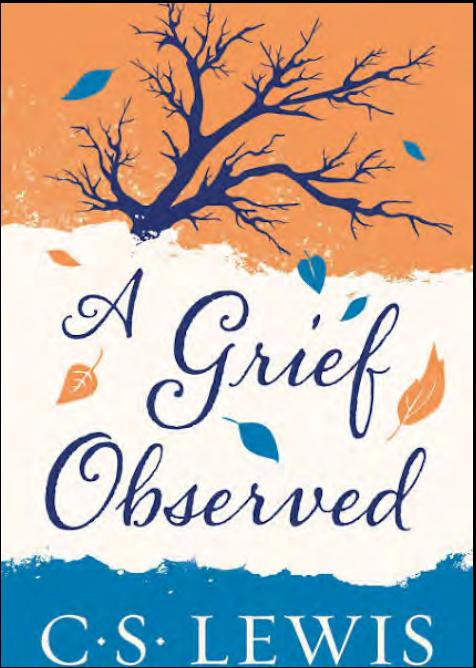
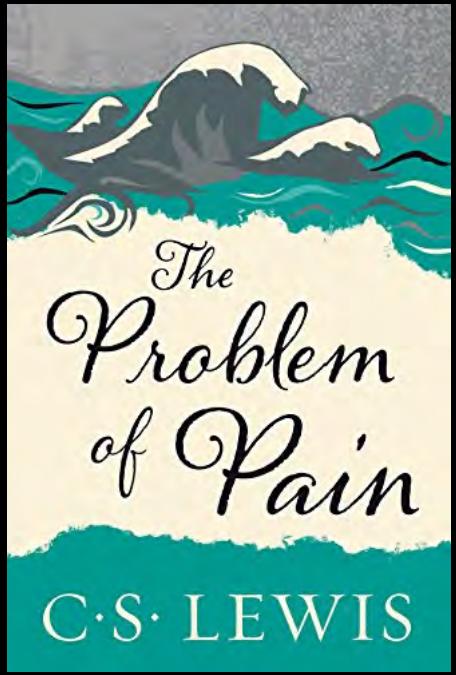
Journey of Job

For this week's, go to
hopecc.com/slides & hopecc.com/notes

This week's message:

The Problem of Evil

hopecc.com/slides & hopecc.com/notes



... The most precious gift that marriage gave me was this constant impact of something very close and intimate yet all the time unmistakably other, resistant - in a word, real. Is all that work to be undone? Is what I shall still call [Helen] to sink back horribly into being not much more than one of my old bachelor pipedreams? Oh my dear, my dear, come back for one moment and drive that miserable phantom away. Oh God, God, why did you take such trouble to force this creature out of its shell if it is now doomed to crawl back -- to be sucked back -- into it?



~ Clive Staples (C.S.) Lewis *From A Grief Observed*

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- (1) God exists.
- (2) God is all-good.
- (3) God is all-powerful.
- (4) Evil exists.

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Careful Definitions:

Evil

Free Will

Omnipotence

Goodness

What is Evil?

What is Evil?

evil

■ **adjective**

extremely wicked and immoral.

- ▶ embodying or associated with the forces of the devil.
- ▶ harmful or tending to harm.

~ *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

What is Evil?

Is evil “a created thing”?

What is Evil?

Is evil “a created thing”?

*Two kinds of evil:
Human and Natural*

Genesis 3:17a

To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ Cursed is the ground because of you...

What is Free Will?

What is Free Will?

Genesis 2:16-17

16And the L O R D God commanded the man, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; 17but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will certainly die.”

What is Free Will?

Galatians 5:13

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.

What is Free Will?

Human Actions come from:
Heredity + Environment

What is Free Will?

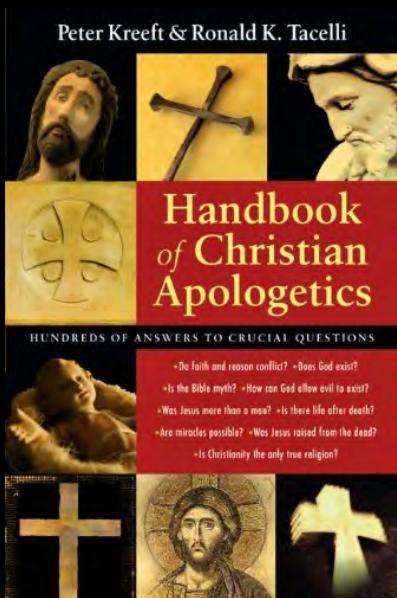
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????????????

What is Free Will?

Human Actions come from:
Heredity + Environment
+ Free Will

The next question is: Why did God give us free will and allow us to misuse it? The question is misleading. One gives a polish to a table, or a pony to a schoolboy, but one does not give three sides to a triangle or free will to a human being. Free will is part of our essence. There can be no human being without it. The alternative to free will is not being a human but an animal or a machine.



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Omnipotence

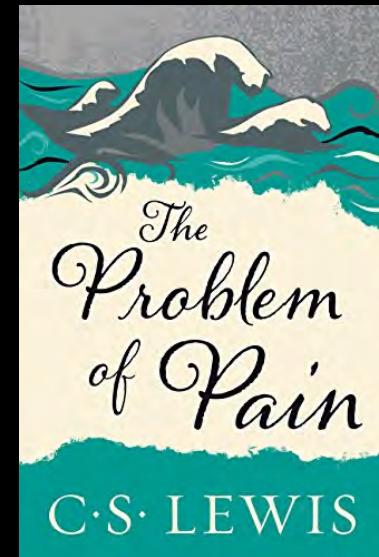
Omnipotence

God can do ANYTHING!

Psalm 115:3

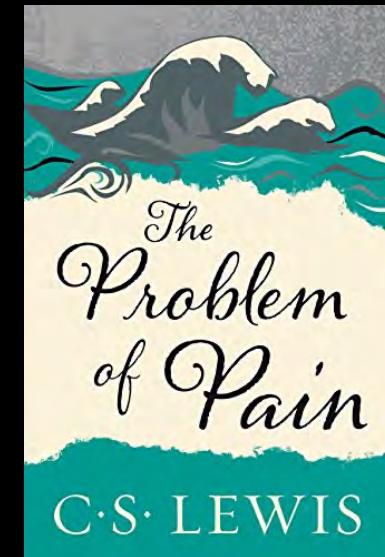
Our God is in heaven;
he does whatever pleases him.

His Omnipotence means power to do all that is intrinsically possible, not to do the intrinsically impossible. You may attribute miracles to Him, but not nonsense. This is no limit to His power. If you choose to say, 'God can give a creature free will and at the same time withhold free will from it,' you have not succeeded in saying anything about God: meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply



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Goodness

Goodness

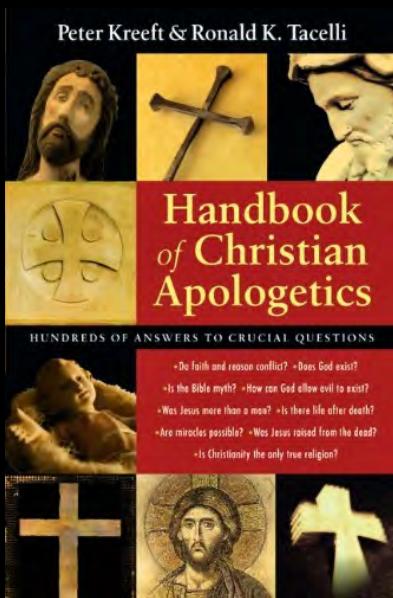
James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift is from above,
coming down from the Father of the heavenly
lights, who does not change like shifting
shadows.

Goodness

Does Goodness always mean
kindness (relief from pain)?

God let Job suffer not because he lacked love but precisely out of his love, to bring Job to the point of the Beatific Vision of God face to face (Job 42:5), which is humanity's supreme happiness.



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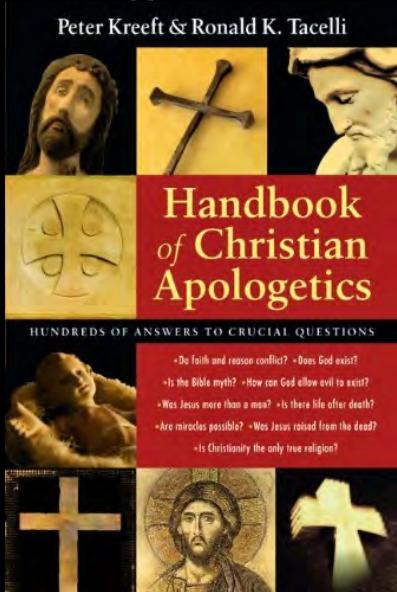
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Testing our hypothesis:
Do these ideas work as Jesus
encounters the effects of evil?

John 11:1-44

Now, what about
real evil
in us?

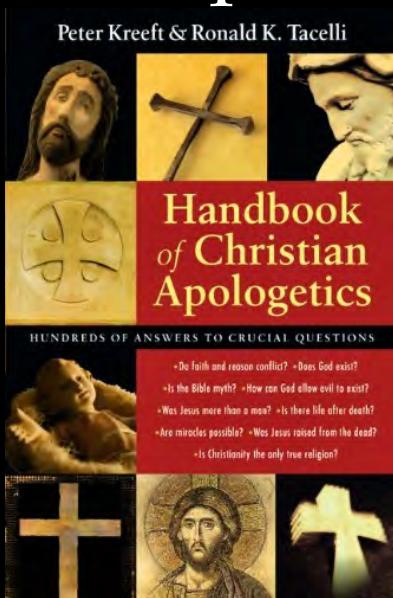
More important than evil as an argument against the existence of God is evil as a broken relationship with God, a spiritual divorce. Therefore,



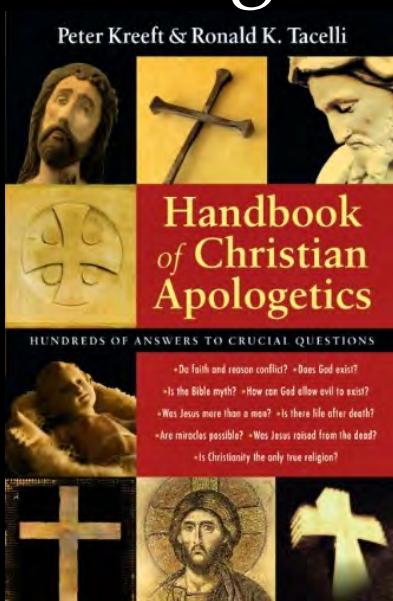
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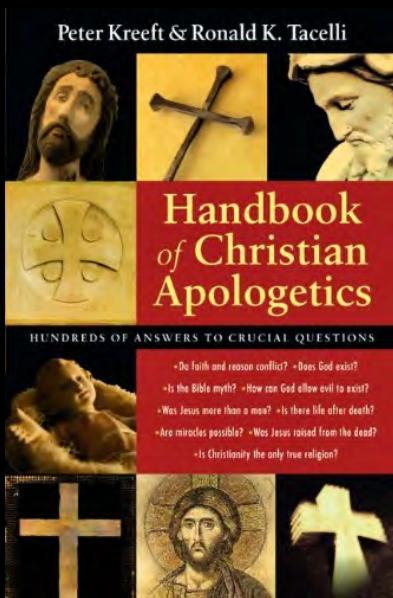
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Guilt can be removed only by God, because guilt is the index of a broken covenant with God... A good psychologist can set you free from guilt feelings, but not from real guilt. He can give you anesthetics but cannot cure your disease. Psychology can make you feel good, but only religion – relationship with God – can make you be good.



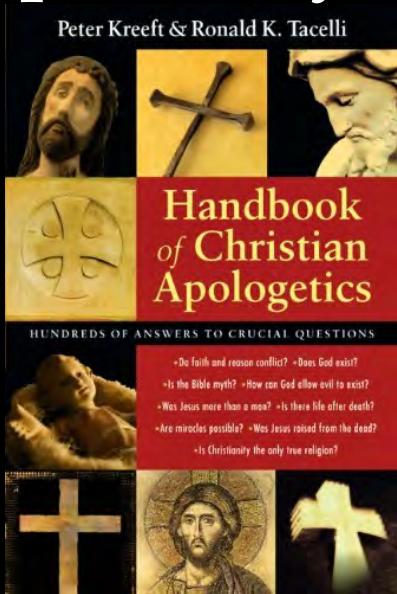
That's why God sent his Son; no one but Jesus Christ could take away our sin and guilt. Faith in his atoning sacrifice is the only answer to the real problem of evil. Our only hope is not a good answer but "good news," the gospel.



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Gospel Application

“Have you moved from WHY? to WHO?”

“What’s your answer to YOUR problem of evil?”