

## HOW CAN A GOOD GOD ALLOW EVIL?

The question of why there is evil in the world was never discussed by the ancient philosophers of Egypt, Babylon, Persia, Greece or Rome. They were polytheists who had a pantheon of gods. Evil was the result of conflicts between the gods. For example, the historical account of the war on Troy was reported by the Greeks as the result of jealousy and rivalry between three goddesses.

However, with the understanding of a Holy and loving God, which was a Hebrew concept revealed through the prophets of Israel, the question of how there could be evil in the world began to be discussed. The book of Job is the oldest Theodicy that we know of. A Theodicy is a defence of the justice of God in the light of evil in the world. How can evil and suffering exist when God is all powerful and all good?

### Sin and Suffering

The friends of Job had a legalistic explanation that the reason Job was suffering so terribly was because he must be guilty of terrible sin. God severely rebuked these false counsellors and vindicated Job as a blameless man targeted by satan.

When the disciples saw a man who was blind from birth, they asked Jesus: “***Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?***” ***Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.”*** John 9:1-3

### The Fall

Suffering and evil is a result of the Fall. God made a good and perfect world. Before Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and give in to the temptation of satan, the world was without pain, suffering and death. Evil came into the world as a result of mankind’s rebellion against the Creator. All of Creation continues to suffer as a result of the sinfulness of human beings. Pain, disease, sorrow and death are the terrible consequences of human wickedness.

### False Religions

We can also say that false religions cause most of the suffering in the world today:

**Animism**, witchcraft, or voodooism, has produced terrified, superstitious followers who have engaged in ritual killings, cannibalism and cruelty. Witchdoctors have routinely blamed individuals for natural disasters such as a bolt of lightning striking a hut, or a death by disease. With the drums playing and the witchdoctor swaying, in a trance, he will identify some poor innocent soul as responsible for any given event. That person would then be forced to jump off a high cliff, drink poison, be fed to crocodiles, or clubbed to death. In many parts of Africa young girls have been forced to have their front teeth sawn off by the witchdoctor as part of their “*beautification*” ceremonies. In one area that I know of the most beautiful girl in the district would be sacrificed to the crocodile god! Poor people have frequently sacrificed their last chicken to ancestral spirits, instead of providing nourishment to their starving children. There is no doubt that animism causes untold suffering.

**Hinduism** has produced idolatrous followers who have engaged in infanticide, widow burning and the burning of lepers. Missionary William Carey documented how widows as young as eleven years old were burned alive on the funeral pyre of their husband. On one occasion over thirty widows of one man were burned alive at the cremation of their deceased husband. Lepers would be burned in order to ensure *“a better reincarnation!”* Many mothers sacrificed their children by throwing them into the Mother Ganges River to be eaten by crocodiles.

Because of Hinduism’s belief in reincarnation, rats may not be killed. It would take a train five thousand kilometres long to haul the grain eaten by Indian rats in single year. And Hindu temples contain vast fortunes of gold, rubies, sapphires and other precious stones in their statues, which are worshipped as idols. It is actually Hinduism’s reincarnation beliefs, protected rats, idols made of gold and jewels, wasted resources and superstitions that are causing much of the poverty and starvation in that country.

**Islam** has produced callous males who abuse females, engage in polygamy, slavery, slave raids, kidnapping, terrorism and suicide bombing.

**Communism** has produced commissars and comrades who have slaughtered tens of millions of people in the gulags and killing fields, in the name of freedom. Marxists have oppressed and impoverished millions more under their dictatorships, in the name of liberation.

**Socialism** has impoverished countless countries and eroded economies, in the name of uplifting the poor.

**Secular humanist education** is producing increasingly selfish, shallow, stupid and superficial socialists.

### **Ideas and Actions Have Consequences**

All suffering ultimately is a result of mankind’s sin and rebellion against Almighty God. Suffering is intrinsically related to the Fall. There was no suffering prior to sin. Suffering in this world is part of the complex of God’s judgment on the world. Everything has consequences.

**Sexual sin** often leads to sexually transmitted diseases, herpes, gonorrhoea, AIDS, etc. **Gambling** often leads to poverty and bankruptcy. **Adultery** often leads to divorce. **Gossip** separates friends. Our **selfishness** hurts others. **Lies** lead to bondage. **Selfishness, cowardice, pride, greed, envy** and **hate** cause untold suffering and pain. **Passivity** and **neutrality** causes even more suffering. Inactivity and a heartless refusal to get involved compounds the problem. *“All that is necessary for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.”*

### **But Why Do the Innocent Suffer?**

We all have personally seen many examples of this principle of what a man sows that shall he reap. However, we also know many cases of people suffering as a result of no fault of their own. So, many people ask: **Why do bad things happen to good people?**

Many are innocent victims of other people’s unrighteous behaviour. Yet the Christian, confident in the Sovereignty of God, can declare: **“And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those are the called according to His purpose.”** Romans 8:28

## **What You Meant For Evil God Used For Good**

In the book of Genesis we read of the treachery of Joseph's brothers selling him to slave traders. For twelve years Joseph suffered unjustly as a slave and as a prisoner in Egypt. Yet God raised him to being the Governor of Egypt to save the lives of millions from starvation. Later Joseph could declare to his brothers: ***"But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive."*** Genesis 50:20

## **No One Is Good Except God Alone**

Of course, we could point out that no one is really good, not in the light of a Holy God as revealed in His Law. *"As it is written: There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none that understands; there is none that seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one. ...For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."* Romans 3:10-23

Instead of asking why do bad things happen to good people we should rather ask: **why do so many good things happen to bad people?** We generally receive much better than we deserve. God is most patient and gracious.

## **Why Did Jesus Suffer?**

Another question which we should ask: Why did Jesus Christ have to suffer, He was the only truly good and righteous person who ever lived. Yet Jesus was misunderstood, slandered, falsely accused and lied about, hated and betrayed. He was forsaken by His followers, unjustly arrested, illegally tried and wrongly condemned. Jesus was mocked, beaten, whipped, insulted, slapped and crucified. Why did the Righteous One have to suffer? He suffered on behalf of us, He died for our sins. The just in the place of the unjust (1Peter 3:18).

## **Love in Action**

God is compassionate. He entered into this world and suffered everything that we have suffered, and much more. He even experienced the wrath of hell, so that we would not have to. During His ministry on earth our Lord Jesus gave sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, speech to the dumb, He made the cripples walk, cleansed the lepers, and even raised the dead.

The shortest verse in the Bible is: *"Jesus wept."* (John 11:35). The Bible tells us to weep with those who weep and laugh with those who laugh. Although Jesus was about to demonstrate His power to raise Lazarus from the dead, He was moved in Spirit and grieved over the suffering that His friends were going through. We do not serve a God who is unmoved by our afflictions.

## **Purpose in Pain**

We need to recognise that there may be a purpose behind our pains. Yes, we may be the innocent victim of somebody else's unrighteous behaviour. The Lord may also be chastising me for disobedience to His Word. The suffering could also be part of the suffering for righteousness which all Christians are called to. The Lord does send circumstances and people to help us develop our spiritual muscle and character.

***"You therefore must endure hardship as a good soldier of Jesus Christ."*** 2 Timothy 2:3

Military training is designed to shape characters, and teach skills to save lives.

***“Yes, and all who desire to live Godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”***

2 Timothy 3:12

***“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honour and glory at the Revelation of Jesus Christ ...”*** 1 Peter 1:6-7

***“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. But let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”*** James 1:2-4

***“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings, that when His Glory is revealed, you will also be glad with exceeding joy.”***

1 Peter 4:12-13

Suffering can be used by God to purify us and to prepare us for special service. All of God’s servants have known suffering while God purged and prepared them for His service. Moses was forty years in the wilderness before becoming the deliverer of Israel. David was an outlaw and a fugitive for many years before becoming king of Israel.

***“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”*** Romans 8:18

As pioneer missionary, C.T. Studd declared: *“If Jesus Christ be God and died for me, then no sacrifice can be too great for me to make for Him.”*

### **Search Me O God!**

When we experience trials we need to search our hearts to see if there are some wicked ways in us that could be grounds for God to be correcting us. This chastisement is designed to lead us to repentance and to full restoration of fellowship. Is there something God is saying to you? Is there an error of your life that needs sorting out? You may not know why you are suffering, but it is important that you respond in a Godly way.

***“For to this you were called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that you should follow His steps.”*** 1 Peter 2:21

### **Serving the Suffering**

Our Lord, Jesus Christ taught in the parable of The Good Samaritan that we are to love our neighbour by alleviating the suffering of others. For this reason, throughout the last 2,000 years, millions of Christians have been rescuing abandoned babies, adopting orphans, opposing abortion, founding and maintaining hospitals in all corners of the globe (even in the most remote and dangerous areas), providing emergency relief, assistance and projects to uplift the poor and the needy. Christians have steadfastly opposed the slave trade and slavery, abolished infanticide, widow burning and cannibalism. Feeding the hungry and launching missions to bring countless

millions to Christ are just some of the many ways in which Christians throughout history have worked to reduce suffering worldwide.

### **The Worst Suffering Possible**

We also need to consider what is the worst suffering imaginable? The answer is nothing that we will experience in this life. The most extreme pain and suffering will be experienced in an eternity in Hell, separated from God forever. The Bible clearly teaches that those who reject Christ will be cast into the Lake of Fire. Some people raise issues of suffering and evil in the world as some kind of theoretical smoke screen that they can use to reject the free gift of Salvation from Almighty God. We need to warn people about the reality of a Holy God, whose Laws we have violated, and of the very real danger of an eternity of regrets in Hell. “**..God...now commands all men everywhere to repent.**” Acts17:30

### **Making Sense Out of Suffering**

All suffering ultimately is a result of mankind's rebellion against Almighty God. No one is sinless except Jesus Christ and He suffered so that we would not have to suffer eternally for our sins. There are no truly good people on the earth. We are all sinful in the light of God's Law. We can learn and grow through suffering. Pain can yield positive results in our character development. What others mean for evil, God can use for good. God works all things together for good for those who love Him and are called according to His purpose.

Jesus Christ came and shared in human suffering - He suffered more than any man. We can, and we must, help alleviate the suffering of others. Human suffering is ultimately caused by human sin and God nailed that problem to the Cross almost two thousand years ago.

*The audio CD of this message by Dr. Peter Hammond is available from Livingstone Fellowship  
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