

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW EVIL & SUFFERING?



A Study Outline

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Why Does God Allow Evil & Suffering?

I. THE DILEMMA

- A. If...
 - 1. God exists...
 - 2. God is all-good...
 - 3. God is all-powerful...
 - 4. Evil exists...
- B. Then...
 - 1. Why does God allow evil to exist?
 - 2. Why does God allow Christians to suffer?

II. POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- A. There is no God (Atheism).
- B. God is not all-good (Pantheism).
- C. God is not all-powerful (ancient polytheism¹, process theology).
- D. There is no evil (Christian Science, Hinduism², New Age thinking).
- E. God is not present to combat evil (Deism, "clockmaker" concept of God).
- F. All propositions are true; God exists, is all-good, is all-powerful, and evil exists (orthodox Christianity, Judaism, Islam).

III. TWO TYPES OF EVIL

- A. Natural evil: Earthquakes, tornados, floods, disease, hurricanes, lightning.³
- B. Moral evil: Bad choices made by created beings--war, murder, robbery, immorality, Satanic and demonic influences, etc.

IV. WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN EVIL, SIN AND SUFFERING?

- A. Sin is rejecting God.

¹ Ancient polytheism limited God's power by splitting God into many little gods, some good, and some evil. Peter Kreeft & Ronald K. Tacelli, Handbook of Christian Apologetics, p. 129

² Hinduism accepts what is called the law of karma, that is, all suffering comes from punishment by a just God for evil deeds in a previous experience. In doing so, evil is not erased, but suffering comes from punishment, rather than the direct result of evil.

³ Of course, sometimes the two types of evil are intermingled, such as when flooding results in loss of human life due to poor planning or shoddy construction of buildings.

1. Sin is fundamental unbelief, distrust and rejection of God and human displacement of God as the center of reality.⁴
 2. It is "missing the mark," Grk. *hamartia* (Rom. 6:23).
 3. It is going beyond an established limit, transgression (Ps. 19:13; Isa. 53:8).
 4. It is deviating from a right course, iniquity (Ps. 25:11).
 5. It is rebellion against God (Ps. 106:43).
 6. It is deceitfulness; lying, cheating or misleading others (Heb. 13:3).
 7. It is perverting the truth (Prov. 15:4).
- B. Evil is choosing to do something wicked.
1. Evil may be defined as something that is morally wrong or bad, wicked, harmful, or injurious, usually accompanied by misfortune or suffering.
 2. Evil is something that gives rise to wickedness and sin.
- C. Suffering is the natural consequence of sin and evil.
1. To suffer is to feel pain or distress, to sustain loss, injury, harm, or punishment.⁵
 2. But we are not assume that all suffering comes from sin (cf. Job, John 9:1-2)⁶

V. WHERE DOES EVIL COME FROM?

- A. Not God
1. God did not create evil. Everything has come from God, and the creation narrative of the Bible says five times that "it was good" (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25).
 2. "Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong" (Job 34:10b).
 3. God is responsible for making evil possible, but free creatures are responsible for making it actual.⁷
- B. Man
1. Man is given the freedom to choose (Gen. 2:16-17)
 2. For God to create beings in his own image, who are capable of sustaining a personal relationship with Him, they must be beings who are capable of freely loving Him and following his will without coercion.
 3. But creatures who are free to choose can either love God, hate Him, or ignore Him.
 4. Creatures who are free to follow God's will must also be free to reject it.
 5. Man chooses to reject God (Rom. 1:18-21).
 6. Evil and suffering are the direct result of rejecting God (Rom. 1:23-32).
 7. Man has a sinful evil nature that brings suffering to himself (Prov. 5:22; 29:6; Isa. 59:1-7; Rom. 6:12; 1 John 2:16; Jas. 4:1).
 8. When people act in ways outside the will of God, great evil and suffering is the ultimate

⁴ Stanley J. Grenz, David Guretzki and Cherith Fee Nordling. *Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*. (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1999), p. 107.

⁵ www.dictionary.com

⁶ This is contrary to the retribution principle which states that the good person will receive blessings and the evil person will receive evil. See "Retribution Principle in the Book of Job," Shannon Rainwater, May 2, 2008. <<http://biblegrounds.com/2008/05/02/retribution-principle-in-the-book-of-job>>. Accessed January 15, 2015.

⁷ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999), p. 219.

result.⁸

C. Satan and his demons

1. The whole world is under the control of the evil one (1 John 5:19; Matt. 4:8-9).
2. Satan was allowed by God to cause Job to suffer (Job 1:6-12).
3. Satan finds great pleasure in ruining God's creation and causing misery and suffering in people (Matt. 13:24-28, parable of the weeds).
4. Ever since the Garden of Eden Satan has been opposing God and the work of Jesus Christ (Gen. 3:14-15).

VI. WHY DOES GOD ALLOW EVIL & SUFFERING?

A. Why didn't God create a world without evil and suffering?

1. He did (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25).
2. Everything has come from God, and the creation narrative of the Bible says five times that "it was good."⁹

B. Why is God so slow in doing away with evil and suffering? (2 Pet. 3:7-9).

1. God's does not operate on man's timing (2 Pet. 3:8).
2. Jesus is waiting so more sinners will repent and turn to him (2 Pet. 3:9).

"Pain is God's
megaphone to warn a
morally deaf world."
C. S. Lewis

C. If moral evil is due to man's choices then does natural evil come from God?

1. God did not create a world with natural disasters. Everything has come from God, and the creation narrative of the Bible says five times that "it was good" (Gen. 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25).
2. Disasters in nature are not caused by God, rather disasters are due to a mutilation of God's natural laws as a result of sin.¹⁰

D. The problem of suffering in the world cannot always be easily explained, yet there may be some reasons why it is permitted by God. Here are a few.

1. Suffering can make people turn to God. Perhaps there are people who would never sense their utter dependence on God apart from experiencing the intense pain that they do in life (Ps. 119:71; John 9:1-3; 1 Pet. 2:19).
2. Suffering may be the active judgment of God. For example:
 - The judgment of evil people in Noah's day (Gen. 6:13).
 - The judgment of evil people in Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24-25).
 - The judgment of Pharaoh and Egypt (Exod. 12:12).

⁸ This line of thinking is known as the "free will defense" concerning the problem of evil. For more on this, see Michael Lacewing's "The Problem of Evil and the Free Will Defense," <<http://documents.routledge-interactive.s3.amazonaws.com/9781138793934/AS/Godandtheworld/Problemofevilandfreewill.pdf>>. Accessed January 14, 2015.

⁹ Acts 17:30 might at first suggest that God overlooked some sins in the past ("In the past God overlooked such ignorance, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent") but in this passage Paul is stating that God did not bring immediate judgment to the world in previous times, but warns of the coming judgment). See ESV notes.

¹⁰ Exactly how this happens is not fully disclosed in Scripture. In some cases God's judgment of sin took place through disasters—the Flood, Sodom & Gomorrah, but we cannot say that natural disasters are always judgments of God. Gary Poole & Judson Polin, *Tough Questions*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998, 2003, p. 75

3. Suffering may somehow prepare us for heaven. It may be that the suffering we experience in this life is somehow preparatory to our existence in the life to come (2 Cor. 4:16-18).
4. God may have reasons beyond our understanding. Even apart from the revelation of Scripture, there may be other possible unknown reasons behind God's permission of evil (Job. 38:1—42:3; Isa. 55:8-9).

VII. CAN ANYTHING GOOD COME OUT OF EVIL AND SUFFERING?

- A. YES. It can **glorify God**.
 - Suffering can provide an opportunity for God to display his glory-- to make evident his mercy, faithfulness, power and love in the midst of painful circumstances (John. 9:1-3).
- B. YES. It can **strengthen our faith**.
 - Suffering can also allow us to give proof of the genuineness of our faith, and even serve to strengthen our faith (1 Pet. 1:7).
 - As in the case of Job, our faithfulness in trial shows that we serve Him not merely for the benefits He offers, but for the love of God Himself (Job 13:15).
- C. YES. It can **strengthen his church**.
 - Severe trial also provides an opportunity for believers to demonstrate their love for one another as members of the body of Christ who "bear one another's burdens" (1 Cor. 12:26; Gal. 6:2).
 - As we are comforted by God in affliction, so we are better able to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:4).
- D. YES. It can **make us hungrier for God**.
 - Suffering also plays a key role in developing godly virtues, and in deterring us from sin. Paul recognized that his "thorn in the flesh" served to keep him from boasting, and promoted true humility and dependence on God (2 Cor. 12:7-9).
 - The psalmist recognized that his affliction had increased his determination to follow God's will (Ps. 119:71).
 - Even Jesus "learned obedience from the things He suffered" (Heb. 5:8). As a man He learned by experience the value of submitting to the will of God, even when it was the most difficult thing in the world to do.
- E. YES. It can **make us hungrier for heaven**.
 - Finally, evil and suffering can awaken in us a greater hunger for heaven, and for that time when God's purposes for these experiences will have been finally fulfilled, when pain and sorrow shall be no more (Rom. 8:23-24; Rev. 21:4).¹¹

"Suffering can make you better or it can make you bitter."
N. L. Geisler

VIII. FOUR WAYS TO ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING?

1. Encourage them to **express it**.
 - It is evident from Scripture that when we suffer it is not unnatural to experience

¹¹ Rick Rood, *The Problem of Evil*, Leadership U, 2002. [<http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/evil.html>]. Accessed January 14, 2015.

emotional pain, nor is it unspiritual to express it (Ps. 62:8).

2. Encourage them to **draw comfort from God's Word**.
 - Reflect on Scriptures which assure us that God knows and cares about our situation, and promises to be with us to comfort and uphold us (Isa. 53:3; Heb. 2:18; 4:15).
 - Rest assured that God will ultimately bring good out of evil (Rom. 8:18, 28).
3. Encourage them to **receive comfort from others**.
 - When we suffer, those who love us will comfort us with their care (2 Cor. 1:3-4).
4. Remind them that evil and suffering are **only temporary** (Rev. 21:1-4)¹²



Where to Get More Information

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¹² For those who are born-again (John 3:3).