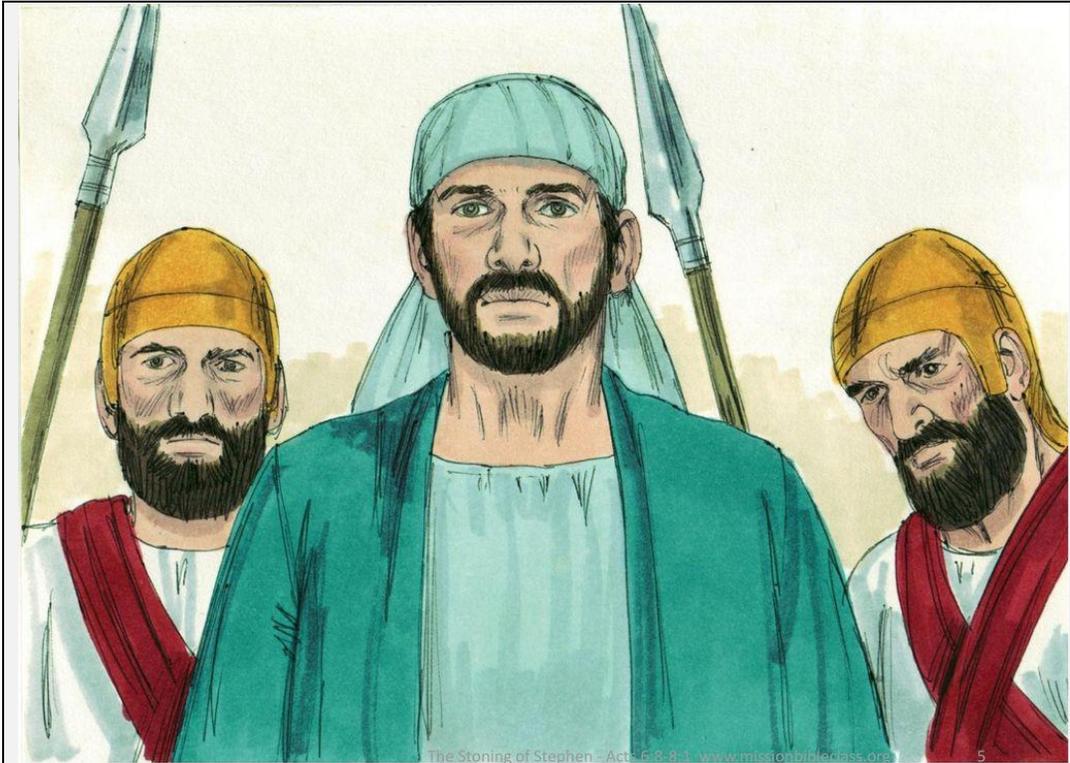


PART 10: CHRISTLIKE

ACTS 6:8--8:3

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MAIN IDEA

God's mission of spreading the gospel was advanced through the remarkable Christlike life and ministry of Stephen, who suffered martyrdom for his faith in Christ.

THE DILEMMA: Why did God allow Stephen, a great witness of Jesus Christ, to be stoned to death. God exists...God is all-good...God is all-powerful...evil exists. Then...why does God allow evil to exist? Why does God allow Christians to suffer?¹

I. 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

¹ The attempt to justify or defend God in the face of evil is what theologians call "theodicy."

says five times that "it was good."²

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).
3. God will judge evil someday at the Great White Throne

C. 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.
2. 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).
3. Suffering may be the active judgment of God.
4. 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).
5. 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).

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

A. YES. It can _____.

1. 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 _____.

1. Suffering can also allow us to give proof of the genuineness of our faith, and even serve to strengthen our faith (1 Pet. 1:6-7).
2. 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 _____.

1. 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).
2. As we are comforted by God in affliction, so we are better able to comfort others (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

² 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.

D. YES. It can make you _____.

1. 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).
2. The psalmist recognized that his affliction had increased his determination to follow God's will (Ps. 119:71).
3. 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 _____.

1. 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 (Phil. 3:20-21; Rom. 8:23-24; Rev. 21:4).³

III. APPLICATION: HOW TO ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO ARE SUFFERING

A. Encourage them to _____.

1. It is evident from Scripture that when we suffer it is not unnatural to experience emotional pain, nor is it unspiritual to express it (Ps. 62:8).

B. Encourage them to draw _____ from God's Word.

1. 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).
2. Rest assured that God will ultimately bring good out of evil (Rom. 8:18, 28).

C. Encourage them to _____ comfort from others.

1. When we suffer, those who love us will comfort us with their care (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

D. Remind them that evil and suffering are _____ (Rev. 21:1-4)⁴

"Suffering can make you *better* or it can make you *bitter*."

N. L. Geisler

³ Rick Rood, *The Problem of Evil*, Leadership U, 2002.
[<http://www.leaderu.com/orgs/probe/docs/evil.html>]. Accessed January 14, 2015.

⁴ For those who are born-again (John 3:3).