

Reconciling a Good and Powerful God with an Evil world

When wicked and painful events of life occur, people wonder how an all-powerful and all-good God could allow such things. People wrestle with these competing realities and question whether God is indeed good and sovereign over the events in His creation. How could He--or why would He--allow such grievous things? Harsh events occur, such as disease and death and even morally wicked events like the Sandy Hook school shooting on December 14, 2012, the Holocaust, child abuse and many other instances of wicked, murderous acts. The existence of God, with all His biblical attributes of goodness and sovereignty, and the co-existence of evil and pain appear as contradictory realities to many. Yet the Bible teaches both truths. The Christian, as he submits to the authority of Scripture, can reconcile this apparent paradox. There is really no problem at all. There will always be a degree of mystery, with the secret things belonging to the Lord (Deut 29:29). From the starting point of Scripture we can affirm the biblical revelation of God's goodness and sovereignty and His allowance of wickedness, and leave the reasons to God Himself. He is not obligated to consult with His creation as to His purposes or how He executes those purposes. Notice with me several Biblical affirmations.

First of all, the Bible affirms the fact of **evil's existence**. You might say, "That's patently obvious to the casual observer." Yet, we accept the reality of pain and suffering not on our experience alone, but because it is revealed in Scripture as a fact. Since the fall of man, he has lived subject to the consequences of the Fall on the earth which God Himself cursed (Gen 3:16-24). Since that fateful day, the world has been subject to famine, earthquakes, fires, genetic defects, tsunamis, and other painful effects as a result of the fall. Now, "man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7).

There exists *natural* evil, in the form of disease and disaster, and *moral* evil, which is spiritual in nature. This includes all sin (i.e. man's personal and inherent bent, attitude, and course of thinking which is antithetical to God's ways). In other words, there is the spiritual realm that must be considered, not just physical events. Life also consists of *supernatural* evil, or spiritual warfare against demonic forces (Eph 6:12; 1 Jn 2:18). So the Bible affirms the dreadful reality of pain, suffering, and sin in this world.

Second, the Bible states the fact of **God's existence**. He is the one true and living God, revealed in Scripture (Jer 10:10). He exists with all His attributes (e.g. holiness, love, justice, and absolute sovereignty, etc.). He owns all (1 Chron 29:11); controls all (1 Chron 29:12); and nothing happens outside of His perfectly ordained plan as He "works all things according to the counsel of His will" (Eph 1:11).

He has called forth famine when it has served His purposes (Ps 105:16) and He has also sent in lions to attack His enemies in order to accomplish His purpose (2 Ki 17:25). God is the One who sent the worldwide flood, the greatest "natural" calamity that ever hit the earth (Gen 6-7). He is the sovereign One, the King of all earthly kings and Lord of all earthly lords, Who must be bowed to in allegiance (1 Tim 6:15). He is the One who created all things by His own will and for His own glory (Rev 4:11). He does what He sees fit and views evil, pain, and turmoil as no disruption to His plan.

Third, **GOD Himself wills evil's existence**. Without God's permission, evil could not exist. It is a part of His perfect plan, not a surprise or interruption to His plan which must be compensated for. Many discussions on theodicy (reconciling or justifying a good and sovereign God with an evil world), appeal to a man-centered theology, such as the "free-will defense," trying to get God "off the hook." But God does not sleep or slumber (Ps 121:3-4). He hasn't left the helm of the ship when tragedy strikes. God exercises His sovereign will over good *and* bad things to point people to Himself and to cause them to know: "I am the LORD, and there is no other..." (Isa 45:5-7, 9-10).

There are only a few options to consider. Either God did not know evil would happen (like the heresy that openness theology espouses); He does not have power to overcome it (the fallacy of process theology); or He has chosen not to stop it for some hidden, higher reason. Who are we, the created, to answer back and question God? Is finite man to stand in judgment of the infinite God(see the argument of Rom 9:20)?

God alone is the One Who created earth and man. God, in a mysterious way, stirs up man to accomplish His purposes (Isa 45:12-13). The issue is not some weakness in God, but the flawed logic of man. We can not seek to bring God down to our erroneously perceived "higher" court of man's justice. God Himself establishes what is right and just (Deut 32:4). We must recognize that God does not view man's will or wisdom above His

own. He does what He does because it is right. He's the absolute standard for what is right and only He can see the end from the beginning (Isa 46:10).

We must conclude and rest in the fact that **God has a purpose for pain and evil** to exist. He created a world that exists with pain, evil, and trouble to put the full array of His glorious attributes on display. God explicitly stated this when He said to Pharaoh, "For this very purpose I raised you up, to demonstrate my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed throughout the whole earth" (Rom 9:17).

Though God did not cause sin, He receives more glory from His creatures because of the existence of it. Rather than being less glorious, He is more glorious because of sin's existence. If sin had not occurred, how would God's righteousness be demonstrated (Rom 3:5)? We can only understand His righteousness against the backdrop of unrighteousness (Rom 3:25-26).

Christians, redeemed from slavery of their sin, can glory in their Redeemer and the glorious redemption He has accomplished. Through the existence of sin, God can also sovereignly display His love (Rom 5:8). Rather than questioning the goodness and love of God, people should look to the cross of Calvary, the greatest display of love, against the backdrop of sin and injustice.

Furthermore, to allow or will sin's existence, God demonstrates His wrath. As a holy God, He has as much right to show His wrath as His love (Rom 9:22).

Finally, God demonstrates His mercy (Rom 9:23). Before sin's existence, God was not fully worshipped for His glory, love, wrath, holiness, and mercy. But now, against the backdrop of sin, rebels, and unrighteousness, He is exceedingly glorious. Because God has saved such great sinners, He remains a glorious Savior!

Therefore, when experiencing pain, turmoil, and other effects of sin, we should praise, rather than blame, God. His ways are unfathomable (Rom 11:33).

One masterful account in Scripture which exposes this truth is that of Joseph. His brothers were jealous (Gen 37:11), hated him (Gen 37:4, 5, 8), wanted to kill him (Gen 37:20), cast him into a pit (Gen 37:24), and sold him into slavery (Gen 37:28). Yet Joseph recognized the hidden hand of God's providence working through painful events: "God sent me before you to preserve life" (Gen 45:5). What they meant for evil, God meant for good (Gen 50:20).

If you are a Christian, one who has turned from your sin and placed your faith in Christ alone, then you recognize the greatness of Christ Jesus rescuing you from your sin and hell. We would not be so transcendent in our worship, adoration, and praise if we hadn't been rescued from such evil. Job, in his suffering, became a stellar example of this. He kept asking the wrong question: Why. God never answered why Job suffered so greatly. Contrariwise, God offered Himself as the One to be worshipped and extolled. God pointed out how ignorant Job was to the inner workings of God's plan (Job 38:1-4; 40:1-9; 42:1-6). Rather than understand God's mysterious ways, Job would have to trust that God's sovereign wisdom and plans were best. God replaced the question of *why* with *who*. Whom do you worship and turn to when difficulty strikes?

Unless we get to this point of worshipping the good and sovereign God Who works all things for His glory and the good of His followers (Rom 8:28), the hurtful events of life will be the emphasis, rather than the Omnipotent God, Who is deserving of all adoration. Rather than bringing God down to the level of human appeal, we must rise to greater heights of worship and submissively realize that God is not like us, but He comes near us as Immanuel--God with us. He came to save man from sin and death. He came to reconcile rebellious man with Himself, to deliver him from hell, and to give him an eternal home in His presence, where all wrongs are done away with (Rev 21:1-4).

This is a day which is filled with sin, mourning, pain, and injustices. But in heaven, the saints will spend forever bowing at Christ's feet and singing "Worthy is the Lamb" (Rev 4:11; 5:9-10, 13-14).

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