

Suffering : Why Does God Allow Us To Suffer?

By Mark Hatfield

1. When you think of tornadoes, inoperable cancer, car accidents, terrorist attacks, AIDS, drive-by shootings, child abuse etc., you have to ask how a just God could allow such things to take place.
2. In mentioning any one of these circumstances that people face, the chills run down our spines and we feel sick to our stomachs that anyone would have to go through such suffering.
3. If you stop and think about what really stirs up all our anger, fear and outrage, you are led to only one conclusion: evil.
4. Some people focus on the randomness of nature and place the blame there. Some accuse a couple sinister but powerful people. Some let the cause rest within themselves. Others point to devils or evil spirits as the culprit behind such wickedness. Unfortunately, at one time or another, each of us has probably blamed God for what has happened in our life.
5. Let me ask you: Where does evil come from? Do we ascribe it to God...after all He made everything; He must have been involved in making evil. Right?
6. What exactly is evil anyways? Is evil a part of God, like the "Dark Side" of the force? Maybe God is testing us -- He is watching to see how we'll handle all of this pain and agony. Maybe it's punishment -- He is telling us, "This is what you had coming to you for the way that you conduct yourself". Or maybe this world was created to be good and like a bad science experiment, it got out of control.

I. Where Did Evil Come From?

A. Something's wrong here!

1. Look around us. We live in a messed up world. This is a dark place to live, and while at times a ray of beauty or hope shines through, it is clouded over by the next senseless murder or "natural disaster".
2. Was the Garden of Eden ever a real place? Did such a place of perfection ever really exist, where man was in personal fellowship with God and no evil had yet been presented to the world?
3. In a quote from his novel "Catch 22" Joseph Heller shows Yossarian holding a conversation with Lt. Scheisskopf's wife that says:

"Don't tell me God works in mysterious ways. There's nothing so mysterious about it. He's not working at all. He's playing. Or else He's forgotten all about us...How much reverence can you have for a Supreme being who finds it necessary to include such phenomena as phlegm and tooth decay in his divine system of creation? What in the world was going through that warped, evil, scatological mind of his when he robbed old people of the ability to control their bowel movements? Why in the world did he ever create pain?...Why couldn't he have used a doorbell instead to notify us, or one of his celestial choirs? Or a system of red-and blue neon tubes right in the middle of each person's forehead?...What a colossal, immortal blunderer! When you consider the opportunity and power he had to really do a job, and

then look at the stupid ugly little mess he made of it instead , his sheer incompetence is almost staggering... Why, no self-respecting businessman would hire a burglar like him as even a shipping clerk!’ ‘Stop it! Stop it!’ Lt. Scheisskopf’s wife screamed suddenly... ‘STOP IT.’ ‘I thought you didn’t believe in God’, he asked bewildered. ‘I don’t she sobbed... But the God I don’t believe in is a good God, a just God, a merciful God. He’s not the mean and stupid God you make him out to be.’”

4. Who can believe in a God of goodness behind those suffering in the world? Most people are content to conclude that He is either a poor creator or a poor redeemer.
- B. What is evil and where did it come from?
1. Philosophers have categorized two different kinds of evil:
 - Moral Evil - man’s own inhumanity to man, based on hate, greed, or overindulgence
 - Natural Evil - evil’s brought on by natural causes in the world, such as floods, earthquakes, or tornadoes and different sorts of diseases, accidents, and injuries.
 2. Cliffe Knechtle states, “The vast majority of human evil and suffering is a direct result of human irresponsibility.”
 3. The question still remains, isn’t God responsible for evil since He created all things?
 4. Epicurus wrote in 350 B.C. “Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to; or he cannot and does not want to. If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, but does not want to, he is wicked. But, if God both can and wants to abolish evil, then how come evil is in the world?”
 5. David Hume echoed these words when he wrote: “Is he willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is impotent. Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent. Is he both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”
 6. Once we put things into proper perspective we can see a whole different side of God and His position toward evil:
 - a. God created the universe as very good, without evil and suffering.
 - b. God created perfect human beings in His image.
 - c. God created humans with a complete ability to freely choose between staying in harmony with God or rejecting Him.
 - d. Humankind freely chose to turn away from God.
 - e. Evil and suffering entered the world as a result of that separation from God and his goodness.
 - f. Since the time that evil entered the world, God has been seeking to restore a perfect fellowship with mankind again through His plan of redemption.
 7. Norman Geisler said it like this: “We have a real choice about what we do. God made us that way so we could be like Him and could love freely (forced love is not love at all, is it?). But in making us that way, he also allowed for the possibility of evil. To be free we had to have not only the opportunity to choose good, but also the ability to choose evil. That was the risk God knowingly took. That doesn’t make him responsible for evil. He created the fact of freedom; we perform the acts of freedom. He [God] made evil possible; men made evil actual”.

8. So now we finally have the proper perspective.
9. Cliff Knechtle, whom we quoted earlier said, "Genesis 1 clearly communicates that when God created, all his creation was very good. God did not create evil, suffering or death. He created us to enjoy himself, each other and to celebrate his gift of life. Genesis 3 is the tragic record of how man and woman chose to reject God. The Bible, history books and the morning newspaper record how an immeasurable amount of evil has followed in the wake of human rebellion against God. The vast majority of this carnage is a direct result of human choice."
10. The same author continues, "Babies are born with multiple birth defects. Genetic disorders plague many of us. An earthquake levels a city, and thousands lose their lives in the rubble. The Bible teaches that there is not always a one-to-one correspondence between sin and suffering. When we human beings told God to shove off, he partially honored our request. Nature began to revolt. The earth was cursed. Genetic breakdown and disease began. Pain and death became a part of the human experience. The Good creation was marred. We live in an unjust world. We are born into a world made chaotic and unfair by humanity in revolt against its Creator"

II. What Should We Do About Evil?

A. Recognize that it is undesirable

1. In the Handbook of Christian Apologetics the authors wrote, "The fact that we do not naturally accept this world full of injustice, suffering, sin, disease and death-- the very fact of our outrage at evil is a clue that we are in touch with a standard of goodness by which we judge this world as defective, as falling drastically short of the mark. The fact that we judge something evil might even be developed into an argument for the existence of the standard of Perfect Goodness implied in our judgment, and thus for the existence of the God of perfect goodness whom evil's existence seems to disprove." (Romans 5:3-4; 8:18, 28; 12:9, 15)
2. When a reporter is seen interviewing a couple in front of their little boy's school because as he was leaving with a friend, they were both struck down by gunfire in a drive-by shooting, you have to wonder why these innocent souls? He didn't do anything to anyone. As the interview turns to a school picture of the boy with missing front teeth and a carefree smile, you begin to ask these tough questions.
3. How can God sit by and let evil affect the innocent, the gentle, the helpless souls who mean no harm? This is a fair question, put before a God who claims to be just. Why do the innocent suffer? (Read Psalm 73:3-5, 12-14).
4. All suffering must be viewed in the perspective that it is either the result of an act of nature or lack thereof, or one or more beings that are either human or demonic, or finally a poor choice on the part of the individual suffering. It could also be a combination of all of these. (Matthew 5:45)
5. John Wenham said, "Because sin deserves death and we are all sinners, it means that all our mercies are undeserved mercies. Any apparent unfairness in God's treatment of us arises not because some have too much punishment, but because some of us appear to have too little. None of us will ever receive harsher judgment than we ever deserve...The marvel is, in the biblical view, not that men die for their sins, but that we remain alive in spite of them." (I Pet. 4:19)

Conclusion

1. Let us view suffering from a proper perspective recognizing that God is loving and holy but He is also just. God could not force us to love Him. It had to be our choice. This is the choice that you are faced with at this time.
2. When mankind chooses to disregard the will of God it is called sin (I John 3:4). When sin is committed it leads to death (Rom. 6:23). Therefore, pain, suffering and death are not God's creation, but man's decision (Rom. 3:23).
3. A man once knelt by the graveside of his 16 year old son crying, "God, why me? Why did you allow this to happen? Where are you when I need you the most?" A preacher that happened to be walking by responded to his questions, "I am sorry about your loss; God knows what you are going through right now." The preacher then continued, "You see God is in the same place that He was when His own Son died. "
4. Jesus suffered the death of the cross so that you and I might live on in eternity. Don't blame God for evil, but trust in Him to save you from the wickedness that has corrupted the world from the beginning. He is the only one who can save you from suffering.