

# Why Does God Permit Evil?

**The question of the centuries which so many ask—and so few can answer**

A mother brought in her handsome, strapping 17-year-old son for appendix pain and found out he had cancer all through his body. Why?

In their home, a retarded man tries to intercede as his sister and father are being stabbed and beaten. He in turn is mercilessly beaten to death with a cane. His murderers steal two television sets and flee. Why? Why?

A young man riding alone on his bike is met by an on-coming motorist. She has been drinking; she cannot keep her car in her lane. He had so much to live for, but she had lived it up too much. His life suddenly, tragically is ended. Oh, why?

A Christian nation that has grown strong and mighty is built on the labor of millions of African slaves. How can this be?

In Bangladesh, a tidal wave strikes its coast—and 250,000 lives are washed away. Men, women and children. Why?

## Understanding God

The problem of understanding why there is evil is really a problem about understanding God. The question challenges the very belief in the existence of God. If He is so powerful, so all-knowing if He made us, if He cares anything about us, why do we see all around us so many "bad things happening to good people"?

Have the Scriptures overestimated the "love of God." Perhaps He is all-loving, but lacks the power to protect and save—except on occasion. No, in addition to being all-loving and all-powerful, our God is very just and He is also very wise. Just as an architect cannot be judged by his unfinished work, so God cannot be judged by His unfinished work with mankind. Walk down any street in a big city and you might find a boarded off section where construction is going on. There might be a lot of noise, a lot of dust and sparks flying up in the air. If you peek through the little hole, you might see a very big mess. Would you say to yourself, What a terrible, awful attempt at a building? No, you would wait and see. But still, can any glorious end ever begin to compensate for all the human suffering from the beginning of man's history?

## Root Cause of Evil

If the prevalence of evil is ever to be understood, the cause of it must be determined. The cause of evil is sin—not only personal sin, but inherited sin. Man has inherited a legacy of sin from not just his parents, but from the first parents. "Dying, thou shalt die" was the inheritance passed on (Genesis 2:17, mar.) "The fathers have eaten our grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezekiel 18:2). It was not literally the eating of grapes that plunged man into sin, suffering and death. But certainly it was Adam failing a simple test of obedience and eating of the forbidden fruit of the tree. "By the transgression of the one, death reigned though the one As in Adam all die " (Romans 5:17; I Corinthians 15:22)

How tragically and quickly jealousy and murder invaded our first parents' home. Their firstborn son killed their secondborn. Fellowship with God having been cut off, man's distressed mind affected his physical health and soon disease became entrenched in the human race. Man lost his dominion—dominion over himself and dominion over nature. So what about all the problems and calamities in nature? Are they then because of sin too? Actually as part of the curse, God also said, "Cursed is the ground for thy sake" (Genesis 3:17). Man would have to also endure an unfriendly earth as part of the penalty for sin.

But if God is so all-wise, could He not have prevented man's fall into sin and all the resulting evil? And is it really fair to condemn the whole race just because of two people? Is He really just?

## Man Can Make Choices

Yes, God could have prevented sin from entering the world. But He would have had to create man to be a robot without his own freedom of choice. Plants do not sin. Neither do animals for that matter. Nor the stars. But man was created in God's own image, an intelligent creation, with the ability to choose between right and wrong, good and evil. So how would you teach your children to prefer the good? You would admonish them, but you would permit them to experience the consequences of bad choices. If they were forever shielded from exposure to wrong choices, they would be forever subject to the possibility of going off in the wrong direction—but never self-directed on the right path. They might be innocent for a long time, but never virtuous.

Basically God left man to himself. All the atrocities, man's inhumanity to man, raging diseases and plagues through the centuries—are the results of that original choice. This choice set man on a downward escalator of degradation and suffering. Would it not have been more just to let everyone die and suffer for his own sins? If each human being was judged separately, each one would need a separate redeemer to die in his place. God in his infinite wisdom condemned all in one man Adam so that He could redeem all in His

one Son Jesus. "For if by one man's offense death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ" (Romans 5:17).

In God's plan for humanity to have a wonderful eternity, He not only anticipated man's fall but planned for man's recovery. In His love He planned for His Son to be the "lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8). But while God's infinite wisdom is evident by an arrangement needing only one Redeemer and His unfathomable love is demonstrated by the providing of His own Son as that Redeemer—not many of the human race have been blessed. It does not seem just. More seem to be suffering than are blessed. And Jesus died 2,000 years ago.

## **Then When will Evil End?**

Like any Architect who is a Builder, God has an optimum time table for accomplishing His master plan. Just when the population of humans has filled the capacity of earth and man has had his fill of the evil consequences of sin, God will provide an alternative in His Kingdom on earth. Those who died without hearing "the only Name under heaven whereby one might be saved" will come forth to learn, to grow and to live. "The inhabitants of the earth will learn righteousness They also that erred in spirit shall come to understanding " (Isaiah 26:9; 29:24). In this Kingdom righteousness will flourish. "and the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick" (Isaiah 33:24). Health and happiness will prevail. Why? Man will choose to love and obey God—and will love his fellow man. "They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, saith the LORD" (Isaiah 65:25).

Why will the vast majority of mankind choose to serve God? They will have something Adam did not have: Experience. What a perspective! What a contrast! They will have had the bitter experience of the permission of evil—the consequences of sin. The babies who died in infancy also will have an opportunity to grow up and learn by observation the dark history of man's fall. This history will be a vivid record left for all as a model for all eternity—even for future creations.

Man will remember their former experience with evil, but the bitter pain will be gone. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Revelation 21:4). Much like a woman in long difficult labor, she forgets her travail for the joy of her beautiful baby. "A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come; but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for the joy that a man is born into the world" (John 16:21). Likewise the anguish of all human suffering will be forgotten and replaced with the joy of serving God and living forever.

## Why Must Christians Suffer?

But why has this Kingdom been so long in coming—since Jesus died for man centuries ago? And those who have followed Christ, in fact, seem to have suffered more sometimes than the worldly or the godless! The call to follow Jesus Christ is a call to "take up my cross and follow me." Instead of a path strewn with roses, the Christian is promised grace for bearing up under every trial "such as is common to man" (1 Corinthians 10:13). This suffering belonging to the Christian is part of our professional training. Our profession is a "Priesthood" which will sympathetically help and teach those of man entering the Kingdom (1 Peter 2:5; Hebrews 5:1,2; Revelation 5:10; ).

If those in the world have lost sons, so must some of those in this sympathetic priesthood. If some have watched loved ones murdered, so must some in this priesthood. If some have lost jobs and dignity, so must many in this priesthood of believers. If some have suffered paralysis or long protracted disease, the believers learn sympathy and mercy by going through the same thing.

When mankind finally understands His Plan, God's wisdom, justice, love and power will be vindicated. Mankind will praise God, "Thou art worthy, O Lord to receive glory and honor and power: for thou hast created all things and for thy pleasure they are and were created" (Revelation 4:11). How could God possibly "receive power"? From those to whom He gave the freedom of choice will come back returned thanks. They will realize God's way was the best way for them too.