

Suffering

Epicurus (~300 BC) – If God is good then He would not want suffering. If God is great, all-powerful, then He could prevent suffering. Since there is suffering, then God cannot be both all-powerful and good. Otherwise God would stop all suffering.

This argument has persisted for thousands of years. So either we are not satisfied with the answer, or no sufficient answer has been given. I suspect the former.

I think one of the reasons that many people in our churches struggle with their faith is because the teaching and music give the message that the Christian life is supposed to be carefree and problem free.

At the cross, at the cross where I first saw the light, And the burden of my heart rolled away, It was there by faith I received my sight, And now I am happy all the day!

I. Why is there suffering in the world?

Similar to Epicurus, people continue to ask the same question in different forms:

- The late Dr. Carl Sagan said, “If God is all-powerful and loving, why do we see children dying, people suffering, and bad things happening to good people?” Surely such suffering and evil means that either He is not powerful or good, or that He doesn’t exist at all. If there’s a God of love and you say He is a merciful God and the Bible says God alone is infinite, why does He let all this death and suffering go on? Is He not powerful enough to overcome it? Surely an all-powerful God could stop all this death, destruction, and decay.”
- From Charles Darwin’s biography “Any vestige of belief in God left him when his daughter Annie died. Annie’s cruel death destroyed Charles’ tatters and belief in a moral and just universe. Later he would say that this period claimed the final death nail for his Christianity. Charles now took his stand as an unbeliever.”

This view assumes God is good and great, but nothing more. It does not take holiness into account. Or justice. If there is no punishment for those that violate good, then God would also not be good.

- If someone commits a crime and there is no punishment we say justice was not done.
- Sin is a crime against God and against His creation.
- God is holy. Holy means otherness. Also purity. But foremost otherly. God is Set Apart from others. Holy. He is not like any other. He is good. He is great. He is just. He is Holy.

The main problem with the “If God is all loving and all powerful, then there should not be suffering” is that it only ascribes 2 characteristics to God who is far more than 2 characteristics deep.

- It also fails to take into account freewill and choice that all people are given.

Psalm 100:5 For the LORD *is* good; His mercy *is* everlasting, And His truth *endures* to all generations.

- What does it mean that God is good?
- He is the source of all goodness.
- Any act can only be deemed good if there is a standard.
- God is the ultimate standard of good. It is His character. God always acts and behaves according to His nature.

When God created reality as we know it, He did so in six days, and when He was done, He said that everything was very good. In fact, if you look up this word in the original Hebrew, the translation should really be that it was “exceedingly good.”

- Originally, it was a beautiful world. It was exceedingly good. Pain, suffering, and death did not exist, and Adam and Eve walked freely with their God, uncovered and not ashamed in any way. But then, it became corrupted, all of it.

The Choice

- **Genesis 2:16-17** And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die."
- **Genesis 3:4-5** Then the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."
- At that pivotal moment in history a choice was made that altered the course of humanity, sending shock waves forever into the future; spreading lies, pain, isolation, and death to all generations.
- *By their choice they put distance between themselves and God. Before, they had walked and talked with God. Now when they heard his approach, they hid in the shrubbery. An awkward separation had crept in to spoil the intimacy. And every quiver of disappointment in our own relationship with God is an aftershock from their initial act of rebellion.* – Phillip Yancey

Throughout Scripture, the Bible points to this event—"the fall" of man—as the origin of death.

- In Romans 5:12 Paul states, "Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned."
- Romans 6:23 it asserts that "the wages of sin is death,"
- In 1 Corinthians 15:56 we read, "The sting of death is sin."

Romans 8:20-22 ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected *it* in hope; ²¹ because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs together until now.

- This is why natural disasters occur – part of the curse on this world.

Please understand the implications of this: It's not God's fault there's death in the world. It's our fault. And just like Adam, we would much rather point to someone else, or something else, rather than take responsibility for it ourselves.

- **Jeremiah 17:9** "The heart *is* deceitful above all *things*, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?
- Instead of saying, "Look what sin did to the world!" You know what we want to say? "Why does God do that?" When we disobey, we are truly committing high treason against the God of creation. Do you realize how bad that sin is? Just look at what it has done to the world!

If love is a choice, suffering is a possibility. Freewill. If you can choose love you can also choose hate. Right or wrong.

- **Isaiah 59:1-2** Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. ² But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden *His* face from you, so that He will not hear.

For God to remove suffering from the world then He would have to remove our ability to choose evil. We would lose all freewill.

II. Why does God allow suffering to continue after we are saved?

After we got saved, aren't we set free from the curse of sin and death?

- Yes, but we live in a world that is not saved. One day we will, but that's jumping ahead.
- Also, victory over sin and death are conditions applied to our Spirit. We do gain eternal life. We are free of the consequences of sin. This is part of our inheritance. But we still live in a world that is under sin and death.

Consider Daniel, Hananiah, Mishaël, and Azariah.

- **Daniel 1:1** In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it.

- **Daniel 1:3** Then the king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring some of the children of Israel and some of the king's descendants and some of the nobles,
- **Daniel 1:6-7** Now from among those of the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. ⁷ To them the chief of the eunuchs gave names: he gave Daniel *the name* Belteshazzar; to Hananiah, Shadrach; to Mishael, Meshach; and to Azariah, Abed-Nego.
- They are facing the same punishment as everyone else, although they were not unfaithful. God punishes the nation, and they are part of that nation.

John the Baptist was wrongfully imprisoned.

- **Matthew 11:2-6** And when John had heard in prison about the works of Christ, he sent two of his disciples ³ and said to Him, "Are You the Coming One, or do we look for another?" ⁴ Jesus answered and said to them, "Go and tell John the things which you hear and see: ⁵ *The* blind see and *the* lame walk; *the* lepers are cleansed and *the* deaf hear; *the* dead are raised up and *the* poor have the gospel preached to them. ⁶ And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."
- John's suffering caused him to doubt
- Jesus did not rescue him
- And Jesus said not to be offended by this

This Psalm written by Asaph

Psalm 73:11-14 And they say, "How does God know? And is there knowledge in the Most High?" ¹² Behold, these *are* the ungodly, Who are always at ease; They increase *in* riches. ¹³ Surely I have cleansed my heart *in* vain, And washed my hands in innocence. ¹⁴ For all day long I have been plagued, And chastened every morning.

(But look at his conclusion) Psalm 73:16-17 When I thought *how* to understand this, It *was* too painful for me— ¹⁷ Until I went into the sanctuary of God; *Then* I understood their end.

There is a purpose to the suffering that God allows:

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing. ¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have *its* perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.

Romans 5:3-5 And not only *that*, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; ⁴ and perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us.

The Bible tells us that there is suffering and tribulation in this world.

- **Romans 8:28** And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.
- This says that in those things, God stands above them and uses them to bring about good.
- Ultimately suffering will be turned to our good.
- God triumphs through and over our suffering.

III. Will there be an end to it?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

Revelation 21:4 And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.”

How do we live in a world with suffering?

As Bible-believing Christians, we begin with a totally different set of assumptions. We begin with the fact that a good God does exist. And that He is all powerful. But also that He is holy, perfect and just.

And we know that this world is not our home.

- **Philippians 3:20-21** For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.
- **Hebrews 11:13-16** These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced *them* and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. ¹⁴ For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. ¹⁵ And truly if they had called to mind that *country* from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. ¹⁶ But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly *country*. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.

This world, and the things in it will never bring peace and joy. Only God can do that. It's why we pray for His Kingdom to come, His will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.

When we experience suffering – 3 things to remember:

God is with us

- **John 16:33** These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."
- **1 Peter 5:10** But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle *you*.
- **Isaiah 43:1-2** But now, thus says the LORD, who created you, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called *you* by your name; You *are* Mine. ² When you pass through the waters, I *will be* with you; And through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, Nor shall the flame scorch you.

When we are going through trials, grieving, suffering – it is not the time to turn from God – It is the time to run to Him with everything inside of you.

Our Community is with us

- **Galatians 6:2** Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.
- **Romans 12:15** Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep.
- **2 Corinthians 1:3-4** Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

When we are going through hard times, do not forsake your church family. And as a church family – be there for each other. Sacrifice if necessary.

We have a future and a hope.

- **Romans 8:18** For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy *to be compared* with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

- **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14** But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.
- **Titus 1:2** in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began,
- **John 16:22** Therefore you now have sorrow; but I will see you again and your heart will rejoice, and your joy no one will take from you.

I started by quoting from a hymn called "At the Cross" by Isaac Watts.

At the cross, at the cross Where I first saw the light, And the burden of my heart rolled away, It was there by faith I received my sight, And now I am happy all the day!

But listen to the verses:

Alas! And did my Savior bleed And did my Sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head For such a worm as I?

Was it for crimes that I had done He groaned upon the tree? Amazing pity! Grace unknown! And love beyond degree!

Once we understand the price paid to overcome the sin that we commit that causes the suffering of this world, maybe the chorus rings a little truer!