

If God Exists, How Can He Allow
Suffering & Evil
Part 3



Why Study Suffering and Evil?

If God Exists, How Can He Allow Suffering and Evil?

- 1. The problems of evil and suffering move from the philosophical to the personal in the blink of an eye.*
- 2. Barna Research Group: "If you could ask God one question, and He had to answer you, what would you ask?"*
- 3. Anthony Flew abandoned atheism because of the overwhelming evidence for a Designer in creation. Yet he could not accept Christianity because of the problem of evil and suffering.*

Where We've Been

WEEK ONE:

Traditional Christian Explanations of Suffering

Your Explanations of Suffering

*Identified Free Will as the #1 Response to Why Suffering
Exists in the World*

Began to Explore Free Will

LAST WEEK:

Why Did God Create Us If He Knew We Would Fall?

*Why Gives Us Free Will If He Knew Most Of Us Would Turn
Against Him, and Suffer Eternally as a Result?*

*Is God Culpable for Sin Because He Created Us Knowing We
Would Sin?*

Some Observations

*Allowing for the possibility of sin,
in the midst of God's express prohibition of sin,
does not make God culpable of sin.*

*God is the source of all good, and all good comes from God.
(See, e.g., James 1:17)*

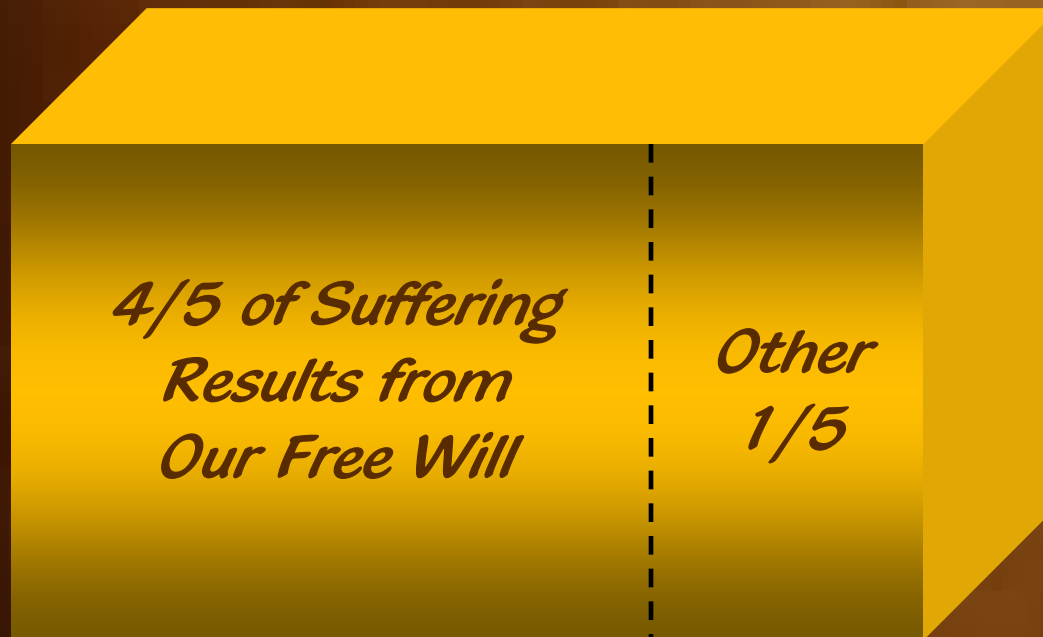
*God is Holy, pure and blameless. He cannot be the author,
cause or source of evil.
(Habakkuk 1:13, James 1:13, Matthew 19:17)*

*But it must be true that God, for whatever reason, allows evil.
Otherwise, we conclude that evil is beyond God's sovereign power.*

Christian Explanations for Suffering

- 1. Suffering results from God's punishment on unrepentant people.*
- 2. Suffering results from God's discipline in our lives.*
- 3. Suffering results from a test we face from God.*
- 4. Suffering results from acts of Satan and his demons.*
- 5. We are allowed to suffer to provide an example to others of how to live in the midst of suffering.*
- 6. We are allowed to suffer so that we can better sympathize with others.*
- 7. We are allowed to suffer to keep us humble.*
- 8. We are allowed to suffer so that God can teach us through our suffering things we could not learn without it.*
- 9. We are allowed to suffer so we can better depend on God.*
- 10. God causes suffering to get our attention / speak to us.*
- 11. God causes suffering to help us grow in our relationship with Christ.*
- 12. God allows suffering to further the work of Christ in this world (persecution, martyrdom, suffering for the Gospel).*

Sources of Suffering



Sources of Suffering



*Natural
Evil*

Responses to Suffering Resulting From Natural Disasters

1. *God has created the world to operate within certain laws of nature that He ordained. Natural disasters happen on their own, just like gravity works on its own to hold the universe in place.*

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” (Colossians 1:15-17)

“He causes His sun to rise on the evil and good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:45)

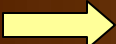
*He spreads the snow like wool and scatters the frost like ashes.
He hurls down His hail like pebbles. Who can withstand His icy blast?
He sends His word and melts them; He stirs up his breezes, and the waters flow. (Psalm 147:16-18)*

Responses to Suffering Resulting From Natural Disasters

- 1. God has created the world to operate within certain laws of nature that He ordained. Natural disasters happen on their own, just like gravity works on its own to hold the universe in place.*

Natural "disasters" are a byproduct of natural processes.

Gravity  *Falling off a roof; jumping off a bridge*

Plate tectonics  *Creates land masses; builds mountain ranges
Results in oil and other fuel deposits
Causes earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes, etc.*

Water cycle  *Causes hurricanes and floods
Brings fresh water to the earth*

Responses to Suffering Resulting From Natural Disasters

- 1. God has created the world to operate within certain laws of nature that He ordained. Natural disasters happen on their own, just like gravity works on its own to hold the universe in place.*
- 2. The earth is under a curse, so that the very laws of nature have been tainted by sin, leading to natural disasters and suffering.*

"To Adam He said, 'Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, You must not eat of it, cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.'" (Genesis 3:17)

Responses to Suffering Resulting From Natural Disasters

1. *God has created the world to operate within certain laws of nature that He ordained. Natural disasters happen on their own, just like gravity works on its own to hold the universe in place.*
2. *The earth is under a curse, so that the very laws of nature have been tainted by sin, leading to natural disasters and suffering.*
3. *Our free will plays a role in natural disasters. We have free will to:*
 - *Cause damage to the earth and its environment;*
 - *Build cities in known earthquake zones, flood plains, etc.*
 - *Construct our cities in ways that increase the damage caused from natural disasters.*
4. *Sometimes God uses natural disasters to punish evil.*
 - *The Flood*
 - *Plagues of Egypt (Exodus 7-12)*
 - *Sending of Locusts (Joel 2:25)*
 - *Snakes (Numbers 21:4-6)*
 - *Burning Sulfer on Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 19:24)*
 - *Storms on the Seas (i.e., Jonah, and others)*

Responses to Suffering Resulting From Natural Disasters

5. *Sometimes Satan is allowed to inflict suffering through natural disasters.*

The Lord said to Satan, "Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger. . . . One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brothers house, . . . the fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants. . . . [Then] suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapse on them and they are dead." (Excerpts from Job 1:12-18)

"Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings." (1 Peter 5:8-9)

Responses to Suffering Resulting From Natural Disasters

5. *Sometimes Satan is allowed to inflict suffering through natural disasters.*

6. *God sends natural disasters to turn His people back to Him.*

"When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord cause it?" (Amos 3:6b)

"I gave you empty stomachs in every city and lack of bread in every town, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD. "I also withheld rain from you when the harvest was still three months away. I sent rain on one town, but withheld it from another. One field had rain; another had none and dried up. People staggered from town to town for water but did not get enough to drink, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

"Many times I struck your gardens and vineyards, I struck them with blight and mildew. Locusts devoured your fig and olive trees, yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD. "I sent plagues among you as I did to Egypt . . . yet you have not returned to me," declares the LORD.

"Therefore this is what I will do to you, Israel, and because I will do this to you, prepare to meet your God, O Israel." (Amos 4:6-10a; 12)

Responses to Suffering Resulting From Natural Disasters

5. *Sometimes Satan is allowed to inflict suffering through natural disasters.*
6. *God sends natural disasters to turn His people back to Him.*
7. *Other explanations:*
 - *Disaster leads to self-examination of our own mortality*
 - *Disaster can bring out the best in people*
 - *Disaster can lead to spiritual renewal*
 - *Disaster shapes our character*

Responses to Suffering Resulting From Natural Disasters

*If some disasters simply occur in nature,
why doesn't God do more to prevent such widespread
death, destruction and suffering?*

"That God can and does, on occasions, modify the behaviour of matter and produce what we call miracles is part of the Christian faith; but the very conception of a common, and therefore stable world, demands that these occasions should be extremely rare. . . . Try to exclude the possibility of suffering which the order of nature and the existence of free will involves, and you find that you have excluded life itself." (C. S. Lewis – The Problem of Pain, p. 25)

Still Ahead . . .

What about other natural evils, such as sickness and death?

How did the Biblical writers deal with suffering and evil?

Is suffering caused by God evil?

Evaluating your responses to today's survey.



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