

If God Exists, How Can He Allow
Suffering & Evil
Part 6



Where We've Been

FIRST FOUR WEEKS:

Traditional Christian Explanations of Suffering

Free Will and the Question of Suffering

Looking Past Free Will to God's Sovereignty

Biblical Explanations of Natural Disasters

Other Biblical Explanations for Suffering

LAST WEEK:

Starting to Put It All Together

What Should Our Response Be To Suffering?

Where We're Going

TONIGHT:

Responding to Your Questions

Focus on Service and Giving

NEXT WEEK:

Wrapping Up Your Questions and Our Series on Suffering

Verses on Women in Ministry

THEN:

Women In Ministry – Dr. Sarah Sumner

How Should We Respond To Evil And Suffering?

When We Find Ourselves In The Midst Of Suffering:

Faith
Anticipation
Perseverance
Surrender
Gratefulness

When Others Are In The Midst Of Suffering:

Humility
Help
Love For Others Above Self

How Should We Respond To Evil And Suffering?

I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us. The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved.

In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

- Excerpted from Romans 8:18-28

How Should We Respond To Evil And Suffering?

*"There is no one righteous, not even one;
there is no one who understands,
no one who seeks God.*

*All have turned away,
they have together become worthless;
there is no one who does good,
not even one."*

*"Their throats are open graves;
their tongues practice deceit."*

"The poison of vipers is on their lips."

"Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness."

*"Their feet are swift to shed blood;
ruin and misery mark their ways,
and the way of peace they do not know."*

"There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Romans 3:10-18

How Should We Respond To Evil And Suffering?

If We Deserve Nothing Apart From Death And Then Judgment

If We Cannot Know When Calamity Will Befall Us

If We Will Rarely Understand Why Trouble Has Befallen Us

If It Is Only By The Grace Of God That We Have This Moment Of Peace

Then We Should Never Take Such Grace For Granted

Nor Turn Against God When Such Grace Is Withheld

*But Eagerly Anticipate The Good Things The Lord Has Prepared
For Those That Love Him*

*"No eye has seen,
No ear has heard,
No mind has conceived
What God has prepared for those who love him."*

1 Corinthians 2:9

Not Responding To Your Questions

What will heaven be like if we have free will but no ability to sin?

How much power does Satan have?

Where does spiritual warfare fit into the evil in our culture? Why is it not seen as important as it is in other cultures?

What is our responsibility to help others in suffering? What part is our responsibility and what part is God's?

Responding To Your Questions

Why does God deliver/protect/save some and not others?

Why does God respond to some people's suffering with specific action and seem to remain inactive in other people's situations (seems like a disproportionate amount in the third world)?

- *We do know that at times, God can and does intervene to prevent suffering and evil. We rarely know how often.*
- *We have to be careful when assuming that God has intervened in a particular situation, and avoid assuming He has not.*
- *We cannot know God's overall plan and could not comprehend it if He told it to us.*
- *God works all things to His Glory and for the (eternal) good of those who love Him.*
- *We must accept in faith that we may never know why other than it is to accomplish His plan.*

Responding To Your Questions

How can the salvation of one person from suffering be explained as a blessing from a good God, while someone else who is suffering greater things not be saved?

- *Same answer.*
- *We have to be sensitive to attributing our salvation as a "blessing" and the fate of another as a "punishment."*
- *Every breath we have is a blessing from God (every good thing comes from God).*
- *We should in humility give thanks to God for all things, even suffering, illness and death. (1 Thessalonians 5:18)*

Responding To Your Questions

Why do some people who seem like they deserve to suffer seem to receive none, such as evil people that cause suffering to innocents?

- *We need to be careful not to be too sure about the reasons that some people suffer, and some do not.*
- *It remains part of God's perfect plan, which means we have to trust that for whatever reason, God did not cause or allow that person to suffer.*
- *This question is the very reason that an afterlife without heaven and hell would call God's justice into question.*

Responding To Your Questions

If all truth is God's truth, and God created everything, how did sin and evil come into existence?

If God can't be around it, how did He create evil?

Is evil created or does it just exist?

- *God did not create evil.*
- *Evil is not a thing that exists by itself.*
- *Evil is not doing what God commands, or doing what God prohibits.*
- *God allowed for free will, which required the possibility to choose to violate His commands, or do what He prohibited (evil).*
- *Evil results when we use our free will to violate His commands or do what God prohibits.*

Responding To Your Questions

Can God's standard be applied to Him? The Ten Commandments say thou shall not kill. Yet God has ordered the death of others as well as being personally involved in the death of some.

Not all of these people necessarily deserved their fate (such as a baby in the Flood). Would God be considered evil?

Why did God allow genocide in the Old Testament?

- *God does not commit evil.*
- *No one is righteous, and we all deserve our fate (even babies). We all deserve death (and all will die, it's just a matter of when).*
- *The Ten Commandments prohibit "murder," not killing.*
- *Although in most cases ultimate justice is delayed, God can and does bring judgment and punishment in the present. This can include death to a people (Canaanites) or to the whole earth (the Flood).*

Responding To Your Questions

Can you have suffering without pain?

Is God "responsible" for pain?

- *Suffering requires "pain" of some kind, although there are various degrees of suffering and various degrees of pain.*
- *Even feeling for someone else's suffering can be said to bring us pain.*
- *God's sovereignty means He either causes or allows all things.*
- *Therefore God can, and does, cause suffering, or He can simply allow it.*

Responding To Your Questions

How is a person expected to reconcile the good, loving God that we are taught to know with the fierce, terrifying God who created the crocodile or let pythons loose? The God who fully understands suffering and still lets it happen? It is a kind of nonsensical paradox in which good and horrifying exist in one being. Someone to fear and be drawn to love at the same time.

- *We need an expansive view of love that is not merely gentleness or kindness, but one that would punish/prune for our own good.*
- *It could be a matter of perspective. The Israelites might see God as loving while the Egyptians saw Him as fierce and deadly.*
- *Our notion of God's holiness is often immature.*
- *God's attributes do not operate in isolation. For example, justice vs. mercy, or wrath vs. grace.*

Responding To Your Questions

How do I love a God who refuses to care for His people?

- *We are the ones who refuse to care for His people.*
- *God works things for the eternal good of those who love Him, and that (because of His plan) may not be presently obvious.*
- *God created a world with everything in it – enough for all. But we don't share. We hoard and sin against our brothers.*
- *But doesn't God know that we aren't going to help others?*
- *God allows us to experience the consequence of our choice. God doesn't overwhelm this world with daily miracles that would alter the consequence of each action.*
- *God chooses to use His people, to chooses to partner with us.*

Responding To Your Questions

How can God be called "just" if He does not act fairly?

- *Our concept of fairness is tainted by sin, and is often not the same as God's justice.*
- *Justice demands that we all deserve death, and that none should be saved from the evil and suffering of this world.*
- *We should tremble before the thought of asking for justice, especially justice immediately delivered.*
- *It is only by God's grace (undeserved favor) and His mercy (withholding what we actually deserve) that we have any life or peace or prosperity at all.*
- *Parable of the Workers' in the Vineyard. (Matt. 20:1-16)*
"Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Don't I have the right to do what I want? Or are you envious because I am generous?"

Responding To Your Questions

If God can experience all the suffering that everyone has ever felt, would He not need some serious therapy?

- *Does God actually experience our suffering?*
- *Even if God wanted to get some therapy, He would have a hard time making an appointment with a qualified therapist.*

Romans 11:34 says,

*"Who has known the mind of the Lord?
Or who has been His counselor?"*

Next Week

Responses To Phillip's Questions*

Wrapping It All Up

* * *

Verses on Women In Ministry



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