

## The Problem of Evil (Pain and Suffering), part 2

### D. Common mistakes in trying to understand suffering

\*\*We need to have an accurate understanding of suffering because eventually we or someone we know will go through intense suffering and then it may be for us to explain. If we have a wrong understanding or wrong attitude, the enemy can use it against us and lead people away from God.

- i. Each person should be exactly rewarded according to how good or bad they are. That good people deserve good things and bad people deserve bad things.
  - a) The Bible however teaches that there are no good people. Romans 3:10-19, 23
    - Many Christians even don't get this fully – they think that they are somehow earning credit with God. We truly need to understand it that we're all bad and until we do we can't have a true appreciation of God's grace.
    - When applied to suffering, a misunderstanding will set us up for a fall because there is often bad things happening to good people and good things happening to bad people. David said that his feet almost slipped when he saw the prosperity of the wicked (Psalm 73).
    - Salvation is all by grace.
  - b) The good news! We've all fallen short, but ... Psalm 103:10-17
    - He doesn't deal with us according to our sins ... He has pity ... His grace has removed our sin ... He knows what we're made of ... His mercy is everlasting.
    - The idea that God will bless me if I follow Him or is waiting to crush me if I disobey is not in the Bible at all.
- ii. We believe that “good” in life is related to happiness and happiness is related to comfort.
  - a) What does the phrase “good life” mean to you? What makes life good? Nice house? Nice car? Enough food to eat? No sickness? No pain? Something that makes you comfortable usually.
  - b) The Bible also doesn't support this idea ... because Biblical happiness is something much deeper than happiness and it is not taken away by suffering.
    - A Christian can have a good and joyful life with great meaning when there is great pain and suffering.
    - Much of what God wants to accomplish in our lives is done through hard times. It is how we grow and He shows the depth of His love through it.
    - It is all about perspective!
      - Romans 8:18 ... sufferings are not even worthy to compare with the coming glory. Paul would know best (2 Cor 11:24-28).
      - Philippians 1:29 ... For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake ... we've been promised suffering also.
  - c) C.S. Lewis said that God whispers to us through our joys, speaks to us through our different experiences, but he shouts to us through our pains.
    - Pain is a way God uses to get our attention.
- iii. Karma – Everything that happens to us today is a result of our actions in a previous life.
  - a) If we have a bad former life, the sufferings that we go through in this current life are somehow paying for the bad things that we did in a different life.
    - This is a popular idea in new age and eastern religions.
    - Hindus have traditionally believed that it is wrong to help suffering people.
  - b) Hebrews 9:27 – it is appointed to man once to die and then there is judgment. This verse is directly against Karma and reincarnation. If we don't know Jesus as savior and are judged according to our sins, then the penalty is eternal punishment. There are no second chances.
  - c) People will often rely upon things like these until trouble and hard times happen. Then all of a

sudden it doesn't make sense and people will look for answers.

IV. "You must have done something to deserve it"

- a) Job's friends told him this and Job had done nothing to warrant it. Satan had simply asked for permission to test Job and so all these things happened to him.
  - Job's friends said that no one deserves to have this happen to them so he must have had something in his life to cause it – that God was judging him.
  - This is a cruel response and can devastate a person.
  - If you believe that God doesn't allow suffering and that you have enough faith to be healed, but then after getting prayed for you aren't healed, what are you left with?
    - The problem is with you ... you don't have enough faith or there is sin in your life.
    - The problem is with God ... He's not keeping His promise
    - The problem is that God isn't even there.
- b) Christians may not admit it, but when they see things just going wrong in someone's life time after time they may begin to think it.
- c) We need to have a strong foundational belief in God's righteousness and fairness because if we don't then when troubles come, and they will, our foundation will crack and quite possibly our belief in God will be shaken or worse – destroyed.
- d) To some degree, it is true however that man will reap what he sows (Gal 6:7).
  - If you get involved with sin, God is not going to necessarily protect you from the punishment of sin. You still must deal with the earthly punishment.
  - Also look at John 9:1 ...
    - about the man who was born blind so that God could be glorified through it – there was no sin in his life or in the life of his parents.
  - Also look at Luke 13:1-5 ...
    - The Galileans were offering sacrifices and so by Jewish tradition they were completely clean and so it wasn't their sin which brought upon them the trouble.
    - It was an accident that the tower of Siloam fell and killed the men ... not because of their sin.
  - Also look at Habakkuk 3:17-18 ...
    - Even though there are no supplies ... all their food was gone ... yet will they rejoice in the Lord.
    - Job said, Even if God were to kill me, I would continue to praise Him.
    - The mark of Christianity is not taking over the heathens by war, but the taking over of hearts. The greatest battle is the personal battle of the heart.
    - Christianity is the only religion which helps us to deal with suffering in a rational way

IV. The Emotional Issue

- i. Ministry to Hurting People: In addition to the intellectual side of the problem of evil, there is also an emotional side of the issue. Many times when people are suffering physically or emotionally, they are not in the frame of mind to hear intellectual arguments. It is far better to minister to them by being a good listener and loving them.

As Christians, we can look at how Jesus related to pain. He empathized with people – suffering with them and rejoicing with them. Jesus knows the pain we experience because He has suffered much more than we ever will – emotionally, physically, mentally, and spiritually. Sometimes it is helpful to say to someone who is grieving, "The God I know will do the right thing for \_\_\_\_\_ (you, your daughter, your son, etc)".

- a) God knows our suffering – He is the great sufferer and has met the problem of evil with the gift of His own son at a very great cost to Himself.
  - He is a man of sorrows acquainted with grief – Isaiah 53:3
  - Because He suffered temptation, He is able to sympathize with us – Hebrews 2:18
  - He is our high priest – Hebrews 4:15

- ii. God of Comfort and Hope: We can address the emotional side of the issue also by pointing people to the God of Comfort and Hope. For unbelievers especially, we can underline their need for God. He can lead them out of the darkness of pain. The only ultimate answer to pain is the hope God offers.

He is a God who cares and a God who is there. He loves all people with an impartial and everlasting love! To Christians, He offers comfort and never leaves or forsakes us. He offers hope for the future. We are a “living hope through the resurrection of Jesus .. to an inheritance” which is reserved in heaven.

- iii. The key is looking at the character of God (not the circumstances) We need to interpret circumstances through what we know about God and not to try and understand God by our circumstances.
- a) Romans 8:32
  - b) Habbakuk 3:17-18