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WHY DOES GOD ALLOW  
**EVIL &  
SUFFERING?**

MINI BOOK

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There are many obstacles that keep people from having faith in God. For example, there are those who don't have access to the gospel because there is no one to preach it to them. This is why Paul says that without a preacher to bring the good news, people cannot believe (Romans 10:14-15). Another obstacle to faith is that some folks love their sins so much that they refuse to abandon them in the pursuit of Christ (John 3:19).

There are also many who do not come to faith because of false teaching and teachers, and the sad case of people who refuse to believe because of the poor conduct and witness of believers.

Finally, there are those who refuse to believe in God because they cannot accept the idea that a good and merciful God would allow so much injustice and suffering in the world. They ask, "How can there be a God when there is so much evil, suffering, and injustice in this world that an almighty and merciful God could prevent?" In this study, I would like to address this particular objection to faith which is often referred to as the "Problem of Suffering."

This issue is not only an obstacle to faith for non-believers, it also challenges the faith of believers as well. Every time I read

about a child who is kidnapped and killed, I ask myself questions concerning faith in God expressed in the practice of Christianity. Is my faith and what I believe really true? Why would God allow such a terrible thing? Why does He permit evil and the suffering it causes if He truly is a God of mercy?

Any attempt to answer these questions, however, requires us to examine the existence evil itself.

## **WHAT IS EVIL?**

There are two kinds of evil in this world:

1. **Natural evil** is where things happen to us against our will and well-being. Fires, accidents, disease, earthquakes, and all those things

that cause indiscriminate suffering on this earth.

2. **Moral evil** is where human will and action are evident (i.e. crime, violence, immorality, selfishness, etc.) The things that people do to themselves and others which are evil and cause suffering and death.

The problem we have with evil is that it affects both the innocent and the guilty, and there is often no justice meted out to those who cause harm. This is the sad and undeniable reality of life.

It is a fair statement to say, therefore, that a good and all-powerful God (what the Christian concept of God is) could prevent evil if He wanted to. Some people defend their disbelief by saying, "I'd like to believe in your God, but cannot because if He

existed He would not let bad things happen to good people." These are the ones who have heard the gospel and may want to believe but look at the problem of evil in the world and refuse to accept a God who allows it.

In order to develop faith, therefore, we need to understand certain basic things.

## **WHERE DOES EVIL COME FROM?**

Christianity teaches that evil, in all of its forms, is the result of disobedience of God and His laws. The first instance of disobedience that we know of is Satan's rebellion before the creation of the world (II Peter 2:4). Satan refused to remain in the position to which he was assigned by God.

He disobeyed this command and continued in this pattern of rebellion with the successful temptation of Adam and Eve (Genesis 3:1-7). The negative effects of this disobedience grew as the descendants of Adam and Eve multiplied in number, as well as in ungodly behavior (disobeying God and His laws) to this day.

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 5:12**

The result of this cumulative disobedience is the evil that we see in the world today and the suffering caused by that evil, not by God. We see it expressed in both moral and natural evil and the consequences of each.



## **MORAL EVIL CAUSES SUFFERING**

The violence, immorality, and hatred in the world is caused by man's unwillingness to love and obey God, and love his neighbor as himself.

Some people think that injustice and poverty are the source of evil, but this is not true. Sin is the source of evil, and is the chief cause of injustice and poverty. If you could trace every crime, every broken home, every case of emotional and physical abuse to its root, you would find the sins of pride, lust, selfishness, and anger (just to name a few) as the true causes for man's suffering.

For the wages of sin is death, but  
the free gift of God is eternal life in

Christ Jesus our Lord.

**- Romans 6:23**

Paul said that the result of sin is death, and death is manifested in this world through evil, not just funerals.

Suffering is the result of man's disobedience. For example, God's command says, "Do not murder" (Exodus 20:13). Man, because of jealousy, anger, greed, or pride disobeys that command and murders another human being. That killing takes the life of another, but along with it comes the suffering and anguish of the families of both the killer and the victim.

This is the thread that moral evil follows from disobedience to suffering.

Some people may ask what sin has to do with natural evil (the suffering caused by severe weather, car accidents, illness, etc.). For example, an innocent baby dies of leukemia; how is this child responsible for his own or his family's suffering? The answer to this question requires some background information explaining how the physical world became corrupted after the sin of Adam and Eve.

In his book, "*The Genesis Record*," Henry Morris explains that after the fall of Adam there was not only a broken relationship with God, causing moral darkness, resulting in evil and suffering among men. He writes that there was also a psychological breakdown evidenced, for example, by the shame that both Adam and Eve experienced after their sin, and the belligerence expressed by Cain after he

murdered his brother Abel. He goes on to say that there was also an ecological breakdown beginning with Adam and Eve's departure from the garden, and the toil now required to cultivate and live from the land.

These were signals of the total collapse to come. He then details the social disintegration that ultimately provoked the greatest natural disaster in history, the worldwide flood of Noah's day.

Dr. Morris demonstrates how hydrologists (scientists who study the effect of water pressure on the earth) have done experiments to find out what would happen if the earth was covered with water. These researchers were not Christian ministers or apologists, they were scientists. They built a model of this

phenomena in their lab and conducted experiments to learn what would happen if the earth was suddenly covered with water over a period of forty days.

They discovered that if the earth was covered with water, such as in the great flood, the earth would shift on its axis causing the north and south poles to freeze. This would drastically change the weather patterns which, in turn, would severely affect animals and plants. The Bible tells us that the earth was originally fed by underground streams and protected by a ring of vapor in the atmosphere (Genesis 7:11).

Both the underground streams and the water vapor were dissolved in order to create the great flood. Dr. Morris says that without the vapor shield in place, one

result would be that new strains of bacteria would enter our environment bringing disease to humans, animals, and plants. Dr. Morris' book goes into much more detail, but essentially what he states is that the flood created an ecological disaster which explains the presence of diseases, the imbalances in nature, and the environmental catastrophes (and changes) that have plagued man since that time (climate change has been happening since the flood and will continue until the world ends when Jesus returns - 2 Peter 3:7). Here's the point: the reason for the flood was sin. The flood was sent by God because humanity was on the pathway to self-destruction due to unbridled sinfulness.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great on the earth, and that every intent of

the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

**- Genesis 6:5**

Mankind had become extremely evil and, without divine intervention, would ultimately destroy itself. God saved a small remnant (Noah and his family) in order to repopulate the earth and continue His plan to send a Redeemer who would ultimately pay the moral debt for all mankind, thus enabling those who believe in Him to live forever with God in sinless perfection (Romans 5:1-2).

And so, moral and natural evil can find their source in man's disobedience to God and His law. Man disobeyed God's command and destroyed his relationship with Him. He also destroyed his relationship with other human beings and

ultimately caused the breakdown of the very environment that God had created to sustain and satisfy him. This explains where the diseases that attack humans indiscriminately (like the baby with leukemia) come from.

What is the source of evil and suffering? The Bible teaches that evil and suffering are the natural result that take place when human beings violate God's will in any way.

### **WHY DOES GOD PERMIT EVIL?**

In order to answer this question, we must examine the idea of free will. God permits evil to exist because it is the downside of free will, and free will is necessary if man is to be truly made in the image of God.



Let Us make man in Our image,  
according to our likeness.

**- Genesis 1:26**

In the book of Genesis, we read that God created the universe, the earth, the environment, the creatures that inhabit it, and then completed His work with the creation of man. Adam was similar to the earth in that he was made from it and could perfectly interact with it (i.e. he ate its food and breathed its air). However, he was also similar to God so that he could interact with God as well, the only being that was created so. Man's affinity with God meant that he shared Godly attributes that minerals, plants, and animals did not.

For example:

- God could communicate and so could man. God said "let there be this" and "let there be that" and man was able to say, "This is a sheep, a fish, or this is woman" (Genesis 2:21-23).
- God could perceive goodness and beauty. He looked at his creation and said, "It is very good" (Genesis 1:31). Man was also given this ability in that he recognized and appreciated woman as his suitable human partner in life.
- God had the power of creating and by virtue of reproduction, so did man.

- God had willed that man have the ability to choose. He said "Let Us make man." This action indicated that man's creation was a choice agreed upon by the Godhead. Man, in God's image, also has the ability to choose (free will).

This was made clear when God informed man that he had to exercise his free will in choosing to eat or not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:16-17).

A being without free will is not a being made in the image of God. Man must be able to glorify God by willfully and freely obeying Him. The worship of God requires free will because worship which is automated is no worship at all. It is an insult to the living God. In order to be in

the image of God, therefore, man had to be created with the ability to exercise his free will.

The problem with free will, however, is that it gives man a choice: to obey and enjoy life in perfect harmony (with no evil and its consequence of suffering), or to disobey and destroy his relationship with God, other humans, and the creation thus bringing evil and its consequences upon mankind.

We know this story. It should have been an easy choice but because of the previous disobedience of Satan and his evil seduction, Adam chose to disobey and as a result brought all forms of calamity and suffering crashing down on his and our heads to this day.

## **WHY DID GOD CREATE MAN AT ALL?**

Somebody might say, why create man at all if God knew that doing so would result in so much suffering? One answer to this question is that when God was faced with the choice to create or not to create, He chose to create because it was the most righteous option despite the sufferings to come. This answer leads to another question, "How do we know that creating was the right choice for God to make?" The fact that God chose to create indicates that it was the right choice for the simple reason that God does not make any mistakes and there is no unrighteousness in Him (Psalms 145:17). The conclusion, then, is this: God did the supremely right thing in creating man with free will. Man is the one that misused his free will.

The good news in all of this is that God is greater than evil and suffering because He had a way of dealing with the consequences brought about by mankind's failure to exercise free will correctly.

And so, evil exists in this world and it causes great suffering. This is an undeniable fact. However, the mere existence of evil does not mean that God ignores it or that God is not active in dealing and responding to the evil in the world.

### **WHAT DOES GOD DO ABOUT EVIL?**

When people talk about the problem of evil, they think that evil exists without God doing anything about it. What they fail to see are the things that God actively does in response to evil. For example:

# **1. God Limits Evil**

Ever thought about that? There is terrible evil in the world and the rate of suffering is great, but from the very beginning God has used a variety of ways to limit the amount of evil and the scope of suffering. Here are a few ways that He has done this:

## **He Limits the Lifespan of Man**

Before the flood, when the earth was still in relative harmony, man lived for centuries (Genesis 9:28-29). After the great flood, however, man's lifespan diminished to what it is today (Psalm 90:10). This average lifespan of 70-80 years was written about almost 4,000 years ago. This limits the time of evil men in their pursuit, as well as the time good men must suffer. In the context of eternity, 70-80 years is not all that much.

## **He Gives Us the Power to Do Good**

God has created man in such a way that despite his sins and weaknesses, he is still capable of great good. This is another way that God deals with evil. Despite the evil in the world, there is still a possibility of joy that comes from family life, the appreciation of beauty in all of its forms, the delights of the creation around us, as well as our work and recreational activities. God could have completely cursed us and left us with no possibility of joy on this earth, but He did not. We can still find things to smile about despite our suffering and disappointments. All of these good things (blessings) come from God, not Satan.



## **He Gives Us Knowledge**

God has provided knowledge in order to solve the many problems we face here on earth. Scientific and engineering breakthroughs, discoveries of medicine, social and technological advances are all possible because the mercy of God enables and multiplies these to man's comfort and advancement.

All knowledge comes from God and the progress that man has made in understanding and exploiting the creation for his own good and for the relief of suffering is nothing more than what God has commanded in the garden when He said that man was to fill the earth and to subdue it (Genesis 1:28).

Man has not improved his lot despite God; man has reduced suffering and eliminated

much of the evil in the world through God's mercy and enlightenment.

## **2. God Uses Evil to Teach Us Something**

God does not remove evil because it is the direct result of man's choice. To remove evil is to remove choice, and to remove choice is to eliminate man as a free thinking, independent, and eternal being. You cannot be an eternal being if you do not possess free will. You need free will in order to be eternal. For this reason, then, God uses the evil in the world to teach mankind lessons about good, things man once knew but lost because of sin.

Throughout the Bible we have instances of this type of teaching. Job is a prime example of God's use of evil to teach and

mature one of his sons. In this story, Job is the victim of both natural and moral evil. His children are killed by a storm that destroys their home and Job contracts a terrible skin disease.

He suffers from both moral and natural evil because his servants and property are plundered by attacking hoards, and his body is stricken by disease. This good man could not understand why a righteous person like himself should suffer from the effects of evil, but he finally learns that he was unable to judge God and understand His creation based only on his human experience. Job's knowledge was valid but limited. In the end, his suffering taught him to trust God as the ruler of the universe even if there were things in that universe that caused him to suffer, because God was

still capable of taking care of both the universe and Job as well.

This is what happens when we suffer, we begin to lose confidence that God can take care of us. We begin to think that maybe God has fumbled the ball in some cosmic way. We have difficulty understanding why this particular "evil" is happening to us.

The Bible is full of stories where through the experience of hardship God teaches men and women important lessons concerning hope, perseverance, mercy, forgiveness, and victory through ongoing faith in Christ.

Because of the surpassing  
greatness of the revelations, for  
this reason, to keep me from  
exalting myself, there was given

me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.”

**- II Corinthians 12:7-9**

In this passage, did God know that Paul was suffering? Yes. Had God lost control? No. Did God care? Yes. However, God's agenda with the suffering was different than Paul's agenda. Paul's plea was, "Stop the suffering now!" God's agenda said, "The suffering will stop when you learn the lesson that this evil is teaching."

Paul the Apostle served God faithfully. He succeeded in planting churches throughout

the Roman Empire, he wrote a good portion of the New Testament and yet it was through suffering that God was able to teach him the priceless lessons of contentment, trust, and submission.

Consider it all joy, my brethren,  
when you encounter various trials,  
knowing that the testing of your  
faith produces endurance. And let  
endurance have its perfect result,  
so that you may be perfect and  
complete, lacking in nothing.

**- James 1:2-4**

James tells us that we should consider it all joy when we meet various trials. Why does he say this? He teaches this because through the evil and suffering present in this world God is able to teach us some of

the most important lessons we need to learn about faith.

### **3. God Allows Evil to Exist but He Doesn't Allow It to Win**

People who become discouraged on account of the evil in the world and refuse to believe in God because of it have a short view of history, as well as a limited view of God. Evil has damaged the earth and caused suffering but despite its worst attack, people still rejoice when goodness in any form appears.

We saw this phenomena take place following the 9/11 attack, when Islamic terrorists crashed two airliners into the World Trade Center buildings in New York City killing thousands and witnessed on television by people all over the world. As

dramatic as this was, the lasting images that affected the people during that crisis were the ones showing first responders literally giving their lives (because many died in the wreckage or as a result of the poisonous fumes) to search out survivors in the dangerous rubble left behind. Images of ordinary people risking their safety to save others. Volunteers working to exhaustion in order to serve others. Folks lined up around the block to give blood or to give millions of dollars to help the fallen. Innumerable unseen acts of kindness that crossed every social, religious, cultural, and economic line where the only bond that linked people together was their common suffering. These were done in an effort to overwhelm the unspeakable evil visited upon the innocent on that day. The good did not erase the evil but it showed that good was immeasurably better and



stronger than evil, no matter how egregious.

Of course, the ultimate response to evil is Jesus Christ. God has allowed evil to exist but He has answered the problem of evil once for all through His Son, Jesus. We've said that sin is the source of evil, and death is its inevitable end, but Jesus Christ died on the cross to pay the penalty due for every sin (and the evil it has caused) committed by every person that ever lived.

and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.

**- I Peter 2:24**

In other words, the problem of evil, sin, was taken care of by the cross, and the problem of death was overcome by Jesus' resurrection. Evil exists now. Evil creates suffering now. Evil leads to death now. However, God has dealt with evil, suffering, and death by offering us forgiveness for the evil that we do and hope for a life with God where there will be no evil or suffering.

Imagine if there was no possibility of forgiveness for the evil that we all commit? God has provided a measure of relief from the suffering we experience, as well as support and reassurance while we go through our various trials. He has given us His word. He has given us His Spirit. These are the things that sustain us in our suffering. He has also given us the promise of resurrection and eternal life after death, and these have been confirmed by the

resurrection of Jesus and offered to everyone through the gospel.

Please know that even though God permits evil and suffering, He does offer solutions to these. Isn't it sad that people too often see the evil in the world but refuse to accept God's solution for it?

- Jesus Christ reveals and proves the existence of God.
- Jesus Christ removes the barriers of sin and condemnation, and makes peace between God and man.
- Jesus Christ allows a person to be at peace with himself and have hope for the future.
- Jesus Christ empowers all who believe in Him to live in harmony

with God and with others in the world despite personal failings and suffering caused by evil.

We are insignificant and it seems that we don't have much influence in stopping the evil in this world. However, the good news is that God has given each of us the power to stop the effects of evil in our own lives through Jesus Christ. We mitigate the evil in the world by first removing it from our own lives through Christ and then lessen its impact with every soul we bring to Him through the gospel.

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LEARN IT,  
PASS IT ON...**

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