

The Word@ZPC

# The Case for God in an Anti-God World

## **Suffering**

*Where is God When it Hurts?*

March 11, 2009

(held over from last week) **The Challenge of Interpreting the Bible**

Each text has multiple \_\_\_\_\_, but only one \_\_\_\_\_.

Do we take the Bible literally? Absolutely...if by that we mean what the original human author \_\_\_\_\_.

In the end, God's Word has astonishing coherence, considering:

66 individual books	3 continents (Asia, Africa, Europe)
40-plus authors	3 languages (Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic)
1400-year time span of authorship	
Diversity of authors (kings, farmers, fishermen, historians)	
Diversity of settings (palaces, fields, prisons, villages, cities)	
Rigorous tackling of life's greatest and toughest questions	

### **The Grand Dilemma**

Christians affirm four realities:

- (1) God exists.
- (2) God is all-good and all-wise.
- (3) God is all-powerful.
- (4) Suffering and evil exist.

How can all four be true at the same time?

*"Suffering is fatal to Christianity"* (John Stuart Mill)

*"If God exists, then he is the devil"* (Baudelaire)

*"The fact of suffering undoubtedly constitutes the single greatest challenge to the Christian faith, and has been in every generation. Its distribution and degree appear to be entirely random and therefore unfair. Sensitive spirits ask if it can possibly be reconciled with God's justice and love."* (John Stott)

“Theodicy” is the realm of theology that grapples with the reality of suffering.

*Theos* \_\_\_\_\_ and *diakaios* \_\_\_\_\_ = “God is off the hook.”

Two hidden assumptions:

I bet I could do a better job of running the universe!

To eliminate suffering I would need to eliminate \_\_\_\_\_.  
That would decisively mean an end to \_\_\_\_\_.

If there were good reasons for the existence of evil, we should see them.

*If you have a God great and transcendent enough to be mad at because he hasn't stopped evil and suffering in the world, then you have (at the same moment) a God great and transcendent enough to have good reasons for allowing it to continue that you can't know. Indeed, you can't have it both ways. (Tim Keller)*

### **Classic Answers to the Problem of Suffering** (in ascending order of viability)

Suffering doesn't really \_\_\_\_\_.

Christian Scientists assert that pain is just an illusion.

*Problem:* This flies in the face of all human experience.

Suffering happens because I'm personally \_\_\_\_\_ to be happy.

New Agers suggest that we need to act on the truth that *we are God*.

*Problem:* This works best for self-absorbed affluent people.

Suffering is caused by capricious \_\_\_\_\_.

Animists (primitive cultures) buy off the spirits through rituals & sacrifices.

*Problem:* I can never experience true or lasting peace.

Suffering is payment for sins from \_\_\_\_\_.

Classic Hinduism requires burning off “bad karma” through disciplines.

*Problem:* This view paralyzes social action and helping others.

Suffering arises from having \_\_\_\_\_.

Buddhism (Hinduism-in-one-life) aims to extinguish personal desire.

Problem: Extinguishing desire also extinguishes my humanity.

Suffering happens because people break God's \_\_\_\_\_.

This is the predominant view of Muslims, orthodox Jews, Job's three friends, and many Christian faith-healers.

Problem: I am left holding the bag for my own pain, and a great deal of pain is obviously not my responsibility.

Suffering happens because God's power is \_\_\_\_\_.

Rabbi Harold Kushner (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*) is comforted by a God who cares, but cannot prevent disasters.

Problem: The omnipotence of God is sacrificed to "solve the problem."

Suffering happens because there is \_\_\_\_\_.

Atheists, materialists, and Darwinists declare that we need to "own our pain" as part of reality, and/or plot our own heroic response to suffering.

Problem: If there is no evil, there is also no good.

Suffering happens because pain and evil help accomplish \_\_\_\_\_

John Hick (*Evil and the God of Love*) proposes that suffering is God's intentional tool to shape our character.

Problem: The Bible says God is not the author of evil (James 1:13-17)

### Orthodox Christianity's Incredible Answer

The Christian "answer" is not really an answer at all.

*"It's the Answerer. It's Jesus himself. It's not a bunch of words. It's the Word."  
(Peter Kreeft)*

Christians affirm three foundational points:

- (1) The world is \_\_\_\_\_ (Genesis 1:31)  
(2) The world is \_\_\_\_\_ (Genesis 3; Romans 8:18-21)  
(3) The world can be \_\_\_\_\_ (Ephesians 2:5; "but...God")

God's work of redemption was primarily accomplished on the cross.

God will *not* be let off the hook. God puts \_\_\_\_\_ on the hook.

### **The Cross: Where God's Love and Justice Meet**

In the cross, we see our own wickedness and \_\_\_\_\_ at God.

Where would we be if all evil were eliminated at 8:17 p.m. today?

*"Sir: Regarding your article, What's Wrong with the World?  
I am. Yours truly, G.K. Chesterton"*

In the cross, we see God's offer of forgiveness even when life is at its ugliest.

God offers a new start in the midst of our own failure (Luke 23:34, 43).

God not only asks for \_\_\_\_\_; he actually offers it.

In the cross, we see that God is not distant from our \_\_\_\_\_.

In his death, God suffers in love, identifying with those who are forsaken.

*"He had to pay for our sins so that someday he can end  
evil and suffering without ending us." (Tim Keller)*

### **So How Do Christians Answer the Toughest Questions?**

*Where is God when it hurts?*

He is right beside me, suffering along with me (I Peter 5:7).

*Why is this happening to me?*

So that I might have the chance to trust God more fully (2 Cor 1:3-11).

*Why doesn't God put an end to all suffering right now?*

While we don't know what the answer is, we know what the answer *isn't*:  
It can't be that he doesn't \_\_\_\_\_ (Romans 5:8-11; 8:35-39).

*Why doesn't God explain my pain?*

God didn't come to explain our pain but to share our pain (Isaiah 53:3-6).  
We do have hints, however, that one day we shall know "why" (I Cor 13:12)

*Why does God permit terrible things to happen?*

Some suffering happens because God honors our \_\_\_\_\_.  
All suffering has the power to shape our character (Jas 1:2-4; Rom 5:3-5)

God doesn't promise supernatural \_\_\_\_\_ from hardship, but a  
supernatural \_\_\_\_\_ of hardship (Rom 8:28). God never wastes pain!

*How can a loving God bear all the suffering in the world?*

He did in fact bear all the world's suffering...through his Son on the cross.

*Will God one day make all things right?*

As Sam Gamgee asked in *The Lord of the Rings*: "Is everything sad  
going to come untrue?"

Yes! The resurrection is not just a consolation, but a \_\_\_\_\_.

*"God whispers in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains;  
it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."* (C.S. Lewis)

*"We don't know why we suffer, but we know why we trust God...  
and he knows why"* (Os Guinness)

*"It's Friday...but Sunday's comin'!"* (Tony Campolo)

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