
BIBLE TALK

This week the question is: ***If there is a God, why does evil exist?***

This question is asking why evil things happen if there is truly an all-wise, all-powerful, loving and good God.

- Why are terrorists allowed to hijack planes and fly them into buildings and destroy innocent people in the name of Islam?
- Why are Catholic priests allowed to abuse innocent boys in their parish?
- Why do bridges collapse and innocent people die in Minnesota?
- Why was there an Adolph Hitler and a Joseph Stalin?

These are the questions asked by atheists. A Greek Philosopher named Epicurus argued that if there was a God in heaven and He could not prevent suffering, then He would not be all-powerful. On the other hand, if God could prevent suffering, but did not, then He would not be good. So ... to the atheist, the ideas of a loving God and evil both existing are completely incompatible with each other.

SOME ASSUMPTIONS

There are at least three great assumptions being made by many people that we need to address.

1) It is assumed that men do not possess "free will."

In other words, people are assuming that if there was a loving God He would not allow anyone to choose things that might result in their harm. They believe that if God were truly a loving God He would continuously interfere with the decisions and actions of men and never allow them to do anything that might result in suffering.

But this reasoning is unwarranted and invalid. God, because He is loving and because He is good, has created mankind with “free will” – with the ability to choose between good and evil. One man said it like this:

Could anyone conceive of God as a loving God who created intelligent beings, but then programmed them to slavishly serve Him without personal will-power?

(Wayne Jackson, Does Human Suffering Disprove the Existence of a Benevolent God?)

For Bible passages teaching that man was created with “free will” read: Gen 2:16-17; Josh 24:15; Isa 7:15; Jn 5:39-40; Jn 7:17; and Rev 22:17.

When God gave men the ability to choose between good and evil, the consequence was that evil and suffering will result when men choose evil. Evil choices carry with them evil consequences.

1 Peter 4:15

15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters.

If a man chooses to commit murder and is thereby imprisoned, or executed, whose fault is that? My friends, it is the fault of the criminal himself, and not God's!

Not only do evil choices result in suffering for the man who makes the choice, but sometimes innocent people are affected. For example, a drunken driver may have a wreck and kill several innocent people. His evil choice affected both himself and innocent victims. But this suffering is not God's fault; it's the fault of the man who chose to do evil.

2) It is an assumption that if God were a “loving” God He would not allow suffering if He could stop it.

Allowing someone to suffer does not necessarily mean that someone is unloving. For example, suppose a rancher warns his son repeatedly to stay away from an electric cattle fence, but in spite of the father's warnings the son continues to investigate, experiment and play around with the electric wire. Eventually the father decides to keep quiet and allow the son to learn a lesson. Eventually the boy touches the wire and gets zapped.

Q: Was it the father's fault that the son got zapped or could we say that the father was unloving because he stood back and allowed his son to reach forth and grab the wire?

The answer to both these questions is no. It was not the father's fault. He repeatedly warned his son of the consequences and he was not unloving for allowing his son to learn a lesson the hard way. Perhaps the son has learned to listen to his father the next time.

Likewise, God has warned us repeatedly in the Scriptures of the terrible consequences of sin.

Jeremiah 11:7

7 For I earnestly exhorted your fathers in the day I brought them up out of the land of Egypt, until this day, rising early and exhorting, saying, "Obey My voice."

Jeremiah 25:4

4 And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets, rising early and sending them, but you have not listened nor inclined your ear to hear.

Notice especially in this last passage that after all the warnings sent by God the people refused to hearken; they refused to listen to God and obey His voice.

As a result God sent the Babylon army to invade the land and take Judah into bondage, but even this was for their own good. Just as the mischievous boy learned to listen to his father's advise by the jolt from the electric fence, Judah learned to listen to God's advise by the suffering they endured in captivity.

Hebrews 12:7-11

7 If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom a father does not chasten?

8 But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

9 Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits and live?

10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness.

11 Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

This now brings up the third assumption that people make in regards to suffering and pain.

3) It is an assumption that all suffering and pain are bad.

To some people the worst possible tragedy in life is that someone might suffer. They assume that nothing good could possibly come from suffering. But think of what would happen if there were no pain and suffering.

First of all, if men could feel no pain someone might set his foot down in a fire without realizing it and his entire foot would burn completely off without his ever feeling it or knowing it. Again, someone might stick their hand into a paper shredder to fix a paper jam and without realizing it shred off their entire hand, and if men could not feel pain there would be nothing that could be done.

Pain alerts us to the fact that something is wrong and we are able to nip disaster in the bud before it takes our life.

Second, as we have already learned from Hebrews 12, the Scriptures show us that not all suffering is bad and that good actually does come from suffering.

2 Corinthians 12:7-10

7 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure.

8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me.

9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

The nobles qualities of man are learned thru suffering. By suffering men learn patience, kindness, bravery and even thankfulness. Suffering reminds us that this world was never designed to be our eternal home. If there were no pain, or distress no one would want to leave the earth and go to heaven to be with God. But suffering and pain creates within us a desire for some better place than this.

Hebrews 11:16

16 But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them.