

Sermon Mark S. Aites

## WHY DOES GOD PERMIT SUFFERING?

(Sources: G.Brantley, 14th Annual St. Louis Lectureship;  
W. Jackson, *The Book Of Job*; also, Batsell Barrett Baxter)

### INTRODUCTION:

1. One of the major obstacles to many people believing in God is trying to understand why God permits human suffering.
2. They reason, if God is such a loving and merciful God, then why does He allow man, who was made in His image, to suffer?
3. It has long been a favorite argument of atheists that if there is a loving and all-powerful God, then why does evil and human suffering exist?
  - 1) If there is a God then why am I, or one of my loved ones, afflicted with cancer?
  - 2) If there is a God, then why do righteous people suffer when those of the world do not?
4. Epicurus, the Greek philosopher, who lived around 300 B.C., maintained that, "If God wanted to prevent evil, but cannot, then He is not all-powerful -- if He can prevent evil, but will not, then He is not good. If He has both the power and the will to eliminate evil, then why is evil in the world?"
5. In bro. Wayne Jackson's work on the Book of Job, he says: "The fallacy of Epicurus' argument is the assumption that no good purpose can be served by the allowance of evil and suffering in the world."
6. This causes one to ask: Is there good to be found in suffering?
7. Before we answer that question, we need to consider that sometimes we suffer for various reasons:

### DISCUSSION:

#### I. FROM WRONG PERSONAL CHOICES.

##### A. Examples:

1. A boy plays with fireworks, and losing a finger or a hand. Such would not have happened if he had not been playing with fireworks.
2. Someone may drive a car too fast, and lose control. Such would not happen if they were operating their car at a safe speed.
3. Someone may rebel against the law, and get shot or beat up in a scuffle. Such would not have happened if that person would abide by the laws of the land.
4. Someone might abuse alcohol, drugs, or even cigarettes; things which can bring on problems such as liver damage, emphysema, or cancer.
5. Or someone will engage in sexual immorality, and in so doing, contract an unwanted venereal disease, aids, or pregnancy. Such would not be the case if they refrained from sexual activity.
6. It may be that a person, of his own choices, makes unwise financial decisions. Such would not happen if that person were more careful in the decisions made.
7. Or it could even be someone who speaks without thinking, speaking a careless word, bringing about problems in relationships, and bringing on mental and emotional anguish.
8. If we are not careful, we can bring problems on ourselves.

##### B. Consider even Bible examples:

1. Nadab and Abihu (**Lev. 10**).
2. A man who gathered sticks on the sabbath day (**Num. 15:32ff**).
3. Uzzah (**2 Sam. 6:6-7**).

4. Judas Iscariot
5. Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5**).

C. When we make poor or wrongful choices, is it God's fault?

1. We must realize that the fault lies squarely with the individual.
2. God gives us the freedom to choose, and sometimes we make the wrong choice.

WE ALSO CAN SUFFER...

## **II FROM THE WRONG CHOICE OF OTHERS.**

A. **Rom. 14:7** *For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself.*

B. Examples:

1. Second hand smoke.
2. **Illus:** a mother smokes marijuana gave birth to a child that was born with one arm.
  - 1) Birth defects from the misuse of drugs is more common than we care to think.
  - 2) There have been instances of babies born with an addiction to crack.
3. A person may be involved in an automobile accident, and the fault may be the one driving; or even one of the passengers while you are driving; or another driver in another automobile.
4. A person may be in a bank to make a deposit, and become a victim of a robbery.
5. There have been instances of people being seriously hurt or killed in what are called, "Drive by shootings."
6. Or you might get sick because of food poisoning, botulism, or salmonella, because someone was careless.
7. And we even see it in matters of religion: mothers and fathers prevent or hinder the worship, or even religious education, of their children.

C. In a lecture by Gary Brantley, during the 14th annual St. Louis lectureship, had addressed the problem of pain and suffering, and dealt with the question: "Do we not suffer with the wrong choices of our children?"

1. It is normal for young people to make mistakes, and those mistakes become problems and trials for the other members of the family.
2. In some cases, the consequences can last through life.

D. Consider some biblical examples where people suffered because of the actions of others.

1. Moses and Aaron had their first encounter with Pharaoh which effected the Israelites, as they were forced to make bricks without straw (**Exod. 5:7**).
2. There was Balaam, who was requested by Balak to curse Israel.
  - 1) Balaam was forbidden to curse Israel, but he advised to Balak that they entice Israel to sin.
  - 2) Balaam did not escape punishment, and was later slain.
3. There was Achan (**Josh 7**), who took an item from Jericho, against God's explicit instructions, and it caused Israel to be defeated at Ai, and for others to die.

E. Because of man's freedom of choice or will, others can and often will suffer for the choices that someone makes.

SUFFERING TOO CAN COME FROM

## **III. THE WRONG CHOICES OF GENERATIONS PAST.**

A. Now we can say that on the good side, we reap the benefits of past generations.

1. Technology: telephone, automobiles, the light bulb, etc. We enjoy these things because someone invented it.

2. We also have benefited from scientific discoveries, medical advancements, and many other inventions made by man.
- B. But on the negative side: we also bear the consequences of the wrong choices of past generations.
  1. In our own time the A.I.D.S. virus is a good example:
    - 1) The origin of A.I.D.S. remains a highly debated issue, but in 1981 it was first diagnosed in New York.
    - 2) Some 65 thousand new cases are reported every year in this country.
  2. The decision made by individuals to engage in fornication (illicit sexual sin), or in the sharing of infected needles in drug use, has affected millions of people.
    - 1) The spread of the HIV Virus/A.I.D.S. will unfortunately effect many generations to come.
    - 2) The real tragedy is those who get infected through a blood transfusion, or to hear of a husband or wife that was infected by their spouse.
  3. One of the most striking biblical examples that has affected all of us was the choice made by Adam and Eve.
    - 1) Their decision to sin and eat of the forbidden fruit led to them being deprived of the tree of life (**Gen. 3:22-23**).
    - 2) Paul: **Rom. 5:12** *Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.*
    - 3) Today we still bear the consequences of their action, as we all die (**Heb. 9:27**).
  4. In **Exod. 20:5ff**, God warned the children of Israel that if they rejected Him and His will, that subsequent generations would bear the consequences; even unto the 3rd and 4th generations.
- C. The affects of wrong choices of generations past can be far reaching.
- D. Consider for example the weather:
  1. We need rain to water the earth, but sometimes we face devastations because of storms.
  2. But the devastation that comes from things such as hurricanes, tornadoes, or floods was also the result of man's sin.
  3. Before the great flood of Noah's day, the Bible does not speak of rain, but does speak of a mist (**Gen. 2:6**).
  4. The scientists who believe in the biblical account of the creation, speak of an idea environment before the flood.
    - 1) They believe that the world was once enveloped by a vapor canopy, and believe it is referred to in **Gen. 1:6** (cf. "Firmament").
    - 2) It was not until the flood that we read of a great rain (**Gen. 7:11**).
- E. Man, through his sin and corruptness of the world, led to the changing of his environment and climate.
  1. The great flood led to the changing of the features of the earth -- mountain ranges, deserts.
  2. There were evidently changes in the atmospheric pressures as well.
  3. Some of the most renowned Bible scholars of our day even contend that prior to the flood there were no volcanic eruptions, or other severe weather disturbances.
- F. Today, when storms strike, and lives are lost, it is not necessarily the will of god, but the consequences of a corrupt world that existed long ago.

SOMETIMES THERE IS SUFFERING FROM...

#### IV. NATURAL LAWS.

- A. God, in His infinite wisdom, made His creation orderly, as He designed it to be governed by a number of natural laws.
  - 1. These laws have been established for our good.
  - 2. For example: gravity, which keeps us from being cast into space.
- B. But on the negative side, we know that gravity can be devastating.
  - 1. If you drop a heavy object of your toe, you suffer from the downside of gravity.
  - 2. You might climb a ladder and slip and fall.
  - 3. In **Luke 13**, Jesus referred to the tower of Siloam which fell upon some men; those 18 men were victims of gravity.
  - 4. Jesus made the point that these men were no greater sinners that they suffered such a calamity, but that all sin; and unless they repent they will perish.
  - 5. Although the laws of God are designed for our good, we see also that they can work against us.

#### V. WHY DOES SUFFERING EXIST?

- A. The answer is so that man could have a free will, an opportunity of choice.
- B. Note that in some of these categories that we have discussed, free will is involved.
  - 1. God has not made us as automatons or robots, but has allowed us to make choices between good and evil.
  - 2. Moses charged Israel to choose life (**Deut. 30:19**).
  - 3. Even today we present the gospel (good news) of Jesus Christ, and the choice is to either obey or reject Him.
- C. Even concerning the choices of others; they are made of their own free will.
  - 1. In order for them to have the opportunity to choose to do good, there must also be the opportunity for them to choose wrong.
  - 2. Even in regard to past generations, their choices were made from free will, and we are affected by their decisions.
- D. Free will is extremely important:
  - 1. God created man out of love, and in His infinite wisdom He provided a way for man to be redeemed from sin, and the slavery of sin (**cf. Rom. 6**).
  - 2. But with that ability of choice we must understand that some suffering is a natural consequence of free will.

#### VI. WHY DOESN'T GOD INTERVENE?

- A. It certainly is not because He cannot.
  - 1. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego faced the fiery furnace, they said: *Our God is able to deliver us* (**Dan. 3:17**).
  - 2. Jesus pointed out that with God, *all things are possible* (**Matt. 19:26**).
- B. Although I can't say this with 100% assurance, the best answer seems to be that God chooses to limit Himself.
  - 1. The late Batsell Barret Baxter: "God cannot create a mountain that He cannot climb. He cannot dig a hold that He cannot fill."
  - 2. Satan is certainly no opposition to the power of God; as even in the book of Job he could only do what God permitted him to do.
    - 1) **Rev. 20** depicts satan as being bound by an angel, and then he is cast into the bottomless pit.

- 2) The Bible also speaks of hell which has been created for the devil and his angels (**Matt. 25:41**).
- C. As alluded to earlier in the lesson, God does not intervene or cause a calamity, but permits it to take place to accomplish His will.
- D. We must remember that in the beginning, God's creation was *very good* (**Gen. 1:31**).
  1. Hebrew word would seem to convey perfection; i.e., exactly what He wanted.
  2. Evil then came on the scene. This was not created by God, but was permitted to allow man to be a creature of choice.
  3. There would be no reason for God to allow these things to be if man had not sinned; but man has rendered that a mute point. (**Rom. 3:23**).

#### **CONCLUSION:**

1. We may never fully understand why people get cancer, or some other dreaded disease.
2. It may be self-inflicted; the environment, which man has corrupted, may cause the harm; or it might be through the fault of others. The point is that in some cases, we may never know the answer.
3. Thankfully, our time here is short and we know that God promises that there will be no suffering in heaven (**Rev. 21:4**).
4. Consider that all suffering though is not evil.
  - 1) Man just generally assumes that all suffering is evil.
  - 2) But consider, if there were no suffering, where would be our need for God, or our desire for heaven?
5. Baxter: "Man's primary purpose in existence is to honor and glorify God, and to become as God-like as it is humanly possible to become. Now this being so, everything that takes him away from God is evil, and anything that brings him toward God is good."
6. The Bible certainly makes this evident:
  - 1) Example: the love of money (root of all kinds of evil, **1 Tim. 6:10**), is that which can take us away from God.
  - 2) When man, however, is down, when he is suffering, it is then that he needs God.
7. For this reason, we cannot say that all suffering is evil.
8. In fact, sometimes suffering leads to the salvation of a lost soul:
  - 1) For example: a dear friend new of a man who had a heart attack, which led him to be restored.
  - 2) **Heb. 12:11**
9. Sometimes there is a joy in that we suffer for being Christians (cf. **Acts 5:41**).
10. Close by saying: some have thought that God has not responded to the death and suffering in this world; but He has -- consider His own Son.