

## **WHY IS THERE EVIL?, 1PETER 1:3-9, ROM5:12-21**

Why? Questions for Christians #6

◆**Intro:** Last week I heard on the news that a four-year-old little boy was swept away by rushing creek waters. It'd been several days and they hadn't found him. It cuts your heart hearing that kind of thing. This week we nearly had a tornado in town. There are uprooted trees everywhere. The rain was so thick you couldn't see across the street! Standing in rubble of a once-home folks often cry out "Why?".

◆Then of course there are all the other ugly, and painful things perpetrated not by "acts of God", so called because they are clearly beyond us. There are evils of moral nature: rapes, teens snapped up in Meijer's parking lot for sex-trafficking, opioid overdoses, drunken brawls, divorcing marriages, a mother who drowns her 5 kids, even genocide. We may think lightly of all of these in our movies, but when they happen to us, we call it evil. Evil, suffering, clear and obvious wrong – this causes many of us to wonder about God. This is the problem of evil.

◆The "problem of evil" may be summarized like this: If there is an almighty God, and if he is good, why is there also evil? Would not an able God and a good God naturally destroy evil? To us, this is the right course of action. So since there is obvious evil, many conclude that God is not good, or that he is unable and weak, or that he just isn't there -for surely God the Almighty would do what we think he should do... I'm going to tell you up front that God's revealed Word tells us both that God is almighty,

## **WHY IS THERE EVIL?, 1PETER 1:3-9, ROM5:12-21**

Why? Questions for Christians #6

and that God is good. That puts even the existence of evil under his good and beneficial control.

◆ *"I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. ... I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things... "This is what the LORD says--the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands?" Isaiah 45:5-11, NIV.*

◆ In this context God is about to make the foreign king Cyrus of Persia, bless Israel. But he first had enslaved Israel under Cyrus. How do we reconcile these things? Well, we are not to the ...End Game.

◆ **Step 1 in facing evil: Start with love.** The first thing people need in dealing with evil is usually NOT answers. So be careful. Usually when people are asking the big "Why?" it's because they hurt, whether it's a little girl crying "Why?" from an overturned bicycle, or and mother crying "Why?" when the police are at the front door to inform her of her child's death, as happened to my wife's friend.

◆ A. What people need in torment and pain is first of all love, sympathy, empathy, companionship and the like, not reasonable explanations. Yes, Romans 8:28 is true, all things do work for the good for those who are Christ's, but that is something to teach each other *before* tragedy strikes, or later in the healing. It

## **WHY IS THERE EVIL?, 1PETER 1:3-9, ROM5:12-21**

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doesn't help much at a funeral. Sure, we can offer some rationale for why God might allow such things, and I hope to do that in a minute. But look behind the question when your neighbor is in pain. You might offer to look for answers at some point, but first ask them how you can help them get through the moment.

◆ *"[He] comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God." 2 Corinthians 1:4, NIV.*

◆ Think it over, if someone we love is abused or hurt, all the reasons in the world would not make it OK with us! If you told me my child's murder would cause droves of atheists to become Christians, I would still not be OK with it and it would not take away my pain. So let's be careful to see our friend's need for support and love first, rather than quick answers. Sound good?

◆ **B.** So what comfort do we have from God? Here's something else to share with the person in pain: The God of the Bible knows and feels our pain with us and cares so much about it that he sent us his Son to begin it's grand reversal. Christianity alone among the world religions claims that God became uniquely and fully human, and therefore knows first hand our despair, rejection, loneliness (Keller). His death was a suffering of love to rescue creation and begin the end of evil! That's really good news. Share some good news. There is an answer to evil. We'll come back to this.

## **WHY IS THERE EVIL?, 1PETER 1:3-9, ROM5:12-21**

Why? Questions for Christians #6

◆ **Step 2 in facing evil: don't blame God.** This gets you no where in dealing with evil.

◆ A. The God the Bible preaches is a holy, pure, and righteous God.

◆ *"Your eyes are too pure to look on evil; you cannot tolerate wrong. Why then do you tolerate the treacherous? Why are you silent while the wicked swallow up those more righteous than themselves?" Habakkuk 1:13, NIV.*

◆ Here the prophet Habakkuk knows that God is not evil, but he also struggles with the fact that he allows it. Some folks say you can't have it both ways: good, almighty God, and an evil world. He would have to fix it. (This is in a sense true, but we are not in the End Game yet. Hang on to that thought.) So this tension between 1) suffering/evil and 2) the reality of God, has chased many away from God, but in their suffering they miss the truth that if there really isn't a good God who set the standard of good and right, then there is no such thing as evil/suffering either. The atheist has no reason to call anything evil, because he has no standard to call something good except his own opinion. And yet even the atheist senses evil and wrong.

◆ B. So where did it come from?

◆ *"Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned-- for before the law was given, sin was in the world. But sin is not taken into account when there is no law.*

## **WHY IS THERE EVIL?, 1PETER 1:3-9, ROM5:12-21**

Why? Questions for Christians #6

*Nevertheless, death reigned from the time of Adam to the time of Moses, even over those who did not sin by breaking a command, as did Adam, who was a pattern of the one to come.” Romans 5:12-14, NIV.*

◆ Why is there evil? Because we brought it on. “Even those who did not sin” live in a death state we received from our first parents!

◆ v12 *sin entered the world through one man and death through sin*

◆ v15 *the many died by the trespass of one man*

◆ v17 *by the trespass of one man, death reigned through that one man*

◆ v18 *the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men*

◆ Evil is not a person, but a deficiency of godliness in people. (It’s also in some spirits by the way.) Perhaps it is better understood as a **moral** state of being. People wonder “Well where did evil come from? If God is the Creator of all things, then God made evil too.” No, it’s not a thing God made. It is the absence of right and good in us, just as dark is not a particle, it is the absence of photons, particles of light. Our first parents formed the mold from which we all come: people without full holiness. Now, why might God allow evil to be in mankind? Wouldn’t it be better to never allow any evil? Here’s a possible answer that certainly doesn’t plumb the depths of God’s sovereign purposes and

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Why? Questions for Christians #6

mysteries, does at least help us see that there can be answers, even those we can't comprehend.

◆**Step 3 in understanding evil: there is greater good through God's allowance of evil.** God is so omnipotent that he can use even evil for greater good (Romans 8:28). And *much* evil and suffering can be endured because there is a greater future coming as a result.

◆"I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Romans 8:18, NIV.

◆*"In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. These have come so that your faith--of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire--may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus Christ is revealed." 1 Peter 1:6, 7, NIV.*

◆What kind of greater goods might there be that could make killings, and bankruptcies, and cancers worth enduring?

◆**A. Love.** It's hard not to agree that love is great good. But love is not possible from a robot. Inherent in the ability to love is the ability to not love. God made man with the ability to chose right or wrong, love or hatred. God desires that we should love him back as he loves us, but love is a voluntary choice. It can not be forced. So "evil is inherent in the risky gift of free will." (JB Philips) When Adam and Eve used this freedom and sinned, they

## **WHY IS THERE EVIL?, 1PETER 1:3-9, ROM5:12-21**

Why? Questions for Christians #6

forever stained human nature with the inability chose rightly thereafter, and thus all human are what Paul calls, “under sin” or “dead in transgressions and sin” and “without hope”. So by allowing evil God also allowed love. The good news is that God’s love is stronger than our evil!

◆ “But the gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died by the trespass of the one man, how much more did God’s grace and the gift that came by the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, overflow to the many! Again, the gift of God is not like the result of the one man’s sin: The judgment followed one sin and brought condemnation, but the gift followed many trespasses and brought justification. For if, by the trespass of the one man, death reigned through that one man, how much more will those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ.” Romans 5:15-17, NIV.

◆ **B. Salvation:** Could it be that a saved and healed world, or a saved and restored child, is a greater thing than one that never hurt, fell, or endangered? Could this even cause greater love?

◆ **Clip:** Infinity Wars. Dr. Strange gives up his stone and allows Thanos the power to kill half of the universe, because it is the only way (out of 14,000,605 possibilities) for a future in which the world survives and humanity wins. Life through death! (See, our movies can’t help but reflect the Gospel because our longings can only be satisfied by the Gospel.)

## **WHY IS THERE EVIL?, 1PETER 1:3-9, ROM5:12-21**

Why? Questions for Christians #6

◆ Think of it like this: suppose I let my toddler get too close to the stove top and singe his hand a little. I could create a home world where he never has the option of interacting with a stove, and therefore will never get burned, and never cooked or baked either. Or I could let him get a burn, and then I know that he will never willingly touch the stove top again. He will voluntarily chose the wise and good. He has learned good by facing evil. This is what God did with our world. He allowed us to touch the stove (sin), and then healed us through Jesus (salvation) and will finish that off so that by the time we live fully in his kingdom, sinning will no longer be an option for us (we will cook and bake delicacies without danger). Our own nature will preclude it.

◆ That's exciting isn't it? Salvation is so much more than a ticket to heaven. It's a change of character, of desires. It's the ability to want and willingly choose the better, and live in goodness.

◆ **C. Slow Judgement:** Judgement is God's final answer on evil. See, many folks think that God must not be good because evil hasn't been crushed, but they are jumping to conclusions. Everywhere in the scriptures God promises that he is crushing, and will finally crush sin and death. He simply hasn't finished it yet. He is patient.

◆ *"And God has also commanded that the heavens and the earth will be consumed by fire on the day of judgment, when ungodly people will perish. But you must not forget, dear friends, that a*

## **WHY IS THERE EVIL?, 1PETER 1:3-9, ROM5:12-21**

Why? Questions for Christians #6

*day is like a thousand years to the Lord, and a thousand years is like a day. The Lord isn't really being slow about his promise to return, as some people think. No, he is being patient for your sake. He does not want anyone to perish, so he is giving more time for everyone to repent." 2 Peter 3:7-9, NLT.*

◆ If God would crush all evil today, many here would be crushed along with it! He is giving us the opportunity to join Jesus' family and exit Adam's.

◆ **D. Other goods:** Paul lists out for us earlier in the chapter a variety of good things that result from pain and suffering: perseverance, character, hope (v5). Hebrews 12 adds that holiness is another product. Awareness of eternity that we would otherwise not think about is another (2Cor.4:16-18). We have an amazing ability to not think about life, meaning, God, eternity - until we are in pain. Then even the atheist ponders God, if at least to be mad at him. Lewis says that God only whispers to us in pleasure but shouts to us in our pain. "It is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world."

◆ **Conclusion:** The solution to the problem of evil, friends, is that this world is not all there is. It is NOT the best world. It is not what's coming. God is good, and almighty and in the process of destroying evil. That bell tolled with the birth, death, and resurrection of Jesus from being dead! Now things have begun to reverse. When you attach yourself to Jesus, you receive the gift of that reversal. Revelation 21 say there will be no more death,

## **WHY IS THERE EVIL?, 1PETER 1:3-9, ROM5:12-21**

Why? Questions for Christians #6

crying or pain. A new order is on the way. We don't see the end game, but Jesus has foreseen it. We need to have faith in him. Whats coming with Christ is not a consolation prize, it is a whole remake of first prize.

◆ In the climax of the Lord of the Rings trilogy, Sam Gamgee discovers his friend Gandalf is not dead but alive. He cries, "I thought you were dead! But then I though I was dead myself! Is everything sad going to come untrue?" Yes, friends. "Everything sad is going to come untrue and it will somehow be greater for having once been broken and lost" (Keller). Even the material world will be purged of decay and death. All will be life! Heaven will work backwards turning every agony into a glory and every noise into eternal harmony. You want a solution to the evil you've faced and will face? Bow and receive it through faith in Jesus Christ.

◆ Read 1Pet 1:3-9 again.