

SUFFERING IN THE WORLD: DOES GOD LOVE US?

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I. Need to Get Rid of Parochial Self-Centeredness

- A. If God were holy, there would be no evil.
- B. If God were loving, he would not confine people to hell forever.

Obviously, if there is a final overthrow of evil, it must be forever.

- A. People fuss at God on the one hand because there is evil.
- B. People desire on the other hand to practice freedom of the will.
- A. People ask why God does not get rid of evil. When God gets rid of evil,
- B. People ask why God did not give a father of theirs a longer chance to repent.
- A. If God treats everyone alike, what good does it do to be a Christian?
- B. If God blesses the righteous, he could be accused of playing favorites or picking on sinners.

These difficulties point up the need in the problem of pain to get self-centeredness out of the way to gain an omniscient viewpoint relative to the purposes of God. Otherwise we are just viewing it in terms of our own feelings. Modern society has made a rather uniform equation of pain and guilt for inflicting pain.

II. Why Does God Not Do Something?

- A. Why does God not simply eradicate evil people and leave the good people here?

Matthew 13:24-30: The intertwined roots of people's lives means that extracting evil people from the world could destroy some of the faithful who would not understand.

God does do this on occasion: 2 Peter 2:4-9.

- B. Why does not God go ahead with the end of the world?

God's delay represents grace and love, not disinterest or inability: 2 Peter 3:9; Romans 2:3-8; 1 Timothy 1:15-17; 1 Peter 3:18-20 (Exodus 34:6-7).

The flood was delayed for 120 years. Meantime Noah served as a herald of righteousness (Genesis 6:3; 2 Peter 2:5).

Destruction of the Canaanites was delayed until their evil was full (Genesis 15:16).

Destruction of Jerusalem was delayed for a generation till the Jews could see for sure that Jesus was not just another fly-by-night Messianic claimant.

God wants to change the wicked into the faithful more than he wants to destroy them. God is more interested in saving than in punishing. He seeks to redeem before he judges (John 3:17-18).

III. Basic Facts About Suffering

- A. Suffering as such originated from sin.
- B. Guilt is the sting of pain. (A child may cry over a light spanking but laugh over a playful spanking that is perhaps harder.) Certain adjustments are in order:
 1. There is no necessary correlation between a suffering and a sin.
 2. There is no necessary correlation between the degree of suffering and the degree of sin.
 3. God's administration of pain is indirect through nature.

IV. Suffering of People and the Love of God

- A. Instituting suffering/death is an act of love to force people to recognize his need for relationship to God.
- B. Instituting suffering/death was an act of love that provides occasion for the experience of development (exhilaration).
- C. Instituting suffering/death is an act of love that provides the possibility of God's identifying with it as an act of love (incarnation).