

Evil and Suffering in Light of God's Love and Power

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People are not robots.

- Man was sinless when God created him (Gen. 2-3).
- If God had forceably prevented man from sinning, man's will would not be free.
- Without free choice, love is impossible.

God's ultimate plan is to perfect those who choose to be perfected.

- In the new creation there will be no sin, suffering, death, or evil (Rev. 21:4).
- Only (and all) those who overcome sin and evil by choosing to worship Christ, rather than to live for self, can enter into this perfect state (Rev. 21:7-8).
- The perfecting process takes place via the interaction of our will and Christ's in opposition to Satan's will (Acts 8:23, Phil. 2:13, 2 Thes. 3:5, 2 Tim. 2:26).

What is spiritual is eternal.

- All spiritual beings will live forever. They cannot be annihilated (Dan. 12:2, Matt. 25:46).
- Everyone's conscience confirms that life continues after physical death (Eccl. 3:11).
- Spiritual death, which came through man's sin, preceded the physical death of man. Spiritual death refers to man's incapacity to do good and, unless he entrusts himself to the goodness of Christ, results in his eternal separation from God (Rom. 5:12-21).

All people now sin. All enter life in a state of spiritual incapacitation.

- Through Adam's trespass, sin has been imputed to each human (Rom. 5:12-21).
- We are sinners, by nature, from conception (Ps. 51:5).
- Without God's restraint and influence we would be totally depraved (Jer. 17:9, John 16:8-11).
- Nothing done on our own is righteous by God's standard (Isa. 64:6, John 15:5, Rom. 3:10-20).

Life on earth has an eternal purpose.

- This life is roughly analogous to a school course with a final examination.
- This life is intended to prepare us for the eternity that lies ahead (1 Cor. 6:2-3, 1 Pet. 2:9).
- Only one chance and only so much time is needed for an individual to choose (or reject) God's offer and to choose (or reject) God's training (Luke 16:19-31, Heb. 9:27).
- Neither too much nor too little time would be good for us (Isa. 38-39, Isa. 57:1-2, Acts 5:1-10).

Physical death has a good purpose.

- God gave us physical death so that we might have the possibility of being rescued from spiritual death (Gen. 3:22-24).
- Death seals and protects the righteousness of the one who chooses God (1 Kings 14:12-13, Is. 57:1-2).
- Death limits the degradation and punishment of the one who rejects God (Rom. 1:32).
- Death limits the spread of wickedness in society (Gen. 19).

Suffering has a purpose.

- Suffering alerts us to potentially destructive problems—physical, emotional, and spiritual (2 Cor. 7:8-13).
- Suffering restrains us, keeping us from committing evil (Heb. 12:5-13).
- Suffering humbles us, reminding us of our weakness (2 Cor. 12:7-10).
- Suffering teaches us about ourselves, our values, our choices (Matt. 13:20-23).
- Suffering teaches us about God—the magnitude of His love for us in His willingness to suffer and die in our place (Heb. 12:2).
- Suffering builds perseverance, character, and hope (Rom. 5:3-4).

God is involved in our suffering.

- God identifies personally with the sufferings of human beings (Matt. 25:31-46).
- God personally has suffered and has been tempted more than anyone (Is. 50:4-7, Is. 52:13 - 53:12).
- God is at work through His Spirit to restrain evil, to call people to repent of their evil and to submit to His authority over their lives (John 16:8-11, Joel 2:32, John 14:15-23).
- God promises that all things will work together for good for those who love Him and are called to His purpose (Rom. 8:28).

Man's short lifespan and suffering bring spiritual protection,

- Long lifespans benefit the wicked, not the righteous (Gen. 6:38).
- Absence of suffering benefits the wicked, not the righteous (Gen. 3:16-19).

Innocence is available in Christ alone.

- Man's conscience speaks to him of a God whose standard is perfection—perfection in love, perfection in obedience to His moral code, obedience in action, word, and thought (1 Sam. 6:20, Is. 59:2-14, Heb. 1:12-13).
- Only a perfect being can meet that standard (Deut. 32:4, 1 Sam. 2:2).
- Through His life, death, and bodily resurrection, Jesus Christ proved Himself to be the perfect one, the one and only redeemer of sinful man (Heb. 2:9-15).

Human solutions fail to solve our problem.

- Even with the best possible government, worldwide peace and justice, unparalleled prosperity, unprecedented good health, and lifespans in the hundreds of years, most people, when the chance arises, will choose rebellion and evil (Rev. 20:1-10).

- Minimizing the consequences of sin fails to check its spread (Gen. 4:11-13, Heb. 12:5-13).
- Punishment for sin is necessary for restraint and correction, but it is insufficient to eliminate sin.
- Only God has the power to conquer Satan, sin, and death (Is. 43:10-11 & 59:15-16).

It is good that Satan is the initiator of evil and is the tempter.

- Because Satan is the most powerful created being, and because the circumstances (sin, death, suffering, and evil) in which he is tempting us are the most severe, there exists no possibility of our facing any greater test than the one we undergo in our brief physical life on Earth (Is. 14:11-17, Ezek. 28:12-19, Jude 9).
- If we pass this test, choosing God's rescue in Christ, the way is opened for God to deliver us eternally from all sin, death, suffering, and evil *without* taking away our free-will, and without losing the possibility to love (Rev. 21:3-8).
- For our rescue to be eternally secure, everyone must be subjected to the ultimate test (Rev. 20:7-10).

The test is not too difficult.

- God will not allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). God's help and comfort are always available to those who depend on Him (Matt. 28:20, Heb. 13:5).

Suffering that aligns with God's will shows the power of the gospel.

- Those who exchange their guilt for Christ's innocence gain, through the trials in their lives, perseverance maturity, hope, and God's perfect by (Rom. 5:3-4, James 1:24).
- Suffering within God's will purifies the soul and communicates to the world the surpassing value of the spiritual over the physical, the eternal over the temporal (Heb. 12:16, 1 Pet. 2:19-25, 1 Pet. 4:1-2).
- Skeptics watch Christians' response to suffering and persecution to see whether or not the faith of such people is true, reliable, and secure, to see whether or not God is miraculously at work within them (1 Pet. 3:13-18).
- The severest, often unacknowledged, test to which doubters subject believers is persecution (Job, Acts 7:55-8:3 & 9:1-19).
- One of the greatest possible joys of this life comes through suffering for "righteousness"sake (Matt. 5:10, 1 Pet. 4:14).

Our time of suffering is brief.

- Our lifespan is like a whiff of smoke compared to eternity (Job 7:6-10, Ps. 103:15-16, James 4:14). We can barely begin to fathom God's time frame (2 Tim. 1:9, Tit. 1:2, 2 Pet. 3:8, Rev. 21:1).

God has a purpose in blessing the wicked.

- God always reaches to us first through His mercy and grace and then through His justice and rebukes (John 3:16-18, 2 Pet. 3:9).

- God first blesses those who are going astray so that they may acknowledge Him as the source of their blessing and then repent (Ps. 73, Rom. 2:4).
- If people refuse to acknowledge God as the source of their blessing, God removes the blessing and thus prepares them to listen to the message of those who have chosen Him (Prov. 24:15-20).
- If the wicked persist in wickedness, they receive only what they have chosen—eternal torment and separation from God (Ps.73).

Both Heaven and hell are expressions of God's perfect love.

- Nobody dies without having the clear, understood opportunity to receive or reject God's offer of forgiveness for sin and of life with Him (John 3:16-21).
- Just as it is impossible from a human perspective to imagine how awful the torment in hell could be and how anyone could possibly deserve the punishment, it is equally impossible to imagine how wonderful heaven could be and how anyone could possibly deserve the blessing (1 Cor. 2:9).
- Those who go to hell are those who prefer eternal torment to obedience to God and fellowship with Him (Luke 12:8-10, Heb. 6:4-6, Heb. 10:26-29).
- Scripture tells of differing degrees of torment in hell—the greater the wickedness, the greater it will be (Rev. 20:11-15)—and of differing rewards in heaven, depending on one's degree of submission to the work of God's Spirit in building Christlikeness (1 Cor. 3:12-15).
- If God imposed no torment in hell, the residents there would vex one another to an unthinkable degree (Jer. 17:9). One purpose of the torment is to restrain the expression of evil. Some need more restraint than others.