

The Problem With Evil or Why Do Bad Things Happen To Good People
[Most of this study was drawn from an article & Bible Study by Pastor Ian Pacey]

I. Watch Video: <http://www.godtube.com/watch/?v=FJEF0JNU>

II. A Problem Of Definition.

A. Who are the "good" people from a biblical perspective?

Romans 3:10 - "As it is written: "There is no one righteous, no, not even one. No one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."

No person is good according to God's standard.

B. What is the nature of God, and is He capable of evil?

Mark 10:17-18 - "And as he was setting out on his journey, a man ran up and knelt before him and asked him, "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" And Jesus said to him, "Why do you call me good? No one is good except God alone."

God is the only One who can rightly be described as "good," for only He is completely benevolent toward us.

1 John 4:8 - "Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love (ἀγάπη)."

God is "love," and not any old love, but the selfless agape-flavor of love, which is given to you by God giving up something in self-sacrifice.

Revelation 4:8 - "And the four living creatures, each of them with six wings, are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, 'Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!'"

God is "Holy," hating sin and every form of evil. And He is "almighty," all-powerful or omnipotent, entirely capable of dealing with anything, even with the problem of evil.

C. What is truly "evil" and what is its source?

Genesis 1:31 & 3:6,15-17 - "And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.... So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.... 'I will put enmity between you [the serpent] and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.' To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.' And to Adam he said, 'Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life.'"

How does God describe every single thing that He had made in His creation?

Everything God created was good, actually very good.

Did He create anything that was "evil?"

No, It was completely good. Perfect and evil-free.

How did evil come into this world? [Nt. Rev. 12:7-9]

Satan, having rebelled against God and His good and gracious will, was cast from heaven, and landed smack-dab in the middle of the Garden. He tempted Eve and Adam to rebel against God and His will as well.

Did the devil create it, if not what is it?

When Adam & Eve rebelled, sin corrupted the perfect creation, removing some of its “goodness” as it were. So evil is not a “thing” created, but it is actually a “lack of goodness” which Adam and Eve, and all their descendants now sadly know, all too well.

III. The Persistent Problem Of Evil And Bad Things Happening In The World.

A. So God is not the author of evil, or the primary reason why bad things happen in this world. What is the root cause of evil, and bad things happening in the world? [Nt. again Gen. 3:15-17]

Romans 5:11 - "Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned"

Romans 8:20-23 - "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies."

Sadly, Adam and Eve’s eyes were opened when they sinned, and the unfortunate promise of the serpent was fulfilled, they knew the difference between good and evil, experiencing the latter now for the very first time. You are in the same boat as our first parents. You, too, have sinned, as they did, and now you know evil in your life. You get hurt, grow tired, suffer ill, and see the corruption of the formerly all good creation all around you. Sin itself is the reason evil is in the world.

B. Some passages seem to make it sound like God is the direct creator and cause of evil.

Isaiah 45:7 - "I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things."

Amos 3:6 - "Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the LORD has done it?"

How do we view such verses in the overall context of what we know about God and evil from other, clear passages in the Bible?

Since we know evil is not a “created thing,” we can look to other creations, Satan and our own sinful flesh, as the sources of evil.

But if God is the original Creator of Satan and man and has the power to overcome evil, doesn't that make Him complicit?

We must remember, it’s not that God created man or the devil “flawed” initially. God cannot be blamed for Satan’s rebellion or man’s fall into sin. This was a result of their own choices. So when you read such Bible passages that tell of God being the “cause” of evil calamities, remember that He is not the “direct” cause, but rather is allowing for evil circumstances in this now corrupted creation, for a time.

C. If God is perfectly good in and of Himself, yet evil abounds in the world, He must have some sort of good purpose.

Read Job 1-2

Romans 8:18-28 - "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but we ourselves,

who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience. Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because¹ the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good,¹ for those who are called according to his purpose."

Is God the one who causes evil in your life? Is God in control through all of your suffering?

As we see in the story of Job, God Himself does not do the "afflicting," but He does permit Satan to inflict suffering, but always with a limit. (He may be the devil, but he's always "God's devil.")

For what purpose does God allow your suffering for a time?

Accept legitimate answers and redirect. The sufferings of all creation are intended by God to direct our hope to the new creation, the paradise restored that we are too long for. And we are comforted by God's Own Spirit as we await the new heavens and new earth to know that God is using all these things, even our sufferings of evil, for our ultimate good. For you have been called to the purpose of His good and gracious will in Christ!

IV. The Various Purposes Of God That May Be Served Through Affliction.

Some believe that the sufferings we may face in this life may be categorized as serving the purpose of correction with affection, perfection with direction, and reflection.

A. Correction With Affection

1. What kind of correction is indicated by the following verses?

That we may learn that God's ways are not our ways and God's ways are always best.

Ecclesiastes 8:17 - "then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it." Shows that many times we will not know why we are going through sufferings

Ecclesiastes 8:6 - "For there is a proper time and procedure for every matter, though a person may be weighed down by misery."

Consider reading all of Ecclesiastes chapter 8 for the "why" of suffering.

2. What kind of correction is indicated by the example given in the letters to the churches in Revelation 2-3?

Accept answers, but note that these are examples of being turned away from a dangerous course. Jesus rebuked or corrected them for their good. He did it out of love, but did not forsake them despite their many imperfections.

Consider reading Rev. 2 & 3.

Jesus rebuked most of the churches except the Philadelphia church. In Ephesus they had forsaken their first love. In Pergamum they needed to repent. In Thyatira they had false prophets. In Sardis they had fallen asleep. In Laodicea they were lukewarm.

3. A father correcting his children does so out of love and affection. The opposite of love is not hate – it is indifference. God loves us and He corrects us because of His perfect love for us. What do the following verses tell us about the motivation of God's correction, even when it means allowing our lives to be impacted by evil, and letting bad things happen to us?

God equates discipline with love. And since He delights in us (Psalm 37) He corrects us. When we correct our child for playing too close to the street, it is because we love him/her and don't want hi/her killed or hurt. Our correction is swift and sure because we delight in our child.

God is the perfect parent and He corrects every son and daughter that He loves. No discipline is equal to no love. Where a parent corrects their child they show love for that child. When God corrects us, and He does every child of His, it is because He loves us.

Proverbs 3:12 - "because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in."

Hebrews 12:5-6 - "And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you...because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

B. Perfection With Direction.

1. What is perfected in us through suffering and the promise of "better and lasting possessions" according to Hebrews 10:32-36?

Answers may vary, but it reveals that suffering or "bad things" yield in us great rewards for the future. They serve to perfect our perspective on time and eternity, temporal ease and everlasting inheritance, etc.

Hebrews 10:32-36 - "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you endured in a great conflict full of suffering. Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. You suffered along with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised."

2. What, if not perfected, is made more perfect in us when bad things happen to us according to these Hebrews 5:7-9?

Not that Jesus needed to learn obedience because He lived a sinless life, but we are being perfected in "passive obedience" through our sufferings.

Hebrews 5:7-9 - "During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with fervent cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Son though he was, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him."

3. What perfection is worked in us through suffering according to these verses?

Suffering helps perfect our identification with Christ; His cross and His crown. It allows us to more fully grasp His sacrifice for us, etc.

1 Peter 4:12-15 - "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing; so that also at the revelation of His glory, you may rejoice with exultation. If you are reviled for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."

4. When Gold is refined, it takes up to seven times to have it refined to complete purity. The way gold is refined reminds us that we are the gold and God is the Refiner. Gold is heated up to extreme temperatures which allow all dross (impurities) to be burned away. The closer the gold is to being purified, the more the refiner sees his reflection. The refiner knows when the gold is completely refined when the refiner sees his reflection perfectly. What implications of this do you see in the following verses?

When the gold (us) have had all the impurities (dross) burned away (by suffering), then the gold (us) reflect the Refiner (God). So suffering makes us reflect God in our lives and we are growing in perfection although not yet

perfect. God's sovereign hand is always leading us, guiding us, directing us to something better, whether we see it or not. Sometimes He is directing us to our knees. At other times He directs us to repent. Yet at other times He directs us to depend upon Him. And sometimes He directs us away from something that would hurt us. He will not leave us to ourselves...He loves us too much to do that.

Malachi 3:3-5 - "But who can endure the day of his coming, and who can stand when he appears? For he is like a refiner's fire and like fullers' soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver, and he will purify the sons of Levi and refine them like gold and silver, and they will bring offerings in righteousness to the LORD. Then the offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to the LORD as in the days of old and as in former years."

Zechariah 13:8-9 - "In the whole land, declares the LORD, two thirds shall be cut off and perish, and one third shall be left alive. And I will put this third into the fire, and refine them as one refines silver, and test them as gold is tested. They will call upon my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'They are my people'; and they will say, 'The LORD is my God.'"

1 Peter 1:3-7 - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, as was necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith- more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire- may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

C. Reflection

1. What are we called to reflect upon in Luke 13:1-5?

We are reminded in both our own suffering and in the sufferings common to all people that the wage of sin is death, so that we may repent and receive the forgiveness and new life that is God's gift to us in His Son, Jesus Christ.

Luke 13:1-5 - "There were some present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them: do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who lived in Jerusalem? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish."

2. What are we called to reflect upon in 1 Corinthians 10:13?

It reminds us that, when we suffer testing times in this life, we can rely on God. We cannot endure in our own strength so when suffering comes, and it most certainly will, we are to reflect upon our own life and our deep dependency on God.

1 Corinthians 10:13 - "No temptation (literal Greek is "testing") has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted (again, "tested") beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted ("tested") he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

3. What are we called to reflect upon in Romans 8:18 & 28?

This is a time honored and godly principle that all suffering will yield the best possible result. We are to remember God's goodness and mercy, and trust that His purpose for us, to save us for eternal life with Him is always good. We can reflect while we suffer on the fact that even the bad things that happen to us can have good results.

Romans 8:18 - "that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us."

Romans 8:28 - "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

V. But Why Do Good Things Seem To Happen to Bad People?

A. What seeming paradox do the following verses present, and how may it lead us to question the value of our faith and the necessity of godly living?

When good things happen to "bad" people is a very hard thing to understand. It may lead some to turn away from God when they see no temporal and tangible benefit to it.

Psalm 73:2-3 - "But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked."

Psalm 73:12 - "This is what the wicked are like— always free of care, they go on amassing wealth."

Ecclesiastes 9:2 - "All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not."

Ecclesiastes 9:11 - "The race is not to the swift nor the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise nor wealth to the brilliant nor favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all."

Ecclesiastes 8:14 - "here is something else meaningless (puzzling) that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless." That is something that is hard to understand: "the righteous get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get what the righteous deserve."

B. Again, what do we need to remember from Romans 3:10 and Matt. 19:17, regarding "good" and "bad" people? And what do we learn about the "rest of the story" for those who do not fear God?

There really are no "good" people. Only God is good, and at the proper time they will receive the just rewards for all that they have done apart from faith in Christ.

Psalm 73:12 - "till I entered the sanctuary of God; then I understood their final destiny." and Psalm 73:27 "Those who are far from you will perish; you destroy all who are unfaithful to you."

Ecclesiastes 8:12 - "Although a wicked person who commits a hundred crimes may live a long time, I know that it will go better with those who fear God, who are reverent before him."

VI. How Should We View Suffering And Endure The Bad Things That Happen To Us?

A. There are some things we do not and cannot understand. What can we learn from the following verses from Ecclesiastes 8?

God does not tell us everything about why we go through certain things. He is sovereign. He is working all things out in His own way. It is God's prerogative to tell us what we need to know and withhold those things that are none of our business.

Eccles. 8:16-17 - "When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth—people getting no sleep day or night— then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it".

B. Rejoice in what it says about us and our future glory in Christ. What does Romans 5:1-11 teach us about how we are to view our sufferings in this fallen world?

It sounds odd, but we may actually rejoice in the midst of the sufferings we endure as a Christian in this evil world! Not that you have to go around smiling, 24/7 as though you are always super-happy. Happiness is not the same thing as joy, exactly. You have joy, a fruit of the Holy Spirit, deep down, because you recognize that God is actually at work in your sufferings, to produce all kinds of good things, the ultimate of which is hope! For, although you suffer evils now, you know that the time will come soon when you will no longer experience anything of the sort!

Romans 5:1-11 - "Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. More than that, we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us. For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person— though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

C. Trust that Christ has conquered all evil for us. What do the following verses tell us about how Jesus has dealt with the course of evil and rescued us from every bad thing?

Since the rebellion of sin is what caused evil in the first place, Jesus came to earth to take on the problem, head-on. Or better said, "full-body-on," since He Himself became sin, bearing all your sin and mine, and even the sins of the entire world in His Own body on the tree of the cross. There, He was willing to suffer the wages of evil-causing sin, which is death—eternal death and separation from His heavenly Father. That what Jesus experienced at the cross, being "cursed" by God in your place, so that you are now blessed with His forgiveness, life and salvation. Jesus was willingly forsaken by His Father at Calvary so that you will never be forsaken by God. Jesus solves the problem of evil by having your sin nailed to Him on the tree. Now you have the promise of a new creation in which there will be no evil, and in which nothing "bad" will ever happen to you.

2 Corinthians 5:21 - "For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

Galatians 3:13 - "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us— for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree'"

2 Peter 3:13 - "But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells."

Revelation 21:4,27 - "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away... nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life."

CLOSING PRAYER

Merciful and everlasting God the Father, Who did not spare Your only Son but delivered Him up for us that He bear our sins on the cross, grant that our hearts may be so fixed with steadfast faith in our Savior that we may not fear the power of any evils; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.