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Why God Allows Evil

1. Answer the Christian: Why Do People Suffer for a Sin Adam Committed Long Ago?

Short Answer: Adam is the federal head or representative of all humanity. We all have a seminal or realistic union with Adam so we were in him when he sinned. Also, the doctrine of Traducianism which teaches that the origin of the sinful soul is transmitted from Adam and Eve on down through sexual procreation helps believers to understand why we are born with original sin.

Sometimes as a Christian the most difficult questions I wrestle with come not from skeptics (although they do offer some difficult ones), but rather my own internal struggles with doctrines such as original sin. Christians who are aware of my studies in apologetics have posed questions on original sin to me as well. When original sin comes up in a conversation, there are many ways the issue of fairness is raised but it generally boils down to the question, “How can God eternally punish people with something they inherit the moment of their conception?” Let me be brutally honest here, although I agree one hundred percent with the short answers above, I continue to grapple with this subject. I’m not sure if it is my fallen nature questioning God as Paul alluded to in Romans 9. Even though the context in Romans 9 is not original sin, after Paul mentions in verse 13 “Jacob I loved Esau I hated” (it doesn’t matter if you want to translate “hated” as “loved less” as there still is a Divine favoritism going here), Paul gets down to the nitty gritty and anticipates the question “Is God unjust? (vs 14)” He concludes in the same verse “By no means!” Paul then anticipated several more questions “Why does He still find fault? Who can resist His will?” to which he concluded with “Who are you oh man to answer back to God? (vs 20)” The bottom line is the Biblical text teaches we are responsible for our sins even though we are born sinful. When it comes to understanding fairness with my puny, finite conception of it

and God, I ultimately by faith trust the words that Abraham uttered so long ago in Genesis 18:25, “Shall not the Judge of all the Earth do what is just?”

Christians tend to offer two explanations for why we suffer for Adam’s sin. The first is what is called “Federal Headship.” This is the view where God appointed Adam to be the representative of the whole human race. So, when Adam sinned, we being in his loins also sinned. God having perfect knowledge knew Adam would be a fair and accurate representation of humanity. By analogy, Federal Headship is akin to the President of the United States declaring war on a nation, yet he did not poll every single American citizen but the entire country is at war.

The second explanation is called by two names, either Natural Headship or Traducianism. After Adam and Eve’s wills became totally corrupt, their physical offspring also inherited this fallen nature. Some Christians would classify this as “Total Depravity” meaning that humanity after the fall, is naturally inclined to all evil, and apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit cannot please God in any salvific way. This is not to be confused with “Utter Depravity” as in mankind can be as evil as in absolutely not being able to do any good on an earthly level. Rather, Total Depravity refers to the extent of humanity’s corruption after the fall and not the degree of corruption (i.e. Utter Depravity).

2 Answer the skeptic: Why does God let a child die?

Short answer: This type of question creates a slippery slope in that it assumes children should be immune to murder, accident and disease and other moral evils. The slippery slope is created by pondering the question, “To what age should children be indestructible?” It gives room to the festering notion of calling into question God’s fairness (in allowing children to die) and if children were indestructible, God would have to do millions of miracles a day for most people who do not want to worship Him.

The main problem from all the subset problems enumerated above is the fact that if God did all this, He would eventually violate a great majority of humanity's freewill. The Bible describes fallen, unregenerate man in a constant state of suppressing the evidence of the God of the Bible (Rom 1:18). Not only in this view would God be a cosmic bell-hop serving the whims of humanity at their pleasure, He would be forcing Himself on the most hardened of humanity by the millions of perpetual miracles a day. Imagine if Adolph Hitler had children, this view would assume that Hitler deserved his children to be miraculously indestructible. All humanity deserves what is eloquently summed up in the Westminster Shorter Catechism answer (Question 84) in that every sin deserves "God's wrath and curse, both in this life, and that which is to come." God does not owe the children of Adam's offspring anything!

3 Answer the skeptic: How might it be fair that God ordered the killing of Canaanite children?

Short Answer: When adults and communities and nations sin, very often there are consequences for children. What the skeptic fails to understand is that the conquest was not a military campaign but a sentence of judgment and therefore God being the author of life has the right to take it as He wishes. Also, one could argue if there is an age of accountability, God would have prevented the children of the Canaanites from growing up and further perpetrating evil and hence end up eternally lost.

On numerous occasions I have had to address the complaint that the destruction of the Canaanites, specifically their children, makes the God of the Bible look like a genocidal monster! The Biblical record is crystal clear as it notes, "They [Israel] utterly destroyed everything in the city [Jericho], both man and woman, young and old, and ox and sheep and donkey, with the edge of the sword" (Joshua 6:21). The notion of children being killed on the surface seems like an airtight argument for the skeptics. After all, didn't Jesus say regarding children in Matthew 18:6

“whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea?”

First, there is no contradiction between Matthew 18:6 and the command in Joshua to mete out Divine judgment. The text specifically says in Matthew “those who believe in me” (Jesus) and the Canaanites did not believe in the God of the Bible. Second, the God of the Bible is the author and even taker of life. The Lord plainly instructed the Israelites in Deuteronomy 32:39 “See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand.” This includes innocent children. For example, even on a human level, it is not always wrong to take an innocent life. On the tragic day of September 11, 2001, fighter jets were sent up to shoot down Flight 93 which had a plane full of innocent people. Flight 93 ended up crashing before fighter jets arrived on the scene. However, in cases like this, it is acceptable to kill innocent people. Third, many skeptics are assuming a standard of right and wrong and yet if there is no God, then no objective standard of morality was violated with the destruction of the Canaanite children. If the atheist and skeptic says, “God did something morally wrong in commanding the extermination of the Canaanites,” then he or she affirms the existence of objective morality and that can only be the case if an Objective Moral Lawgiver, i.e. God exists. So the skeptic here is caught in a dilemma of his or her own making. As Greg Koukl said on his Stand to Reason website that the atheist who asks why God would allow the destruction of the Canaanites, is the first person to complain about rampant evil (i.e. the Canaanites’ behavior) when God allows it to go unchecked. Greg summed up the skeptic’s logic here as tantamount to “How could a good God allow things that are contrary to my opinion?” or, to put it more bluntly, “I can’t believe in the existence of a God who would disagree with me.”

Lastly, if the Canaanite children were spared, it is possible that when they grew up, they would somehow find out about their ancestors being wiped out. Israel could not take the chance with this scenario. The way the Jewish people recorded their history in the Ancient Near East allows for zero possibility that the stories of Israel's past, would not at some point have been told to the children of Canaanites. That is not a good recipe for social order in the Promised Land.

4 Answer the skeptic: Why do bad things happen to good people?

Short answer: Jesus Christ taught in Luke 18:19 "No one is good except God alone." Paul in Romans 3:12 quoting three Old Testament references (Psalm 14:1-3, Psalm 53:1-3 & Ecc 7:20) teaches the same thing that "there is no one who does good, not even one." Many times the person posing the question is a relativist and that causes big problems in terms of consistency regarding the question because the notion of what constitutes "good" is a meaningless concept in the world of moral relativism.

The only time in human history that saw a bad thing happen to a good Person occurred at the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. The question posed by the skeptics makes a huge assumption, namely that humans are good. Also, the skeptic makes another assumption that he or she does not have a limited perspective on why bad things happen to people. When pondering the initial question posed by the skeptic, one is inexorably driven to a proverbial fork in the road of two possible conclusions. The first is maybe God knows better than I do in my current situation of suffering from a "bad" event in my life. The other possible conclusion (which the skeptic seems to draw) is God is not that powerful after all, and if He truly was incarnate in Jesus Christ, then He was a victim like all of us. This notion that Jesus was a helpless "victim" of fate, contradicts His own words where He said in John 10:18, no one takes His life, "but I lay it down of my own

accord.” I know that when I look back at perceived “bad” events in my life which caused me suffering for a time, after the trial, I usually ended up becoming much more of what I ought to have been (based on a Biblical standard “being conformed to the image of His Son.” Romans 8:29). In other words, the only way I could have grown in terms of becoming more like Christ, was to go through the trial. The skeptic makes a greater leap of faith by assuming God is not all wise and all-powerful to steer the ship of evil (and not power it) for His own good purposes.

5 Answer the skeptic: Why is eternal punishment fair?

Short answer: Eternal separation from God is a just punishment for those who will not repent for all eternity and abhor the presence of God. The unregenerate person does not want God’s fellowship, so for God to force them into heaven would be sheer hell for them for all eternity.

I have both wrestled with the question and had it posed to me, namely “If in my lifetime I have committed a finite number of sins and I do not receive Christ’s forgiveness, why is eternity in hell a just punishment?” What the person asking this question fails to understand is that the guilty are forever guilty. Hell is a quarantine for people who will never repent. After a million years of punishment, the non-repentant are still guilty! Yes, God is loving and forgiving, but He would be unjust if He just swept the sins of the non-repentant under the proverbial rug.

The other concept that the person questioning hell’s fairness fails to understand is the nature of God’s goodness. Humanity’s fallen; totally depraved nature, cannot take into objective consideration the holiness of God. Any sin against an all perfect eternal being would require an eternal punishment. Humanity tries to fathom justice in the case of the perpetually unrepentant having a limit. Those who wrestle with the notion of justice from God being an eternal perfect being, never really consider how their view of justice having human limits is influenced by their

fallen, depraved nature. When humanity sins, we are assaulting an eternal, morally perfect God, and God's only just recourse is eternally quarantining the perpetually unregenerate.

6 Answer the skeptic: If conscious belief in Jesus is required for salvation, how is that fair to those who never heard the gospel?

Short answer: The skeptics have done a great job in obfuscating history and not comprehending the global spread of the gospel. The Gospel message is getting out, but the messengers are getting killed! The Bible tells us in Romans 1:18 that mankind's default position is the suppression of truth. A sovereign, just God will make sure that those who cry out to Him will hear the gospel.

I do not want to discount the honest question a skeptic may have about the un-evangelized, but many times I have discovered that the person bringing this up is usually using it as a way of deflecting the moral and theological demands of the gospel. I try to lovingly tell them in essence, "That's a good question and I'll give you my thoughts in a minute, but aren't you glad you have the opportunity to hear the good news?"

The skeptic posing this question assumes that because a country or geographic area may officially be opposed to Christianity that there are no Christians in the general populace proclaiming their faith. For example, just because there are Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia with zero churches (above ground), that God is not actively working within the hearts of individuals (underground). I see no evidence in Scripture that prohibits God revealing Himself to people in situations like this via dreams, or radio broadcasts or via them browsing the Internet. The suppression of truth in Romans 1:18 was alluded to above and I should point out contextually it is more than just a general revelation of God that is being suppressed as Paul also mentions in the

previous verse (1:16) “the gospel is the power of salvation to everyone who believes.” The skeptic likes to assume there is no connection between general revelation leading contextually in Romans 1 to gospel revelation to which humanity generally suppresses. I trust that the God who commanded His disciples to “go, teach, disciple and baptize...all nations” (Matt 28:19) will not leave Himself without a witness to all of mankind.

7 Answer the skeptic: Free will isn't so valuable for God to permit so much suffering

Short answer: If God is going to create genuine humans with a will, He must allow them to do evil. The only other alternative is God creating automatons that are forced to not only do good but love Him.

The concept of eternity also has to factor into free will and God permitting suffering. The Bible says in 2 Cor 4:17 “For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.” Ultimately, what is a trial of cancer or the premature death of a child when compared to the notion the Just Judge of the universe will one day right all wrongs and this correction will extend into all eternity? Even Christians in the midst of great suffering can forget that presently this is not the best of all worlds, but it is the best way to the best of all worlds. God, who has an infinite mind and reasoning capacity has determined this.

The materialist view has a hard time explaining the purpose of suffering. Free will fits well when one looks at the panoply of Christian doctrine. The strict materialist cannot account for freewill. If human beings are solely physical objects, it does not matter how complex they are as all their decisions in the materialistic worldview are nothing but chemical reactions in the brain. So, God desiring to have a relationship with people, decided to create us with free will. I would rather experience suffering due to free will and mankind rebelling, rather than being an automaton puppet on a string, or a plethora of bio-chemical reactions in my brain.

8 Answer the Christian: What good is the suffering I endure?

Short answer: God uses suffering for Christians to prove us, purify us and protect us.

God also uses suffering so we can comfort others who are in the midst of trials we made it through by the grace of God.

Besides growing in doctrinal knowledge, a Christian can grow in emotional and psychological maturity as he or she goes through periods of trials and suffering. The apostle Peter tells us that our sufferings as Christians not only proves our faith and makes it surer to us, but it results in the praise of God. Speaking of trials and sufferings, the Apostle Peter said in 1 Peter 1:7 “These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed.” Sometimes when Christians (including myself) are in the midst of heavy suffering, we forget the truth that the Apostle Peter spoke under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Trials show the ever-growing work of the Spirit in sanctification in our lives. We would not know how strong an oak tree’s roots are until it survives a storm. Likewise, when I look back on the trials I’ve gone through, I first thank the Lord, and second, the remembrance of the past helps me know God will always be faithful.

Lastly, for the Christian there is a promise of comfort in trials and a reason for them. In 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 the Apostle Paul says “³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, ⁴ who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. ⁵ For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.” I can testify that my experience going through trials has allowed me to minister

to those going through similar trials and people who have gone through trials have also ministered to me.

9 Answer the Christian: How will heaven mitigate the suffering on earth?

Short answer: If we really contemplate eternal bliss with the Lord, and if we truly understand all that we are going to inherit, this reality should get us through any trial this side of eternity!

The apostle Paul understood how eternity with Christ will mitigate the suffering Christians endure before they die or Christ returns. In fact, as I alluded to in point 7, Paul calls all of the possibilities of suffering in this life in the singular as a “light momentary affliction.” (2 Cor 4:17). Talk about having a truly eternal perspective! To call all of life’s afflictions (plural) a “light momentary affliction” (singular), is to have the proper mindset to deal with trials and sufferings of all kinds.

Also, contemplating what we Christians will do for eternity helps to mitigate our suffering on earth. The incorrect notion of the extreme theocentric view of heaven (where saints just contemplate the Divine for all eternity) does little to mitigate our suffering on earth. If I thought of heaven as a boring place devoid of colors other than white, it would fail to mitigate my suffering on earth. A correct view of heaven will help with suffering on earth. For example, there is an often-forgotten verse in the book of Daniel (7:27) that explicitly teaches “the sovereignty, power, greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High.” Christians will be given roles as rulers in the eternal kingdom. Revelation 21:3-4 fleshes out the answer to question one in the Westminster Shorter Catechism that we will “enjoy God forever” as our dwelling will be with Him and “He will wipe away every tear” from the eyes of

His people. All this knowledge and a deep contemplation of eternity make any suffering in this life insignificant. It is sad that pastors seldom, if ever, preach on ruling with Christ.

10 Answer at a Christian Dinner Party: Why does God allow evil?

To fully answer this question at a dinner party, it is best to break down the response based upon two objections presented to the Christian to offer a rejoinder to the honest skeptic. There are two kinds of evil that need to be addressed and they are natural evil (mold, pestilence, earthquakes, tsunamis etc.) and moral evil (rape, torture, child-abuse etc). The Christian must face these two elements of evil in a straight-forward manner with the skeptic in order to proclaim the Gospel to them afterwards. These are serious questions that even Christians need to think through and by thinking through them, believers will not only grow in their sanctification, but also will be equipped to deal with unbelievers who raise these issues. So, I will now begin the first part of my answer with the problem of natural evil.

After Adam and Eve sinned, there were several curses pronounced by God and the one to which I envision a dinner conversation pondering first and foremost is natural evil. The question is usually posed, “Why does a good God allow children to get cancer or sit back while people die from natural disasters such as floods, earthquakes and tsunamis?” This is a very difficult question to answer because unlike moral evil, there is no human agent with freewill to blame. I would lovingly point out that the curse of the ground with natural evil being a result is a reminder to all humanity of the penalties of sin. In conversational format with my dinner guest, I would ask him or her if every time they pricked their finger on a rose-thorn, or saw a famine when the earth did not produce according to the mandate in Genesis 2:15, if people would be reminded of the original sin committed by Adam and Eve? Before the fall, God gave work as a blessing (Gen 2:15) and He has every right to penalize the soil to remind man of the original sin,

for much of man's life is occupied with his employment. Adam and Eve sinned by eating so now they would suffer in order to eat. I would also point out to my dinner guest that God is gracious by letting man die, thus not leaving humanity in a perpetual chaotic state. Christ wearing the crown of thorns in His sacrificial death means He took the original curse of the earth as well as the sins of His people and when He returns natural evil will cease! It makes no sense to say, "When Christ returns, the curse of the ground is still in effect." The removal of the curse is part of Christ's redemptive work. The bottom line is every evil that we face (natural or moral), is the result of humanity rejecting God's rules for us.

After dealing with natural evil over dinner, inevitably the problem of moral evil will arise. The problem of moral evil is answered by the notion Adam and Eve had a genuine freewill. Nearly every person that complains about the problem of moral evil scoffs at the notion of not having freewill. I would point out to my guest the ugliness of Adam and Eve being mere robots, or puppets on a string if God created them without a genuine free will. There is no way around the bottom line that if God created Adam and Eve with a genuine freewill, that axiomatically means they had the capacity to do evil. I would also politely question my dinner guest by asking "Can you come up with a better option than Adam and Eve (and all humanity after them) being robots if God did not allow freewill?" I would conclude by telling my friend that there is no logical contradiction between an all good God and the existence of evil. The problem of evil does not logically rule out God's existence. The atheist does not have good answer to the problem of evil, and if there is no God, then temporary suffering compared to being dead for all eternity renders any evil we suffer in this life completely meaningless. The problem of evil really is not the problem many think it is for Christianity, for after all, the whole Bible is the story of God

dealing with evil. In the Christian story, God stepped into time in the Person of Jesus Christ and dealt with the problem of evil. This cannot be said for any other story and worldview.