

Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People — Or Do They?

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In the Garden of Eden, God forbade the human race to sin and warned them of the death and suffering that they would bring upon themselves if they did it any way. After finding them hiding behind trees and bringing them out in the open, God pronounced judgment upon them that was both objective and subjective. It was objective, because it was God's punishment for their disobedience; it was subjective because it was sowing and reaping. They had created the kind of race and world to live in where the inevitable results would be suffering and death. Here are those proclamations from Genesis:

Objective Judgment: Genesis 2:16, 17: "And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die."

Subjective Judgment: Genesis 3:16-19: "Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

Judgment with Hope

Christ, in order to ultimately bring about a world where suffering no longer exists, suffered more than any man in this world.

II Corinthians 5:20-21: **“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”**

I Peter 3:16-18: **“Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit...”**

Life Through Death — Not Around it

When we come to Christ and are born into the family of God, that gives us the promise of a perfect future. Furthermore, it gives us a reason for living in this world. It makes it possible for us to turn our sufferings into something redemptive in terms of sanctification. But there is something it does not do. *It does not remit the curse placed upon mortality.* To the extent that we are still children of Adam, we will suffer and eventually die. God has made a way for us to turn these experiences to our good. But He does not take them away. **To do so would be unjust. If God’s justice ever goes away, everything we live for and hope for goes away with it.**

It is our duty and our lot to understand this and to take our sufferings patiently, instead of getting our feelings hurt, stamping our foot, and conjuring up cases against God and the Faith. The Bible lays this out plainly:

Colossians 1:24: **“Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church...”**

I Peter 1:3-7: **“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you, Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honor and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.”**

I Peter 4:1-2: **“Forasmuch then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin; that he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.”**

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God and brought suffering on their own heads and on the heads of their children; when Christ came down and suffered for us to ultimately, in the new creation, save us from this lot eternally; and when suffering is the redemption of mortality, why do we think we should not suffer and why would we not want to? Why do we grow impatient, feel sorry for ourselves, and pout when God means it all to us for good?

Why Does God Allow Suffering if He is so Good?

The self-righteousness of those who ask this question is showing through at this point. They are not good persons by nature — none of us is! They are

fallen sinners just like everyone else. Further more, natural morality, if indeed such there be, cannot save our lives from judgment now and cannot immortalize them for eternity. If people really feel that they would be just as good if they were not Christians and that natural morality is just as good as true Christian morality, then they should go back and re-examine their conversion. If they did not know that they were vile sinners, under condemnation, without hope, living in a world that is a road to nowhere; and if they did not give up on themselves and the old world of Adam when they came to the Cross, then what was it that they wanted Christ to save them from—and to what?

Such people are often proud of what they are without Christ and conversion. God has a different opinion. Let us take a look at that from Romans 3:10-20: **“As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one. Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness: Their feet are swift to shed blood: Destruction and misery are in their ways: And the way of peace have they not known: There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.”**

Where is the Justice?

Thus their complaint, that they are good people who are somehow being mistreated, falls on deaf ears with God. Even so, they persist in their

complaint. They themselves do not do serious harm to others, while many who claim God's grace have murdered, molested, etc. Where is the justice in that?

The answer is that the justice is either in the Cross of Christ where He took upon Himself our sins and suffered at the hands of a just God, going into hell, the place of the damned, so that we would not have to go through that judgment—or it is in the Day when people stand before God in judgment without Christ and are condemned to eternal death. Such complainers seem offended by the notion that God, through Christ, can and will forgive sinners. I call upon them to reconsider. They are slandering the life, death, resurrection of Christ, and Pentecost with that type of reasoning. If their complaint were right, which it is not, they would not be forgiven and would have no home in heaven to look forward to. If they intend to stand before God and argue with Him, as they often do with me, that they are good people who do not deserve the judgment of mortality that God meted out in the Garden of Eden, then they are to be pitied — and more. Let us look a little more about where righteousness and justice are, what they are, and how they become ours:

Romans 3:21-28: **“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified (acquitted of guilt) freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation [one to stand in our place of judgment] through faith in his blood [the belief that His blood satisfied the justice and judgment of God against sinners whether we understand it or not] , to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law?**

of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”

God is just and demands that evil and evil doers be punished. That is why, when Jesus prayed that God not put Him through the agonies of the Cross, God would not hear Him. The sins that people are so angry about, Christ took the rap for. It is not against them that people sin; they are sinners too. It is against God that men sin, and it is God's business if He wished to have His justice satisfied by the death of Christ so that He can let us live if we come to the Cross and die with Christ. And it was up to Christ, not us, if He wanted to do that for us. Praise God!

That Which Has Not Yet Died and Has Not Changed

The fact that self-pitying people have trouble relating God's grace to His justice does not matter to Him. It is not a problem for God to reconcile it. As for the evil that men do, even professing Christians, the old nature is still the old nature. When Christian people get out of the Spirit (as they are in their bitterness and their accusations against God) and walk in the flesh, their deeds and their characters are just as bad as they ever were.

No, No, No, My Friend!

People may object to my saying that questioning God pejoratively is bad. Well, it is not me that says it, but God and the Apostles. Listen: Romans 9:19-20: **“Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault? For who hath resisted his will? Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus?”** It is a dangerous thing for the Creature to criticize the Creator.

Hebrews 3:7-11: **“Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of**

temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart; and they have not known my ways. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest....” God does not take kindly to being second guessed and questioned by His people. He expects that they will know and believe that He is God and that He knows what He is doing.

The Final Word Has Not Yet Been Spoken on Evil Works

Christians will give an account of the evil that they do and they will suffer loss for those things. If they have indeed repented and come to Christ, they will go to heaven but they will not take much with them. This is spelled out clearly in I Corinthians 3:11-15: **“For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.”** We are not required to be passive about gross sins that Christians commit and there are disciplines that are, or should be in any case, carried out in the Church.

The Final Word About Sin Has Been Spoken

But is it not proper for people to be angry about the fact that Christ died to save sinners. This is spelled out in Romans 5:6-10, and it is talking, among others, about you and me: “For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved

from wrath through him. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.”

We were not looking for God, He was looking for us. He saved us when we were His enemies, working industriously against him, we were sinners and, in spite of what people may think, there was nothing good in us to warrant it, as Romans 3:10-20 says. There will be no unrighteous people in heaven, and there will be no bitter and unforgiving people either. That will be owing altogether to the love and the grace of God, the justice and the judgment of God, and the Redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

What About Underprivileged Nations and Deprived Peoples?

Perhaps all of that is true, but what about third world countries where there is no food, no water, no houses, no civil protection, nakedness, and general mayhem? Is this a judgment of God, and if so, how is it reconciled? There is a judgment of God against nations and societies based on how they have treated the knowledge of the Gospel, or how they have neglected, mistreated, and disdained it. The writings of the prophets are full of these warnings. Natural Theology (the natural knowledge of the existence of God by way of the testimony of nature) will not save anyone's soul or answer any of the transcendent questions in the Day of Judgment. But it does have an impact on the quality of mortal society. Historic Orthodox Christianity has never believed that the educating of society through natural theology is part of the mission of the Church, though the Roman Catholics and other sectarian groups have. Even so, that natural knowledge of God is there. Additionally, there is abundant evidence that the Gospel of Christ once flourished in those areas. In Borneo, for instance, the Dyak sprinkles blood on the land before planting to rid it of the evil spirits. Clearly this is a perversion, through many centuries, of the blood of Christ that takes away sins. In India, cows are worshiped, which is a remnant of the Old Testament teaching about the red

heifer; and the Hindu laying on beds of nails all day and suffering in order to be holy is a perversion of the teachings of the Apostles about the virtues of suffering for Christ and, in this way, ceasing from sin (I Peter 4:2). There are hundreds of such anthropological evidences.

These neglects and abuses bring the judgment of God on both the objective and subjective level. God will not be disdained and mocked. The more and the longer nations hold Him and His truth in contempt, the further they move away from His moral law, the more they turn to superstition and witchcraft, the more God withdraws His blessings and mercies from them. That is just the way it works and no one can change it. And then, the further a people gets from God and His laws, the more the fabric of their society rots and decays. It is said that the Roman Empire never fell from without, it fell from within as the foundation rotted out from under it and it collapsed its own hole. That is what has happened to many underdeveloped, unstructured, and impoverished countries. And when it happens, crime, violence, inhumanity, leaders without compassion, structural breakdown, and all the other undesirable domestic and social evils follow. National economies go in the tank so that there are no jobs and no monies for social services. It is the law of the harvest. It is sowing and reaping. And it gets back to the basic problem of what Adam and Eve brought down on the head of their children. That is where it all began.

The Inequitable Application of Judgment

But how can we rationalize and explain the inequity that we see when bad things happen? Some people seem to have it bad all of the time while others seem to be pretty “lucky” in that regard. The answer is comprehended in this verse from Ecclesiastes 9:11: **“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.”** In an imperfect

world where uncontrolled forces are at work, that which we would naturally expect to see seldom comes to pass. If you are walking along a mountain road after it has been raining, a rock may break loose from the bank and fall on your head. There is no design to that. It is time and chance. You just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time and the chance of that calamity befalling you was increased under the circumstances. Certainly God is in control of it all but, in the process, God has created a world where some things happen just because they happen. A man is walking along a street in Los Angeles, minding his own business, when two cars speed by. The rear car is shooting at the car in front. The aim of the gunman is bad and he strikes the poor passer by. Why did that happen? It happened because that is the way things work in this world. That is what Solomon has told us. You are strolling along down a lane, looking up at a bird in a tree, when you stub your toe on a rock and break it. Why did that happen? It happened because you were not watching your step. There is no design to it. A tornado veers off of its charted course, comes down your valley, and destroys all the houses in your neighborhood. Why did that happen? It happened because your houses were in its path. You are walking in a lovely field of clover when you drive a thorn through your foot. Why did it happen? There is no particular reason. These things are matters of time and chance. It is the kind of world Adam and Eve left us with. According to the third chapter of Genesis, if Adam and Eve had not done what they did there would be no hoodlums driving the streets with guns and no thorns in the field, but they did do it, and God will not put a stop to the unfolding of the time and history world on the basis of time and chance until He stops it all. It will happen, and thank God for that, but in the meanwhile, we are going to have to put up with the unpredictable unfolding of events that Solomon, the ancient wise man, described. And for the time being, for many at least, it is better than the alternative.

But Didn't God Know?

People often complain to me and ask the question, with respect to the creation of man and the various failed covenants of the Old Testament: Didn't God know this would happen? The Bible says He is Omniscient and Omnipotent and that He knows everything that is going to happen. So what's the point?

Of course God knew what would happen. But it was the only way He could get for Himself that eternal family of righteous people in the image of God that He wanted. Do those who complain and criticize God's ways think that they could have come up with a better plan? Say it isn't so, please!

God was willing to lose us as created beings in order to bring us back as born children. It was also the way that He could weed out of His kingdom those who do not wish to be His children forever. Mankind has nothing to complain about. If we got what justice demands, we would all be on our way to hell. We are the law breakers, the sinners, and the ones who wish to blame God for our failures. God is the one who is offended, wounded, and put to the hurt. But to God, the game was worth the candle. When it is all said and done, God will have what He wanted. Those who love God and believe in God know that He is only good and can do no wrong. They reverence and praise Him for His unspeakable gift of Christ and salvation. In the end, they will have what they wanted too — forever!

Who is to Blame

To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (II Corinthians 5:19-20)

It is said that Leonardo da Vinci once painted a picture of the Crucifixion. If looked at from a certain angle and in a certain light, it seemed that there was another figure on the Cross with Jesus. This was his way of expressing with art the truth of II Corinthians 5:19-20. The argument is sometimes made that it is God's fault. Anyway you want to look at it, the argument goes, God set it in motion, all the while knowing what was going to happen. Therefore, God should take the blame. He should be the one to suffer. To this claim, the Christian has only to point to the Cross. When God started the process, He did know what was going to happen. The Crucifixion was contemplated and planed before the world was made. God did accept the blame. He did suffer. The nails that pierced the hands of the man Jesus pierced the hands of God. God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself. No man has ever known suffering like that and no one ever will. He who knew no sin was made sin for us so that we could be made into His righteousness and enjoy a world forever where there will never be an inferior thing again. And now the invitation goes out, even to His critics, to accept the suffering of God on your behalf and be reconciled to Him by the Cross.

In Conclusion

Bad things happened because of the Fall and the death and suffering that our ancient parents brought upon their children. Lest we feel sorry for ourselves we have come along and, by our sinful actions and thoughts, ratified the decision they made.

Bad things do not happen to *good* people because *there are no good people* (Romans 3:10 and 14). The sufferings of mortality, for the Christian with the right attitude, can be redemptive. We can buy back our lives from the evil shops of pawn where our ancient parents hocked them. If we got what we deserved, we would be destroyed forever in the fires of God's Final Judgment. If we got what we deserved now, there would be no medicine to relieve suffering, no sympathetic friends to pour out our complaints to, no communication with

God to pray to and get comfort, and no hope for the future. There would be no food to eat, no water to drink, no beds to sleep in, and no roof over our heads to shelter us from the elements.

Be careful about criticizing God for the gracious way that He has treated rebellious, sinful, and ungrateful men. It will not influence God, it will not change the way things are, and it will certainly not help you — so why do it?

May the grace, mercy, love, and care of God our Creator and our Savior be with you all, Amen!

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