

## THE REALITY OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

### INTRO

Is there a satisfactory answer to the question: “Why Does a good, All-Powerful and All-Knowing God, allow evil and suffering in the world?” How would you answer that question?

1. It is a difficult question because it challenges our faith. It implies other questions like:

“Is not God all-knowing?” If He is all-knowing, He should have seen this coming—and stopped it.

“Is not God all-powerful?” If He is all-powerful, He should have used that power to prevent the evil from happening.

“Is not God loving?” If He is loving—and all-knowing and all-powerful—why does He allow these things to happen?

2. Not only is it a difficult question—it is also a personal question because whether we realize it or not, we have all asked it in some way, shape, or form. The reasons are different and the emotions behind it may be different, but I’m quite certain every one of us have voiced (or thought) words to God such as “how long will you let things like this go on?” or “why are you letting this happen to me or my loved one?”

Randy Alcorn writes: “The problem of evil and suffering moves from the philosophical”—[a big-picture thought about life]—“to the personal”—[that which affects you]—“in a moment of time” (If God is Good, 9).

3. Lastly, it is a relevant question. Not only do we sometimes ask *ourselves* this question, it is often asked by the general populace after incidents like 9-11 and school shootings. Atheists ask it too—and suggest it is “proof” that there is no God!

As we begin to look at this topic this morning, I feel it necessary to give a couple of disclaimers:

1. This topic is too complex and too important to cover in one sermon, so consider this an intro to a series
2. I am by no means an expert in “solving” this age-old question because there are no “neat and tidy solutions” (Alcorn, 22).

### **1. The Difference Between Evil and Suffering**

What is the difference between evil and suffering? Without getting overly technical, here are some things we should keep in mind.

A. Evil is the action; suffering is the consequences of the action

--A school shooting is evil; suffering is what the survivors—and loved ones of those killed—endure

B. Suffering sometimes occurs when there was no evil action that brought it on

--A friend’s son is laid up in the hospital with a body cast due to a skiing accident. There is nothing evil about skiing, but there is certainly suffering

--Suffering in the aftermath of a flood or hurricane was brought on by a “natural disaster”—not an evil activity by an individual

--And suffering from cancer or a disease is not brought on by an evil action of an individual—it is the result of living in a sin-cursed world

### **2. The Demonstration of Evil and Suffering in the World**

A. Suffering not connected to an evil action

--August 25, 2017—Hurricane Harvey hit TX—75 died

--September 10, 2017—Hurricane Irma hit FL—90 died there; 40 more in the Caribbean

--September 26, 2017—Hurricane Maria hit PR—The “official” count is 64, but many are suggesting that the actual number is in the hundreds

--One we often don't think about is **starvation**. One website states that 36 **million** people will die from starvation in 2018 and that every 5 seconds a child under 5 years of age dies.

## B. Evil

i. Hitler's Holocaust--6 million Jews lost their lives between 1941 and 1945

ii. School shootings: Columbine (1999; 13 killed); Sandy Hook (2012; 20 children; 6 adults); and just 11 days ago—on Valentine's Day—14 children and 3 adults

iii. September 11, 2001—now known as 9-11—2973 people died. I do not want to underplay the horror of that day in our history, but Randy Alcorn points out that even that high a number is a fraction of the lives lost throughout the world on a given day. Then Alcorn adds this: “The death toll in the 1994 Rwandan genocide...amounted to more than two World Trade Center disasters *every day for one hundred days straight*” (pg 10). Think of that—between 600,000 and 800,000 people were slaughtered by their own countrymen in a hundred-day span!

iv. And in the United States—a so-called “civilized” and “educated” nation—3000 helpless infants will be murdered inside their mother's womb in 2018. That equates to 2 children every minute and a total of 120 dying during the course of our 1-hour church service. We cannot escape the fact that there is evil—and there is suffering—in the world!

The reality of evil and suffering is not only demonstrated in the world, it is also declared in the Word!

### **3. The Declaration of Evil and Suffering in the Word**

Habakkuk 1:2—“O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save!”

Although the question is not word-for-word “God, if you are all-knowing and all-powerful, why are you letting this happen?” it is pretty close!

--“God, I am crying out to you—why aren't you listening?”

--“God, I am seeing violence and injustice—and so are you—why are you not delivering!”

I am glad we have verses like this in the Bible for at least 2 reasons:

1. It shows us that the Bible writers were men like us. Although they were **holy** men we are told in II Peter 1:21, they were still **men**. They were not super-human; they had emotions like us and struggles like us and temptations like us and questions like us. And because they came to God with these questions, we know that we can too! That should be a blessing to us.

2. What should be even more of a blessing, though, is the fact that God is well aware of the question! He is not afraid of the question; He does not ignore it or pretend that it doesn't exist. In fact, He invites us to think about it and ask it or He wouldn't have had it in the Bible!

The prophet is stumped as to why God is not doing anything.

A. First, there is **perplexity because of God's inactivity in spite of prayer**

--Prayed long: “O Lord, how **long** shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear!” (v 2)

Habakkuk is not the only one who asked God “How **long**...”

**David**: “How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever? how long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? how long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?” (Ps 13:1-2)

**Asaph:** “O Lord God of hosts, how long wilt thou be angry against the prayer of thy people?” (Ps 80:4)

**Jeremiah:** “How long shall the land mourn, and the herbs of every field wither, for the wickedness of them that dwell therein? the beasts are consumed, and the birds; because they said, He shall not see our last end.” (Jer 12:4)

**Saints martyred during the tribulation:** “And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Rev 6:10).

--Prayed fervently; twice says “cry”

--Prayed in will of God—was crying out against violence (v 2), iniquity, spoiling, violence, strife, and contention (v 3). In other words, the prophet was pointing out what God hates and was asking God to judge, but nothing was happening. It is almost as if Habakkuk is saying: “God—when are you going to act as God and halt the injustice that is going on!”

Not only was there perplexity of God’s inactivity in spite of prayer, there was also

#### **B. *Perplexity because of God’s indifference in spite of the promotion of sin***

--“Not only are you not answering,” Habakkuk says, “you are showing me iniquity and causing me to behold grievance” (v 3). **Spoiling**—some people taking advantage of another; and **violence**—some people doing bodily harm to another—is “before me”—it is rampant and I can’t get away from it.

--The result of sin going unpunished is that sin is getting worse. The wicked are triumphing over the righteous (vs 4) and the result is wrong—twisted—judgment is taking place.

So, what’s the application; what can we take away from the fact God “acknowledges” that there is evil and suffering in the world? What does God want us to do?

### **4. *A Determined Response in spite of Evil and Suffering in the World***

#### Response #1--Trust God’s Justice

Notice the switch in verse 5: “Behold ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously; for I will work a work in your days...” Verse 6—“For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation....”

The prophet expresses his grief to God that his prayer is unanswered and that evil is triumphing; God gives Habakkuk his answer in verses 5-11. What’s God’s answer?

Judgement—punishment for sin—is coming! God was raising up the Chaldeans—the Babylonians—to punish **His** people. God’s people had practiced violence; verse 9 tells us they will be recipients of violence. Gal 6:7 reminds us “Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.” They are reaping what they have sown. Sin is not ignored or forgotten; God will judge—and He will judge rightly.

#### Response #2—Look to God for answers (Hab 2:1)

“I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me...”

Habakkuk says that just as a watchman waits, he will wait to hear what God says to him. Carl Armerding wrote: “It is a wise man who takes his questions **about** God **to** God for the answers” (Exp Bible Commentary, 623).

Are there perplexities about injustices in the world? There most certainly are. Where do you look for answers? Remember Jesus’ words to the Sadducees—you do err not knowing the Scriptures or the power of God.

Response #3—Obey God when the answers come (Hab 2:2)

“And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it.” Did Habakkuk do that? He most certainly did. How do we know? Because we still have the vision—the prophecy—and it is recorded for us in God’s Word!

Response #4—Wait on God’s timing (Hab 2:3)

“For the vision is yet for an appointed time”—it is for a future event—“but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry.” This vision—this prophecy—is for a future event. “Mark it down, Habakkuk—it will surely come to pass...”

Response #5—Live by faith (Hab 2:4)

“Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith.”

What does living by faith look like?

- It is a trust in God’s justice
- And a look to God for answers
- And an obedience to God when the answers come
- And a patient waiting on God’s timing

It is more than that, however, because Paul repeats this verse in Galatians 3:11 “But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, the just shall live by faith.”

In others words, faith is what makes you justified—right with God—**not** our efforts to keep the law—to do good or be good. His soul which is lifted up—the one who is puffed up and proud and thinks he can work his way to heaven—“is not upright in him.” We can’t get to heaven by being good because we can never be good enough!

**CONCLUDING THOUGHTS:**

1. Have you bowed the knee when it comes to obtaining forgiveness of sins and receiving eternal life? If you are trying to work your way to heaven you are **standing up**—not bowing down—and your soul is not upright in you. Bow the knee and come to God the only way you can—by trusting the shed blood of Jesus to pay the penalty for your sins.
2. Second, are you trusting God’s justice and timing? He will always do right all the time at just the right time so trust Him.
3. Lastly, do you look to God for answers? And when they come, do you obey? Don’t be hard-hearted or thick-headed—bow the knee!