

THE PROBLEM OF OTHER PEOPLE'S SUFFERING

Matthew W. Bassford

I first encountered the classical statement of the problem of human suffering in a religious-studies class in college. The professor wrote on the board, "If God could stop suffering and chooses not to, He is not perfectly good. If God wants to stop suffering and can't, He is not perfectly powerful. If God is both perfectly good and perfectly powerful, why does suffering exist?"

Though skeptics are fond of the problem of suffering, there are several problems with it. To me, one of the most significant is its assumption that our understanding of the good is the same as God's understanding (Mark 10:18). A toddler cannot comprehend why their mother does not feed them candy for every meal and let them stick their fingers into electrical sockets. Is it the mother's conception of the good that is flawed, or the toddler's?

God knows more than we do, has a far better grasp of the consequences of suffering, is far more concerned with the eternal than the earthly, and doesn't think like us to begin with. The Bible presents Him as a God who is perfectly good, yet whose actions are not subject to human reason. It calls us to trust even when, and especially when, we don't understand.

All of this, though, is the sort of thing that is discussed in collegiate lecture halls and Wednesday-night Bible classes. It doesn't have much to do with the actual lived experience of suffering. When you are the one who has lost a child, when you are the one who is grappling with a terminal diagnosis, you are much more concerned with the consequences of God's existence/nonexistence than you are with proofs to establish either.

If God is and is a rewarder of those who seek Him (Hebrews 11:6), suffering and indeed life itself are meaningful. I suffer, yes, but I suffer with hope. My efforts to glorify God are significant and give others the opportunity to make consequential changes in their own life. In the end, I will be blessed with such joy that all my suffering will seem to me as nothing more than momentary, light affliction.

If there is no God, then none of the above applies. Neither my suffering nor my life have meaning. It is impossible for them to be meaningful. I am nothing more than the victim of malignant chance, as everyone will be sooner or later. My efforts to lift others up are

– Continued on page 3 –

– Continued from page 2 –

pointless. In the end, I will die and be forgotten, with no more significance than the pattern left on the sand by the last wave to wash up on the beach.

If that's all there is to life, why live? Why go on? Why bother wrestling with the monstrous? The counsel of atheism to the sufferer is the counsel of despair, and it never can be anything else.

Yes, this is an emotional argument, but our reactions to the "rational" arguments about the existence of God are emotionally driven too. Anybody who thinks they can dispassionately reason to fundamental truths about the nature of existence without being powerfully influenced by their desires and fears is a fool. We make such decisions with the Biblical heart, the Eastern mind-and-heart, not the Western mind.

Indeed, the belief that we can rely on the latter is one of the great illusions of Western civilization. The product of such self-deceptive "reasoning" might stand up in the classroom, but suffering forces us to confront the truth. Either we choose to trust in the God whose ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8), or we reject Him. The former choice is not pleasant, but the latter is unbearable.

– Continued from page 1 –

Christians may find themselves living far from a church of Christ where truth is taught and lived, and a commute may be too burdensome. If they want to reside nearer to their brethren in Christ, they would have good cause for a move.

Fleeing danger. When Saul meant to harm David, David fled to the Philistines and lived in Gath before settling in Ziklag (1st Samuel 27:1-7). Stephen's martyrdom in Jerusalem pushed many disciples into Judea, Samaria, Phoenicia, Cyprus, and Antioch (Acts 8:1; 11:19). The apostle Paul often had to flee from one city to the next due to persecution (Acts 13:50-51). When people are no longer safe where they live, they seek refuge on foreign soil. Whether oppressive government, warfare, crime, natural disaster, or some other threat is the cause, foreigners ought to be welcomed to safety (Deuteronomy 10:19).

Conclusion: Countless reasons can be considered for moving, education (Acts 22:3) and marriage (Genesis 2:24) among them, but wherever one settles on earth will be merely a temporary abode (2nd Corinthians 5:1). Heaven is the true home of every Christian (John 14:2; Hebrews 11:10, 14-16).

**"WHAT MUST I DO
TO BE SAVED?"**

ACTS 16:30

LEARN THE GOSPEL

John 6:45; Romans 10:17

BELIEVE IN CHRIST

Hebrews 11:6; John 3:16

CONFESS CHRIST

Matthew 10:32-33; Romans 10:9-10

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 3:19; 17:30

BE BAPTIZED INTO CHRIST

Mark 16:16; Romans 6:3-6

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"THE ASSEMBLING OF
OURSELVES TOGETHER"**

HEBREWS 10:24-25

SUNDAY

Worship @ 10:00 a.m.

Studies @ 11:45 a.m.

WEDNESDAY

Studies & Worship @ 7:00 p.m.

THURSDAY

Men's/Women's Studies
@ 6:30 p.m.

75 Sherrod Boulevard
Belen, New Mexico

**"IF A MAN IS OVERTAKEN IN
ANY TRESPASS...
RESTORE SUCH A ONE"**

GALATIANS 6:1

CONFESS TRESPASSES

James 5:16; 1st John 1:9

REPENT OF SIN

Acts 8:22

PRAY FOR FORGIVENESS

Acts 8:22

REMAIN STEADFAST

1st Corinthians 15:58; Revelation 2:10

**"A WORD FITLY SPOKEN IS
LIKE APPLES OF GOLD IN
SETTINGS OF SILVER"**

PROVERBS 25:11

"Every time you encounter a conflict, you will inevitably show what you really think of God."

– Ken Sande

"WHOLE COUNSEL"

ACTS 20:27

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 7

FEBRUARY 19TH, 2023

MOVING MOTIVES

Bryan Matthew Dockens

Needing to relocate is not only a modern reality, but one the ancients often experienced. Many causes for moving are acknowledged in Scripture.

Cost of living. Famine caused Abraham to dwell temporarily in Egypt (Genesis 12:10), Isaac to move to Gerar (26:1), Jacob and the patriarchs to settle in Egypt (45:6-13), and Elimelech and Naomi to take their sons with them to Moab (Ruth 1:1-2). When one's living must be made elsewhere, it is understandable to pack up and go.

Proximity to family. Food wasn't the only thing Jacob was after when he brought his family of over seventy people to Egypt; he was reuniting with his long lost son Joseph (Acts 7:14-15)! When Ruth joined Naomi's return to Israel, it was out of loyalty to her mother-in-law (Ruth 1:6-22). Some may thrive without direct and regular contact with their kindred, but it is common to rely on parents, even in adulthood, or on children, especially in old age.

Worship opportunity. When Jeroboam began ruling over the ten tribes of Israel, having seceded from Judah, he feared that worshiping in Jerusalem, which was in Judah and which was required of God, would cause him to lose his subjects, so he established a state religion of idolatry. That caused faithful Hebrews to forsake their lands in the northern kingdom and settle in Judah (2nd Chronicles 11:13-17). Now, – Continued on page 3 –

RIO GRANDE VALLEY CHURCH OF CHRIST

505-864-0282

rgvcoc@gmail.com

Box 989, Belen, NM 87002

www.RGVChurchOfChrist.org

75 Sherrod Boulevard

Facebook.com/RGVChurchOfChrist