

Human Suffering and the Existence of God

1. The Presence of Evil, Suffering

- A. The horror of Dunblane, Scotland. Everyone has a personal story of suffering to tell: from nature (illness, injury, pain, death); from others (unkindness, abuse, injustice); from own actions. Christians not immune to suffering.
- B. Many exercise their moral capacity to question God's integrity or His existence:
 - 1. The existence of suffering denies either God's goodness or power.
 - 2. Some place blame for evil directly upon God's shoulders. H.L. Mencken, writer of early 20th century: "The whole Christian system, like every other similar system, goes to pieces upon the problem of evil. Its most adept theologians, attempting to reconcile the Heavenly Father of their theory with the dreadful agonies of man in His world, can only retreat behind Chrysostom's despairing maxim that *"a comprehended God is no God"* (G. Seldes, *The Great Thoughts*, p. 282).
 - 3. Criminals receive more benefit of the doubt than does God.
- C. Naturalists consider **all** "whys" as irrelevant. Those guided by Scriptures have the most important "whys" answered, but some things remain obscure:
 - 1. Why did man's sin produce harmful changes in the environment? Why does Satan exist? Why allowed in Eden? Why his influence today? Why do innocent people suffer? Why do random events occur if God is "in control"?
 - 2. We must reason from what we know about God to what we don't know about our circumstances.
 - 3. **But there is a point at which "why" becomes moot; we must accept what is and how we will choose to respond to it.**

2. God and Suffering

- A. God has given us much resource to prevent and alleviate suffering.
 - 1. Moral laws which, if followed, would solve **most** of the world's problems.
 - 2. Civil government which punishes those who choose to cause suffering.
 - 3. Intelligence and freedom to manipulate environment to alleviate suffering: medical advancements, agricultural improvements, etc.

B. God enables suffering to be a strengthening agent.

1. We don't have to be destroyed by suffering: Rom 5:3-4; Jas 1:2-4; 1 Pet 2:19-20; 3:13-14; 4:15-16, 19: 5:10.
2. Our **attitude** toward suffering will determine whether our character is **en-nobled** or **eroded** by it.

C. God's participation in our suffering. God could not just say "I understand." God, in essence said, *"If you have to endure it, then I will endure it with you."*

1. Heb 2:10-13 - Jesus made perfect through suffering.
2. Heb 2:14-16 - Jesus did not nullify physical death but removed the element that makes it a fearful experience: sin. God is *personally familiar* with death.
3. Heb 2:17-18 - Jesus is our sympathetic representative in heaven. Heaven and earth are so different, yet Jesus' suffering bridges the gap between the two.

D. God will recompense all at the final judgment. This world does not have the final say regarding injustice - Ac 17:31 - *"God has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness."*

3. God's Sovereignty

A. Job's struggle with God's fairness - Job 19:6-11; 23:1-7. From the depths of his suffering Job only sees God's severity, injustice. He wishes to argue his case.

B. God does **not** explain the background of what has befallen Job; He ignores the circumstance and focuses upon His sovereign power and wisdom:

1. God created all things by order, design. Who is man to question or criticize?
2. God controls all things, even His enemies. Man cannot even control wild beasts.
3. Even from the pain and anguish of our suffering we have no right to fault God for His decisions on what He allows to happen.

C. **Illus:** Couldn't see Crater Lake for the dense fog. Application: We must not judge the character of God by present circumstances alone. Evidence of God's existence lies beyond the fog of present realities.

Conclusion: We must learn to **trust** God. There is abundant evidence that *"I will never leave you nor forsake you"* (Heb 13:5) and *"the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us"* (Rom 8:18).