

# Why Does God Allow So Much Suffering?

John MacArthur

I have been assigned an easy question to answer. I don't know how I'm going to fill the time. I'm just going to give you the answer. Why does God allow evil and suffering in the world?

This is a very, very important question. This is a question that I will tell you, on a personal level, is *the* single question that my friend, Larry King, always goes back to as – Oh, you didn't know about that friendship? - that he always goes back to, to demonstrate why he cannot believe.

There are some agnostics, and that's usually a word thrown around as if it were noble. But the Latin equivalent is "ignoramus," just to put it in perspective. But there are some people who are agnostics simply because they don't care to know. There are some people who are agnostics, and they can give you an apologetic defense of their agnosticism. No matter what you say, they will take you through a rational series of arguments as to why they cannot believe. And with him, it is always the fact that there is so much evil in the world, how can God be good? We never get past that dilemma for him, try as we may.

One of the, I think, favorite justifications for biblical skeptics' and theological liberals' inability to accept the Scripture, is they cannot resolve the issue of God being good and loving, wise, kind, powerful, and the world being dominated by evil in all kinds of forms.

A syllogism might go a little bit like this. The biblical God is loving. The biblical God is good. The biblical God is holy. The biblical God is wise. The biblical God is all-powerful. Massive evil exists in the world, therefore the biblical God does not exist. How can you tell me that God is all-loving, all good, all holy, all-knowing, all-powerful, and then explain to me evil? Therefore, in the minds of some, the biblical God cannot exist, and therefore, the Bible that presents such a God is not to be believed. Now, there are some who see this as such a serious dilemma that it sort of puts the Christian at maybe fourth and forty on his ten yard line. And the only option is to punt, change the subject, or snap back with Deuteronomy 29:29, "The secret things belong to the Lord," kick that as far as you can into enemy territory. Is that the best that we can do when pressed against our theological end zone? Absolutely not.

If you know the divine playbook, then you know there's a perfect play design, not just to get us temporary escape or get us the first down or get us in field goal range. But there is an answer in the Bible with which we will score a touchdown. It'll take us all the way to triumph and victory. Scripture gives us an answer.

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Not only an answer that you can understand, but an answer that you can joyfully accept. An answer in which you can rejoice. And it's not one of the inadequate short answers like, "Well, God's not responsible. Adam and Eve are," which only poses the question as to why God allowed Adam and Eve the option of making sinful choices. He created them.

If God knew they were going to make those kinds of choices, then why did he make them capable of making those kinds of choices? That doesn't help.

Well, you say, well, God's not responsible, the devil is, which only then poses the question, Why did God create angels knowing that they would fall, one of them would become the devil and lead the whole human race into sin? If He knew he was going to make those choices and lead to these issues, why did He make him? And since He's the creator who created them from nothing, He could have made them any way He wanted to make them? So, that doesn't help.

All the answers that are legitimate answers lead us back to God. You can't stop asking the question at Satan, and you can't stop asking the question at man, even Adam and Eve. You're going to wind up in heaven, if you really want an answer to this question. It'll take you all the way back to God, but that's basically true of every aspect of foundational theology.

Everything, ultimately, goes back to the nature of God and the purposes of God. So, this is not unusual in that sense, although, for some people, it seems to be more mystifying than some other issues.

Now, let me give you a little sequence of things, and we're going to be a little bit theological, but this is a theological issue before us. So, let me just give you some little bullet points, okay, and move you along toward an answer to this question. Would you agree with point one? Evil exists. Can I hear an amen? Yes, evil exists. You're not equivocal on that, are you? You understand that. Unless you happen to belong to Christian Science, and follow the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy Patterson Glover Fry, who believed there was no such thing as evil, including adultery and divorce. If you are – and death. If you are somehow stuck in Christian Science, which is like Grapenuts. It's not grapes or nuts, and it's not Christian or scientific. Well, I don't know why they call it Grapenuts, do you? I don't get it.

This kind of thinking is for people who think they're poached eggs. Aren't even dealing with reality. Playing metaphysical games. We all understand that evil exists. It exists massively. It exists in a dominating way in our world. A dominating way.

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Now, there are several ways to break down evil. Just to give you some categories to think about it. First of all, let's talk about natural evil, or maybe you like the word *calamity*. We're not talking about morally, first of all. We're talking about the presence of that which is dangerous, destructive and deadly, which is a reflection of that which is most emblematic of sin, which is decay and death. There is natural evil in the world. Anyone would be a fool to deny that.

This, in a sense, is not a personal issue. It is a part of the creation itself, in its fallen condition. It is impersonal. It is external to us. It is temporal. Diseases, disasters, catastrophes, from tidal waves to tiny bacteria. From viruses to volcanic eruptions, this planet is a very dangerous place to live. A very dangerous place.

I preached last Sunday night, kind of an interesting sermon, on what the Bible says about global warming. You ready for it? Second Peter 3, "The elements shall melt with fervent heat and the whole earth will be burned up." Okay? Yeah. But you're not going to do that with your hairspray. So, spray away. Walk on the grass. Kill a deer, and drill for oil. Those were some of the conclusions I drew Sunday night.

I read a book this summer called *The Great Influenza*. It's normally out of my reading zone. *The Great Influenza* by John Barry. It is, it is a magisterial work. It is one of the most thoroughly-researched books of any subject I've ever read in my entire life, and once I started reading it I couldn't put it down. It's not graphs and scientific data. It's the story of the great flu epidemic that hit the United States in the teen years, 1918. And in 24 months, the best estimates are 100,000,000 people died on this planet. One hundred million people. They faced a virulent virus that had morphed itself and mutated itself into such virulence that the normal process of viral infection didn't operate. It was so virulent, some people died of the sheer trauma to the body that the virus brought. Some people died of secondary causes, primarily pneumonia. Most people who died, died between the ages of 20 and 40, who had the strongest immune system because their own immune system killed them. In its effort to fight the virus, it killed the person. One hundred million people. All of that happened because of a tiny virus in some pigs in Kansas. All viruses come from birds. Got in pigs. Some people who were around the pigs were conscripted to go into World War I. They were sent to a base in Kansas with 25,000 soldiers. Infected the soldiers there, and it went all over the world.

A virus isn't like a bacteria. It's not a fully live entity. It only has half a life. In order to reproduce itself, it has to attach itself to a living cell, and then it takes over the encoded genetic system in that living cell and reproduces itself through that living cell.

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What kind of a mysterious evil is *that*? And it could happen again. This is a very dangerous place to live.

I am so glad to be living on this end of human history. Do you know there wasn't a disease in the history of humanity cured, scientifically, until 1885? Because they didn't know what caused disease. They were bleeding people. So, you can be thankful for advancement, right? You can be thankful you're living on this end of man subduing the earth. But this is a dangerous planet to live on.

I want all the energy I can get. And I want it for all the world, because people who are poor and deprived of energy, are the ones that die in natural disasters. So, this is a very, very, very hard place to survive. And you know that. Natural evil.

That's why Romans 8 says, "The whole creation" – Does what? – "groans." There is, secondly, moral evil. Moral evil is personal, internal, spiritual. Wickedness, sin, transgression. This dominates the human race. And I'm not just talking about moral evil like you heard in those presidential kind of discussions on television. I'm not talking about what goes on in Darfur. We all know that's evil at massive proportions. But this kind of moral evil is so pervasive. It's in every single human heart and is a dominating and controlling force. The Bible says, "There's not one who's good, no not one." "All the thoughts of the heart are only evil continually." Man is driven by lusts that produce sin and death. And so, the world is, itself, under a curse, which makes natural evil everywhere present. And it's inhabited by people who are evil to the core, morally. All these immoral sinners trying to survive in a fallen world, colliding with each other in malfunctioning marriages and families and friendships and rivalries that escalate into wars, are manifest evidence of the moral evil in the world.

Thirdly, there is supernatural evil. There is not only the evil that is in the heart of man. But there is a force of demonic beings that are as old as their creation, which would have been around the time of the creation of everything else, who are spiritual entities who, by disposition and nature, spiritual nature, are corrupt. They're evil spirits. They are liars and deceivers. And 1 John 5:20 says, "The whole world lies in the lap of their leader and their system."

Revelation 12 tells us a third of the holy angels fell out of heaven and constitute the force of demons, who develop their ideologies, the fortresses that become the tombs of people, as Paul describes them in 2 Corinthians chapter 10. These are vile beings who really, in some ways, were a little bit more clandestine until Jesus arrived, and when Jesus arrived, they made an all-out effort to try to stop Him.

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And so, they surfaced in a way that we don't have any record of in biblical history during the life and ministry of Jesus. He was demonstrating His power over them, but at the same time, was unmasking the reality of them.

They infect our lives, as we learn from Job. God sometimes even allows that, as we learn from Job and from Peter and from Paul, who was given a messenger of Satan to buffet him to keep him humble. They have a delegated sovereignty in the world. You understand that Satan is the prince of the power of the air. He has a temporary right to rule over the world system. So, you have evil on a natural level. You have evil on a human level, moral evil.

And then you have evil on a supernatural level with a force of demons who use their powers to seduce and deceive humanity and to fight the purposes of God, and they are primarily involved in the development of false religious systems. They are the purveyors of doctrines of demons. Boy, are they sophisticated.

One of the more prominent ones currently is Mormonism, which has made an all-effort to be accepted as a form of Christianity. You need to understand this. Nothing is more explicitly pagan than Mormonism. It is more like Hinduism than it is like Christianity. Christianity has one God. The Mormons have millions. That should be enough. They believe in millions of gods. They believe they become gods. They believe some god created the God who created the world. And the God who created the world had some kind of spiritual sex with the mother god and produced Jesus. The cleverness of this, putting it in a moral context, a superficially moral context, with a kind of commitment to families and giving it the façade of acceptability, morality, only makes it more deadly.

We do not wrestle against what? Flesh and blood. Principalities. Powers. There's a structure. There's an order in the demonic world.

And then, just to add a fourth, there is one evil that will last forever. And I just call it the evil of hell. The evil of hell. Evil forever, unmitigated, for all the people who are there. But for now, evil is not just present in our world. It is pervasive. It is subtle. It is powerful. It is dominant. It is outside of us. It is in us. It is around us. So, we start with the obvious. Evil exists. And it's not just minimal, and it's not just the kinds of things that we see on the television and read about in the criminal realm or the social realm in deprived places in the world. It is everywhere in everyone, out of control, systemic evil. The second thing we can affirm is that God exists. Evil exists and God exists. The God of the Bible is the true and only living God. He is the God who Scripture reveals Him to be because Scripture is His self-revelation. He is the God that Scripture reveals. And

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the Scripture tells us that He is the only God. He is the Trinity, but He is one God in three persons. He is the only God and He is, according to Scripture, *absolutely* sovereign.

Now by that I mean He's absolutely in charge of everything. *Everything*. He controls *everything*. He created everything out of nothing. He controls everything, and He will consummate everything. He is governing history in every minute detail. There's not one molecule in the universe that's out of line with His purposes.

Yes, this earth will be destroyed, but not because the polar ice caps melt and it gets flooded. Every time you see a rainbow you know that's not going to happen. And Genesis 8:22 says, "As long as the earth remains, there will be seed time and harvest, day and night, morning and evening." And the way it's all going to come to an end is when God determines to uncreate it in an atomic implosion. He is in control of everything. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof."

First Chronicles 29 says, "Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth, is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all...thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength to all." And I love what it says in Psalm 115 verse 3, "Our God is in the heavens, and He does whatever He pleases."

Daniel 4:35, "And He does according to His will in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth. And none can stay His hand, or say to Him, 'What are you doing?'" Call into question any act of His. Scripture repeatedly, as we well know and appreciate, tells us that God is absolutely sovereign, absolutely sovereign. You say, "Well, it's a difficult concept." Whoa, not nearly as difficult as believing that He's not. If you're having trouble accepting the sovereignty of God, then think awhile on the idea that He's not in charge. How do you like that? I'm so glad that He is in charge. That just goes with being God, by the way. It's not a stretch.

Deuteronomy 32:39, "See now that I, I am He, and there is no God besides Me. It is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded, and it is I who heal. And there is no one who can deliver from My hand." God is not trying to protect Himself from the idea that He might actually have a purpose for evil.

Exodus 4:11, "The Lord said to him" – that was to Moses – "Who made man's mouth? Who makes him mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?" Psalm 105:16, "God called for a famine on the land." Second Kings 17:25, "They didn't fear the Lord.

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Therefore, the Lord sent lions which killed some of them." So, for all those folks who are trying to get God off the hook, He's happy to leave Himself on it.

Lamentations 3:37 and 38, "Is it not from the mouth of the Most High that both good and ill come forth?" I'm not sure how anybody could miss the fact that God exists as sovereign and allows evil, especially if you read the book of Genesis and read about the Flood. What was the population of the earth when the Flood came? I've heard estimates from 10,000,000 to 100,000,000, depending on how fast they multiplied when they lived to be 900 years old.

I'm just glad there weren't homeschoolers in those days. How fast they multiplied, we don't know. But we know that God drowned millions of people. Personally, took responsibility for that.

So, while liberal theology and assorted other so-called evangelicals feel desperately the need to rescue God from this perception, God is quite content to make it clear that He is, in fact, unhesitatingly sovereign over everything that exists, without a hint of reluctance. He's not asking to be rescued from bad press that's fallen upon Him because He's been blamed for all the bad things that are in the world.

Don't be mistaken. He is holy. He cannot do evil. He cannot look upon evil positively. He is the God who is incapable of doing anything evil. He is holy, holy, holy, but he is content to leave the responsibility for evil's existence and even its action, with Himself. Another way to say it would be to borrow the words of 1 Timothy 6:15, "He's the only Potentate." He's the sole ruler of the universe. And why does He do what He does? Jesus gave us a good insight into that in John, or in Matthew 11, when he said, "Even so Father, for so it seemed good in your sight." He does what He wills.

Job 23:13, "He is in one mind, and who can turn Him? And what His soul desires, even that He does." Psalm 33, "He spoke, and it was done. He commanded, and it stood fast. The Lord brings the counsel of the heathen to naught. He makes the devices of the people of no effect. The counsel of the Lord stands forever. The thoughts of His heart to all generations." Psalm 103:19, "The Lord has prepared His throne in the heavens, and His kingdom rules over all."

Isaiah 14:27, "The Lord of hosts has purposed, and who shall disannul it? His hand is stretched out. Who will turn it back?" Isaiah 46:9-10, "Remember the former things of old, I am God. There is no one else. I am God, there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, 'My counsel shall stand, I will do all My pleasure.'"

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First Samuel 2:6-8, "The Lord kills and makes alive. He brings down to the grave and brings up. The Lord makes poor and He makes rich. He brings low and lifts up, for the pillars of the earth are the Lord's, and He has set the world on them." Or, Amos 3:6, "If there is a calamity in a city, will not the Lord have done it?"

Here is God taking full responsibility for the existence of evil, since He is *God* and controls everything. Evil is no disruption in God's purpose.

So, comes to a third point. Evil exists. Sovereign God exists. Inescapable, is the third point. God wills evil to exist. He wills evil to exist. And certainly, there are scriptures - I don't want to belabor the point - but just to give you one to think about in Isaiah 45 verse 5. "I am the Lord, there is no other; beside Me there is no God. I will gird you though you have not known Me, that men may know from the rising to the setting of the sun, there is no one besides Me. I am the Lord, there is no other; the one forming light and creating darkness, causing well-being and creating calamity. I am the Lord who does all these."

Or verse 9, "Woe to the one who quarrels with his Maker! An earthenware vessel among the vessels of earth! Will the clay say to the potter, 'What are you doing?' Or the thing you are making say 'He has no hands?' Woe to him who says to a father, 'Why are you begetting?' Or to a woman, 'To what are you giving birth?' Thus says the Lord, the Holy One of Israel, and his maker: Ask Me about the things to come concerning My sons; you shall commit to Me the work of My hands. It is *I* who made the earth, and created man on it. *I* stretched out the heavens with my hand. I ordained all their host." Again, and again, God takes full responsibility for the existence of evil unfolding in this world. Now, at this point, panic strikes the heart of Arminians. Their eyes roll back in their heads. They become short of breath, and they go into a rapid heart rate. Their palms become sweaty.

They were okay with evil exists, and they were okay with God exists. They were even okay with God is sovereign. As long as you limit His sovereign power or His sovereign knowledge. They don't want to deny the power of God. They don't want to deny the knowledge of God. They just want to limit that.

The panic attack hits them because they just can't let God be held responsible for evil, and they want to save God from a fate worse than death - being responsible for the existence of evil in the world.



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Now, how do they go about doing this? Well, they reinvent God. And you have to understand that this is a diminished God. Okay? While Scripture commands us to exalt God and to lift Him high, the restructured God, the reconstructed God, let's say, is a diminished deity. They have to pull Him down at some point, and you really only have two options.

Many would say, God has limited power. He can't stop evil. Can't stop evil. Either because He doesn't have the power in His nature or because He has willingly limited that power in some way. Nonetheless, God has limited power. He is powerless to stop it. I heard that so many times growing up as a young person. When I posed the question, I would say something like, "Why doesn't God stop evil in the world?" And I would get answers like this: "Well, He didn't start it." And then I would hear an illustration from a pulpit like, "Well, if you saw a fight going on and you didn't start it, you might not stop it." Those answers did not help.

Either He doesn't have the power to stop it, and so God is in a very difficult position like everybody else. He doesn't like what's going on but can't do anything about it anymore than we can. Or, He has the power but He's somehow limited in His knowledge of what's going to happen. And so, it catches Him by surprise when it happens. You think that's a pretty lay concept? It isn't. Behind that is a whole theology called process theology. Have you heard of that? You'd be better off if you haven't, truthfully.

Here's what process theology says. God is in process. He's developing. And the more stuff that goes on, the more information He gets, the better He becomes at dealing with it. Really? That's process theology. God is getting better at doing His God-work. And nothing teaches like experience, right?

He's a deity in process. He's becoming what He is not yet, but will be, in the end, what He should be.

We also meet another little group of theologians in this category of limited knowledge. And they are known as the openness group. And they simply say this. It's another form of the same thing. God doesn't know the future. God can't know the future because the future can't be known because it hasn't happened. That God does not know the future.

Do you understand all the imaginations you have to go through to write a book to make that convincing argument using the Bible? But they do. God, the newly-designed God, has a *huge* limitation. He does not know what hasn't happened. So, everything God does is a reaction. And I just want to say, "Well, then how do you explain Psalm

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22, which starts out, 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?'" Because Jesus said that on the cross. And Psalm 22 gives details of the cross, explicit details of the cross. And that's just one important passage to bring up.

But the idea is that God is reacting, and He feels so bad about the way things worked out. Well, do you mean then that the crucifixion of Jesus Christ was a surprise? He was hanging in there on Thursday night thinking, "Hey, I don't know how this is going to go. It's not Friday yet." Really? Really?

And then when Christ did get on the cross, God quickly came up with this great idea. As long as He's going to die anyway, I might as well make Him a substitute for sinners. What a great concept! Unfortunately, that entire concept was revealed in Isaiah 53 in explicit detail.

But all of this overturning of the nature of God and the truth of Scripture, to get God off the hook, and God doesn't want to be off that hook. He's God. We'll never be able to divest God of the responsibility for the existence of evil. He allowed it and designed it into this universe, without being responsible for it.

I don't really think He was in the garden keeping His fingers crossed, hoping for the best from Adam and Eve. And I'll tell you one thing, if positive thinking for God doesn't work, you can forget about it. Oh, you can be anything you want to be, really. Since He's not able to know what's going to happen, He had to adjust with everything that surprises Him along the way. Now, all of that is foolishness, but I point it out to you because these are efforts that are being made by educated theologians to get God out from being responsible for evil.

They all jump on the Kushner bandwagon. Remember the rabbi that wrote the book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People?* The problem with that title is, there are no good people. But that's his view. He knew that God was the issue. And in the problem with evil, you're going to end up with God. You're never going to get away from that, unless you invent a new God. And that's the ultimate blasphemy.

You talk about violating the Commandments. You're taking the name of the Lord your God in vain when you create a god of your own making and call him the God of Scripture. It's an idol. You can't get God off the hook. All these kind of answers come from people who have a warped theology proper. A warped view of God.

Now, okay, let's then move on in our little discussion. What? Now that we understand God exists, evil exists, and God allowed evil to exist, we could say, "Well, why?" How

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are we to understand the existence of evil? What kind of theodicy do we use? Theodicy from *theos*, God *dikē*, righteous or just. How do we – how do we defend the justice of God? What kind of system do we use? It may be philosophical at first.

There are metaphysical systems. I'll give you a couple. Metaphysical system says that evil is an inevitable reality, a corollary of good. It has to exist because ying has to have yang. In fact, I had a fascinating experience. I was on Larry King one night, and I was talking about the exclusivity of Christ as the only savior, what we'll talk about tomorrow. And I was talking about the single authority of Scripture. And I was just really – I mean people say, "How do you prepare to go on there, when you don't know what the questions are going to be?" And it's easy. I know what I want to say. I really don't care what the questions are.

So, there's two things I want to get to. One is the singular authority of Scripture, and the other is the singular reality of Christ as the one and only savior. And I'm just looking for places to say that. But, so I was banging on those two drums this night. And I went back to my office the next day and I got a phone call. And I got a phone call, and it was from Guy Richie, the husband of Madonna. You know, I don't think I'm on his favorite five. I'm pretty sure I'm not, so I don't know what resurrected him out of the woodwork. But he said, "Would you come to my house and talk to me?" Sure!

So, I got in my little car and I drove to Beverly Hills. And I went to their house and he said to me, "You know this is a very – I have to have a very serious conversation with you." I said, "Really?" I said, "This is great. What's the issue?" He said, "You – you are so dogmatic. You are so absolute in your affirmation of truth. You are throwing the universe's equilibrium off."

Wow! My response was, "Are you *kidding me*? Throwing the universe's equilibrium off?" So, I said, "Tell me about it." So, we sat there face to face, and he spent an hour telling me all about Cabala and metaphysics and ying/yang and all that. And so, when he got done, I spent an hour telling him about the gospel; so it was a good opportunity. But there are people who have this metaphysical concept that there is a necessity of evil by virtue of the fact that there has to be something opposite good. It isn't created by God, they would like to say. No, it just exists. It's just there, and that's the way it is because for every plus, there has to be a minus, etc., etc. It is a fact of *privation*. And there's actually some truth in that. It is an element of finitude. It's just there because it has to be there by contrast. And there is a sense in which evil is a deprivation. It is not something God created. It is something that reflects the rebellion against what God created and who God is. So, there is some truth, but it still doesn't get to the issue of why.

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Then there are other theodicies that fall into what I call the category of free will. And this is the most popular way to answer this problem. It's what keeps people in the dilemma the longest. It is that you just can't have a God who takes away our free will. Can't do that. We're Americans. This is a democracy. I'll promise you this though. If you grew up in medieval England, or if you were living in a tribe with a chief, or if you grew up in a totalitarian dictatorship, you wouldn't be wrestling quite as much with human rights. You would have a better understanding of unilateral power and sovereignty than you do. The American experiment doesn't really help our theology at this point. Free will is more important to God than disallowing evil. That's an interesting concept. Free will trumps evil on God's value scale. I am so committed to *free will* that it's going to mean I have to allow evil. God prized human autonomy, and to protect human autonomy he had to allow evil. So, evil backs in the door because free will trumps everything. Humans have to have the self-determined freedom to act. And if God acted as the primary cause on them, if God decided and God coerced, and God compelled, it would violate their will.

Again, you would still have to answer the question as to why, if God knew they would have free will and make stupid choices, he made them capable of doing that? It doesn't help you. You see, to design a God that has limited knowledge, to design a God that has limited power, to design a God – listen to this – who would rather have us do our will than Him do *His* will, is to design a God that is not in the Bible. So, God is all-knowing. God is all-powerful. Evil exists. God willed evil to exist. He didn't create it. That would be impossible for Him, as it is impossible for Him to do any evil. But He willed that it exists.

Now that leads us to the question, Why? And I think maybe we just have time to address that. Why? Well, you might be glad to know that I'm not here to be the first person to give you the answer. How about the *Westminster Confession*? Listen to this. "God, from all eternity, did by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass" – yet, so - "as thereby, neither is God the author of sin nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures. Nor is the liberty or contingency of second-hand causes taken away. Sinfulness proceeds only from the creature and not from God who, being most holy and righteous, neither can be the author and approver of sin."

And, later it says, "All that God decrees and providentially brings to pass, is all to the praise of his glory. Therefore, the existence of evil is, in the end, to the praise of his glory."

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And if you answer this question right, my friend, it will take you to heights of worship that you would never be able to experience if you don't answer it correctly, because you have a diminished God.

The reason God ordained evil is for His own glory. Simple question. Is God made more glorious because evil exists, or is He made less glorious because evil exists? I will tell you this. God is made infinitely more glorious because evil exists. We praise Him because of what He has done to overcome evil.

So, our fourth-down winning play in the playbook. Listen to some things from Romans, and turn to Romans 9, if you will. That was the introduction. Now I'm going to go to the text. Romans 9, but I'm going to talk about a couple of other passages before we get there. I want you to kind of capture a word, if you can.

There's a great little statement in Romans 3:5 and this is what it says, "Our unrighteousness" – here's the key word – "*demonstrates* the righteousness of God." "Our unrighteousness *demonstrates* the righteousness of God." In other words, our unrighteousness – and in that case, he's talking about Israel particularly. Our unrighteousness – our sin, our fallenness, our inequity, our corruption, our wretchedness – puts the righteousness of God on display. And that is singularly a reality at the cross, isn't it?

Where you see the full manifestation of the righteousness of God displayed, as He punishes the holy, harmless, undefiled Son, for *our sins*, to satisfy necessarily His righteousness. Romans 10, Paul says the Jews have a problem. They do not understand the righteousness of God.

What do you mean by that? They don't know how righteous God is. How is that reflected? They go about to establish their own righteousness. They think the righteousness of God is attainable to them. In other words, they think God is less righteous than He is, and they are more righteous than they are, and so they can *earn* acceptance with God. They can meet His standard. They don't understand that Christ is the end of the law for righteousness.

You never will understand how righteous God is until you go to the cross. And you will see there that as loving and gracious and merciful as God is, as eager and willing as He is to forgive the sinner, He still has to carry out *infinite punishment* on a substitute to deal with His righteousness.

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You know, that's a – I don't know if you read that, that whole cross scene thoughtfully, but from 9:00 in the morning until 12:00 when He's hanging on the cross, He says some things. First thing, "Father forgive them." And then, "Today you'll be with Me in Paradise." And then it goes dark, and it goes dark for three hours and He says nothing. And then the darkness is gone and He speaks His final words. And I don't know if you ever think about that darkness. Most people think that that's the absence of God. I've been rethinking that lately. There are Old Testament accounts that tell us that God reveals Himself in the darkness. Sinai, the covenant with Abraham, the darkness emblematic of the presence of God in judgment.

Maybe that three hours of darkness was the infinite punishment of an infinite person by God for all our sins. And it's when that ended, in the text, that He said, "My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?" Maybe He was saying, "You've been here in judgment presence, and now You're gone," as if there was no immediate comfort there. It's interesting to think about that.

But what was on display at the cross was the righteousness of God in the necessity of pouring out an infinite punishment on an infinite person who therefore had an infinite capacity to absorb it all in three hours, which all the sinners of all the world who end in hell will never be able to absorb in eternity. This puts the righteousness of God on display. We would never see the majesty of that righteousness if we didn't see the cross. We'd never see the cross if there were no sin. So, for the demonstrating of His righteousness, He would allow sin.

But look at Romans 9. Just a couple of comments. Verse 22, "What if God, although willing to demonstrate His wrath, and to make His power known, endured with much patience vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? And He did so in order that He might make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory."

So, in Romans 3:5, Paul says that God demonstrates His righteousness in response to our unrighteousness. In Romans 5:8, he says that "God demonstrates His love toward us in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Here God demonstrates – *endeiknumi*. God demonstrates two things. He demonstrates His wrath and His mercy. Does God not have a right to put His wrath on display? Does God not have a right to put His holy anger on display? Verse 22 says He does. What if? What if? So, what? Doesn't God have the right to demonstrate His wrath on vessels of wrath prepared for destruction? God gets glory from His wrath. God gets glory from His judgment. But on the other hand, He also has made known, verse 23, "the riches of His glory on vessels of mercy." We wouldn't know what wrath was, and we wouldn't know what

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mercy was if there were no sin. And in both cases, Romans 11 ends with that great paean of praise, that doxology, that God is demonstrating the riches of His glory. He's putting the full range of His attributes on display.

In Revelation 15, listen to this. After the wrath of God is finished – verse 1, it says, "I saw a sea of glass mixed with fire. Those who had come off victorious from the beast and his image and from the number of his name, standing on a sea of glass holding harps of God to glorify its saints. And they sang the song of Moses, the bondservant of God, and the song of the Lamb, and this is how it went: 'Great and marvelous are Thy works, O Lord God the Almighty! Righteous and true are Thy ways, thou King of the nations. Who will not fear, O Lord, and glorify Thy name? For Thou alone are holy. For all the nations will come and worship before Thee, for Thy righteous acts have been revealed.'"

God puts His righteousness on display by the way He confronts and deals with sin. And that becomes the very essence of heavenly worship.

Perhaps the greatest illustration of this is to understand that the greatest evil the world ever did, the murder of Jesus, the greatest evil that men ever did, the crucifixion of the Son of God, was, in fact, was in fact – ordained by God Himself. Acts 2:22, "Men of Israel," says Peter, "listen to these words: Jesus the Nazarene, a Man attested to you by God with miracles and wonders and signs which God performed through Him in your midst, just as you yourselves know. This man delivered up by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put him to death. By the predetermined plan of God." The most evil thing that men have ever done in history, the execution of the Son of God, in mocking sarcasm was, in fact, planned by God so that He could display His righteousness.

In the fourth chapter of Acts, verse 27, "Truly in the city they were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod, Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles, the people of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur."

The writers of the Scripture understood it perfectly. Just a final, final passage. Tough talk from God. Job 38. This is really tough talk on this issue.

Job, you remember, is posing all these questions as to why God has done what He's done because he's suffered all this stuff and all this evil has come into his life and all this calamity. And he was a good, righteous man. So, the Lord answered Job out of the whirlwind and said this: "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without

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knowledge?" Huh. That's a pretty straightforward indictment. "Now gird up your loins like a man, and I will ask you and you instruct me." Divine sarcasm. Oh, you tell me then. Job, you tell me what I should have done.

Tell Me how to do it better. By the way, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me if you have understanding. Who set its measurements since you know? Who stretched the line on it? On what were its bases sunk? Who laid its cornerstone? When the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy, who enclosed the sea with doors when bursting forth it went out from the womb, when I made a cloud its garment, thick darkness its swaddling band; and I placed boundaries on it, and set a bolt and doors; and I said, 'Thus far you shall come, but no farther.' Where were you when I bounded and bordered the oceans?" Have you ever in your life commanded the morning, Job? Have you ever caused the dawn to know its place? Have you entered into the springs of the sea? Have you walked in the recesses of the deep? Have you seen the gates of deep darkness? Have you understood the expanse of the earth? By the way, where is the way to the dwelling of light? And darkness, where does it belong? Who cleft a channel for the flood and a way for the thunderbolt?

And he just goes on like this. This is just one shot after another. "Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades and loose the cords of Orion? Are you in charge of the stars and the constellations?" I mean do you understand how stupid it is to pose these kinds of questions that call the nature and purposes of God to account to you?

Then he gets even more earthly in verse 1 of chapter 39. "Do you know the time the mountain goats give birth?" Goes all the way down through all these ostriches and horse and other animals. This is just a, just a diatribe against the folly of asking questions and thinking God needs to explain Himself to you.

And then He asks him if he thinks he can control a dinosaur. Then He comes down to 42. Job 42. Okay. "Then Job answered the Lord and said, 'I know you can do all things, and no purpose of Your hand can be thwarted.'" End of discussion. That's it. You got it. That's it.

"Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? Therefore, I have declared that which I did not understand." I admit it. And the beautiful part of it is, verse 5; he says, "'I had heard of You with the hearing of mine ear.'" You know, I had a certain understanding of You but after all this, I really see You, and I "repent in dust and ashes."



## **Why Does God Allow So Much Suffering?**

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Let God be God and worship Him for the sovereign that He is, unfolding the glory of His own nature through wrath and mercy, which necessitate evil. This is our God. I'll tell you this: I don't want to live in a world where evil controls God. No such world exists. But that's the choice you have.

You either believe in the God who is in complete control of evil, or you believe evil is in control of God, and He's reacting to it the best He can. That's not the God of Scripture. We worship you Lord, with thanksgiving. These things, in many ways, are simple to understand and yet mysterious to us. But there's no mystery about the purpose you had to demonstrate – demonstrate Your righteousness, demonstrate Your love, demonstrate Your wrath, demonstrate Your mercy. Demonstrate forever Your glory, through allowing evil in this world and through triumphing through it.

And Lord, if we thought for a moment that you were not in control of evil, we would have no guarantee that it wouldn't appear again in heaven. And heaven wouldn't be the heaven of Scripture where there is no sin and no corruption and no death. You are in control of it.

And when its day is done and You have made Your demonstration complete, we will live forever in the glories of the New Heaven and the New Earth where evil will never, ever exist again because You are the sovereign. We worship You, we praise You, and we rest in this great confidence, thanking You that all of this has been committed to us through the grace that has come in Jesus Christ. And we pray in His name. Amen.