

Suffering and the God of Love

If God is omnipotent and omnibenevolent, why do we suffer?

Second Corinthians 4.16–18

Mainly an outline of Gary Workman's material with additional notes by Don Ruhl

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Scripture Reader and Reading: Blade – Romans 8.18

Prelude:

I. Concerning the existence of God and the existence of suffering, people reason:

A. If God wants to remove suffering, but

1. He cannot,
2. He is not Almighty.

B. If God can remove suffering, but

1. He does not,
2. He is not a God of love.

II. They see Him as either powerless or loveless,

A. if He even exists in their way of thinking, and

B. believing they have caught Him, or us, in a contradiction,

1. they argue that He does not exist, and
2. therefore, they do not have to listen to the Bible.

Persuasion:

I. The Problems Suffering Presents

A. Atheistic perspective:

1. Either God wishes to destroy evil and cannot;
 - a) or he can but will not;
 - b) or both,
 - (1) He could not if He wanted to, and
 - (2) if He wanted to, He could not.

2. Atheists argue that the laws of nature that God created,
 - a) do not reward right behavior nor condemn wrong behavior. (Illustrate)
 - b) Therefore, God does not exist.
3. They claim
 - a) an Almighty God *could* prevent suffering and
 - b) a heavenly Father *would* prevent suffering.

B. Despairing believer perspective:

1. “I am his child, why am I suffering?”
2. “I have sacrificed for him, why doesn’t He hear my prayer?”
3. Some will ask, “What did I do to deserve this?”
 - a) Or someone will introduce a similar thought to the believer

**7 “Remember now, who ever perished being innocent?
Or where were the upright ever cut off?”
(Job 4.7)**

- b) Do you ask yourself what you did wrong when things do not go well?

II. Primary Solutions

A. The free agency of man

1. Allows choices, sometimes harmful; Does not “choice” imply that?

15 “See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil...” (Deu 30.15).

19 “I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live...” (Deu 30.19).

2. God made us in His image for a reason, (Gen 1.27).

- a) He sought infinite fellowship.
 - b) So choice had to enter, without it we would be heartless machines.
3. Responsibility is associated with freedom.
- a) Must bear responsibility of wrong choice.
 - b) If not, man would not use wisdom in decisions.
4. There have to be consequences of wrong choices
- a) Gen 2.17 – Death
 - b) Gen 3.16–19 – Childbirth pain, Cursed Ground
 - c) Rom 5.12 – Death
- B. The laws of nature
1. For our benefit, but
 2. violation brings harm.
 - a) Water, fire
- C. The meting out of punishment.
1. Not all suffering is punishment—Job; Luke 13.1–5
 2. Some suffering is punishment:
 - a) Lev 10.1, 2—Nadab and Abihu
 - b) 2Sa 6.6, 7—Uzzah
 - c) Acts 5.1–5—Ananias and Sapphira
 - d) Acts 12.21–23—Herod
 - e) Acts 13.6–12—Elymas
 - f) Whole communities—Sodom, Israel in the wilderness
 - g) 1Co 11
 - h) Heb 12.5–11

D. The development of character—makes us mature.

1. Soul must be prepared for heaven,

27 But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie, but only those who are written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev 21.27).

2. Suffering makes us rethink our path

67 Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.

71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted,
That I may learn Your statutes.
(Psa 119.67, 71)

35 And some of those of understanding shall fall, to refine them, purify them, and make them white, until the time of the end; because it is still for the appointed time (Dan 11.35).

3 And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; 4 and perseverance, character; and character, hope. 5 Now hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit who was given to us (Rom 5.3–5).

6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ... (1Pe 1.6, 7).

3. Lessons can be learned from suffering,

2 Better to go to the house of mourning
Than to go to the house of feasting,
For that is the end of all men;

And the living will take it to heart.

- 3 Sorrow is better than laughter,
For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.
(Ecc 7.2, 3)**

4. Stepping stone rather than stumbling-stone.

III. Secondary Solutions

A. We live in a social context—Rom 14.7; Lam 5.7.

- 7 Our fathers sinned and are no more,
But we bear their iniquities.
(Lam 5.7)**

7 For none of us lives to himself, and no one dies to himself (Rom 14.7).

1. What if God had created us in isolation?
 - a) Would that be worth living?
 - b) Interaction is fulfilling.

2. We suffer from the actions of others.

3. We also enjoy benefits from others.

B. God is waiting for people to repent,

1. then He will end earthly suffering, and begin
 - a) eternal suffering for some and
 - b) eternal bliss for others.
2. Let us be thankful for God's longsuffering.
 - a) His longsuffering:
 - (1) Gen 6.3 – 120 years

(2) 1Pe 3.20 – Peter references

10 He has not dealt with us according to our sins,
Nor punished us according to our iniquities.
(Psa 103.10)

3 If You, LORD, should mark iniquities,
O Lord, who could stand?

4 But there is forgiveness with You,
That You may be feared.
(Psa 130.3, 4)

4 Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and
longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to
repentance? (Rom 2.4).

9 The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count
slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any
should perish but that all should come to repentance (2Pe 3.9).

C. The existence of Satan

8 Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a
roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1Pe 5.8).

D. The suffering of God and Jesus

46 And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli,
Eli, lama sabachthani?” that is, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken
Me?” (Matt 27.46).

1. Who can comprehend the suffering they went through at the crucifixion?
 - a) Physical—actual crucifixion
 - b) Emotional—rejection of His people

- c) Spiritual—separation
- 2. Let us not ask why we suffer, but why did he suffer.
 - a) My rendition of Psalm 22.1ff
- E. Man is not omniscient.

25 There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death.
(Pro 16.25)

23 O LORD, I know the way of man is not in himself;
It is not in man who walks to direct his own steps.
(Jer 10.23)

- F. The values of man are often misplaced.

- 1. Man thinks:
 - a) Pleasure = Good
 - b) Pain = Evil

15 “...For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Luke 16.15).

- 2. Are there things that are painful but good for us? Surgery.
- 3. Are there things that are pleasurable but bad for us? Illegal drugs
- 4. When it comes to this world and suffering,

8 “For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,” says the LORD.
9 “For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.”
(Isa 55.8, 9)

Exhortation:

I. Where suffering leads, some things to remember,

28 And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose (Rom 8.28).

A. The good = v. 29 the image of Christ

B. God uses suffering to accomplish this.

II. Suffering perplexes, faith in God helps us to endure.

III. The level of your suffering shows God's confidence in you,

13 No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it (1Co 10.13).

IV. Do not expect heaven on earth.

A. Man marred the earth.

B. God creates a new heaven and a new earth (2Pe 3.13).

C. Earth prepares us for heaven,

18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Rom 8.18).

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory (2Co 4.17).

V. Therefore, do not see suffering

A. as a reason to curse God, but

B. as a reason to serve God.

1. He has suffered for us.
2. Let us suffer for Him, because
 - a) if we suffer with Him now,
 - b) we will not have to suffer away from Him later.
 - (1) With His power and with His love,
 - (2) He has provided a place for us where suffering no longer exists,

4 “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Rev 21.4).

3 And there shall be no more curse, but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it, and His servants shall serve Him (Rev 22.3).

VI. There is a God in heaven who loves you.

- A. He does not lack power to remove suffering, but
 1. He waits for you to change.
- B. He does not lack compassion, but
 1. His compassion moves us
 2. to qualify ourselves to live in a way where suffering will never exist.
- C. So then are you willing to pay the price required to live there?
 1. Follow Him.
 2. Believe whatever He says.
 3. Do whatever He commands.
 - a) Then He will do what it takes
 - b) for you to live in a place where suffering does not exist.