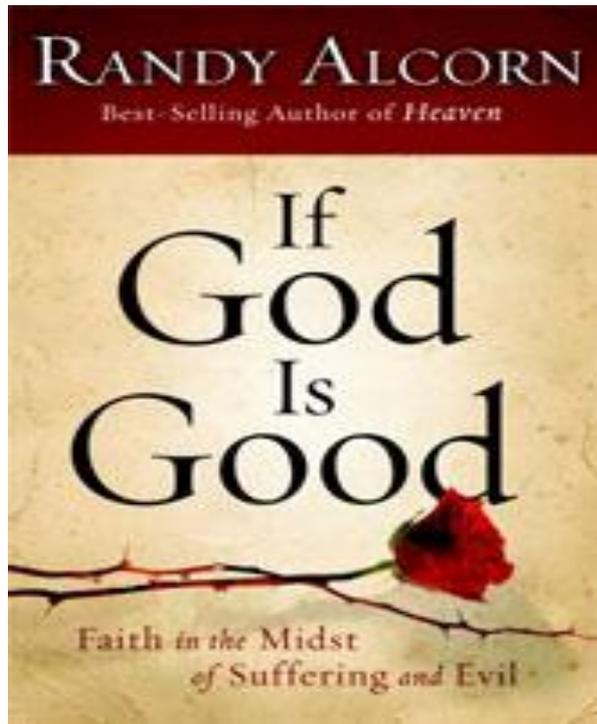




Love God. Love People. Change the World.



If God is Good.

Lesson #10

**Christian Life Assembly
Winter 2010 ABF
Jim Hoffman**

Suffering and Evil

- Seem random and unfair.
- Seem to contradict the idea of an all-powerful and all-knowing God who loves us.
- Constitute the best arguments of God's enemies and he does not seem to mind.

Understanding the Problem

- Few things are as common to the human experience as suffering.
- How we answer the “If God is good” question will have a big impact on how we view God.
- Complete this sentence; if God is good then why does he allow _____?

Understanding the Problem

- 1 Peter 1:6 In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. 7 These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. NIV
- “The faith that cannot be shaken is the faith that has been shaken”. Randy Alcorn

Understanding the Problem

- The problem of evil and suffering moves from the philosophical to the personal in a moment of time.
 - Your doctor says “you have cancer”.
 - You learn your child is being abused.
 - Your spouse announces they are leaving.
 - _____
- Pain is always local and has a face and a name.
 - It’s a disease
 - It’s a person
 - It’s a circumstance

Follow this progression ...

- If God is all good then he would want to prevent evil and suffering.
- If God is all knowing, then he would know how to prevent evil.
- If God is all-powerful then he is able to prevent evil.
- And yet, evil and suffering are common to life under the sun.

The Saints have wondered ...

- Ps 6:2 Be merciful to me, Lord, for I am faint; O Lord, heal me, for my bones are in agony. 3 My soul is in anguish. How long, O Lord, how long? NIV
- Hab 1:2 How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen? Or cry out to you, "Violence!" but you do not save? NIV
- Rev 6:10 They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" NIV

Evil and Suffering ...

- Suffering always follows an evil act. It is a caboose that follows an engine.
- Without suffering, we would not know pain. From that point of view, could the pain and suffering that follows evil be a gift?
- Without suffering, we would not know the love of God. It causes, we would not know some of God's best attributes: love, mercy, and forgiveness.

Evil and Suffering ...

- One of the reasons, if not the reason, so much suffering exists in the world is that without suffering we would not seek God.
- Imagine growing up in a world where sin was wrong, but had no temporal consequences.
- What would be the likely result of living in a world like that?

Questions

- If you agree that many Christians believe their performance guarantees health and wealth – where did the church ever get such an idea?
- 2 Tim 4:3 For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine . Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. NIV (What evidence do you see that we have reached the time cited above?)

The Perspective We Need...

- “What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. The most portentous fact about any man is not what he may at any given time say or do, but what he, in his deep heart perceives God to be like. That our idea of God corresponds as nearly as possible to the true being of God is of immense importance to us. Compared with our actual thoughts about Him, our creedal statements are of little consequence. The idolatrous heart assumes that God is other than He is – in itself a monstrous sin – and substitutes for the true God one made in his own likeness. Before the Christian church goes into eclipse anywhere there must first be a corrupting of her simple basic theology. She simply gets a wrong answer to the question, ‘What is God like?’ and goes on from there.” A. W. Tozer

←—————→

The perspective we need if we are going to understand evil and suffering...

- Many believe their performance earns status (points) with God and the better they serve Him the safer they are.
- This is false! There is an undeniable link between the blessing that flows from living by the principles of scripture, but there are no promises.
- Like the book of Proverbs – many of the scriptural admonitions generally work for us, but apart from the spiritual absolutes there are no guarantees.

Performance brings blessing?

- There are certain benefits for living righteously in this life, but insulation from life is not among them.
- Job's friends thought he was suffering for some hidden sin and told him so to his face – many Christians today would be more discrete and say such things behind his back. 😊
- I do believe that obedience brings blessing, but some blessings really are disguised.

Theodicy

- A theodicy is an attempt to show that God is just and argue that he can be sovereign and good despite the world's evil and suffering.
- A common but false assumption is that an all-good, all-knowing, and all-powerful God cannot have good reasons for creating a universe in which evil and suffering exist.
- The best argument against such a statement is that we do not know everything God knows.

Evils Entry into the Universe

- It is inaccurate to say that God created Satan and demons – He created Lucifer and righteous angels who later rebelled.
- Satan and his followers wanted to have more power than God – they wanted to be the exalted leaders of the universe and decided to attempt a coup.
- Bear in mind the bible tells us about the entry of evil, but never explains it's root. (origin)

Evils Entry into the Universe

- **So why would God allow this rebellion to take place?**
- **Why would he create creatures who would later rebel and try to harm Him?**
- **One reason could be that it's through His conquering of evil that He is shown in his best light – it's one thing to rule over perfectly behaved subjects, and quite another to love those who rebel against and hate you.**

Our Enemy Exposed

- The devil goes about the world seeking to keep people from Christ, harm them when he can, steal away their joy and generally do evil to all.
- So we should not be surprised when he uses his own work (sin, sickness, and destruction) to get us to question the goodness of God.
- He specializes in, and causes the very things he accuses God of not caring about.

Our Enemy Exposed

- He may be a roaring lion, but he is a roaring lion on a leash held by God.
- So back to the question of the study – “If God is good why does He allow _____?”.
- He could shut Satan down today, but everyday he delays his final judgment is another day of grace and mercy extended to a fallen world who will perish without Him.

We Sin Because We are Sinners

- **“It is the high-minded unbeliever, desperately trying in the teeth of repeated delusions to retain his ‘faith in human nature’ who is really sad. We actually are, at present, creatures whose character must be, in some respects, a horror to God, as it is, when we really see it, a horror to ourselves. This I believe to be a fact: and I notice that the holier a man is, the more fully he is aware of that fact.” C. S. Lewis**
- **“We tend to minimize our sin because we do not see it’s real object – God, himself. We Imagine our sin has no effect on Him and we could not be more wrong.” Randy Alcorn**

We Sin Because We are Sinners

- The clearest measure we have of evil's depth is found in what it cost to redeem us.
- History's greatest problem could not be solved by the love of God; it took nothing less than the death of God's son.
- The solution to sin and evil is so radical that it is unthinkable apart from God. No other father would do what ours did.

We Sin Because We are Sinners

- **Isa 64:6 All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away. NIV**
- **What is the extent of our sin? It has rendered us totally disabled spiritually. (Eph 2:1 As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins, NIV)**
- **It is not that we do no good (we feed the hungry, we clothe the naked, etc ...), but it's that we have nothing to offer to gain a right standing with God.**

Sins of Omission

- “Apart from Christ, we are different from every ruthless dictator and notorious murderer only in degree.” Randy Alcorn
- The holocaust of the 1930’s and 40’s was orchestrated by a handful of ideological thugs, but was carried out by ordinary, everyday people.
- Edmund Burke said, “All that is necessary for evil to prevail is for good men to do nothing”.

The Problem of Sin

- Randy Alcorn recounts this story:
 - Child molester/murderer convicted and sentenced to death
 - His daughters pray for the man to be saved.
 - He prays along with them only because he knew he should.
 - The man gives testimony at his execution of finding Christ.
 - The onlookers are outraged that such a sinner can claim forgiveness.

- We flatter ourselves when we look at evil acts and confidently say, “I would never do that”.

- Jer 4:22 "My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good." NIV

The Problem of Sin

- “the only part of Christian dogma that can actually be proved is our sin nature” G.K. Chesterton
- “When the apostles preached, they could assume even in their Pagan hearers a real consciousness of deserving the Divine anger. The Pagan mysteries existed to allay this consciousness, and the Epicurean philosophy claimed to deliver men from the fear of eternal punishment. It was against this background that the Gospel appeared as good news. It brought good news of possible healing to men who knew that they were mortally ill. But all this has changed. Christianity now has to preach the diagnosis— in itself very bad news— before it can win a hearing for the cure.” C.S. Lewis

The Problem of Sin

- **Three points of view:**

- **Posse Non Peccare – possible not to sin**

- **Non Posse Peccare – not possible to sin**

- **Non Posse Non Peccare – not possible to not sin.**

The Problem of Sin

- “But this freedom from the dominion of sin is not the end of the struggle against sin. In fact, it is the beginning of a new conflict with it. For while we have died to sin, it has not died in us.” Sinclair Ferguson
- Many scriptures affirm that man will not always do right, but none affirm he can never do right.
- We are guilty of having a sin nature and we are also guilty of some sins – most us however can also claim to have some good deeds to our credit. – What no one has claim to, on their own, is righteousness.

Some Sin More

- **Matt 11:24** But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you." NIV
- **Luke 12:47** "And that slave who knew his master's will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, shall receive many lashes, 48 but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. And from everyone who has been given much shall much be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more. NASB
- **2 Tim 3:13** while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. NIV

Personal Perspective

- Years ago the London Times asked several prominent writers to address the subject of ‘what is wrong with the world?’.
- GK Chesterton wrote:

Dear Sirs,

I am.

Sincerely yours,

G.K. Chesterton

Natural Disasters and Suffering

- If a builder were to craft a beautiful and perfectly built house and had it ruined by his tenants would we blame the builder or the tenants?
- Do you find it interesting that the synonym for natural disaster is 'act of God', but beautiful sunny days are never referred to as such?
- Some disasters of nature are simply the results of a fractured earth, but some are undoubtedly caused by God.

Natural Disasters and Suffering

- Scripture does not distance God from natural disasters and the secondary evils that come with them the way we try to do.
- Isa 45:7 I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the Lord, do all these things. NIV
- Amos 3:6 When a trumpet sounds in a city, do not the people tremble? When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it? NIV
- Without equivocation, God causes some natural disasters.

Natural Disasters and Suffering

- Some are caused by Satan – Job is the classic example wherein Satan incited the Sabaeans and Chaldeans to murder and plunder Job’s family.
- The distinction with Job is it proves that God rules over Satan and Satan cannot touch the believer without God’s permission.
- A new thought perhaps – Satan cannot touch us without God’s permission, but if Job was described by God as perfect and upright, what makes us think we are any safer than Job?

Evil and Suffering Perspective

- When we call on God to bring an end to evil consider what we are saying – God do again, what you did in Noah’s day - Destroy everything!
- Gen 8:21 The Lord smelled the pleasing aroma and said in his heart: "Never again will I curse the ground because of man, even though every inclination of his heart is evil from childhood. And never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. NIV
- He promised to never again start over with sinful people – the next time sin will be put away forever.

Evil and Suffering Perspective

- God never explained to Job why He allowed evil and suffering to come upon him – He wanted Job to trust Him.
- If Job, being blameless, did not get an explanation why he suffered so, should we expect one?
- The scriptures are filled with light to bring us to faith and trust, but they are short on reasons for suffering – perhaps because reason is often the enemy of faith.

Evil and Suffering Perspective

- Mark Lowery, Christian comedian, says his favorite verse is “and it came to pass”.
- When we are “in the fire” it is discomfoting to know that God could bring the ordeal to an end in an instant, but has chosen not to – He is aware and cares.
- Ps 56:8 You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. NLT

Evil and Suffering Perspective

- “While in the larger story this is not the best possible world, it just may be the best possible means of achieving the best possible world.” Randy Alcorn
- God makes no mistakes – if he wanted people to behave properly he could have programmed that into our DNA.
- Maybe he wants people who have seen what sin can do and then appreciate who He is and love him more.



Questions / Comments