

Human Suffering And God's Wrath

Joe Slater

Atheists claim that human suffering proves there is no God. On the other extreme, some who believe in God assert that human suffering is always the result of God's wrath upon the one who is suffering. Truth, as we might expect, lies between the extremes.

Before sin occurred in Eden, there was no sickness, no pain, no hurricanes, no fires, no death. Beyond dispute, God allows such things to be commonplace now because of sin. That is not to say, however, that every episode of suffering is due to divine wrath against the sufferer!

Much of the misunderstanding stems from the false doctrine of inherited sin. I have engaged in discussions with people who believed little babies are born guilty of Adam's sin, and therefore God afflicts them with terrible diseases! But God Himself told Ezekiel that *"the son shall not bear the guilt of the father"* (18:20). God's own law given to Israel through Moses forbade punishing children for the crimes of parents (Deuteronomy 24:16).

Job's friends foolishly assumed his suffering was God's way of punishing him for his sins. The Twelve likewise presumed that a man's blindness from birth might be due to his parents' sin (John 9:2). The Lord corrected all of them.

Everyone has known of cases where the innocent suffer due to the sins of the guilty. Drunk drivers kill the innocent and walk away unscathed. Drug-addicted parents spend money on drugs while innocent children go without food and clothes.

Yes, suffering characterizes the world because of sin. But that does not mean every case of suffering is due to God's wrath against the sufferer.

WE, LIKE SHEEP

As I was on my bus route one day I saw a flock of sheep in a field. In a corner next to the fence, I noticed several sheep grouped together. There, tangled up in the fencing, was a little black lamb. A man, the shepherd I suppose, was walking on the other side of the fence toward the sheep, on his way to rescue the poor little lamb.

Right away I saw a lesson in that sight. Are you like the sheep who was in trouble, or are you like the other sheep along the side? At times we all might be like both. If you are in need of help, do you call to others for help, or are you the one who will gather around when one is in distress?

If you do not let anyone know there is something wrong in your life, then no one will know. We must use our distress signals just like the little lamb baa-ing for help.

On the other hand when you see one of your brothers or sisters in trouble spiritually or in need of something, do you step up to help? We should *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2).

When we see our brother or sister needing help spiritually or physically, we should lend a supporting hand. We should be by their side to comfort or talk to them when they are sad or overwhelmed with burdens. Cheer them on if they need some encouragement. If you can't do anything, call for someone else to help. Be like those other sheep who do all the baa-ing. They are calling to the shepherd for help. We should all call for help to the shepherd, to our Lord Jesus Christ.

"He will tend his flock like a shepherd;

He will gather the lambs in his arms;

He will carry them in his bosom,

and gently lead those that are with young" (Isaiah 40:11).

--Janine Tuggle (Stockton, CA)

GOD AND "HIDE-AND-SEEK"

When I was little, we would play hide and seek with my cousins. One in particular was always easy to find, because when he would hide, he would always giggle loudly (I guess out of pleasure that he felt he had picked a good hiding spot).

I suspect that God is not very good at hide and seek. Now, making a statement like that might seem blasphemous, so let me explain. As King David was giving charge to his son, Solomon, concerning building the temple, he said to him, *"If you seek Him, He will be found by you"* (1 Chronicles 28:9). Yes, God is not very good at hide and seek, because He wants us to find Him.

In case you are ever seeking God and He seems to be hiding, there's a trick that makes Him easily found. No, He doesn't giggle. The prophet Jeremiah reveals the secret in Jeremiah 29:13, *"And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart."* You see, God looks at our heart – and when it is sincere, He can always be easily found.

How is your heart? If you keep it sincere, and you seek in the right place, you will always be able to find God.

--Edd Sterchi (Campbellsville, KY)

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Before Adam and Eve sinned, God walked with them in the cool of the day. Too many of us now are satisfied with a brief visit Sunday morning.

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Announcement made at a congregational meeting: "If you will fill out your temperature preference form and drop it in the collection plate, we will average all of the preferences and adjust the thermostats accordingly."