

Doctrine of Suffering

Why People Suffer

1. As the Muslim religion wages war on the world, it is seen that much pain and suffering is the result of the conflict of ideas.
2. When worlds collide, there is violence. The world of Islam is very different from the world of the Judeo-Christian heritage.
3. The word catastrophe, calamity, or tragedy, is often used to speak of terrible events, such as what happened in New York on September 11, 2001, or what happened in Paris in November, 2015, or what happened in Brussels on Monday, March 21, 2016.
4. On these days, devotees of the religion of Islam killed unsuspecting individuals going about their daily lives.
5. One phrase that is often used in connection with the violence of Islam is senseless tragedy.
6. These words form an oxymoron, because in order for there to be a tragedy, there has to be some sense, or standard of good, which has been violated. The word, tragedy, presupposes some kind of order, or purpose in the world. Therefore, the word “senseless”, is inappropriately used.
7. There are tragedies in the world. There are disastrous events that result in loss, or injury, but these events are not senseless, from a Christian point of view. Nothing is senseless in God’s universe.
8. A person may not comprehend what is taking place, but that does not mean the event is senseless.
9. To the perpetrator of a crime, what he or she is doing makes perfect sense. The bombing of the World Trade Center made sense to the Islamic terrorists. They wanted to kill in the name of Allah, and receive an eternal reward for destroying the infidels.
10. The drunk who gets into a car, and drives, is making perfect sense in his own frame of reference. He wants to move from one place to another. The best way to get there is in a car.
11. Nothing happens without a purpose, or meaning. If God is God, if God is sovereign, if God is a God of providence, then nothing ever happens that is senseless.
12. Dr. R. C. Sproul tells the story of a biology class he had to take in college. He remembers the professor saying that scientists are not interested in teleology.
13. As a philosophy major, Mr. Sproul understood what teleology referred to, which is why he was astonished at what the professor had to say.

14. Teleology comes from the Greek, telos, end, goal, or purpose. One of the great quest in the history of philosophy is the meaning and purpose of life, as well as the existence of animals, plants, and the universe itself.
15. Philosophy is profoundly interfered in the purpose and meaning of things, and yet, in a science class, that was said to be ruled out of bounds. What the professor was saying, was that what was learned in the course would be meaningless. It was an astonishing admission.
16. What the professor was really saying, was that science would limit itself to questions of what, how, when, and where, but not why.
17. When people turn to acts of terrorism, the question of why, is very important. Why did God allow 9/11? Why the rise of Islamic terrorism? Why pain and suffering? Why the Holocaust? Why cancer? Why?
18. The why question is raised, because for the Christian, nothing is an accident. There are only incidents in the unfolding of redemptive history. God is a God of purpose.
19. God is not chaotic. God does not play dice, as Albert Einstein once said.
20. Jerry Falwell, and Pat Robertson, suggested that September 11, 2001 was God's judgment upon America for its allowance of abortion, homosexuality, and other moral issues. That created a backlash of commentary, even by Christians. Falwell recanted his initial assessment.
21. The honest answer for such events is, "I do not know." However, that answer does not mean there was not purpose to the events. It just means that individuals do not have enough information, at times, to come to a fixed conclusion on why God allows certain events to take place.
22. Was God involved in 9/11? The answer is yes. It was according to God's purpose, but what that purpose was is unclear.
23. What commentators must also be careful of, is to declare with confidence, that the events of 9/11 were not an act of divine judgment on America. They too should suspend dogmatism on the matter. God does bring calamity on nations as an act of judgment. The Bible clearly teaches the destruction of many nations, apart from gospel repentance.
 - *Jonah 3:4 And Jonah began to enter into the city a day's journey, and he cried, and said, Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown.*
24. The tragedies that befall people throughout the ages, is a question of the ages. Jesus addressed pain and suffering.

- *John 9:1 And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*
- 25.** It is not unusual for parents, who have a child born with an affliction, to view the child as a punishment from God, and not a blessing. Healthy children are considered to be a blessing from God. A child born blind, or afflicted in some way, is viewed as a form of divine judgment.
- 26.** Jesus said that such is not the case. The man born blind, of whom the Lord was asked, had not sinned, nor had his parents sinned that the man should be born blind.
- 27.** Rather, the purpose of the man's blindness was to reflect the grace, mercy, and power of God.
- *John 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.*
- 28.** The idea of pain and suffering being part of the plan of God was a foreign thought to the Jews to whom Jesus spoke, and it is a foreign thought to many Christians today who have been mistaught to believe that all sickness is of the devil. That is simply not a Biblical teaching.
- 29.** Disease and sickness is a direct result of the Fall. It is part of the curse upon creation that shall one day be reversed in the new heaven and the new earth.
- *Revelation 21:4 And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.*
- 30.** Until then, pain and suffering are designed to show forth the power of God, and to manifest the work of God in the lives of individuals.
- 31.** People who start ascribing to the Devil what is really a work of God inadvertently glorify the Evil One, and give him more power and authority than he has.
- 32.** What is even more arrogant is to start rebuking the Devil for something he is not responsible for, as if the Christian has the authority in and of themselves to rebuke Satan. Not even Michael the Archangel was so presumptuous.
- *Jude 9 Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.*
- 33.** If a person is known to be demon possessed because God has revealed that, then appropriate steps can be taken to deal with the evil spirit as Paul did.

- *Acts 16:16 And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying: 17 The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation. 18 And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.*
- 34.** What is contended for is that care must be taken not to presume to know why something has happened, such as Jerry Falwell did concerning 9/11, or to presume to know the source of some affliction, as the Jews did with the man born blind.
- 35.** Care must be taken not to rebuke the Devil without certain knowledge that he is responsible for something lest his pride be inflated, and other Christians are taught to fear his power to hurt them, a power he does not have.
- 36.** Presumption sinning is just as bad a sin as any other, and it is sin condemned.
- *Numbers 15:30 But the soul that doeth ought presumptuously, whether he be born in the land, or a stranger, the same reproacheth the Lord; and that soul shall be cut off from among his people. 31 Because he hath despised the word of the Lord, and hath broken his commandment, that soul shall utterly be cut off; his iniquity shall be upon him.*
- 37.** When personal tragedy comes, it is not wrong to ask God, why? When I had cancer, a dear friend of mine asked, “What lessons do you think God is teaching you?” It was a good question. To this day, I am not sure what the correct answer is. My honest answer is, “I am not sure. I just do not know.”
- 38.** Upon reflection, I can surmise some things. But, I am not sure. What I am sure of is the grace of God. I have survived cancer, triple bypass surgery, a hip replacement, eye surgery, and much more. Modern medicine is part of God’s grace and mercy, but ultimately He is the Great Physician, He is Jehovah Rapha, the One who heals.
- 39.** When Jesus was asked, “Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? “, the Lord knew He was being presented with a logical fallacy. He was being presented with a false dilemma. Both propositions of the question were equally invalid. No choice had to be made between the man, or, his parents. There were other possibilities.
- *John 9:2 And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind?*
- 40.** Care must be taken to consider other options for a situation.
- 41.** Refusing to fall into an illogical discussion, Jesus rejected both false premises to the questions of the Jews to provide two alternative reasons for the man’s blindness.

- *John 9:3 Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned, nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him. 4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work.*

42. Jesus gave two reasons for the man's blindness that had nothing to do with sin, or the Devil.

- The man was born blind in order to reveal a work of God in Him.
- The man was born blind in order for Christ to do the work of the Father who sent Him.

43. After providing a reason for what seemed a senseless act, a baby born blind, Jesus healed the man, and thus revealed who He was.

- *John 9:4 I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. 5 As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world. 6 When he had thus spoken, he spat on the ground, and made clay of the spittle, and he anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay, 7 And said unto him, Go, wash in the pool of Siloam, (which is by interpretation, Sent.) He went his way therefore, and washed, and came seeing. 8 The neighbours therefore, and they which before had seen him that he was blind, said, Is not this he that sat and begged?*

44. Through the sufferings of the man, through all the hardship years of blindness, there was a reason for his pain and suffering. Not only would God reveal Himself in the man, not only would Jesus be glorified, but many friends and neighbors would be brought to faith in the person of Jesus Christ.

45. While the disciples of Jesus were wrong in their understanding of the cause of the blindness of the man, they were not stupid, or ignorant men.

46. They made their assumption based on knowledge of the truth of God, that the ultimate reason for pain and suffering in the world is sin. Get rid of sin, and suffering goes away. In heaven, there is no sin, and there is no suffering. There is no death.

47. There is a connection between sin and suffering. But the immediate cause for a situation may not be a transgression of some particular person.

48. Sometimes sin is the immediate cause of pain and suffering. The Lord revealed to David that the child born to him by Bathsheba would not survive infancy, and David wept. It was to no avail. The child died, and the sin of David remained ever before him.

- *2 Samuel 12:15 And Nathan departed unto his house. And the Lord struck the child that Uriah's wife bare unto David, and it was very sick. 16 David therefore besought God for the child; and David fasted, and went in, and lay all night upon the earth. 17 And the elders of his house arose, and went to him, to raise him up from the earth: but he would not, neither did he eat bread with them. 18 And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the child died. And the servants of David feared to tell him that the child was dead: for they said, Behold, while the child was yet*

alive, we spake unto him, and he would not hearken unto our voice: how will he then vex himself, if we tell him that the child is dead?

- *Psalms 51:1 Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. 2 Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.*

49. God did forgive David. The Lord washed away the sin of David and Bathsheba and restored them to fellowship.

50. God does send sickness as a judgment upon sin. Partaking of the Lord's Supper in an appropriate manner can bring sickness, and even death.

- *1 Corinthians 11:30 For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep.*

51. But there are other reasons for pain and suffering that must also be considered. That is the lesson of John 9.

52. Paul, for example was given a thorn in the flesh for his own sanctification. In his pain and suffering, Paul learned the grace of God.

- *2 Corinthians 12:7 And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. 8 For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 9 And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*

53. There are many reasons why God visits His people with what we might call tragedy, with the experience being related to some immediate sin.

54. Therefore, Christian, do not rush to judgment to ascribe an answer that is not really known. The God of history, and the God of providence, has promised that all things will work together for the good of those who love the Lord and endure the pain and suffering. The pain and suffering of this world is temporary. It cannot be compared to the glory to come. In this, the Christian rejoices.