

## Pain, Sorrow, Suffering, and Death

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The issue of why God allows suffering, death, pain, and sorrow is one of the most challenging questions ever asked. If you or someone you know is experiencing the heartache of a tragedy, unusual pain, sorrow or suffering *right now*, this article may help them understand the bigger picture. I hope it will be encouraging. To get started, please consider the following:

The Bible teaches that God is omnipotent (all powerful) and omniscient (all knowing), but the Bible also teaches that God will not use these infinite powers to benefit Himself. If He did, He would be a self-seeking and self-promoting God.

The Bible also says that God is love. This means that God's words and actions stay within the boundaries defined by the laws of love. Therefore, God refuses to do certain things. For example, God will not violate the power of choice He has given to angels and human beings. He permits each of us the choice to love Him or hate Him. God allows each of His children the freedom to do evil or to do right. Of course, whatever we sow we reap, but to be given the freedom to make those choices is amazing!

God uses His infinite powers for the benefit of His children, and He does so with fairness and justice for all. God loves everyone throughout the world and He wants to be understood even though finite beings can never fully understand an infinite God. However, finite beings *can* understand everything that God has made known. Walking with God means that things we do not understand today will be understood later. As time passes, when faith in God is viewed in reverse, it always makes sense!

No one in the universe is more humble, compassionate, and loving than God. Every day, He suffers far more than we can imagine. Think of it. A perfect God hears every lie, sees every act of hatred, watches our sorrow, and feels our suffering. He witnesses every act of adultery and understands the pain.

He sees every sparrow that falls and mourns with us when a loved one dies. We serve a God who knows the number of hairs on our heads and empathizes with every heartache and injury. God can see everything occurring on Earth and because of His omniscience, He has been heartsick ever since sin began.

God has infinite wisdom. He knows what is infinitely best for an ever expanding universe, including Earth, and for each individual. God is deliberate and purposeful in everything He does, which means there are specific reasons why events unfold in an orderly basis. Even though it may not be evident to our eyes, divine wisdom is at work and later, every individual will see God's larger purposes.

The Bible predicts a day will come when all created beings will bow down before God with astonishment. The saints will kneel with adoration and praise in their hearts and the wicked will

kneel when they see the recorded evidence of His love. The Bible declares the wicked will even admit that God is righteous and fair in His judgment!

God is neither simple nor simplistic. If you want to know God, you must diligently seek Him. A billion years in the past or a billion years in the future are but a small moment in His existence. Long ago, God wisely decided to take several thousand years (a very short time within the context of endless eternity) to resolve the sin problem in such a way so that it will never happen again.

The span of time God is using to deal with sin is important to consider. We tend to view God within the context of our life's experience, but God operates on a huge timescale. The Bible reveals God's character and ways over a period of 7,000 years. When God's words and actions are properly aligned, we learn that His love is larger and more wonderful than words can express!

As you ponder these concepts, I hope you will see a starting place for answering why sorrow and suffering exist. Through the years, people have asked me, "Why doesn't Almighty God stop all of the suffering, sorrow and death that plagues Earth?" I believe that God wisely allows pain, sorrow, suffering, and death to occur on Earth for this brief time period in His eyes because He is resolving the huge problem of sin.

He does not want it to infect the whole universe ever again. Said another way, God is allowing the curse of sin to exist on Earth so it will not recur throughout eternity. Even though this is the basic answer to the question, there is much more to understand.

When God created the angels, they were created to be happy and holy beings. He gave them everything necessary to enjoy eternal life. He also created them with a *strong propensity* to live in harmony with God's two laws of love: (a) You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, and soul, and (b) you shall love your neighbor as yourself. Heaven was an incredible place to live until passion overtook reason.

Unfortunately, Lucifer, the highest created angel, became jealous of Christ. Lucifer wanted to be worshiped as Jesus was worshiped, but the Father would not permit it. Lucifer's pride was hurt and his disappointment soured into rebellion. His hatred for the Father motivated him to secretly seek the sympathy of the angels.

Lucifer used deceit and sophisticated lies to mislead the holy angels. Eventually, Lucifer led a third of the holy angels to become anti-Christ. Of course, the Father knew what was happening. Remember, even though God is omniscient (all knowing), He will not violate the power of choice He gives to His children!

Time after time, the Godhead did everything possible to resolve Lucifer's hatred, but Lucifer would not back down. When all attempts to convince Lucifer to repent failed, the Father assembled and confronted the angels. He commanded the angels to bow down and worship Jesus, and all of the angels who defied His command were immediately cast out of Heaven. God did not destroy Lucifer and his followers at that moment for two very important reasons.

First, if God had killed a third of the angels that day, the remaining two-thirds would have eventually concluded that God is not a God of love. Remember, the remaining angels did not understand Lucifer's passion and rebellion. If they would have watched the sudden death of their dearest friends, they would have served God out of fear instead of love. They would have concluded that Lucifer was right after all: God is a divine bully who insists that everyone obey Him under penalty of death!

Second, God did not immediately destroy Lucifer and the rebellious angels because the knowledge of good and evil was just beginning to unfold. Even though the holy angels were highly intelligent, they did not understand the properties of good and evil for they had never seen or studied evil.

By allowing the rebellious angels to live, God created a living laboratory so that the faithful angels could see how the curse of sin would affect their friends over time. By giving evil the opportunity to reach maturity, God will show the universe forever what sin actually does to happy and holy beings (whether angels or mankind). Throughout endless eternity, God will use this evidence to prevent another incidence of sin, since the power of choice will not end at the second coming. God always gives His children the power of choice.

After Lucifer and his followers were cast out of heaven, Jesus created Adam and Eve. When Lucifer observed Creation Week, he saw, in a demonic way, a fantastic opportunity to "get even" with God. The devil reasoned that if he could lead Adam and Eve into sin, they too, would become *natural* enemies of God.

After he was cast out of Heaven, Lucifer discovered that when a holy being sins, a sudden change occurs within them. They become selfish, self-seeking, and rebellious toward God. God's laws of love become offensive and undesirable to them. When God created the holy angels (as well as Adam and Eve), He gave them a theo-centric (God centered) heart, which means each holy being was given a very strong predisposition for loving God and one another.

When a holy being chooses to commit sin (which is very difficult to do), that strong predisposition for loving God and others becomes a strong predisposition for loving self. Consequently, every sinner becomes ego-centric (self-centered) instead of theo-centric (God-centered). Whether we choose to believe it or not, every sinner has a very strong inclination to be selfish and self-seeking.

To put this in perspective, notice how sinners today typically relate to God's two laws of love, expressed by the Ten Commandments. The first law of love is to love God with all your heart. Sinners relate to the first four commandments which make up the first law of love in the following ways.

Sinners create their own gods and worship graven images (idols). They carelessly speak God's name or take God's name in vain. Even more, they typically resist God command to rest from their labors on His holy Sabbath. The last six commandments describe the second law of love – love your neighbor as yourself.

Sinners treat others with disrespect and cruelty. They lie, cheat, steal, murder, commit adultery, and covet their neighbor's possessions. Worse, the children of sinners will often abuse their parents in horrible ways to get whatever they want. *All sinners have the heart of a predator* and will readily take advantage of each other and do all kinds of evil things to each other to achieve whatever they want. This is the way it was in Noah's day and it is no different today. From birth, every child is naturally selfish and self-centered.

Lucifer is a highly intelligent being and he reasoned that if he could lead Adam and Eve into sin, he would have an increasing number of rebels to fight against "the tyranny" of God. Lucifer realized that Adam and Eve were unlike the angels because they had been given the ability to procreate. If Adam and Eve, along with all their offspring, sinned, Lucifer concluded his empire would swell in size and given enough time, he would become a force for God to deal with!

The devil did not know that God had a very special reason for creating Earth. God gave Adam and Eve the ability to procreate so that Heaven could be repopulated with "victors over sin." God foreknew that Adam and Eve would choose to sin. He also foreknew that it would take 6,000 years for enough sinners to choose eternal life so that He could restore Heaven to three-thirds again!

At the end of sin's drama, Heaven will be better off than ever because one-third of Heaven will be victorious over sin! God has allowed sin to exist for a short season so that the curse of sin might be understood and finally destroyed. Therefore, He has allowed this "living laboratory of sin" to exist for a short time so that no one throughout eternity would want to revisit the experience of sin. When Lucifer and the holy angels rebelled against God, it was difficult because their natural inclination was to love God and one another.

However, the redeemed are born into the curse of sin, but they will choose submission to God and His Word. This is difficult for them because their selfish inclination is to rebel against God and their neighbor! After Jesus' Second Coming, God will have a large multitude of holy beings in the universe who know experientially what the curse of sin is all about (pain, sorrow, suffering and death). These witnesses will forever say, "We have been there, done that, and we assure you that you want nothing to do with it!"

Bible prophecy indicates that we are very close to the end of sin's drama. For a short season of only 6,000 years (remember, a billion years in eternity is but a moment), God has been willing to let the curse of sin run its ugly, painful and deadly course on Earth. Everyone who lives in the universe today, and those who will eventually live in His universe will be able to see and understand what sin and sinners do.

Thus, the knowledge of good and evil gained from Earth's experience with sin is designed to avoid pain, sorrow, suffering, and death throughout eternity. By giving the curse of sin a small measure of time to mature, God knows that He can secure the universe from another round of sin's curse!

The good news is that God has chosen to allow sin's curse to exist for a short season. He has also chosen to give *special grace* to *everyone* who wants freedom from sin's curse. God's

amazing grace comes to us in different ways. First, God is willing to give repentant sinners a deep sense of peace and joy, a happiness within that passes all understanding. Second, God is willing to send the Holy Spirit to comfort, enable, and strengthen us when we are hurting, discouraged, depressed, and lonely.

Third, He is willing to impart wonderful knowledge and understanding about His character, His love, His plans, and His ways. Finally, and most of all, He is willing to transform us. He will enable us to overcome our ego-centric ways. He knows that we are cursed at the present time with the properties of sin (which makes us naturally selfish and self-seeking), so He has made a way for us to be born again!

Through the indwelling power of the Holy Spirit we can taste and experience the joy of a theocentric life and in so doing, we can make the most of walking with God and living in harmony with His laws of love in our present situation! I hope you now appreciate how God is working with a much bigger picture than just Earth. He is preparing the whole universe for endless happiness throughout the corridors of eternity.

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