

## The Problem of Pain- Part 1

Text: Genesis 1-3

### Introduction:

- When you take a quick look at the world around you, there is overwhelming evidence of pain and suffering.
- Young men and women in their 20's diagnosed with cancer, children born with birth defects, countless murders each year, shooting massacres like the one we just experienced in Dallas on Friday, innocent boys and girls abused or raped, loved ones whose bodies are ravaged by disease.
- I could go on and on, but I'll stop because I don't think I have to go any further. We are all aware that this world is full of pain, hurt, sickness, and injustice.
- The atheist points to all these things and laughs at the idea of God. He mockingly asks, "Why would a God of love allow so much pain and suffering in this world?"
- Epicurus put it this way, *"Either God wants to abolish evil, and cannot; or he can, but does not want to... If he wants to, but cannot, he is impotent. If he can, but does not want to, he is wicked... If, as they say, God can abolish evil, and God really wants to do it, why is there evil in the world?"*
- *"Through logic, you can see that the church concept of an all-loving heavenly father doesn't hold water. If a divine Maker fashioned everything that exists, He designed breast cancer for women, childhood leukaemia, cerebral palsy, leprosy, AIDS, Alzheimer's disease, and Down's syndrome. He mandated foxes to rip rabbits apart, and cheetahs to slaughter fawns. No human would be cruel enough to plan such horrors. If a supreme being did so, he's a monster, not an all-merciful father."* James Wright
- *"According to The World Health Report 1996, most of the 17 million people who died of infectious diseases in 1995 were young children. Think of it! The death of each of those millions of children constitutes a 'rebuttal of the notion of the almighty and kindly God in heaven.' How many rebuttals does it take to rid the world of belief in the omnipotent, omnibenevolent God?..."* A.J. Mattill Jr.
- So we see that the lost world has a major problem with the fact that there is pain and suffering in the world. But, let's take things a step further. Although the average Christian may never so boldly mock and oppose God the way the men I just read did, I believe that probably nearly everyone at one time or another struggles with the idea of pain and why God doesn't keep us from experiencing it here on the earth.
- That is why I believe that this is such an important topic for the Christian to think through and to understand what the Bible really has to say about it.
- So for the next three weeks, we are going to take a look at this topic. First of all, this week, we are going to ask the question, "Where does pain come from?"
- Next week, we are going to answer the question, "How does the Christian deal with pain, sickness, and disability in this life?"
- And then, finally, we will answer the question, "How should the church respond to pain, sickness, and disability?"

## Examining Assumptions

- Before we begin to answer the question of where does pain come from, I think it would be wise to take a moment to examine the assumptions that people make when they are dealing with the problem of pain and evil in this world.” When people ask the question, “Why would a God of love allow bad things to happen?” they are assuming that **there are values in life**. Some things are “good” some are “bad.” Where did this idea of good and bad, or good and evil come from? Evolution? I don’t think so.
  - If the purpose of life is to fulfill evolutionary progress, then “bad things” can’t happen to anybody. In fact we can’t even use the words “good” or “bad” because whatever occurs in the evolutionary process is good.
  - They call it “natural selection.” You hear about it all the time in academics. Superior animals that are more fit to survive will do so, and animals that are less fit are eliminated.
    - In an ecosystem, some giraffes may have long necks and others have short ones. If something caused low-lying shrubs to die out, the giraffes with short necks would not get enough food. After a few generations, all the giraffes in that area would have long necks.
    - A species of rats live in a certain type of tree with the branches evenly spaced. Rats too small would not be able to reach from branch to branch, and rats too large would break the branches and fall. Soon, all rats are just the right size for the tree branches.
  - In these situations, natural selection isn’t concerned with any sort of moral “right” or “wrong.” Whatever happens is right because it’s what happened.
  - But suddenly, we get this idea that things “should” be a certain way. Certain things are “good” and certain things are “evil.” Where do we get this idea? It doesn’t come from evolution. It comes from Genesis 1. In fact, all of our answers today are going to come from the book of Genesis. Let’s read Genesis 1:26-27.
- What does it mean when it says that man was made in the image of God? Does it mean that he looked like God? No. The Bible tells us that God is a spirit. (John 4:24). God didn’t have flesh and blood until Jesus Christ came down to earth as a man.
- But the human race has been given a spiritual element that differs from the animal kingdom. We not only have a body and a soul, but we also have a spirit that allows us to interact with God in a personal way that is unique to the relationship between God and man. Notice how God emphasizes the difference between man and the animal world in the two verses we just read.
- It’s this spiritual side of our nature that gives us an innate moral compass, a conscience. Our consciences are an imprint of God’s holy nature, and we unconsciously know when things violate His standard of right and wrong. It’s this conscience that caused the men in the story of the woman caught in adultery to walk away one by one. The Bible says that they were convicted by their own conscience. (John 8:9)
- God has placed inside everyone the knowledge of the Creator. We are all made in His image, and we innately recognize when things do not match His standard of right, wrong, and justice. It’s for this reason that we get angry inside when we hear of wrongful actions that have been done, and why we are pleased inside when we hear of acts of love and heroism.

- Animals don't do this. You never see a tiger overcome by guilt after killing his prey. Scientists have tried to find animals that feel guilt as a result of a moral conscience, but have never been able to do so. Only human beings act this way, and it only makes sense if we believe that we are made in God's image.
- So, the argument that "I don't believe in God because he doesn't stop the evil in the world," doesn't hold water, because the very fact that evil bothers you proves that you are made in the image of God.
- So we've shot down the idea that the presence of evil in the world is the real reason that people don't believe in God. But we haven't at all even begun to answer other questions such as, "Well, why DOESN'T God stop pain in the world? Is God the one causing all the pain in my life? Does God bring pain and sickness into people's lives to teach them things?" Well, we're going to answer all of those questions. But let's start with this question: "Where does pain and evil come from?"

### **Where does pain and evil come from?**

- Let's take a look at the very first time that pain shows up in the Bible. Unsurprisingly, it shows up in the book of Genesis. (Genesis 3:7-19)
- So, from this passage we see that a large majority of the pain that we endure in this life is a direct result of the corruption that resulted in the world due to Adam and Eve's sin. We see three different types of corruptions that begin in this passage.
  - Corruption of the human spirit (vs. 7)
  - Corruption of the human body (vs. 16)
  - Corruption of nature (vs. 17-19)
- Adam and Eve were representatives for all of mankind. The Bible says that when they sinned, the punishment for their sin extended to all human beings who would come after them. (Corruption of spirit- Romans 5:12,15, corruption of body- everyone gets sick; corruption of nature- Romans 8:22)
- Nearly every example of pain or suffering that you have ever experienced in your life, comes from one of these three corruptions. Let's begin with the corruption of the human spirit.

### **Corruption of the Human Spirit (Sin Nature)**

- A great majority of the pain that people endure in this life is due to sinful behavior on the part of someone else.
  - Every time someone is murdered, raped, or kidnapped, someone else's sinful choice is the cause.
  - Every time you feel the pain of being gossiped about, being treated unfairly, or abused, someone else's sinful choice is the cause.
- So, the question many ask is, "Why doesn't God keep people from sinning and hurting others?"
- Well, the answer again comes from Genesis, and it again comes from the unique relationship that God has with mankind.
- From the very beginning, God created mankind with the ability to make choices. Some call this "Free Will." Others, call it "Volition."

- Over and over again in Genesis 2 and 3, we see God giving Adam and Eve choices:
  - 2:19- The choice of what to name the animals
  - 2:16- The choice to eat of any fruit that they chose
  - 2:17- God commanded Adam not to eat of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, but didn't take away his ability to choose.
- Adam and Eve truly had a choice- to obey or disobey God. And as we know, Adam and Eve chose to disobey. Now right there, you may be thinking to yourself, why DIDN'T God just make it to where they couldn't possibly disobey Him. Why couldn't He have made it to where, even if they tried to reach for the tree, God would have kept them from actually eating the fruit?
- Because this would completely destroy the value and beauty of the relationship, and would make Adam and Eve nothing more than robots, programmed to please their Creator. Without true free will and choice, you can't have "relationship."
- Think about it - what makes the relationship with a husband and wife so special is that both chose the other, and chose to love the other. If either spouse were programmed to love the other, and had no other choice but to do things that the other spouse wanted, it would not actually be love. You see, you can't truly have a relationship where two parties love one another, unless both parties fully have the choice to hate one another instead.
- You see, if you take away mankind's ability to choose to **hurt** others, it destroys the value that comes from choosing to **help** others. If God just simply did not allow spouses to commit adultery on one another, it would destroy the meaning behind the choice to stay true to each other. In order for a **good** choice to have value, there has to be a directly opposite **bad** choice that could have been chosen.
- All throughout Israel's history, there were times that they turned their back on God, causing them great heartache and trouble. All throughout these times, God would beg His people to turn back to Him. He would beg them to choose Him over false gods. But He refused to force them to do it. He refused to take away their volition in order to get them to obey Him.
- Often, we blame God for atrocities that happen on the earth that God had absolutely no part of!
  - Jeremiah 19:5- *"They have built also the high places of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal, which I commanded not, nor spake it, neither came it into my mind."*
  - Jeremiah 32:35- *"And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin."*
- God can have no part of sin. If someone sins against you, you can be sure that they were not being led to their choice by God!
- Yet, still, when many Christians are mistreated by someone else, whether it be a relative, a spouse, a friend, a co-worker, or a boss, they feel that God is punishing them in some way, or is causing the situation so that they will learn something.
- But this is not what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that suffering and persecution in this life on the earth shouldn't shock or surprise the Christian, but instead we should realize that these things will be a part of our earthly lives.

- 2 Timothy 3:12- *"Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution."*
- 2 Corinthians 1:5- *"For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ."*
- Philippians 3:10- *"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death;"*
- 1 Peter 4:13- *"But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy."*

### **Corruption of the Human Body and Nature**

- So we've seen how the corruption of mankind's spirit, or our sin nature, is the cause of a great deal of pain in the world. But this is not the only cause of pain and suffering.
- There were two other consequences of sin that can be the cause of pain and suffering in this life: corruption of the human body and corruption of nature.
- When the human body was corrupted in the Garden of Eden, it meant that each human being's body would slowly wear down and age, until finally succumbing to death. It also meant that sickness, disease, and genetic defects would be a part of this life.
- When the nature was corrupted, it meant that thorns, hurricanes, tornadoes, and earthquakes would be a part of this life on the earth.
- Christians are just as susceptible as unbelievers to receiving pain in their life as a result of the corruption of the human body and nature.
- We must remember that our promises from God are **heavenly** in nature, not **earthly**. God does not promise to shield Christians from the pains of sickness, disease, and natural disaster in this life.
  - Think about it for a second. If every person who believed in Christ was assured that their children would never be born with a disability, or their bodies would never contract cancer at an early age, or their homes would never be destroyed by natural disaster, who wouldn't become a Christian?
- In addition to sickness that is the natural result of the corruption of the human body, the Bible also clearly shows that Satan can attack believers with sickness in an effort to pull their attention away from the Lord.
  - Job 2:7- *"So went Satan forth from the presence of the Lord, and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot unto his crown."*
  - 1 Corinthians 5:5 *"Deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh..."*
  - Paul refers to his thorn in his flesh as a messenger of Satan.
- No, God doesn't promise health and wealth in this life. Instead He promises salvation from sin, eternal life in heaven, joy, and peace.
  - Ephesians 1:3- *"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all **spiritual** blessings in **heavenly** places in Christ:"*
  - Romans 8:18- *"For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."*
- So, is it wrong to pray for someone's healing? No. But just know that physical healing is not God's primary objective in the world today. He's trying to heal souls. So if someone you love

does get sick and die, this is not God's way of telling you that you don't have enough faith. It's just a reminder that we live in a sin-cursed world, and it should cause us to look forward to the life that we have waiting for us in heaven. (There are those who would call me a heretic for saying that. But if you really think about it, 100% of all Christians prayers for healing will eventually be answered with, "No," because 100% of Christians die.)

- And as we will look at, in detail, next week, when Christians demonstrate faith **through** the pain and suffering that comes their way in life, it can be one of the greatest way to bring glory to Jesus Christ.
  - 2 Corinthians 12:5, 7-9 - *"Of such an one will I glory: yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities... 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. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. 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."*

#### **Conclusion:**

- In conclusion, we've seen several different reasons for why you could be facing painful circumstances today, and none of those reasons were that God is up in heaven "pulling levers" and "pushing knobs," and will continue to inflict pain in your life until you figure out whatever it is He wants you to learn.
- No, God has given us the inspired Word of God and prayer to be our teacher. Can God teach us things through our difficult circumstances, and can they be used as times of great spiritual growth? Absolutely! We will focus a great deal on that next week. But while God can teach us things through our pain, that does not make Him the author of our pain.
- In fact, did you know what God calls Himself in His Word? Not the God of all *pain*, but the God of all *comfort*.
  - 2 Corinthians 1:3-4- *"Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort; Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God."*
- Praise the Lord that we have a loving God who is ready to comfort our hearts and bring peace throughout even the most painful of circumstances!