THE NEW SHOFAR

Love is stronger than death even though it can't stop death from happening, but no matter how hard death tries it can't separate people from love. It can't take away our memories either. In the end, life is stronger than death- Chuck Swindoll

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The Problem of Evil and Suffering

The reality of suffering is a common argument against the existence of God, or against growing deeper in our faith. We do not have to look far to find the brokenness in our own lives, the lives of others, and the world. Such an awareness can lead to doubts about God. This is known as the “problem of evil” or “problem of pain.” It maintains: 1. If God were all-good, He would desire to end suffering. (2) If He were all-powerful, He would also be able to end it. (3) Therefore, because there is suffering, God must either be not good, not powerful, or possibly even not exist.

Even for believers, the reality of suffering can make faith difficult. We are tempted to wonder: *Why pray, when it doesn’t seem to help my, or another’s, suffering?* The problem of evil and suffering is something with which we must answer. It is perhaps the single most difficult objection to Christianity, and so the Church always seeks to respond with clarity.

What is Suffering?

To begin the discussion of how God can exist despite the presence of human suffering, we must first ask, *What is suffering?* Suffering begins, first and foremost with physical suffering: that is, pain (physical injury, hunger, thirst, sickness). Yet, suffering also runs deeper than that. Beyond physical pain, there is a type of “moral suffering,” a suffering of the heart, as it deals with guilt, witnesses the suffering of others it cares about, or faces decisions that could lead to the suffering of itself or others. Beyond each of these, there also exists a type of existential suffering, that is, the question, “Why?”

The Problem of Evil

Evil exists in the world — we know this from our own suffering and the suffering of others, but also in the abuse of power by those in authority, the selfishness of individuals as they look towards themselves, over against those in greater need, in the violence and discord between individuals and nations. This can lead to the question, *Why did God create evil, if He is all good?* The immediate answer is that God did *not* create evil, He merely *permits* it because of the free will He gave to His creation.

In other words, God in His love for humanity did not bind us in slavery to do His good will but rather gave us the free will to be able to choose to either do His work or follow our own selfishness. The result is that evil is created by man, not God. It is the individual who chooses to engage in domestic violence, broken families, and crimes. It is society that chooses to let its own people go uneducated, unfed, or uncared for. It is nations that choose to enter into war with each other. This is not God’s will for us.

Yet this answer is not enough for us. We think that perhaps God did not create evil and suffering, but nevertheless, He could act to *stop* it. Not all people are choosing evil, but good people must suffer because of those who do. We think, *Why does God not protect them? Why does God not defend me?* I choose the good; I work to end evil and

suffering. But it is beyond my capability. It is too big for me alone. I need help. *If God exists, why does He not do something to help us end this*?

The answer is that He *did* do something. In addition to continually calling us to the good, to follow Him and combat evil, and teaching us all the ways to do this, He ultimately sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to become man, live among us, die on the Cross, and rise again. But evil is still in the world; We still suffer. What good was sending Christ into the world? To the question of suffering, therefore, we answer: God ***has*** done something, something profoundly powerful, not by taking away our free will or numbing us to reality but preserving our dignity by giving suffering great meaning.

The Saving Power of Suffering

As we ask this question, we cannot help noticing that the one to whom he puts the question is himself suffering. He wishes to answer us from the Cross, from the heart of his suffering. In Christ, one learns that the brokenness and hurt of this world are not simply the grind of humanity that God looks upon from afar. Rather, God responds to the question of evil and suffering out of His own experience. His answer comes from the depths of His own heart, from which He underwent the fullness of human suffering. He answers the heart, not as one who stands *above* it, but as one who stands *in solidarity with* it.

In this, we see a reflection and promise of God's plan for our own suffering. We learn that healing comes not in simply ending the hurt we have experienced, but in our reflections on the mystery of faith, the mystery that, in Christ crucified, suffering is a gateway to joy and glory. For men and women of faith, not only is the Redemption accomplished through suffering, but also human suffering itself has been redeemed. Christ, in His suffering that redeemed all humanity, shows us that our suffering too has meaning.

Moreover, Christ begins to reveal for us a glimpse of what that meaning is. In our suffering, we share in the redemption of humanity. Through our hurt, God promises to save others from suffering, to bring about greater good. Our suffering is not evil triumphing over us, but is instead an act of good triumphing over evil anew. In uniting our suffering to Christ, we learn that our suffering — just as does the sacrifice of any lovers for each other — will lead ultimately to joy.

St. Paul writes that, *through Christ, each person is always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies* (2 Cor 4:10) and again, *For this slight momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison* (2 Cor 4:17). St. Peter writes But *rejoice in so far as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed* (1 Pet 4:13). This is where the New Testament picks up the themes outlined in Psalm 89, that an apparent absence of God is not a reflection on God abandoning us because of our sins and failures. Because of Jesus Christ, we remain in the care of God, now and forever. Divine love is never diminished, and nothing can separate us from the love of God, and sin will never be victorious. God's love endures forever. Therein is our undiminished Hope, a Hope that nothing outside of ourselves can ever take away.