

Why does god allow suffering to happen religion essay



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In this paper I will describe why and how the God of Judeo-Christian Scriptures responds to evil in this world, and how a theology of the Trinity informs our understanding of God's response. Firstly I must address the 'why' God responds to evil and suffering in this world; primarily because God is a loving God, and because God is a just God. Secondly I will address the 'how' God responds to evil and suffering; through salvation as the ultimate response, and also through Christians as ambassadors for Christ. I will finally seek to provide perspective to God's response to evil and suffering in this world by applying how a theology of the Trinity leads us to understand this response.

WHY GOD RESPONDS TO EVIL AND SUFFERING IN THIS WORLD

God responds to the evil and suffering in this world because God is a loving God. There is no denying that evil and suffering has entered, and is a constant in this world. The origins of evil are as old as the creation of man, stemming from the fall of man in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3) and are still present in humanity today. God created the world (Gen 1), loves the world (John 3: 16) and it is this love, the love of God, that is one reason 'why' God responds to the evil and suffering in this world, which I will now expand upon.

The 'Grand Story' of God or 'Meta-Narrative' is a story that abounds in demonstrating God's love towards man. Granted, to the onlooker the Judeo-Christian biblical meta-narrative could be offensive and seen as violent from an outsider's perspective as it could be seen to impose on others who have different stories, but when extrapolated in detail it shows, if nothing else so

strongly, God's love for man in an evil and suffering world. It is important to start with "Israel's first and decisive encounter with God" which "was at the Exodus"[1], which is a strange place to start. Most would think that creation would be the place to start, but it was in fact Israel's Exodus where we see the grand scale of God's love for his chosen people, and where a pattern of love is established. We read in Exodus 3: 7-8 that God has indeed seen the misery of his people in Egypt, has heard their cry for help and deliverance from slavery, and is concerned with their sufferings. "So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey". God shows his love towards people who are suffering, and rescues them from it. This is the start of the pattern which continues the entire bible, that God shows compassion and love to those who are suffering.

The second moment in this meta-narrative that demonstrates God's love is the enactment of a plan for our salvation. The need for salvation arose when Adam and Eve sinned in the garden, and God's plan for salvation, to restore us to a right relationship with him once again, centres on the coming of God's son, Jesus, who died on the cross, paying the punishment for sin once and for all (Gal 1: 3-4). Fiddes notes that "a loving God must be a sympathetic and therefore suffering God." [2] It was through the suffering of Jesus that God can be sympathetic, and as such display love. Salvation is the main part of 'How' God responds to evil and suffering in the world, and as such I will expand this point later in the paper, but it must be included in demonstrating the 'why' God responds to evil and suffering, as it is the ultimate display of Love. "For God so loved the world that he gave his one

and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.” (John 3: 16-17) It was this ultimate act of salvation that truly displayed God’s Love for mankind – this act of the Father, in sending his son incarnate, with the goal of salvation of the world,[3]which truly demonstrates the gracious love of God “ that puts us in touch with... Christ.”[4]

The third moment in this meta-narrative that demonstrates God’s love is the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost (Acts 2), to all believers. God’s plan did not just end with Jesus, but it continues today through the work of the Holy Spirit, which I will also discuss further in detail later in this paper.

It must be noted that we are instructed in the scriptures, that “ God is love” in 1 John 4: 17. This gives us confidence as we live in love, and live in God and He in us, that upon judgement day we will be spared. This theme of judgement is one aspect of God’s love which I must now address.

A most interesting and unlikely point, which might seem out of place, and to some argue the opposite, is God’s display of Love through judgement.

Judgement is a theme that permeates the scriptures as much as God’s love permeates the Scriptures, and the two are never separated for long. One example of extreme judgement is the flood (Gen 7), and another would be the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19) which I will look to now. Sodom and Gomorrah were judged because of their wickedness. Their acts were so vile before God that destruction of those people and that place was the only way God could stop their wickedness from spreading and permeating other

cities and towns. It is interesting to note that Jesus talks about Sodom in Matthew 11: 23-24. Jesus' point is that for those towns or cities (and people) that have had far more exposure to God's love and gracious self disclosure, judgement will be more severe for them than for a city such as Sodom, which will still be condemned, but judgement will be served more harshly for those who have had a revelation of God.[5] God's love leads to righteous correction. It is not love to be able to get away with anything and everything. It is because God loves us that he corrects and disciplines us (Hebrews 12: 6), and it is this point of judgement which leads to the next major 'Why' God responds to evil and suffering in this world, and that is because God is a just God.

God is a just God. This very point brings judgement into understanding, because God acts against oppression for just treatment of all. It is starkly demonstrated in the Exodus from Egypt, which we have already discussed, but more light is shed upon this in the personal acts of Jesus, such as the cleansing of the temple (John 2).

Jesus' goal was to bring the kingdom (Matt 6: 9-13), and the sign of this coming was the transformation of corrupt economic, political and religious energies in order to meet human need, something prophetically enacted through the symbolic violence of the temple cleansing.[6]

It is justice for the oppressed - politically, socially, economically and religiously - which demonstrates why God responds to evil and suffering in this world. How could a God who loves his creation put up with corruption, something that threatens the very nature of His creation? God's justice

rightly falls upon all those who love wickedness, and hate righteousness (Romans 1: 18-2: 16).

Because God is a just God, He views everyone as equal, and treats them as such. This principle ties in again with judgement, that each person will stand before God on judgement day and be called to account for all the sins he has committed. It is the exact solution to those who would incorrectly consider themselves elect or deserving of special treatment by God in any way.

Because “ All people are of equal worth in the eyes of God”[7], God treats all people the same, and gives us an example to follow. The role of Christians in enacting this justice in our social arena is important. So important that I have devoted a larger portion of this paper to that point, under the ‘ how’ God responds to evil and suffering in this world.

So if God judges the world as a just God to come to the rescue of the oppressed, how could he instruct his people to wipe out an entire race of people, such as is recorded in 1 Samuel 15: 18? This is a good point, and a question which I will seek to address. The most important rule of thumb here is to know what context this instruction was given. As the nation of Israel was wandering in the dessert for 40 years on their way to Canaan, “ the Amalekites picked off the weak, sick and elderly at the end of the line of march and brutally murdered these stragglers.”[8]These people were vicious, brutal, and wicked people. They burnt children as gifts to their gods, practiced sodomy, bestiality and many more evil vices. It is this wickedness which God judged, because God is a God who loves righteousness and hates wickedness.[9]

I want to take a moment here to refresh where we have been taken in answering the question ' why' God responds to evil and suffering in this world? Firstly we answered the question because God is a loving God. Secondly it was answered because God is a just God. It is now time to look into the ' how' God responds to evil and suffering in this world.

HOW GOD RESPONDS TO EVIL AND SUFFERING IN THIS WORLD.

How God responds to evil and suffering in this world is primarily in two parts. The first is God's ultimate response; salvation - which I will address first. God's ultimate desire for his creation is to be in a right relationship with him. This was subverted by our introduction of sin, in our very nature, starting with Adam and Eve in the garden, dubbed ' the fall' as we fell out of this right relationship with God. This set up a pattern which all generations would follow and looked like a bleak outcome for humanity. But God, who is love, and loves each of us, had a plan to restore our relationship. This plan was shown to many prophets throughout the centuries, and was finally realised in the coming of Jesus, his one and only son to Earth, to be the incarnate[10]presence of God here on Earth. Jesus sought for the nation of Israel to repent of their sins, and at their refusal Jesus set about establishing his Kingdom here in Earth. Jesus lived a sinless life, that was like none-other. He regularly healed people, performed miracles, and even raised people from the dead. These miracles were signs to those around him of his origin, but were seen as blasphemy to the proud powers of the time, which simply saw Jesus as a threat to their power.

Jesus establishment of his kingdom was only possible through the sacrifice of his own life.[11]It was in Jesus death that he paid the penalty of sin, and his resurrection proved its adequacy and acceptability to the father. This was God's plan all along! " God is not simply known for who he is. God is also known for what he does." [12]We came from what seemed a ritualistic hopeless life, to a life full of hope, grounded in the eternal life offered by God, available only through the actions of His son on the cross which reconciled the world to Him.[13]

Salvation is what sets us free from the bondage of sin, and restores us to a right relationship with the Father in heaven. " Salvation encompasses the whole person"[14]and we don't even deserve it! " God does not owe salvation to anyone"[15]but he freely gives it to all who seek it. It is not just one part of us, but the entirety of our being that is saved from sin and death! What wondrous hope Jesus has left us with as his legacy. The other thing that Jesus left us was the Holy Spirit. There is no more succinct explanation of this than Fackre:

The Spirit descends from the ascended Lord to form the Church and launch it on its mission. This continuing work of Christ by the power of the Spirit brings salvation.[16]

It is by the continuing power of the Holy Spirit, that people can be saved. Those people who are saved, and continue this relationship with the ascended Lord are commonly known as Christians who collectively are the church, and through the power the Holy Spirit have much work here on earth to do, which brings us to the second ' How'.

The second ' how' God responds to evil and suffering in this world is only possible by salvation, and that is through Christians. It is a Christian's responsibility as Christ's ambassadors[17]to act against injustice, to uphold equality for all, and to follow Christ's example.

We are instructed to " do good to all people" in Galatians 5: 10, and the practical outworking of this is simple for Christians. We must stand against injustice. This is called by Mott a " Mastery of the fallen nature... in an effort to be conformed to the will of God." [18]Our fallen nature does not naturally stand against injustice, and for a Christian to stand against injustice, he must overcome their sinful nature, and follow the will of God. As Christians who are free by the grace of God, we are compelled to " make do-gooding a natural dimension of the Christian life." [19]It is not an option, but a must for true Christians to oppose injustice.

With Christ as our example to follow, Christians must do what Jesus did. [20]Jesus recognised that the poor were being subjected to exclusion from normal society, and first goes to the poor with the message that they are included in God's Kingdom and have rights to all the benefits of it.[21]These rights are not obtained because they are poor, but because they are children of God.[22]As such, it is most important that Christians understand that this is to be their response also, as it is ' how' God has left us to show his love and response to suffering in this world. For us to truly understand the ' why' and ' how' God responds to evil and suffering in this world, it is important to understand the theology of the Trinity.

HOW A THEOLOGY OF THE TRINITY LEADS US TO UNDERSTAND GOD'S RESPONSE TO EVIL AND SUFFERING IN THIS WORLD.

God is one God, in three persons - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It is by Jesus' revelation to us in Matthew 28: 19 that believers are baptised into this understanding of God in three persons. John opens his Gospel account accrediting Jesus in creation, an accreditation previously only given to God the Father. But John's accreditation is valid. Jesus sends believers the Spirit, to continue his works here on Earth. The Spirit is "related intimately to Jesus"[23]and is sent in His name by the Father (John 14: 26).

But how does this actually affect God's response to suffering? It is affected because their relationship as Father, Son and Spirit, is love - perfect love in relationship. So how does God respond to suffering if he's never experienced it? Actually He has experienced suffering, in the person of Jesus, and it is from this understanding of pain[24]and suffering that God responds to evil and suffering in this world - because God can sympathise[25].

CONCLUSION

In this paper I have described why and how the God of Judeo-Christian Scriptures responds to evil and suffering in this world, and how a theology of the Trinity informs our understanding of God's response. Firstly I addressed the ' why' God responds to evil and suffering in this world; primarily because God is a loving God, and because God is a just God. Secondly I addressed the ' how' God responds to evil and suffering; through Salvation as the ultimate response, and also through Christians as ambassadors for Christ. I finally <https://assignbuster.com/why-does-god-allow-suffering-to-happen-religion-essay/>

provided perspective to God's response to evil and suffering in this world by applying how a theology of the Trinity leads us to understand this response. There is no doubt that God is a Loving God, and acts against evil and suffering in this world.