

God's Love and the Problem of Suffering

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I. God's Claim

The Bible claims that God is love, that he loves his children and the entire world, and that his love is incomprehensible and eternal - 1John 4: 7-10; Mal 1:2; Rev 1:5.

II. Evidence

1. *God's Reaction after the Fall*

God told the parents of the human race that transgression of his law would result in their death. But as soon as Adam and Eve sinned he did not just execute them but met with them and explained to them his plan of salvation. This plan connects God's justice and his love and is made possible through the substitutionary death of an innocent person - Gen 2:16, 17; 3:6, 9, 15.

2. *Salvation*

God loves his enemies. He loves the fallen world. Therefore, he gave the best and most valuable gift he had to give, namely his own Son. In giving his Son he gave himself. Jesus died for us and in our place. Now humanity has another chance to be saved and have everlasting life - John 3:16; Rom 5:8.

3. *The New Earth and Eternal Life*

God gives to rebels such as us eternal life, if we accept it. He will create for us a new earth which is unimaginable and free from all evil and all traces of sin and suffering - John 3:36; Rev 21:1, 3-5.

III. Examples Illustrating God's Love

- (1) Luke 15:11-32 - The parable of the lost sons
- (2) Matt 18, 21-27 - The parable of the unforgiving servant

IV. God and Suffering

Again and again the question is raised: "Why, God, do you allow suffering and evil?" or "Why do you not interfere?" These questions are difficult to answer and allows for preliminary responses only. Here are some suggestions:

- (1) With such a question we accuse God and make him the defendant. However, we are the defendants and must answer to the accusations brought against us. God may ask us why we lied, committed adultery in our thoughts, were not merciful, etc.
"Whenever a native of an island in the Pacific becomes confused about his wooden god, it does not prove that there is no God. Rather it tells him that God is not made out of wood. Whenever today a Christian becomes confused about God's love as he understands it, it does not prove that there is no God; it only proves that God is not as he imagines him to be. A god who would do whatever we wish would be a fairy tale god, who has never existed and will never exist. Suffering is not opposed to faith in God. Rather it confirms God's warnings against disobedience and self-centeredness. God does not always protect us in order that we may recognize the seriousness of human guilt and long for a savior. In suffering God can prepare his children to meet him." (W. Schulz in *Er ist unsere Hoffnung* [Berlin: Union Verlag, 1966], 227 [translated].).
- (2) Suffering is the consequence of sin. But this is what we have caused, not God. He is not responsible for our problem and cannot be forced to take care of it, although he voluntarily addresses it.
- (3) God negates suffering:
 - He has sent Jesus to deliver us from suffering and death (see Jesus' miracles and John 10:10).
 - He creates a new earth without suffering, pain, and death and gives everlasting life.

- He is close to us and helps us in times of pain and suffering and “causes all things to work together for good” (Rom 8:28). He uses suffering as a means of education turning evil into something that in the end is good for us (Heb 12:6). Because of our limited perspective we understand neither God nor suffering completely.

V. Texts Illustrating God’s Love

- (1) John 16:27 - God loves us.
- (2) Jer 31:3 - God draws us.
- (3) 1 John 3:1, 2 - He calls us his children.
- (4) John 17:23 - God loves us as he loves his Son and
- (5) Zech 2:8 - as the apple of his eye.
- (6) Psalm 23; - He takes care of us,
- (7) Luke 12:7 - knows even our hairs.
- (8) Rom 8:31-3; - He keeps us from being
- John 10:27-29 - separated from him.

VI. Implication

“Lord, thank you for your love. I want to love you too.”

- Psalm 18: - David’s confession
- John 21:15-17 - Peter’s confession