

CAUSES OF SUFFERING

A. Suffering can lead to positive results:

1. Diminishes the appeal of a physical existence.
2. Bring out the best in us, more like Christ.
3. Purifies out faith.
4. Makes us more thankful & appreciative.
5. Makes us more dependent & prayerful.
6. Helps to perfect our inner man.
7. Helps us develop a sympathetic compassion.
 - a. Perhaps we can begin to understand why an all-powerful & all-loving God allows suffering in His world.

B. What are the causes of human suffering?

1. It is God? Satan?
2. Solomon said “time & chance” happens to everyone (natural causes?).

For man also does not know his time: like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so **the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them** (Ecc 9:11-12).

Consider the work of God; for who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find nothing that will happen after him (Eccl 7:13-14).

[So it's not wise to speculate on every cause of human suffering; **we** just can't pinpoint the cause in every case.

We simply need to realize there some things we CANNOT KNOW about this subject, **but** the things we CAN KNOW are found in God's word (Deut 29:29).]

I. OUR OWN ACTIONS CAUSE SUFFERING

A. What were the consequences of the first sin? HUMAN SUFFERING!

Gen 2:16-17 – And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; 17 but **of the tree of the knowledge of good & evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.**”

1. The words “in the day” imply an immediate consequence to a sinful action.
2. Death was the immediate result of sin, & that death was their separation from God (*Isa 59:1-2; Ezek 18:4, 20; Rom 6:23*).
3. ALL SIN IS ENSHROUDED IN SUFFERING!

B. **But there** was more suffering that resulted from the sins committed in the garden.

1. Serpent (*Gen 3:15*):
 - a. The reptile was cursed.
 - c. The Savior would have to die.
 - d. His followers would be hated.
2. Woman (*16*):
 - a. Increased pain in childbearing.
 - b. Subjected to the rule of her husband.

3. Man (*17*):
 - a. The ground was cursed to make Adam’s work more difficult, & then his body would return to dust.

C. **So God’s world** is governed by natural & spiritual laws.

1. And when we violate God laws, His order is disrupted & our suffering begins.
 - a. What will happen to a farmer who doesn’t observe the planting seasons?
 - b. What will happen in the cold & flu season if we don’t take precautions?
 - c. What will happen to those who do not fear God & obey His word?

Psa 55:19 – **God**, who is enthroned forever, **will hear them & afflict them** — men who never change their ways & have no fear of God.

2. Now it is even more tragic when seemingly innocent people suffer (automobile accidents, drug babies) – *but these things happen because God's laws have been stepped on.*

3. Yes, sometimes innocent people suffer & we never know the reason for it (cancer, disease).
 - a. In such cases, our first lesson comes into play, & we should look for the good things that come from suffering.

[But human action is just one cause of suffering.

The scriptures record cases of suffering where Satan was directly involved; & His actions toward man are always pernicious, harmful & detrimental to man.]

II. THE WORK OF SATAN CAUSES SUFFERING

- A. God has informed us that the Devil is sometimes a direct cause of suffering.

1. Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6) – why did God allow it?

Jas 5:11 – Indeed we count them blessed who endure. You have heard of the perseverance of Job & seen **the end intended by the Lord — that the Lord is very compassionate & merciful.**

2. Persecuted Christians – why did God allow it?

1 Pet 5:8-9 – Be sober, be vigilant; because **your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion**, seeking whom he may devour. 9 Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.

1:6-7 – In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 **that the genuineness of your faith**, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, **may be found to praise, honor, & glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ**

B. What is Satan's objective?

1. Satan has only one objective, & that is to lead people into sin so they will be eternally separated from God – as he is.

2. And the way he accomplishes that is through lies & deception (Jn 8:44; Rev 20:10).

3. He has several methods at his disposal to propagate his lies (Matt 4:3, 5-6, 8-9).

a. He uses the TV & movie industries (& other media) to show how happy people appear to be by pursuing the lusts of the world (1 Jn 2:15-17).

b. And if that doesn't work, there is always suffering.

c. When people see or experience suffering, the Devil knows there is chance they might lose faith in God & refuse to obey Him.

3. The suffering Satan causes is just his ploy to cause us to give up hope in Christ & be lost.

C. **Can we** know when Satan is directly causing us to suffer?

1. Job never knew, & we may not always know.

2. It is NOT important for us to know when the Devil is directly involved in our suffering.

3. It is enough to know that God has our best interests in mind & that He has placed limits on what Satan can do (Job 1:12; 2:6; 1 Cor 10:13).

4. We simply need to do as Peter tells us, “*be sober, be watchful*” for the adversary.

Jas 1:13 – **Let no one say when he is tempted, “I am tempted by God”**; for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He Himself tempt anyone.

Job 1:22; 2:10 – In all this **Job did not** sin nor **charge God with wrong**... **Job did not sin with his lips**.

[**We** should now understand that Satan is more than a cause of suffering, he is the chief cause of it. **Finally**, are there times when God causes suffering?]

III. THE WORK OF GOD CAUSES SUFFERING

A. **When God** disciplines His children they experience a certain degree of suffering (**Heb 12:5-8**).

1. It is “*not joyful but painful*” & it can cause us to be “*discouraged*” (**12: 11, 4**) – that’s why the Hebrew writer quoted Solomon.

Heb 12:6 – For **whom the LORD loves He chastens, & scourges** every son whom He receives (**Prov 3:12**).

2. Why does God do this? Does He get pleasure out of watching us suffer?

Lam 3:31-33 – For the Lord will not cast off forever. 32 Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. 33 **For He does not afflict willingly**, nor grieve the children of men.

3. Then why does He do it? There are three reasons, which work together as one.

a. Because He loves us.

Rev 3:19 (Laodicea) – **As many as I love, I rebuke & chasten**. Therefore be zealous & repent.

b. Because He wants us to partake in His holiness so we can be saved.

Heb 12:9-10, 14 – Furthermore, we have had human fathers who corrected us, & we paid them respect. Shall we not much more readily be in subjection to the Father of spirits & live? 10 For they indeed for a few days chastened us as seemed best to them, but **He for our profit, that we may be partakers of His holiness...**14 **Pursue** peace with all people, & **holiness, without which no one will see the Lord** (**Matt 5:8**).

c. Because we often don’t discipline ourselves, & we end up standing condemned for our sins right along with the world.

1 Cor 11:31-33 – For **if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged**. 32 But **when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world**. 33 Therefore, my brethren, when you come together to eat, wait for one another.

B. How did God discipline the Jews?

1. He began by giving them the instructions they needed to do His will (Deut 8:6; Amos 2:4-5).
2. He manipulated natural laws to awaken His people to their sin (Amos 4:6-13).
3. He use great armies against their nation (Amos 3:11-15).

[I know of no reason why God could not use these same means today, to bring men to repentance & faithfulness to Jesus Christ the Lord & Savior.]

CLOSING

- A. When we experience suffering in our lives there are three possible causes for that situation.

1. A natural law has been broken.
2. Satan may be at work.
3. Our loving Father may be disciplining us.

B. Can we always know the cause of our suffering?
No! How, then, should we react to it?

1. The simplest & most effective way to view suffering is to always view it as an opportunity to examine your life, in light of God's word, & to draw closer to Him in study & prayer — Because He knows & sees all things.

Psalm 6:1-6, 9

[Our final lesson will consider how best to prepare for suffering.]