

Why Is Evil Allowed to Flourish?

Senseless violence is on the rise. Daily we read of mass shootings, suicides and murders. Why doesn't God intervene? And what is he calling His people to do in the midst of it?

God's Plan of Redemption

Paul addressed these exact questions to the church at Rome in his letter to them. Can you imagine living in a time when you could be crucified or fed to the lions for your faith? Nero, the most diabolical emperor in the history of the empire, sat on the throne issuing insane proclamations. Everywhere you turned there was danger and turmoil. No wonder they wanted to know when God would intervene in such a corrupt and horrific situation.

First-century Jews believed that when the Messiah arrived, He would redeem the physical world as well as their spiritual souls. He was supposed to bring justice and peace to the world. Paul expertly lays out his most comprehensive theological treatise in his letter to the Romans, explaining God's plan of redemption for both mankind spiritually and the physical world itself. He also entreats God's people to step into their vital role as His chosen ones to aid in the unfolding of this plan. Paul's letter ends with a beautiful promise of the world's full and ultimate redemption, along with a charge of what we ought to do in the wait.

Pointless or Purposeful?

In Romans, Paul insists God's ultimate plan to end evil is through the gospel of Jesus Christ. He alone holds the power to redeem man's souls, along with the physical world, through his death and resurrection.

Paul also says God has a specific plan in allowing evil its hour of darkness. He explains it as a logical consequence to man's rebellion against God. But God will ultimately use this consequence to bring about man's redemption:

"Because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him or give thanks to Him as God, but became futile in their imaginations, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools" (Rom. 1:21-22).

That word "futile" means "brittle, pointless, not holding up when scrutinized, illogical and lacking reason." This is how our thinking devolves when we reject God's truth: everything appears pointless, random, without meaning.

I once came across a meme poking fun at evolution—a brittle theory explaining creation in the absence of God.

In the beginning was nothing.

Then nothing happened to nothing.

Then nothing magically exploded for no reason, creating everything.

Then everything magically rearranged itself for no reason into self-replicating bits that became dinosaurs.

Falling Into a Sphere of Fear

This futile thinking leads to foolish hearts that become increasingly darkened. This is fascinating. That word "foolish" indicates one who acts without counsel, hot-tempered, easily led astray, violent, and learning only comes through brutish discipline.

The foolish heart falls into darkness. The word picture is an enveloping sphere that closes in tighter and tighter, hindering foresight or movement, leading to feelings of objective peril and subjective anxiety.

Picture a caged animal without food or water, shrouded in darkness by a heavy blanket with growing anxiety over when it will be released, and you get the idea. It will thrash about violently or lie down in hopelessness. Paul says this is the ultimate reality of the man who denies God's existence.

Objective Peril and Subjective Anxiety

In other words, the real peril that awaits and the possible peril we imagine within our minds. Anxiety is currently the No. 1 health disorder in America. In the past 15 years, depression among college students has doubled and suicide rates have tripled. Is it any wonder when you are taught daily on your campus that your existence is pointless, a random act of chance with no foresight, significance or purpose? And there is no one on earth to possibly provide any answers as to the madness which surrounds you?

Who Will Break the Sphere?

Over 2,000 years ago, Paul penned a letter cryptically communicating the consequences our culture faces today. But he doesn't leave us there in that hopelessness. He further says:

"For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but by the will of Him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its slavery to corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God" (Rom. 8:20-21).

God is using the corruption of the world to be the brutish discipline, this enveloping sphere of objective peril and subjective anxiety, to be the very thing that leads people to seek freedom. Look at our fascination with superheroes. People are searching for a way out of this mess. For someone to stop the madness. They cry out for political reform, gun control, education regarding mental illness, economic equivalence across society—something or someone to break the sphere of darkness we feel closing in upon us. But as believers, we know

the way out. We hope in the freedom that awaits us as children of God. The hope of glory we hold in our hearts. Paul tells us we groan to see this glory as does the physical earth itself.

A Call to God's People

As children of glory in this sphere of darkness we are called to action. "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses, for we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words" (Rom. 8:26).

Do you see what Paul is saying here? The Holy Spirit is interceding for the whole world through God's people. He groans within us for the redemption of God's earth. He groans through us for the lost and the hurting to find freedom. He groans through you and me for those enveloped in darkness to have the light of glory shine upon them. This Spirit is praying through our saved souls for God's will to be done on earth as it is in heaven.

You, dear one, are the very vessel which the Spirit of God is using to bring about his eternal plan of redemption for His creation.

And now for everyone's favorite part of Romans. As we cooperate with the Spirit in praying for God's kingdom to come—the redemption of the earth—the end of evil—the breaking of the sphere of darkness—we are promised that He is working all things together for good. God is allowing the earth to suffer the consequences of brutish discipline in hope that people will cry out to Him to intervene.

Tribulation becomes the doorway to revelation.

Even the senseless violence that cannot be explained.

You and I have been offered a divine invitation to participate in God's eternal redemptive plan for the world. We do that by

sharing the gospel. There is someone who can stop the madness—Jesus!

The light of the world can shine upon our darkened hearts unlocking the sphere of fear enveloping us. We prepare for that by bending our knees and allowing the Holy Spirit to use us as vessels of intercession for “Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”

Will you allow God’s eternal plan to be worked in and through you today?

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