

When Bad Things Happen: A Chance to Represent God Well

When something bad happens, those we love look to us for answers. When life hits, our families and friends can be helped or hurt by our theology, what we say especially in phrases we throw around without thinking. We'll say things like, "God causes all things to work together for good"—words that can be taken to mean God causes the evil to happen so He can somehow make it good. We say, "God must have a plan"—words that make people blame God. The fact that God can cause things to work together for good doesn't mean that those things *are* good. The fact that God has an overall plan sovereign plan does not make those things less evil.

Why Does God Let People Do Evil?

We live in a fallen, evil, cursed world with suffering and evil and death. We live in a war zone, both physically and spiritually. It is a broken world because **God allowed human freedom** that brought sin into a perfect world. Sin brought disease, aging, injury, decay and death to our daily existence. We live surrounded by these. Naturally, they will affect us. Sin also brought evil into the world. Evil is the degeneration of that which was once good. Humans have taken everything God made good and used it for evil: work, sex, leadership, intelligence, and dedication. The prophet's widow was an innocent victim of an evil man. God didn't cause the son of the other widow to die. He just got sick and died. The martyred prophets died at the hands of an evil woman.

We live in the last days of the old creation, which will not be fixed until He returns. One day, Jesus will return to be king over the entire earth. There will be perfect justice then. Evil will be restrained. God has chosen from the beginning to give human beings the freedom to act. When someone asks, "Why did this happen?" Answer with, "An evil human being did this." Don't discount evil.

Speaking of human freedom, it is not a question of either humans were created to be responsible OR God has a sovereign plan. It's both-and. God's sovereign plan takes into account human freedom and evil. It doesn't make those things less evil; it doesn't make them good. It doesn't make the people less responsible. People may hear you say, "God causes all things to work together for good." Then, they may think, "That means it was okay for so-and-so to do that evil thing" or "They didn't do it, God did it." **God doesn't do the evil.** An evil human being does it.

The next question is usually, "Why doesn't God stop it?" Now you are at the bigger question which is "Why does God let any of us do evil?" People get very confused in their thinking, and they want to have it both ways. People want to be free and responsible except when bad things happen. Then, they want God to be responsible. Humans can't have it both ways. Either humans are free and responsible for what they do, or they are not free and responsible for what they do. People can't blame God for human choice.

Why Doesn't God Stop It if He Is Capable of Doing So?

This is the bigger question. The true answer to that is that He does stop evil all the time. God stops more evil than we will ever know. Every day He is stopping evil. You may then ask, "Why doesn't He stop all evil?" **To stop all evil would mean to stop all human freedom.** The thing that the Bible teaches is that God takes our freedom and responsibility far more seriously than we do. Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld stated in an interview right after the attack on the WTC that Americans take their freedom seriously. It is very important to us. It is what our nation stands for. In order to prevent all acts of terrorism, the government would have to take away all freedoms of its citizens, even the law-abiding ones.

God, who is great and powerful, will one day wrap up history and fix it. We live in the hope of this happening in our future. In the meantime, human beings are free to do what they want to do. Through the ministry of Elijah, God turned the hearts of the people back to Himself on Mt. Carmel, but it was only temporary. The Israelites were soon back to worshiping Baal again.

The reality is two-fold. And, both things are true.

- Evil men are held responsible for what they do.
- God over time will reveal something good from it.

Where does Romans 8:28 fit in? God will work out to accomplish a greater good in and for all people who trust in Him (8:29), conforming us to the image of His Son. We must make the choice of what to do in the meantime—respond by faith now when things aren't ideal or follow the pattern of anger, despair and self-pity. So what is the best way to respond?

Right Thinking—God Lets Human Beings Have Their Freedom

Human beings demand their freedom to do what they want to do. Then when something bad happens, they blame God for letting it happen. This happens every day. God lets human beings have their freedom. You don't have to have an answer for all bad things happening. In this world, all may not turn out well. When we are with Christ, we will have the whole story.

We as Christians can look at a tragic incident and say to the victim, "That was gross, black, terrible, straight from the pits of hell and those people are responsible for what they did. But God is bigger and greater and to the person who will trust Him, one day, whether in this life or the next, you will see how He fulfilled that promise to work that together for good in you."

Wrong Answer—I'm Sure God Has a Plan/Purpose for This

When something bad happens, we erroneously say, "I'm sure God has a plan or purpose for this". Bad answer. It's enough to make people blow up at God. We think in shorthand and often talk to others in shorthand and forget where they really are. Instead of saying, "I'm sure there's a reason why this happened" (because that puts the emphasis on God and why did God do this), a better response is: "I don't know why things happen in the world. I do know that God is good, that He is loving, and that you can go to Him for comfort, and He will strengthen and help you. I know He is not finished with you and He has a future for you."

Be Careful of Using "God's in Control"

Don't use the phrase "God's in control" out of the context of His whole plan for human history. Otherwise, you get the impression that some foreign dictator is killing people "but God's in control". What is meant by the phrase really? He is controlling the overall plan of history and overruling human beings and using what they do. But, the **evil is still evil. God is not doing it.** The key is to trust God whether you understand or not.

Conclusion

Here are 4 points to remember about this Issue:

1. Remind Christians we live in a fallen, evil, cursed world with suffering and evil and death. We live in a war zone, both physically and spiritually. It is a broken world.
2. We live in the last days of the old creation, which will not be fixed until He returns.
3. God has chosen from the beginning to give human beings the freedom to act. When someone asks, "Why did this happen?" Answer with, "An evil human being did this." Don't discount evil.
4. God, who is great and powerful, will one day wrap up history and fix it. We live in the hope of this happening in our future. In the meantime, human beings are free to do what they want to do.

To someone who is a *casualty* of this wicked world (cancer, death, rape, murder), try giving her this counsel:

"I don't know if there is any answer to this. But I do know that Jesus said, 'Come to Me, and I will give you rest.' I know for a fact that if you go to Jesus Christ today, you will find comfort and light. He invites you to come to Him for comfort. And, He can fulfill that promise. The world is not always good, but God is. That's why you can trust Him."