

*God in Chains- Why God lets me suffer*

*All expressions concerning the description of God must never be taken literally; they are simply due to the inadequacy of human language "to make the ear listen to what it can hear."  
— Abbot de-Rabbi Nathan, 2*

**Why does God allow evil to exist?**

**There is a good reason why God lets bad things happen to "good" people...** As already discussed, "in the beginning" God limited Himself for our sake in terms of:

Omnipresence—He gave up His monopoly of "beingness" (for lack of a better word) to allow us to exist as something other than Him.

Omnipotence—He gave up some of his power to allow our freewill, which makes it possible for us to choose to love, and thereby allows love to exist.

When we chose to rebel and thus became profane ("unholy"), God accepted still other limitations for our sake:

Holiness—He withdrew from his own creation to allow us to continue to exist. (He temporarily suspended perfect justice.)

Self-sacrifice—He accepted grief and suffering into Himself as the cost of our survival and salvation (the flood, the cross).

In all these ways God has limited His response to evil because He desires us to be free. He wants us to be free for the sake of love, which cannot be imposed by force, but must instead be freely chosen. Unfortunately, freedom to choose love means allowing freedom to choose love's opposite (evil). We cannot be free to love, yet have no other choice. Within the logical framework of this universe as it currently exists, even God cannot make sense of nonsense.

**What can we do about evil?**

**Even in the midst of suffering there is hope for joy...** God's self-limitations not only explain why He lets evil exist, they also give us great reasons to rejoice:

In a world where evil sometimes seems overwhelming, we can still know Almighty God is good. (He cares about us enough to restrict who and what He is *for our sake*—so that we can be free and so we can love.)

In a world with so much hatred, we can know for sure God loves us. (The second person of the Trinity voluntarily joined in our grief and suffering to prove this.)

In a world that seems chaotic, we can trust that God has a master plan. (The *Shema* means God is completely good, therefore although we do not

**GOD LOVES  
AN HONEST QUESTION!**

(continued)

understand how or why, everything He created—even evil—will ultimately work itself out for good.)

To find joy in a world filled with suffering, we must respond to evil with:

Love for God and our neighbors in the face of evil expressed with continuing obedience to His commands (which were given for our benefit).

Faith in the underlying goodness of God's plan, no matter how bad things may appear right now.

**But this response to real suffering is humanly impossible.** Therefore, in order to attain the joy we desire in the midst of evil, we must confess our powerlessness and entreat God to “rescue” us with countless acts of grace every moment to cause faith in us, and inspire obedient love. (See **Ro 7:24-25**, **Mat 6:13**, **Mat 19:26**, **2 Tim 4:16-18** and especially **Philippians 4:11-13**.)

- ▶ Did your need for God's grace end when you first put your faith in Jesus' sacrifice on the cross? (See **2 Cor 9:8**—does this promise apply only to charitable giving? See also **Philippians 2:12-13**—note the ongoing need to “work out our salvation” and note especially who really does the “work.”)
- ✓ Salvation alone does not provide moral strength to resist evil. Christians who try to live moral lives through willpower are just as doomed to fail as any unbeliever. But unlike unbelievers, we are justified through the cross and therefore able to perpetually approach God to ask Him to “rescue” us from sinfulness by giving us ongoing faith and love through His grace.
- ▶ How did you receive God's grace when you first became a Christian? (See **Eph 2:8-9**.)
- ✓ We were saved from the cost of sin (justified in God's eyes) by God's grace alone, received through faith, not by anything we did or could do.
- ▶ How can you receive God's grace to sustain you in your suffering now?
- ✓ We continue to be saved from sinfulness (given power to control or defeat it in our lives) by God's grace alone, received through faith, and not by anything we can do.
- ▶ If we are given faith to be obedient by having faith in God's grace, isn't that an impossible “chicken and egg” kind of paradox? (Read **1 Cor 7:8-9** in combination with the last sentence of **1 Cor 10:13**—what does this say about faith, and what does that teach about this paradox?)
- ✓ Yes, it is a paradox. But that's okay, because faith by definition does not depend on logic; it depends on God. So we do get faith in God through faith from God. This means faith is a self-increasing, self-perpetuating gift, if we will only stop trying so hard and let God make it so.

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