



THEODICY

Justifying God's Character

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ISSUES

- ▶ Suffering of innocent people
- ▶ God destroying the wicked
- ▶ God using His people to destroy the wicked
- ▶ Harsh punishments in laws
- ▶ Apparent contradictions
- ▶ Sacrifice

FACTORS

- ▶ Love = justice + mercy
- ▶ Free will
- ▶ Satan as “the ruler of this world” (John 12:31)
- ▶ God’s love proven on the cross
- ▶ Choice between God and Satan
- ▶ Eternal life versus present life
- ▶ Divine accommodation
- ▶ Limited knowledge and progressive revelation
- ▶ Corporate versus individual

FACTORS:

LOVE = JUSTICE + MERCY

- ▶ “God is love” (1 John 4:8, 16)
- ▶ God’s law is love (Matt. 22:37-40)
- ▶ Love as moral basis for the universe
- ▶ Whole Bible and Great Controversy is about God’s character of love
- ▶ Love = justice + mercy (Exod. 34:6-7)

LOVE = JUSTICE + MERCY

- ▶ Un-love = selfishness = sin
- ▶ A rebel against love cannot continue to exist
- ▶ “For the wages of sin is death...” (Rom. 6:23)
- ▶ Humans have broken the principle of love, so its justice condemns them to eternal non-existence
- ▶ The fact that we are alive proves God’s mercy
- ▶ Any judgment on sinful humans is more merciful than what they deserve: instant eternal destruction

FREE WILL

- ▶ No possibility of love without free will
- ▶ Those free to love are also free not to love
- ▶ God respects human choice (Gen. 7; Rev. 3:20)
- ▶ Those who choose un-love hurt themselves and others
- ▶ Redeeming deceived people without removing their free will requires persuasion over time (John 12:32—“draw all people”) rather than quick coercion

SATAN AS “THE RULER OF THIS WORLD”

- ▶ Adam and Eve had the dominion (Gen. 1:26, 28)
- ▶ They gave their dominion to Satan (John 12:31)
- ▶ So Satan represented Earth in the heavenly congress (Job 1:6-7)
- ▶ Satan's rule is oppressive, causing suffering (Matt 13:28— “An enemy has done this”).
- ▶ Satan lost title to Earth when Christ died (John 12:31)
- ▶ But he continues to cause suffering

GOD'S LOVE PROVEN ON THE CROSS

- ▶ “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8)
- ▶ “For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:38-39)
- ▶ “Though he slay me, I will hope in him” (Job 13:15 ESV)
- ▶ God will restore everything in the end (Rev. 21-22)

CHOICE BETWEEN GOD AND EVIL

- ▶ “I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (Deut 30:19)
- ▶ “There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death” (Prov 14:12; 16:25 ESV)
- ▶ “I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die, O house of Israel?” (Ezek 33:11)
- ▶ “The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance” (2 Pet 3:9)

ETERNAL LIFE VERSUS PRESENT LIFE

- ▶ Quantity: present life span vs. infinite years
- ▶ Quality: present suffering vs. perfect life
- ▶ “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . . that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead” (Phil. 3:8-11 ESV).
- ▶ Death of Ezekiel’s wife (Ezek 24:15-27)

DIVINE ACCOMMODATION

- ▶ Ancient Israelite culture and world-view
- ▶ Abstaining from social engineering that would cause worse evil and suffering if polygamy and servitude were completely outlawed
- ▶ Contextually effective discipline, including using wrongdoers as examples, to teach and warn (Deut. 13:11 [Heb. v. 12]—“And all Israel shall hear and fear and never again do any such wickedness as this among you”).

LIMITED KNOWLEDGE AND PROGRESSIVE REVELATION

- ▶ “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29).
- ▶ What is regarded as “just” moves through time (2 Sam. 21, 24).
- ▶ God leads people at a pace that they should be able to handle

CORPORATE VERSUS INDIVIDUAL

- ▶ Israelites corporately forgiven at Kadesh, but unfaithful scouts died immediately and all other unfaithful adults died in the wilderness (Num. 14)
- ▶ Canaanites corporately condemned, but Rahab saved (Josh. 2, 6)
- ▶ Innocent people suffer because their nation is wicked
- ▶ In Christ, God reconciled the world to Himself (2 Cor. 5:19), but individuals must be reconciled to Him (2 Cor. 5:20)

ISSUES: SUFFERING OF INNOCENT PEOPLE

- ▶ No humans are completely innocent (Rom. 3:23—"all have sinned")
- ▶ We are all born into a sinful state (Ps. 51:5)
- ▶ Suffering is from sin, which is irrational. If there were an ultimate reason for suffering, there would be a reason for sin.
- ▶ Much suffering is caused by those who choose un-love
- ▶ Some suffering is allowed or caused by God for illustrations (Job; Ezekiel's wife)

GOD DESTROYING THE WICKED

- ▶ When God runs out of options . . .
- ▶ “What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it?” (Isa. 5:4 ESV)
- ▶ “‘When therefore the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants?’ They said to him, ‘He will put those wretches to a miserable death...’” (Matt. 21:40-41 ESV)

GOD DESTROYING THE WICKED

- ▶ World destroyed by Flood (Gen. 7)
- ▶ Sodom and Gomorrah by fire (Gen. 19)
- ▶ Nadab and Abihu by fire (Lev. 10)
- ▶ Korah, Dathan, Abiram & Co., and 14,700 (Num. 16)
- ▶ 24,000 Israelites at Baal Peor (Num. 25)
- ▶ All unsaved people by fire of Second Death (Rev. 20)

GOD DESTROYING THE WICKED

“Then your covenant with death will be annulled, and your agreement with Sheol will not stand; when the overwhelming scourge passes through, you will be beaten down by it . . . For the LORD will rise up as on Mount Perazim; as in the Valley of Gibeon he will be roused; to do his deed—strange is his deed! and to work his work—alien is his work!” (Isa. 28:18, 21 ESV)

GOD USING HIS PEOPLE TO DESTROY THE WICKED

- ▶ Canaanites could learn about God through patriarchs
- ▶ 400 years to repent (Gen. 15:13), more than 3x the period for those before the flood (Gen. 6:3).
- ▶ As wicked as the Sodomites
- ▶ God used Israelites rather than fire as His instrument under theocracy
- ▶ No double standard: Israelites who rebelled against God were also to be destroyed to protect others from their influence (Deut 13)

GOD USING HIS PEOPLE TO DESTROY THE WICKED

- ▶ “that they may not teach you to do according to all their abominable practices that they have done for their gods, and so you sin against the LORD your God” (Deut. 20:18 ESV)
- ▶ The Canaanites would destroy the Israelites
- ▶ God used the Israelites as His instrument to test and develop their faith (Judg. 3:1)
- ▶ Warning of ultimate destruction of the wicked

HARSH PUNISHMENTS IN LAWS

- ▶ High accountability to the voluntary covenant with God
- ▶ Model nation showing examples of what God thinks of sin, warning people to avoid ultimate punishment
- ▶ Extreme consequences of rebellion by Israelites
- ▶ Fitting ancient Israelite perception of harshness needed for justice and warning, misunderstood by modern people
- ▶ Comparison with ancient near eastern penalties
- ▶ It was easy to avoid punishment: Don't violate the law!

APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS

- ▶ “Fathers shall not be put to death because of their children, nor shall children be put to death because of their fathers. Each one shall be put to death for his own sin” (Deut 24:16).
- ▶ “The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not suffer for the iniquity of the father, nor the father suffer for the iniquity of the son” (Ezek. 18:20).
- ▶ “visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me” (Exod. 20:5).
- ▶ Children who hate God suffer some results of their ancestors’ sins.

APPARENT CONTRADICTIONS

- ▶ Death of David's first son with Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:18): "ruler punishment," i.e., punishment of a person by causing him to lose individuals belonging to him
- ▶ Saul's sons and grandsons put to death for his sin after he was dead (2 Sam. 21): corporate responsibility and "ruler punishment"
- ▶ 70,000 Israelites died because David ordered a military census (2 Sam. 24): "ruler punishment"

SACRIFICE

- ▶ Sin results in death, i.e., eternal death (Rom. 6:23)
- ▶ Christ fulfilled the justice side of love to give us mercy by suffering the equivalent of the death penalty for all humans (Gal. 3:13—“becoming a curse for us”)
- ▶ It also warns against second death separation from God as the consequence of sin: If God did not spare His own innocent Son when He bore human sin, how can God spare one who chooses sin rather than His free gift?

SACRIFICE

- ▶ Christ could represent all of us because He is our divine Creator (John 1:3; Heb. 1:2; Luke 3:38; cf. Heb. 7:9, 10)
- ▶ Animal sacrifices were needed to impress on minds the meaning of Christ's coming sacrifice
- ▶ No more suffering than animals killed for food

THE BOTTOM LINE

- ▶ You decide whether you will be saved or lost
- ▶ Your choice is whether to accept God's gift of salvation through Christ's sacrifice
- ▶ For sin never to arise again, God can only save people who commit themselves in this life to live forever by God's principle of unselfish love by free choice (cf. Mic. 6:8)