

## The Problem of Cruelty and Suffering

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Let me preface by saying this is an answer to a very specific question from an atheist friend of mine concerning the proposed cruelty and or impotence of God. It's very black and white as there is no room for shades of grey. As you read, I hope you feel empowered and challenged. If something does not jive with what you've come to understand about God and his word, then I encourage you to dig deep into the word and uncover His mysteries. "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out." – Proverbs 25:2 Enjoy!

**\*\*Is God evil, cruel, unjust and or impotent due to his allowing of and or non-intervention concerning awesome weather related catastrophes like tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, and tornados that result in incredible loss of human life? AND Is God evil, impotent, cruel, and or unjust because he visits suffering on innocent people, allows children by the tens of thousands to be torn from their parents' arms and killed or raped, or shot by a terrorist in Church or School?\*\*\***

No. God is not evil, impotent, cruel, or unjust.

Many people believe that if God does exist, then he must be an uninvolved, uncaring, violent, and malevolent wretch to allow such a vast myriad of horrible atrocities to go on under his nose the world over. The assertions people make concerning God and his impotence only apply in a world where He does exist. So for this argument we'll operate under the assumption that God does exist, as that parameter is required to adequately answer the above 2 questions. Let's tackle the weather related argument first.

**SIDE NOTE:** The weather, much like science is amoral; being neither moral or immoral. Just like a rock or a tree, the weather simply is. But for the sake of argument we'll expound and push this topic to its limit.

There is a common trend to blame God and label him as evil, just about every time a catastrophic weather-related event claims lives and causes grand scale destruction. The questions most often raised are: "Why would God cause this? Why would God allow this? Why didn't God stop this?" The belief is that an all-powerful being such as God is either the direct cause of these awesome events, or at the very least could prevent them from happening with his divine powers. Both notions are absolutely possible. We've seen God smite the earth with a lethal storm powerful enough to flood it entirely, killing everything unfortunate enough to not be aboard a boat in Genesis 7:11-12 "11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell upon the earth forty days and forty nights." Matthew 5:45 says "He (God) makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." Psalm 135:6-7 even says "6 Whatever the LORD pleases, he does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps. 7 He it is who makes the clouds rise at the end of the earth, who makes lightnings for the rain and brings forth the wind from his storehouses."

I believe that God can and still does command the weather and the elements in the same way today. It's possible that he is actively controlling weather patterns, the shifting of tectonic plates, or the magnetic alignment of the poles. However, another more likely possibility is that when God created the earth, He simply set the weather into motion much like the spinning of a top and then stepped back letting nature take its course, to intervene when necessary. And due to increasing entropy, thunderstorms become more violent, tsunamis swell larger claiming untold numbers of lives, and tornados raze entire cities to the ground. Much like the free will that God allows us as his creation to enjoy, he also allows nature in the world and its many environments to carve its own path. Some natural disasters, and in fact most natural disasters are just that, natural disasters. Could God stop the onslaught of an F5 tornado or an earthquake? Absolutely. Is it possible that there are other cataclysmic events that God does stop that we may never even know about? Absolutely, and to quote the God Entity from the TV show Futurama: "When you do things right, people won't be sure you've done anything at all." Because he created it, God is in effect the initial cause of all weather. But I don't believe he controls every storm every time.

There is the possibility that the Devil himself is behind specific weather occurrences and natural disasters. In Ephesians 2:2 the Bible describes Satan as the "prince of the power of the air." He is even described in 2 Corinthians 4:4 as the "god of this world." With regards to "prince of the power of the air," there is some conjecture on what location "air" is in reference to. It's believed to be either the upper atmosphere, the lower atmosphere or "air," or an unseen parallel dimension/alternate reality in existence behind the veil. However, the word Air in Ephesians 2:2 is after the Greek word Aér (Ah-ayr), which refers specifically to the lower and denser air/troposphere in which we function and breathe. And this places the Devil's influence and locale right in our area of physical operation. This Greek word Aér is in contrast to the Greek word Aithér, which refers to the higher atmosphere (used in Homer's Iliad).

The world is the Devil's domain. And though he is not omnipotent or omniscient, he does have authentic God-given power (all be it restricted) on, over, and within it. 1 John 5:19 "We know that we are from God, and the whole world lies in the power of the evil one." Luke 4:5-7 "5 And the devil took him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time, 6 and said to him, "To you I will give all this authority and their glory, for it has been delivered to me, and I give it to whom I will. 7 If you, then, will worship me, it will all be yours." The Devil is given power and permission to tempt and torment people as a testing of their faith and resolve. He is given power over some illness (Luke 13:14-16, Job 2:7-8), over death (Hebrews 2:14), over some people referred to in Ephesians 2:2 as "sons of disobedience", over demons as he is called the "prince of demons" in Matthew 9:34, and possibly the weather in a restricted/limited capacity. We see Satan given power over the weather to both test and torment Job and his house. In Job 1:16-19 Satan used "The Fire of God" (most likely lightning) which "burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them." Then he used a "mighty wind" (possibly a tornado) to destroy Job's oldest son's house and killed Job's children.

According to biblical events, it is quite possible that the Devil is behind some catastrophic meteorological disasters. Many theologians believe that the storm that besets Jesus and his followers in Mark 4 was demonic in nature as Jesus actually rebukes the wind and then bids the sea to be still. Again the power given to Satan is subject to God's permission and

sovereignty. For this reason, Satan is called “prince” rather than king. This is because there is only one king – Jesus Christ (1 Timothy 6:13-16).

We as humans also effect the weather both directly and indirectly. For this reason, we cannot lay the blame for all weather related events solely at the feet of God. The building of cities containing huge masses of brick and paved areas, while removing vegetation, cause heat islands to loom above them. These heat islands can and do cause urban tornados which can lead to massive damage and loss of life. A few instances of urban tornados include: Murfreesboro TN on April 10, 2009 – Nashville TN on April 3, 2015 – Chicago in April 1967 – Brooklyn NY on August 8, 2007.

The large amounts of crops we plant can push the dew point (the temp at which the air reaches 100% humidity) up above 80°F in the summer. This creates a very dangerous heat index that reaches much higher than 100°F. For instance, a 96°F day with a relative humidity of 75% feels like 132°F. Corn crops are notorious for this. Having grown up in rural America, I know this heat all too well. When I still lived in Rochelle, IL, the heat index was so high due to humidity for so many days in a row that a section of paved road in our town buckled up like a landmine had gone off beneath it. With a heat index that high, heat stroke becomes a very real and potentially life-threatening danger.

Paving over too much soil with concrete and asphalt has and does have a severe impact on flooding during heavy rainfall events. When rain water has too few places to escape due to an overabundance of relatively impervious concrete or asphalt that covers up permeable soil, an immediate influx of water builds up rapidly in urban areas causing flooding. Any available soil fills up to oversaturation, and the excess water can also run off to cause flooding in other areas that have never seen flooding before.

We also have caused and do cause damage to the ozone layer by the releasing of CFCs that are present in refrigerants, aerosol cans, solvents, and vehicle emissions. In November 2009 the Antarctic ozone hole shifted to the southern tip of South America and exposed the area to direct UV light from the Sun. Too much exposure to UV light can massively damage human tissue by way of skin cancer, eye lesions, liver spots, cancer of the cornea, and so many more.

We cause so much damage to this world and its systems through our avarice and neglect, and then deign to blame God for our misfortune. To ignore the fact that we are so often the architects of our own demise, all while claiming to be making supreme progress environmentally, socially, and economically is TRUE narcissism at its finest. Now granted, there are those of us who do our best to affect positive change in this world, and I am not maligning them. I’m not free of guilt as I know I’ve done my own fair share of harm to the world throughout the course of my life. It’s utterly unavoidable. We are caretakers of this world and though we don’t control everything here in, we must take ownership of the damage we cause (when we do cause it) and not lay the blame solely at God’s feet.

To quote gotquestions.org --- (“God is in control of all things, including the weather. Through His providence, God provides for and protects His children, but He also permits Satan, demons, and mankind to exercise their limited will to commit acts of sin, evil, and wickedness.

These same beings are fully responsible for any and all man-made disasters and tragedies they cause. We know that God has ordained whatsoever comes to pass (Ephesians 1:11; Romans 11:36), and therefore His invisible hand is in our pain, even though He cannot sin or be the perpetrator of evil – James 1:13-17 “13 When tempted, no one should say, “God is tempting me.” For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does He tempt anyone. 14 But each one is tempted when by his own evil desires he is lured away and enticed. 15 Then after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is fully grown, it gives birth to death. 16 Do not be deceived, my beloved brothers. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, with whom there is no change or shifting shadow.”

There can be no meaningless suffering for the believer, whether the suffering is caused by mankind or by a natural event. We may not always know why evil acts or natural disasters happen, but we can be assured that in all our trials and tribulations God is working all things together for His glory and for our everlasting good – Romans 8:18-28 “18 I consider that our present sufferings are not comparable to the glory that will be revealed in us. 19 The creation waits in eager expectation for the revelation of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will, but because of the One who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until the present time. 23 Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved; but hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he can already see? 25 But if we hope for what we do not yet see, we wait for it patiently. 26 In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know how we ought to pray, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groans too deep for words. 27 And He who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that God works all things together for the good of those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.”“)

As I stated earlier the weather is amoral. God’s decision to intervene or not to intervene in lethal storms does not make him evil, cruel, unjust and or impotent. The calculations that are behind his decisions and their outcomes that effect the world for years to come are so precise that I doubt that we as humans could ever think as many levels deep or account for every eventuality as accurately as God does. And even further still, I doubt we could do so in a way that would leave all parties involved adequately satisfied with the outcomes of our decisions. So to say, you can make some people happy some of the time, but you can’t make everyone happy all of the time. We’ll expound on this idea further in the coming paragraphs.

Now for the argument of undue suffering and or death that (as many put it) God “visits on innocent people,” and or allows to plague us and others the world over.

When we as humans experience tragedy, suffering, and loss of life in any capacity it is inherently a sad and frustrating matter. When that tragedy, suffering, and loss of life is at the behest of wicked people, it’s not only saddening and frustrating, it’s also infuriating. The same questions from before rise again: “Why would God allow this? Why didn’t God stop this? Why would God allow a person to do such horrible things to another?” The simplest of answers is

because “we live in a sinful world.” But the implications and gravity of that answer go much deeper than most realize.

The notion of “innocent” people suffering and being put to death comes up against a brick wall when we are hit with the stark realization not a single person on this planet is born innocent of sin. Galatians 5:9 says “A little leaven leavens the whole lump.” And in the same way the original sin of one man (Adam) infects every generation and person to follow with an assured physical and spiritual death (Romans 5:12). More over the blood of Jesus Christ who was the only innocent man to ever live is on our hands, and is the direct reason that he had to die in our stead. Matthew 27:24-26 “24 So when Pilate saw that he was gaining nothing, but rather that a riot was beginning, he took water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, “I am innocent of this man’s blood; see to it yourselves.” 25 And all the people answered, “His blood be on us and on our children!” 26 Then he released for them Barabbas, and having scourged Jesus, delivered him to be crucified.”

Jesus died for all sin (past, present, and future), and as a result we are all born sinful and damned creatures before we can even walk and talk. For this reason, Jesus offers us redemption. Romans 3:23-25 “23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, 26 whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.” Although every infant is born into sin, it is believed that they are shown grace and mercy by not being held accountable for their sins by God until they reach the “age of accountability.” I won’t go too far into it, but the “age of accountability” is the belief that should a baby or small child perish before reaching a specific age and level of understanding (known as the “age of accountability”) while at the same time never being afforded the opportunity to learn of and receive Christ, that God further demonstrates his grace and mercy by granting them entrance into heaven.

We die and suffer horrible atrocities in this life as a result of our sin. But as I alluded to before, we don’t just suffer for our sin. Many of us are so blind that we don’t even realize the potential detriment and pain that our sin, which we may view as completely insignificant, may inflict on another.

Here’s a for instance: Imagine that I go to Wal Mart and steal an HDMI cable. And as a result of my theft, the electronics manager is now over the limit of preventable shrink (items lost due to damage and or theft) and is subsequently fired. That manager is now suffering for my sin. Let’s take it further. Imagine that manager goes home and gets into a fight with his wife over the loss of the job. Imagine that the loss of the job was the final straw in a marriage that was on the mend, and in the resultant argument concerning the couple’s marriage and the loss of the family’s only source of income, they both reach a boiling point and the man strikes his wife. As a result, she takes their two kids, packs up the car, and drives to her mother’s place. Now she is suffering from his sin, and they are both suffering from my original sin. Let’s take it further. On the way to her mother’s place the wife is so distraught that she accidentally pulls out into traffic, and her vehicle is struck by a semi that kills her and her 2 children. Now the manager and his entire family have suffered for my original sin. Let’s take it further. Imagine that the semi driver worked for a global mission outreach, and was carrying building materials for the construction of homes and water filters in some of the poorest areas in Africa. And as a result of a lawsuit filed

against the driver and the global mission outreach, their entire operation goes under and they are forced to shut down their operations. Now the manager, his family, the semi driver, and the mission are all suffering for my original sin. Let's take it further still. Imagine that because the mission has shut down their operations, the much needed food, water filters, and building materials that they were sending to Africa never reach their destination. And as a result the poor people in Africa who were expecting aid, are subjected to the harshness of the elements, all while having to drink polluted water, and not having nearly enough food to keep from starving. Now the manager, his family, the semi driver, the mission, and all those in Africa who were depending on aid, are suffering from my original sin. The implications of scenarios less severe, just as severe, and more severe than this playing out all over the world is an all too serious reality. We don't know how far the ripples of our sins go, or the lives they touch. Sometimes we are both the direct and or indirect cause of another's pain and suffering. Could God stop the above scenario from happening? Absolutely. Why does he often times not stop scenarios like this? Because he has given us free will, and allows us to live with the repercussions of not just our actions, but the actions of others.

**SIDE NOTE:** With regards to suffering for another's sin the Bible has this to say. Ezekiel 18:20 "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. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself." This means that no person is eternally damned for another's sin. We can still suffer physically for another's sin, but that suffering does not apply to our spirit man. A prime example would be the systematic torture and execution of Jewish prisoners that took place at the sinful hands of German soldiers at the Nazi concentration camps. God himself disciplines us so that we will right our step, and avoid eternal punishment. That discipline often comes with its own measure of suffering. For example, the suffering that comes from a minister being found to be having an extramarital affair, may be the loss of his position in the church, the loss of his marriage, and prolonged public scrutiny for years to come despite whatever reformation he may go through in righting his step. God as our heavenly father, uses discipline in much the same capacity as a physical father. Only God's is on an eternal heavenly scale, while a parent's is on a finite world scale. Hard though they may be, the Lord's admonitions are always designed to show us the error of our ways and to bring about correction and righteousness. Hebrews 12:5-6 "5...My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by Him. 6 For the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and chastises every son whom he receives."

We as humans claim to want complete autonomy from God in all the decisions and choices we make, and then have the gall to accuse Him of being evil, impotent, cruel, and unjust when he lets us live with the consequences. Jeremiah 17:9 tells us that "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?" People are inherently wretched, inflicting any number of ill fates upon ourselves and others. And to think that God should only let us live with the consequences of our good actions, but save us from the consequences of our evil actions is also TRUE narcissism at its finest. We do not get to have our cake, and eat it too. Christians are not absolved in this either, as some of the most wretched people who walk this earth claim to follow God. For this reason, Jesus commands, us to "love one another" (John 15:12). Loving one another is not for God's benefit, but for ours. God points the just and the unjust in the right directions to take in life. But it's up to us if we want to follow said directions. He also protects us

from any number of threats that we may be both aware and unaware of. He is also not above giving the unbeliever a blessing, “for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men.” (Luke 6:35).

It’s horrible when people willfully and intentionally beset another with pain and death. The abhorrent killing of children with a firearm while they sit blissfully unaware in class or at church, or the raping of an individual, or the act of children being torn from the arms of their parents only to be put to death, are all the result of the evil and cruel actions of others. Why wouldn’t God stop these evil people from doing these terrible things? Sometimes He does. As I said before, God watches over us and prevents any number of catastrophic and evil events from taking place. This is done either through his direct intervention, or through a person/persons that have been called for such a time. Matthew 7:26 says “Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?” But it all comes back to free will. Free will is not just for those of us who color inside the lines, but for those who would seek to steal, kill, and destroy. God is just. But He wouldn’t be just if he only allowed free will to be enjoyed by the good, and not the evil as well. For this reason, God offers salvation as a free gift to either be accepted or rejected (John 3:16).

I’ll be the first to admit that when I hear of terrorists torturing, raping, and murdering untold numbers of “innocent” people, my immediate thought is not that “they should be tried in a court of law and thrown in prison forever,” but that “they should be executed for their crimes against humanity!” This thought is more common place among good-intentioned individuals than most will admit. And let’s face it. At the end of the movie when the murderous bad guy is about to be defeated by the stalwart good guy, we don’t want the bad guy to be read his rights and thrown into prison. WE WANT HIM DEAD! A suggestion often gets raised that God should “just kill the murderers in this world, because they are evil and need to be destroyed.” Or at the very least “God should stop them.” Do we expect God to stop them with a firm talking to, and a slap on the wrist? NO! Let’s not kid ourselves, and pretend to take the moral high ground here. Those animals abandoned their humanity by senselessly torturing, raping, and killing others, and we would expect God to stop them by wiping them off the face of the earth. An eye for an eye. The Lord may discipline sinful behavior here on earth differently according to the nature of the sin. But in the eyes of God, no one sin (save for blasphemy of the Holy Spirit) ought-weighs another in terms of final punishment, and He hates sin. He tells us very clearly in Romans 6:23 that “the wages of sin is death.” Make no mistake, we were always destined to die for our sin. Not one of us can brazenly say that “my sin isn’t as bad as another’s,” because it’s all the same to God. And to those of us say that God should “just kill the murderers in this world,” I raise another point of view. By that logic I want you to imagine the incredible restraint that God employs in not just killing all of us right here and right now for our transgressions against Him, this world, and each other. Again, we DO NOT get to have our cake and eat it too. God is no respecter of persons. Romans 2:11-12 “11 For God shows no partiality. 12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law.” For this reason, God offers us grace again, and again, and again in hopes that we will come on home to Him and his boundless love. Romans 5:8 “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”

But why do little children have to suffer and die? Isn't it cruel that they should be visited with such a horrible fate? When that suffering and death is at the purposeful and or neglectful hands of evil individuals, then yes it is absolutely cruel.

Let's Imagine for arguments sake we have the omniscient mind of God. And we know that a record breaking tsunami of gargantuan size is going to obliterate the entire coasts of Mozambique, and Malawi. Imagine we know that as result of the tsunami (that God can prevent), 250,000 people will die. And that 200,000 of those doomed people are children whom God will welcome with open arms into heaven at the very second they perish. Imagine that should God prevent the tsunami from happening, that 225,000 of the 250,000 people will live out the rest their lives in squalor, starvation, disease, and in perpetual fear of hostile guerrilla armies. Imagine we know that if the tsunami is prevented, that the bulk of those 225,000 people will suffer and die as a direct result of starvation, exposure to the elements, disease, and sexually transmitted disease. All while continuing to sire more children that are born with disease into poverty, who cannot be properly provided or cared for. Imagine we know that the remaining chunk of the 225,000 will either be raped, murdered, sold into sexual slavery, or forced into servitude within a guerrilla army, where they will then be forced to steal from, rape, torture, and murder others in a continuing vicious cycle that will result in the subsequent deaths and enslavement of another 400,000 people. Imagine we know all that, and know that now God is faced with the choice of either preventing or allowing that tsunami to claim those original 250,000 lives. Armed with the knowledge of what stopping that tsunami means for the future, and knowing that the souls of 200,000 children will be granted entrance into eternal paradise should it not be prevented—I then argue that not only is it not evil, cruel, or unjust for God to allow that tsunami to kill all those people, but that it is in fact incredibly merciful.

My God is not impotent, his ear is not deaf, and his arm is not short. He has to make decisions of this magnitude on a daily basis, and his decisions are not made on a whim. God says in Hebrews 13:5 "I will never leave you nor forsake you." And at his own discretion he gives and takes away (Job 1:21). In God's infinite wisdom He weighs all the odds and makes his decisions accordingly, being that He is ever-present for and experiences all 24 hours of every day for every person on earth. For the world's population of 7.6 billion people, that's 182,400,000,000 hours that He lives through in a single day. This side of eternity and with our limited mental capacity, we cannot hope to understand God and all he does fully. As I've said already, there is a specific reason for everything God does. Proverbs 16:4 "The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." John 9:1-3 "1 As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 And his disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him."

Concerning the other 50,000 who would have died in my illustration, there will undoubtedly be those who had already received Christ and will be welcomed into heaven as well. What about the other non-believers who would have died, aren't they being denied a chance at redemption? Sadly, the answer is no, not in the slightest. And I'll explain why. The unfortunate truth in this life, is that there is no excuse for not being ready. The burden of being ready for anything and expecting the unexpected is on us as humans, not God.

Now what about people who die from natural disasters or at the hands of another who aren't children under the age of accountability? Isn't it cruel that they should die as well? At the hands of another, yes. But under the power of a natural disaster, no. As I've already stated, loss of life in this capacity is of course tragic and horrible. And for those who've received God, obviously they will be welcomed into heaven as well. But what about those who were "born into the WRONG CULTURE" or who "got the WRONG THEOLOGY," who suffer an ill-fated death before their time? Aren't they being denied a chance at redemption? No they are not. The grim reality and truth of the matter is that they are without excuse. We are told in the Bible that none are without sin, and are destined to die for it unless we receive Jesus. Beyond that, God has revealed, and does reveal himself to all creation by way of the natural world and moral conscience, so that no man can say "Lord Lord, I did not know." Romans 1:18-25 "18 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. 19 For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. 20 For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. 21 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. 22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools, 23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. 24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves, 25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen."

Jesus says "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). But how are people who were "born into the WRONG CULTURE" or who "got the WRONG THEOLOGY" to know what God's commands and laws are? God's law is etched into the very souls of man. Romans 2:12-16 "12 For all who have sinned without the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. 13 For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. 14 For when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do what the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. 15 They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them 16 on that day when, according to my gospel, God judges the secrets of men by Christ Jesus."

God is in relentless pursuit of us, but that pursuit needs to be mutual. True Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. The burden of seeking the other out is not left solely up to God. Jeremiah 29:13-14 "13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the LORD." That seeking is a direct exercise in faith, that requires works to come to fruition. James 2:17 tells us that "faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead." Christians are called to bring the gospel message in a real and tangible way to the masses. We Christians are considered the hands and feet of Jesus. For this reason, Jesus tells us in his great commission in Mark 16 "Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation." Could a lot of Christians be doing better at this? Absolutely. Being a witness for Jesus is not solely in the preaching sense. For some Christians, being a witness is carrying

themselves as a Christian should, and letting their life be the witness in word and deed. In Matthew 7 Jesus explains how you can know a person by the fruit they produce. For many unbelievers, simply seeing a Christian act and speak in the way they should is enough to inspire curiosity and a desire to know more. There are and always will be those who stand in opposition to the gospel message by either bashing it, not listening to it, or maligning Christians for believing in it. And that's their prerogative. It's not our job as Christians to convince anyone of the gospel message. We are simply called to share it with any and all who will listen to it. If that message is not received or doesn't want to be heard, then we are to just move on and not give it a second thought. Because we will have done our due diligence. Matthew 10:11-15 "11 And whatever town or village you enter, find out who is worthy in it and stay there until you depart. 12 As you enter the house, greet it. 13 And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town. 15 Truly, I say to you, it will be more bearable on the day of judgment for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah than for that town."

**SIDE NOTE:** We live in the information age. And for anyone with access to a library, a cell phone, the internet, or a television who doesn't do their due diligence and use any of these available resources to learn of Jesus and His gospel, to claim that it's because they were "born into the WRONG CULTURE" or "got the WRONG THEOLOGY," is operating under nothing but a self-destroying, foul, and odious lie. There is so much information about Jesus and His gospel online and on TV, that people can literally stumble onto it. But what about people who live in a culture that is so hostile to Christianity, that they will kill anyone they find who practices it? Matthew 10:26-33 says "26 So have no fear of them, for nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, say in the light, and what you hear whispered, proclaim on the housetops. 28 And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell. 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. 30 But even the hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. 32 So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, 33 but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven."

With regards to a culture that is in complete isolation from the outside world in a jungle or on some remote island, it is entirely possible that God would extend his grace and mercy to them, and allow them entrance into heaven. But then again according to Romans 1:18-25 and Romans 2:12-16, every person on earth has an inherent knowledge of God, that this can be clearly known from creation, and that every person also has a God-given moral compass to guide their life. My personal thoughts on the matter concerning people who do live in isolation are that the Creator may be a hard man, but he ain't blind. And if we as His hands and feet cannot reach someone where they are to share the gospel with them, then there is nothing stopping God from showing up to that person himself. God calls to Samuel in 1 Samuel 3 to tell him of the coming punishment for the priest Eli and his house. God sends the angel Gabriel to the virgin Mary in Luke 1:26-38 to tell her that she would conceive a child of the Holy Spirit and give birth to the son of God. He sends an angel in Matthew 1:18-25 to Joseph (Husband of Mary) in a dream to

calm his mind and tell him the child inside Mary was from the Holy Spirit. God can meet anyone right where they are and at any point in their life.

As for the anyone else who perishes before their time who heard of Jesus and his gospel, but either ignored it or put it on the back burner for a later date—the sad sad truth is that they waited too long to receive God and his redemption. Even the Boy Scouts know to “Be Prepared in Mind,” and to “Be Prepared in Body.” I’m sure you’ve heard it said, but it bears repeating that we are given no promise that we will make it to tomorrow or even to the end of the next five minutes. Yours, mine, or anyone else’s ticket could get punched at any time, which is why Jesus tells us in “The Parable of the Ten Virgins” in Matthew 25, to “Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour.” I’ve said before that God wants a massive family and does not want any to perish (2 Peter 3:8-10).

But if God knows that so many little children are going to die before even being able to experience life, then why even let them be born in the first place? Because every person’s life has value as they are born with intrinsic God-given worth. God knew and valued us before we were even born. In Jeremiah 1:5 God tells us “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you.” God genuinely cherishes us, is mindful of us, and wants the very best for us (Psalm 8:3-6). Every person is brought into this world by the direct choices and actions of other people. God does not make the choice for us, but instead we as humans either make the choice or regrettably have the choice forcibly made for us to bring a new and precious life into this world in the first place. A child who perishes too young was on the way into this world to begin with, at the behest of human choice. And the unfortunate thing concerning some children’s births, is the horrifying life, impoverished region, and or natural-disaster prone region that they are born into. The main reason that people are brought into this world apart from having the opportunity to love and be loved in return, is not simply to live out their lives with their families and friends. It is specifically to have the opportunity to choose for themselves whether or not they want to accept God’s salvation and serve Him while they yet draw breath. God doesn’t force this upon us, effectively making us all robots or dolls devoid of a free will. We are given however much time is allotted to us on this earth, in order that through our understanding and experiences we can make our choice.

I find it interesting that individuals will rail against God calling His moral character into question when a natural disaster, or a bombing, or a plane crash results in some dying while others live. They say that God simply chooses who lives and who dies on a whim. Many of the same people claim that it’s a woman’s moral right to do with her body as she pleases with regards to getting an abortion. The absurdity lies in the claim that when God decides who should live or die, he is immoral. And that when people decide who should live or die, it’s their moral right. At the risk of sounding cavalier, by atheistic standards when God calls one of his flock on home or allows someone to die in an untimely fashion, the resultant death is no more than an extremely late-term abortion. It’s not hard to see the duality of the argument concerning God’s immorality and our morality.

As I’ve already stated numerous times, loss of life in any capacity is a sad sad thing. But it doesn’t have to be. We can still find joy in the darkness of death and suffering by understanding that this world is not our home and that this physical life is but the blinking of an eye in

comparison to what awaits us. Hebrews 13:14 says “For here we have no lasting city, but we seek the city that is to come.” Our immortal souls are “not of the world, just as I (Jesus) am not of the world” (John 17:14). According to James 4:13-14 our lives on earth are akin to vapor “13 Come now, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit”— 14 yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.” For this reason, the Bible tells us in Matthew 6 not to lay up treasures on earth, but instead to lay up treasures in heaven “where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.” The dead in Christ shouldn’t be mourned, but instead should be envied. Because their faith has made them whole.

Yet again, God has a reason for all he does and allows on earth. I am baffled by and marvel at a lot of the things that happen in this world, but I refuse to let my spirit be broken. I do not claim to have all the answers, and when problems arise in my life or the world I don’t just sit around asking “why?” If I do ask the question of “why” it’s coupled with two other very pertinent questions. The two questions are “what does this mean?” and “what must I do?” I take joy in knowing that my suffering is not for nothing, and that God gives insight to those who endure, are faithful, and seek the truth. 2 Timothy 2:1-7 “1 You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, 2 and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also. 3 Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. 5 An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. 6 It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. 7 Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.”

Much of the trouble and hardship we endure, whether it be due to weather catastrophes or the evils and pitfalls of a sinful world is to test our faith and see if it is genuine. 1 Peter 1:6-7 “6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ.”

God also makes promises to those who endure suffering. Promises to be delivered during this vapor of a life or in the next. 1 Peter 5:8-11 “8 Be sober-minded and alert. Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. 9 Resist him, standing firm in your faith and in the knowledge that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kinds of suffering. 10 And after you have suffered for a little while, the God of all grace, who has called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself restore you, secure you, strengthen you, and establish you. 11 To Him be the power forever and ever. Amen.”

God is not evil, cruel, unjust, or impotent. The love that he has for his creation means that he has to make hard decisions daily that to many may seem flippant or callous. We know from scripture that nothing is done without a reason and purpose. Jeremiah 29:11 says “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for your welfare and not for evil, to give you a hope and a future.” But it requires a lens change on our end to view the pains and pitfalls of this world as more than just suffering. And instead to understand that despite what we perceive,

God's actions and will are for our everlasting security and salvation. I hope this sheds some light and challenges you to see just how deep this rabbit hole goes. God bless!

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