

Why Does God Allow Evil?

During a Moriel international prayer meeting one day, a heartbroken lady, sobbing, asked why God hadn't made her son obey the Lord. She had prayed for him for a long time, and it looked like her prayers were going unanswered. That night and the next morning, as I prayed for her, I believe the Lord gave me some insight into why He doesn't force salvation on anyone.

God's kingdom is based on love, not just the love of God for His creation but the love of His creation for Him. The Bible says God is love (1 John 4:8). God doesn't want robots. Robots can't love. You give a robot a command, and it will obey. But it obeys because that's what it's made to do. It's automatic. There's no love there. But a living person who loves the one who is giving the command has the opportunity to obey out of love. That's so much more rewarding to the one giving the command as well as the one obeying. Their relationship is enriched and strengthened. That doesn't mean the one obeying likes the command itself, but the trust shown by the obedient one strengthens the relationship between the two.

Unfortunately, people tend to demand quick fixes, and they usually don't last. One of the quick fixes people like is to force their will on others, whether they like it or not. The consequences can be dangerous or even deadly for the one being forced to submit to another person's will, and that personal relationship between the two sides always takes a hit.

God knows there are no quick fixes for loving relationships. Even as far back as after God created the angels, we see a breakdown in the relationship between God and the angels. We see that Lucifer and the angels that followed him did not love God enough to obey Him. Of course, to choose to love, there must be the potential not to love. That comes in the form of things like pride,

lust for power, greed, or wanting to be the center of attention. That was Lucifer. He led a third of the angels in a rebellion. As much as God loved His creation thus far, His holiness and righteousness would not allow Him to forgive sin without sacrifice. Unlike with mankind who is connected by a bloodline, Jesus could not become an angel and die once for all. There was nothing to connect them. Angels do not reproduce like human beings, and they're not connected to one another. There was no way Jesus could connect with them. The only recourse God had to maintain His justice was to cast them out of Heaven. I don't think the Lake of Fire was an afterthought. Being omniscient, God knew what would happen. He gave every angel the same opportunity to do what was right, but Lucifer and the angels who followed him chose to do what was evil rather than what was good. However, God wasn't finished using them to accomplish His will.

God created man and He created the earth as a sort of testing ground. He provided him with everything he needed for a healthy life and gave Man one stipulation: man could not eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He didn't say why they couldn't eat it. He just said don't eat it. The fruit itself wasn't bad, it was the decision Eve, and eventually, Adam had to make. Would they trust an omniscient and loving God to tell them the truth and have their best interest at heart, or would they believe the serpent? Again, there was the Love test. Love would tell them to trust God and everything He says. When asked about the greatest commandment, Jesus said in **Matthew 22:37** And He said to him, " 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH **ALL** YOUR HEART, AND WITH **ALL** YOUR SOUL, AND WITH **ALL** YOUR MIND.' **38** "This is the great and foremost commandment." If we loved God with the totality of our being we wouldn't disobey His commands so much. But we don't. We often put our feelings and desires before our love for God and that's what gets us in trouble.

The only way some people can learn love is by experience, and that often comes by trial and error. Mom tells a small child not to go near the oven- it's hot- as she takes a cake out of the oven. But the smell of chocolate cake lures the child closer. Mom tells the child to stay away, this time in a sharper voice. Is this love? The child doesn't think so. The child doesn't understand that Mom's correction is out of concern for his safety, and he is determined to satisfy his curiosity and touches the oven door before Mom can set the cake down. As the child screams in pain, Mom grabs him up and runs for the ice pack and the aloe vera plant. As she administers first aid, she speaks quietly and lovingly to the child, holding him close in her lap. There's a mild rebuke as Mom gently tells him, "See what happens when you don't listen? This is why I told you not to touch the oven. Mommy loves you, and I didn't want you to get hurt. If you had done what Mommy said, you wouldn't be hurt now." Hopefully, the next time Mom says, "Don't go near the oven," he'll remember her gentle rebuke and her care and loving arms around him.

As a family sets up camp on a riverbank, Dad tells pre-teen Johnny not to go into the river yet, to wait until he can go with him. Remembering the fun he'd had in a neighbor's backyard pool, Johnny decides it wouldn't hurt to wade in a little bit. Not realizing the difference between a swimming pool with a solid bottom and a river with a shifting dirt river bed, Johnny wades in, first ankle deep, then knee deep and then waist deep, then... Suddenly, there's a strong current, and the mud beneath his feet shifts. He falls and is carried away, fighting but not succeeding in keeping his head above water. Mom happens to see him fall and screams. Dad runs, dives into the river, fights the current, and saves him.

Back on land, Dad makes sure there's no water in his lungs, and he's able to breathe normally. As soon as both of them have calmed down, Dad says, "Son, I told you not to go into the water.

Why did you disobey me?” Johnny responds, “I thought I could go in up to my chest. I did it in Charlie’s swimming pool.” Dad explains, “Son, there are big differences between a swimming pool and a river. One: The bottom of the pool is solid, easy to stand on. The bottom of a river is made of dirt that can shift with a current. Two is the undercurrent. An undercurrent causes the water, and possibly some of the mud floor of the riverbed, to move downstream with it. You can’t always see a current while looking at the surface of the water. You didn’t see it, so you didn’t know what I knew – that the undercurrent was there. You *assumed* it was safe. What you don’t know **can** hurt you. Next time, wait for me. Okay?” Dad said as he ruffled Johnny’s hair. Johnny promised, “I will, Dad,” as they hugged. Johnny’s faith in his dad’s wisdom and their love for each other were strengthened.

Headstrong adults are harder to deal with. Proverbs 14:12 says, “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.” Sometimes, when God uses painful consequences to correct someone we love, we can get in God’s way while trying to protect them from pain. That’s where prayer helps. Of course, God wants us to show the erring one the love of God, but we need to make sure we don’t negate any progress God makes toward repentance in the process. Sometimes love needs to be tough. We need to talk to the erring one and show him how the decisions he made led to the consequences he suffered and how decisions made according to God’s Word would have brought God’s pleasure and blessing. Note that he needs to understand that God’s blessing doesn’t mean immediate gratification of fleshly desires – those things that make us feel good. Decisions we make today, be they good or bad, together with the people we interact with, can have consequences far into our future, and since we don’t know the future, we need to trust the wisdom of God, Who loves us and knows the future and the consequences of every potential

decision we could ever make. We need to look to Him for guidance in every decision of life.

There is a reality we have to deal with. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13-14: **13** “Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. **14** “For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it.” Each person makes his own decision. Sometimes, in spite of everything we may do, or even all that God may do, according to Scripture, many will choose the broad way that leads to destruction. But one has to wonder, how many of those have someone consistently praying for them?

Like the boy in the story who nearly drowned, given enough prayer and time to learn the truth, hopefully our loved ones will recognize God’s wisdom and love in a way that forcing them to obey like a robot could never accomplish, and they will make the decision to follow Christ.

By Sandy Miller