

things are as they are, struggle with suffering, struggle to understand God. We also read in the Bible that people receive answers to their questions, sometimes very different answers than they had expected. For man's greatest misery is not suffering, which is a consequence of sin ("sin" is the evil brought into the world by man's disobedience), but sin itself. Sin separates us from God.

#### GOD'S ANSWER TO OUR SUFFERING

God's answer to our suffering  
C.S. Lewis, a well-known Christian author, calls suffering "God's megaphone to rouse a deaf world." God does not want us to go on living without Him. For if we do so, we will find that the suffering we will experience after we die is infinitely worse than the suffering we experience now. To prevent that, He sent His Son Jesus. While we may stand shaking our fists toward heaven and calling God to account for the evil which we ultimately brought into the world, God provides salvation. He made a new covenant between God and man in Christ. Jesus Christ came into this world and took our nature to suffer and to die, to fulfill the terms of that new covenant and to conquer evil forever. He came to redeem all who believe in Him and to give them the gift of eternal life. One day Jesus will return to this world, and then there will be a new beginning. He

will wipe away all their tears, death will be no more, neither will there be mourning nor lamentation. There will be a new heaven and a new earth in which righteousness will dwell.

Why hasn't this happened yet? Why does God (in our view) wait so long? The Bible says, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise (...) but is longsuffering (patient) to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." (see the Bible, book of 2 Peter, chapter 3, verse 9).

That is most profoundly God's loving response to our suffering.

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Talking about...

## GOD AND SUFFERING

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How nice it would be if there were no suffering. No hunger, no natural disasters, no wars. How nice it would be if there were no diseases and no one died.

But the reality is so different. We hear about all kinds of suffering in the world and we also are affected with it in our own lives. The question why there is suffering and the presence of evil in the world can really trouble people. For some, this is even the ground to deny the existence of God, because "a good and almighty God would not allow all this suffering, would He?"

The Bible tells us that God is the Almighty Creator of this world. That would be an attractive message for many people to believe in, were it not for the fact that there is so much suffering. It is therefore impossible for them to believe in the existence of an Almighty and good God. Maybe this applies to you too.

THE REASONING OFTEN GOES LIKE THIS:

**If God is almighty, He is able to prevent all evil**

**If God is good, it is His will to prevent all evil**

So: If God is almighty and good, there would be no evil

There is evil

So: there is no almighty and good God

But can we draw this conclusion so easily?

### 1. THE ORIGIN OF EVIL AND SUFFERING

Firstly, we often look the wrong way when it comes to the origin of evil and suffering. God created the world and man good, and with free will. God also made a covenant with man: if he did not eat of a certain tree, the Tree of the knowledge of good and of evil, he would receive eternal life. But by breaking this covenant and turning away from God, our first parents brought evil (and the suffering associated with it) into the world. Man himself is therefore the source of evil in the world and therefore also the source of all the misery that results from it.

### 2. WE CANNOT UNDERSTAND GOD

Secondly, we find it difficult to reconcile suffering with the existence of a living God. But, are we not interpreting "love" too superficially? The fact that God is good and full of love does

not necessarily mean that He will prevent all suffering. A loving parent will also accept some suffering for his child to avoid greater harm. Therefore, the fact that God allows suffering is not by definition unloving or meaningless. If we cannot fathom the meaning of suffering, this does not mean that it is meaningless. If God is indeed omnipotent and omniscient, how could we – creatures with limited power and knowledge – fully understand Him? Certainly, this answer can easily be misunderstood when we consider the terrible things that are happening in our world. But – however understandable – then we once again react from a limited understanding and a lack of ability to fathom everything.

### WHAT IF GOD ALWAYS INTERVENED?

In addition, we don't realize the consequence of what we are saying if we command God to intervene every time that suffering lurks. Where would that end? Machines would have to stop regularly or go faster, people would have to be stopped. Even bad thoughts that

come to mind (and precede the actions) would already have to be prevented. In short, we would soon come to the point where we asked God to prevent all evil. Nothing in the world would be certain anymore; natural laws would no longer function and our freedom and responsibility would be gone.

The belief that God can change matter – and sometimes does – so that things we call miracles happen, is part of the Christian faith; but the idea of a stable world requires such events to be rare.

People will always ask why God allows suffering, unless the world (and we ourselves!) are perfect, so that there is no more suffering of any kind. That is precisely what Christians believe: we humans are not perfect, and therefore the creation eagerly awaits the day when it will be delivered from evil and suffering forever.

### SUFFERING IN THE BIBLE

Thus, we live together in a world in which suffering is present as a reality. Both in the "big" world, but also in the "small" world of our own lives. There is no escape from the poignant reality of suffering; sooner or later we all have to face it. How hard can that be! The Bible does not avoid the question of suffering. We read many times in the Bible that people struggle with questions why