

Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

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Pastor's Bible Study

If God Is Good

A Bible Study Series
Based on the book
"If God Is Good" by Randy Alcorn

Part XIV

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Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ's Redemptive Work Evil and Suffering as Seen in Scripture's Redemptive Story

- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ's Redemptive Work**
 - **The story of redemption began before God created the world.**
 - God speaks of "all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world" (Revelation 13:8).
 - Before creation itself, God had written myriad names in the book of life.
 - That book belongs to "the Lamb that was slain."
 - Before God took his first step in forming this universe, already he had determined to sacrifice his Son for our sins, like a lamb on the sacrificial altar.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ's Redemptive Work**
 - God's redemptive plan was not an ad-lib response to unanticipated events. From before the very beginning, God knew the very worst. And the very best it would one day bring.
 - Paul writes, "*For God saved us and called us to live a holy life. He did this, not because we deserved it, but because that was his plan from before the beginning of time—to show us his grace through Christ Jesus.*" (2 Timothy 1:9, NLT)
 - How could God give us grace before our lives began, even before the universe itself existed?
 - Only because God knew and determined in advance the work of Christ for us on the Cross.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ's Redemptive Work**
 - God wrote the script of the unfolding drama of redemption long before Satan, demons, Adam and Eve—and you and I—took the stage.

- And from the beginning, he knew that the utterly spectacular ending would make the dark middle worth it.
 - **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - **The earliest scriptures document evil’s pervasiveness in the human heart.**
 - We find the first four biblical references to evil in Genesis.
 - *“The Lord God made all sorts of trees grow up from the ground—trees that were beautiful and that produced delicious fruit. In the middle of the garden he placed the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”* (Genesis 2:9, NLT)
 - *“except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If you eat its fruit, you are sure to die.”*” (Genesis 2:17, NLT)
 - **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - *““God knows that your eyes will be opened as soon as you eat it, and you will be like God, knowing both good and evil.”*” (Genesis 3:5, NLT)
 - *“Then the Lord God said, “Look, the human beings have become like us, knowing both good and evil. What if they reach out, take fruit from the tree of life, and eat it? Then they will live forever!”*” (Genesis 3:22, NLT)
 - The first two refer to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the second pair to man becoming like God in knowing good and evil.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - The next reference provides a frightening commentary on the extent of human evil: *“The Lord observed the extent of human wickedness on the earth, and he saw that everything they thought or imagined was consistently and totally evil.”* (Genesis 6:5, NLT)
 - After tolerating generations of increasing evil, God sent the Flood as a catastrophic judgment to sweep away evil and start civilization over.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - **God’s present postponement of worldwide judgment gives the human race time to repent and turn to God, thereby avoiding eternal condemnation.**
 - After the Flood, God again affirms man’s evil nature but announces his decision to mercifully withhold sweeping judgment:
 - *“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and there he sacrificed as burnt offerings the animals and birds that had been approved for that purpose. And the Lord was pleased with the aroma of the sacrifice and said to himself, “I will never again curse the ground because of the human race, even though everything they think or imagine is bent toward evil from childhood. I will never again destroy all living things.”* (Genesis 8:20–21, NLT)
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - Noah’s sacrifice represented the coming sacrifice of Christ, which gave God cause to postpone judgment.
 - Elsewhere he expresses his gracious purpose:

- *“God isn’t late with his promise as some measure lateness. He is restraining himself on account of you, holding back the End because he doesn’t want anyone lost. He’s giving everyone space and time to change.”* (2 Peter 3:9, The Message)
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - When we call upon God to end evil we should consider what we are really asking. He *did* once judge evil *almost* completely, but doing so required that he sweep away nearly every human being on the planet.
 - Is this what we want him to do today? We should be careful what we wish for.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - **God’s judgment at Babel kept evil in check, allowing sufficient time for his redemptive story to reach the nations.**
 - God originally commanded humankind to spread across the earth and occupy it. But fallen humanity had another idea.
 - Rebellious people said, *“Then they said, “Come, let’s build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world.””* (Genesis 11:4, NLT)
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - Despite their blatant disobedience, God kept his promise not to judge the earth as in the Flood. But he did confuse their language so they couldn’t understand one another.
 - God then “scattered them from there ver all the earth” (verse 8).
 - God used both the Flood and Babel to restrain sin, allowing the earth to continue on its course before final judgment.
 - Babel, however, served another ultimate redemptive purpose. God later promised Abraham, *“And through your descendants all the nations of the earth will be blessed—all because you have obeyed me.”* (Genesis 22:18, NLT)
 - The Messiah would redeem not only Israel, but representatives of every nation, nations that would not exist apart from God’s judgment on Babel.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - At any time God could eliminate evil, suffering, death, and curse.
 - He does not, because he wants more of the human race to participate in his redemptive plan.
 - He wants people to worship him from every nation.
 - *“After this I saw a vast crowd, too great to count, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing in front of the throne and before the Lamb. They were clothed in white robes and held palm branches in their hands.”* (Revelation 7:9, NLT)
 - *“And they sang a new song with these words: “You are worthy to take the scroll and break its seals and open it. For you were slaughtered, and your blood has ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. And you have caused them to become a Kingdom of priests for our God. And they will reign on the earth.”* (Revelation 5:9–10, NLT)

- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - **God lets the story unfold by restraining evil until his final verdict.**
 - *“Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things? And now you know what is restraining, that he may be revealed in his own time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.”* (2 Thessalonians 2:3–7, NKJV)
 - Clearly it is God who restrains both the man of lawlessness and lawlessness itself.
 - He holds back the tide of human and demonic evil. God infuses this fallen world with his goodness, restraining evil until the moment he brings final judgment.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - **Like Job we live in a cosmic drama, in full view of Heaven’s audience.**
 - In the first chapter of Job, the dram’s Director tells us what the characters don’t know—what’s really going on.
 - Job knew nothing about God commending Job to Satan and calling him blameless. God let Job face terrible trials with no explanation.
 - We share this in common with Job—*God doesn’t specifically explain why he permits evil and suffering to fall upon us.*
 - He wants us to trust him. In one sense, Job is everyman.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - You may feel your choices have been reduced to whether you want Jell-O, or a window opened, or an extra blanket.
 - On the contrary, your choice of whether you will trust God and worship him today reverberates throughout the universe, honoring or dishonoring your God.
 - It also has enormous implications for eternal rewards God promises us in the next life.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - **Human suffering genuinely moves the heart of God, the Storyteller.**
 - *“God said, “I’ve taken a good, long look at the affliction of my people in Egypt. I’ve heard their cries for deliverance from their slave masters; I know all about their pain. And now I have come down to help them, pry them loose from the grip of Egypt, get them out of that country and bring them to a good land with wide-open spaces, a land lush with milk and honey, the land of the Canaanite, the Hittite, the Amorite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. “The Israelite cry for help has come to me, and I’ve seen for myself how cruelly they’re being treated by the Egyptians. It’s time for you to go back: I’m sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the People of Israel, out of Egypt.””* (Exodus 3:7–10, The Message)
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - Our suffering affects God just as any child’s suffering concerns his parent.

- David says to God,
 - *“You keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book.”* (Psalm 56:8, NLT)
 - *“You’ve kept track of my every toss and turn through the sleepless nights, Each tear entered in your ledger, each ache written in your book.”* (Psalm 56:8, The Message)
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - **God’s rich variety of feelings, including compassion, are vital to the story.**
 - Some time ago theologians formulated the doctrine of God’s *impassibility*. They argued that God was without passions.”
 - Their motive was to distinguish God from the mood swings and more erratic and unstable aspects of human emotions.
 - Unfortunately, many Christians came to believe that God doesn’t have emotions.
 - It is critical that we know the heart of God. He genuinely loves and cares about us. If we believe he has no emotions, then we will never feel his love for us, nor will we experience deep love for him.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - An abundance of biblical passages show that God experiences a broad range of emotions.
 - *“And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption.”* (Ephesians 4:30, NLT)
 - *““And the Lord was also angry with me because of you. He said to me, ‘Moses, not even you will enter the Promised Land!’”* (Deuteronomy 1:37, NLT)
 - *“Whenever the Lord raised up a judge over Israel, he was with that judge and rescued the people from their enemies throughout the judge’s lifetime. For the Lord took pity on his people, who were burdened by oppression and suffering.”* (Judges 2:18, NLT)
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - *“The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for wisdom.”* (1 Kings 3:10, NLT)
 - *“For the Lord your God is living among you. He is a mighty savior. He will take delight in you with gladness. With his love, he will calm all your fears. He will rejoice over you with joyful songs.”* (Zephaniah 3:17, NLT)
 - *“So the Lord was sorry he had ever made them and put them on the earth. It broke his heart.”* (Genesis 6:6, NLT)
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - Some explain these verse as ascribing human emotions o God so that we can relate to him better, but surely God wants us to relate to him *as he really is*, and passages that don’t describe him as he is would mislead us.
 - Since God made us in his image, we should assume our emotions are reflective of his, even though ours are subject to sin while his are not.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**

- **While in the larger story this is not the best possible world, it may be the best possible means of achieving the best possible world.**
 - A world that had never been touched by evil *would* be a good place. But would it be the best place possible?
 - If we acknowledge that evil and suffering facilitate the development of significant human virtues, then we must answer no.
 - If you tell God he should not have allowed evil and suffering, then you are saying he should not have allowed us to experience compassion, mercy, and sacrificial love.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - And suppose that once developed, the attributes of patience, mercy, love, and strength of character could last forever, even long after evil had disappeared. Could this justify God’s allowance of evil.
 - If God merely wanted to develop men and women who would behave correctly, he could have bypassed freedom, evil, and suffering.
 - But if he intended that his image-bearers see their genuine need for him and be brought to loving obedience, then how would we propose that he improve the processes he uses in our lives?
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - **The story culminates in a new world made breathtaking because God has overcome evil and suffering.**
 - The suffering of the utterly innocent and infinitely holy Son of God in the place of utterly undeserving sinners to bring us to everlasting joy is the greatest display of the glory of God’s grace that ever was, or ever could be. This was the moment — Good Friday — for which everything in the universe was planned. In conceiving a universe in which to display the glory of His grace, God did not choose plan B. There could be no greater display of the glory of the grace of God than what happened at Calvary. Everything leading to it and everything flowing from it is explained by it, including all the suffering in the world.
 - –John Piper
Suffering and the Sovereignty of God, (2006, p.82)
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - When we live peacefully on the New Earth, where joy will permeate the very air we breathe, we will look back at this present world and affirm not by faith but by sight that all the evil and suffering was worth it—and that Christ’s incarnation and redemption have made the universe a better place.
- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**
 - *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. I heard a loud shout from the throne, saying, “Look, God’s home is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will*

wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**

- *And the one sitting on the throne said, “Look, I am making everything new!” And then he said to me, “Write this down, for what I tell you is trustworthy and true.” And he also said, “It is finished! I am the Alpha and the Omega—the Beginning and the End. To all who are thirsty I will give freely from the springs of the water of life. All who are victorious will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be my children. “But cowards, unbelievers, the corrupt, murderers, the immoral, those who practice witchcraft, idol worshipers, and all liars—their fate is in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.” Then one of the seven angels who held the seven bowls containing the seven last plagues came and said to me, “Come with me! I will show you the bride, the wife of the Lamb.”*

- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**

- *So he took me in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and he showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God and sparkled like a precious stone—like jasper as clear as crystal. The city wall was broad and high, with twelve gates guarded by twelve angels. And the names of the twelve tribes of Israel were written on the gates. There were three gates on each side—east, north, south, and west. The wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were written the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. The angel who talked to me held in his hand a gold measuring stick to measure the city, its gates, and its wall. When he measured it, he found it was a square, as wide as it was long.*

- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**

- *In fact, its length and width and height were each 1,400 miles. Then he measured the walls and found them to be 216 feet thick (according to the human standard used by the angel). The wall was made of jasper, and the city was pure gold, as clear as glass. The wall of the city was built on foundation stones inlaid with twelve precious stones: the first was jasper, the second sapphire, the third agate, the fourth emerald, the fifth onyx, the sixth carnelian, the seventh chrysolite, the eighth beryl, the ninth topaz, the tenth chrysoprase, the eleventh jacinth, the twelfth amethyst. The twelve gates were made of pearls—each gate from a single pearl! And the main street was pure gold, as clear as glass. I saw no temple in the city, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And the city has no need of sun or moon, for the glory of God illuminates the city, and the Lamb is its light. The nations will walk in its light, and the kings of the world will enter the city in all their glory.*

- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ’s Redemptive Work**

- *Its gates will never be closed at the end of day because there is no night there. And all the nations will bring their glory and honor into the city. Nothing evil will be allowed to enter, nor anyone who practices shameful idolatry and dishonesty—but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s Book of Life. Then the angel showed me a river with the water of*

life, clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb. It flowed down the center of the main street. On each side of the river grew a tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, with a fresh crop each month. The leaves were used for medicine to heal the nations. No longer will there be a curse upon anything.

- **Evil and Suffering in the Great Drama of Christ's Redemptive Work**

- *For the throne of God and of the Lamb will be there, and his servants will worship him. And they will see his face, and his name will be written on their foreheads. And there will be no night there—no need for lamps or sun—for the Lord God will shine on them. And they will reign forever and ever. Then the angel said to me, “Everything you have heard and seen is trustworthy and true. The Lord God, who inspires his prophets, has sent his angel to tell his servants what will happen soon.”* (Revelation 21:1–22:6, NLT)

- **It Will Be Worth It All!!!!**