

WHY DOESN'T GOD *DO* SOMETHING?

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Isaiah 63:9¹

If you are a normal human being no doubt you have been forced to wonder why there is so much suffering in this world. Maybe you have watched a loved one endure pain, sickness, suffering, or death. Even the animal world is not free from the results of pain. Last evening I watched a friend's dog who is suffering a slow, painful death. We often ask in these circumstances, "Why doesn't God do something, intervene somehow?" Many times we blame God for causing troubles to come upon us or our friends.

While it is true that we humans don't love dirty, undeserving, bad people, the Bible says that God does love them. This is because of the unique quality of His love.²

Whereas human love is dependent on the beauty or goodness of its object, His love is sovereign and independent. That's why it is free to love evil people. He loved them in Christ, and He still has His arms flung around this world.³ He is still the Good Shepherd seeking His lost sheep,⁴ corporately involved with humanity so that our

¹ "This Is My Father's World";

² John 3:16.

³ 2 Corinthians 5:19-21.

⁴ Luke 15:3-7.

suffering has become His suffering.⁵ The human race is one in Christ, so that He is now part of our family. He cannot forget or forsake His own family!

This is my Father's world, O let me ne'er forget
That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
God is the Ruler yet.

This is my Father's world; why should my heart be sad?

The Lord is King; let the heavens ring!
God reigns, let the earth be glad.

Our problem lies in distinguishing between what we call love and the nature of the love that the Bible reveals. When it says that "God is love," the word in Greek is *agape*, a foreign concept imported from heaven, something wholly absent from native earth-consciousness anywhere. No ancient religion outside the Old Testament had the resources even to hint of its existence.

However scientific our mind may be today, however logical and rational in its attempts to doubt the personality of God, the reality of *agape* confronts us squarely. We can deny it like a blind man may deny sunlight, but if we are honest, it testifies to us of a loving, personal God who is both Father and Saviour of the world. This love blocks agnosticism or atheism in its tracks until such time as conscience either acknowledges it or succumbs to cynical unbelief. Beyond that rejection, even God's angels can do no more.

No historian, evolutionist, or atheist can trace the origin of *agape* to any other source than that of a

⁵ See 1 Corinthians 12:12, 26, 27.

cross erected on a little hill outside Jerusalem. If the fishermen-apostles had minds fertile enough to invent *that* idea, they would deserve the all-time Pulitzer prize.

How Can an Infinite God Have Feelings Like We Have?

An airliner with hundreds of innocent passengers blown out of the sky, a demented murderer spraying machine gun bullets on a school yard of innocent children, an earthquake killing thousands of sleeping people—how can an almighty God in heaven look on such things and allow them if He loves and if He has feelings? Millions of people want to believe in Him, but wonder if He is an impassive Buddha-like Deity, an absentee Landlord who ignores His tenants on Planet Earth.

If the Bible is right when it says that God is a divine Person, it's easy to assume that He must be ensconced in perfect security, immortal, enjoying constant pleasure with millions of angels serving Him. From our viewpoint, the residents of a Beverly Hills mansion needn't worry about homeless beggars in Calcutta.

Deism is the widely popular assumption that although God exists, He is coldly distant, leaving us to our inept selves. Because such an idea breeds selfishness, it is very bad news. If Number One is a devotee of number one, why shouldn't we be the same? The assumption that God is as selfish or unconcerned as we are is the real reason why "me-first" has become such a popular philosophy. All the world's selfishness derives either from a false concept of God or a blatant rejection of its truth.

The Bible picture of God's true character reveals Him as a Person, with a human side. He does care, He does feel earth's hurt, He is concerned. He has sensitive and sympathetic feelings, which means He is in deep pain. In fact, He cannot rest so long as there is one unhappy person left on the earth. His heartache is incessant for He is infinitely close to humanity.

For example, His involvement in the minute nuances of our heart-longings is down-to-earth: "For only a penny you can buy two sparrows, yet not one sparrow falls to the ground without your Father's consent."⁶ He is so corporately involved in our experiences that He has nerve-endings that sense our pain as fully as we feel it, yes even more so, liar at no time is our consciousness alert to the full dimensions of pain's potential. The teenager getting hooked on drugs or immorality cannot foresee the agony in his or her future; God sees and feels all, of it ahead of time. (If only the teenager could!)

Speaking of God's suffering followers on earth, Isaiah says: "In all their affliction He was afflicted. He . . . bore them and carried them all the days of old."⁷

Christ's name is "Immanuel," which is translated, 'God with us.'⁸ In other words, there can be no hurt that a human knows that He does not also feel. Isaiah further explicates this divine consciousness: "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our

⁶ Matthew 10:29, TEV.

⁷ Isaiah 63:9.

⁸ Matthew 1:23.

sorrows. . . . He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him.”⁹ Our otherwise intolerable existence can be transformed by simply believing that often-unbelieved glimpse of God as a sensitive, loving Person.

Even in the midst of our troubles, we humans still enjoy a vast amount of peace, though we may not be conscious of its true source. What Isaiah is saying is this: None of us could know the “credit” benefit of even a moment of fleeting happiness unless a corresponding “debit” had been already borne in our stead by that divine Suffering One. This is the underlying truth of every human joy, every springtime, every delicious strawberry.

He was rejected on earth and expelled, for the people said, “We will not have this Man to reign over us.”¹⁰ Instead of the bitter rejection which He felt, we experience His unconditional acceptance of us, which includes the Father’s also. It’s amazing, not only that He has forgiven His murderers, but that He has not in high dudgeon washed His hands of our predicament. We may richly deserve to be without Him, but in the fullest sense possible He assures us, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world.”¹¹

(Jesus’ work was to reveal the facts about His Father’s character. Not only are Christ and the Father one, but since Christ has become incorporate in humanity and we in Him, our

⁹ Isaiah 53:4, 5.

¹⁰ Luke 19:14.

¹¹ Matthew 28:20.

yearnings and life experiences become His? This staggers our imagination, or we find it hard to believe that Good News can be that good.

But it is.

But our question is: If God is so concerned about us, and if He is all-powerful, and if He feels our suffering, how can He allow evil to go on?

Is He Doing All He Can?

(The Bible discloses a behind-the-scenes cosmic conflict. There is a very good reason for what superficially appears to be unconcern on His part. The truth is, He is very much concerned. But He has an enemy who is fighting a war against Him. This explains what appears to be a mysterious impotence on the part of God.

We are not surprised at rebellions and wars on earth, but who would expect such to happen in heaven? That’s where evil started:

War broke out in heaven: Michael¹² and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon and his angels fought, but they did not prevail, nor was a place found for them in heaven any longer. So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. . . . “Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and the sea! For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time.”¹³

¹² Another name for Christ. See Jude 9 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16.

¹³ Revelation 12:7-12.

During World War II, the subjects of the British crown endured years of agony, while a kind and sensitive King George VI and his gracious queen sat on the throne. The king listened to the daily news of destruction, his own heart torn with sympathy for the agony of his subjects. Gladly would he have ended the war at any moment if he could. But the war was not of his making. Adolf Hitler had thrust the conflict upon him, and the security of Europe required that it be fought through to the bitter end.

This is a miniscule glimpse of the problem which God has. An enemy as thrust this greater war upon Him—a controversy not of His choosing. The cosmic drama of the conflict between good and evil began with Act I—the war in heaven where Satan met defeat. Act II is of our making, introducing the insurrection into this planet. Our first parents, Adam and Eve, signed this world over to the control of God’s enemy and made themselves his captives. Here the rebel managed to recoup his loss in Act I.

God’s love could not abandon the world. The very nature of that love required Him to rescue us. Thus, Act III. The Father must endure intimate sympathy with the agony on this planet until the great conflict between Christ and Satan can be resolved.

Christ came two thousand years ago to claim His rightful place as the world’s Ruler. If He had been accepted, we would long ago have realized the world peace, security, and happiness that we yearn for. But since He was rejected, crucified, cast out of His world, the planet itself is still in rebellion against Him and no more recognizes His authority than did

the Nazis that of George VI or Franklin Roosevelt. While there are people today who wholeheartedly accept Christ as the rightful Ruler of this planet, they are in the minority, fighting “underground” as it were.

The Lord is eager to return to this earth to end this nightmare of selfishness and sin with all its attendant cruelty. No way is He sitting by idly, enjoying Himself in celestial luxury while the war rages on. His love for the world is intense. The universe itself can hardly wait for the cosmic V-Day when the cruel enemy shall be forever defeated.¹⁴

One of the most profound disclosures of Scripture is that one of our days is to God like a thousand years.¹⁵ To us the darkest day is always short, for the pain we can feel is finite, only our own or at best a partial sympathy felt for those few nearest us. But in deep sensitivity God must feel the pain of everyone on earth. Surely that must make one of our collective days seem like a thousand years to Him. He has so much more consciousness pressed into a day than we have. Imagine sharing in the agony of millions, yes billions, of people! He can never go to sleep as we can.¹⁶ He longs ever so much for this planet’s sin to come to an end.

His solution to world problems is infinitely efficient: no band-aids to apply in spectacular but futile experiments. He must get to the root of human problems—the sinful selfishness entrenched in human hearts. All the suffering in the world is in

¹⁴ Romans 9:19-23.

¹⁵ 2 Peter 3:8.

¹⁶ Psalm 121:3.

some way its consequence. In order to solve the problem, that source of evil must be eradicated, Not that selfish people must be eradicated, but selfishness itself must be. This must be accomplished by proclaiming and demonstrating the Good News what Christ accomplished on His cross and what He continues to do as the world's High Priest, as Saviour from that sin.

Satan opposes this. His last-ditch stand is his claim that the sacrifice of Christ and His on-going ministry are an exercise in futility. Look, he sneers, the world is worse now than it was when the Son of God died for its salvation!

To answer this charge, the gospel must produce a beautiful change in believing humanity, and thus give evidence that the plan of salvation is not in vain. Enter Act IV.

Is there such a gospel? Is it really Good News? Does it have power? If so, how does it work? The precious message the Lord sends to the world is not a thunder-and-lightning denunciation of sin abounding, but a heart-warming message of much more abounding grace. That is what penetrates to the inner badness of human evil and changes hearts.

God's Present Problem

When you and I pray, "Please, Lord, why don't You do something to help this sad world?" the answer comes back to us, "Why don't *you* do something?" By His rejection and crucifixion, Christ has been voted out of office on this planet. He cannot stage a coup and usurp control where He is not wanted, but He can work in and through those

people who commit themselves to Him and who respond to His Holy Spirit.

He is "the true Light which gives light to every man who comes into the world."¹⁷ Not all welcome and receive the light, but some do, thank God. He has encircled the world with an atmosphere of grace as real as the air we breathe. Those who choose to welcome it become His children and His co-workers.

He will have the cooperation of the "underground" forces who are loyal to Him in this great controversy, ministering that grace in a practical way to the world. The only hands He can use, the only voice through which He can speak, are ours.

The rebel unfortunately also has collaborators: Christians who deny the gospel. As the true gospel propagates light, so its denial actually propagates darkness. The darkness-gospel looks good in that it regales us with good advice, detailed instruction *what* to do. The problem is that we don't know *how* to do what is right. What we need to know is what *Christ* has done and is doing. Only that knowledge will make it possible for us to be transformed.

But people who think they believe Christ's gospel can be obsessed with a subtle, camouflaged legalism. It's the idea that "we-must-do-this," "we-must-do-that," "we-mustwork-more," "we-must-be-more-faithful," "we-must-get-the-victory," "we-must-study-more," "we-must-pray-more," "we-must-witness-more," *ad infinitum*. Always the idea is that we have to work at this or that; a debt hangs over

¹⁷ John 1:9.

us, an obligation that crushes us. The root poison of self-concern remains in spite of all these human efforts. Ross D. London, writing in *Newsweek*, April 24, 1989, says that “if one chooses good only to gain heaven and avoid hell, one simply acts out of self-interest.” This is the essence of legalism.

Many join the Jews of Christ’s day in asking, “What shall we do that we might work the works of God?” They don’t listen to that divine answer that Jesus gave, perhaps with a sigh, “This is the work of God, that ye believe. . . .”¹⁸ There is a latent fear of the power of such true faith lest we end up not doing enough good works. It has been assumed for centuries that the only motivation that will be effective is the fear of eternal damnation if one does not do everything just right.

But a distorted “gospel” based on fear can produce only frustration, discouragement, and spiritual impotence. And widespread *laissez-faire* in almost every religion testifies to that prevailing distortion. The problem is that faith is not understood as a heart-appreciation of the heavenly love that casts out fear.¹⁹

A Better Motivation Is the Answer

The pure, true gospel reveals a *faith which works*. That is why “it is the power of God to salvation.”²⁰ It produces heart-acceptance of, and obedience to, all the truth. The inspired apostle “determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. . . . My speech and my preaching

¹⁸ John 6:28, 29.

¹⁹ 1 John 4:17-18.

²⁰ Romans 1:16.

were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.”²¹ In these last days the Lord has promised that again such a message will be proclaimed world-wide, a message that transcends fear and truly casts it out.

The reason why it works is that it replaces legalistic imperatives with gospel enablings: “I saw another angel flying in the midst of heaven, having *the everlasting gospel* to preach to . . . every nation, tribe, tongue, and people.” This angel calls upon us to “fear God,” that is, to appreciate His character, “and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment has come.”²² The idea is to honor Him, to appreciate the honest reality of His character of unselfish love.

The first angel is followed by a second who also has Good News but who warns against its clever counterfeit: “Another angel followed, saying, ‘Babylon is fallen, is fallen.’ A third angel warns against a still more clever future counterfeit, the most subtle that the world has ever seen: worship of the beast and his image and receiving his “mark.”²³

The pure recovered gospel is ready for this pre-dawn of the twenty-first century. The reason why it is called “the everlasting gospel” is that it concentrates into one brilliant beam the light of truth that has shone dimly through all past centuries.

The Book of Revelation encourages us to hope for the very best. This vast activity on earth is not in

²¹ 1 Corinthians 2:2, 4.

²² Revelation 14:6, 7, emphasis added.

²³ Vss. 9-11.

vain. Fruitage springs up—the raising up of a people world-wide of whom God can honestly say, “Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”²⁴ In giving His Son for the world, the Father made an infinite investment. Now it will be seen that it pays off. Christ did not make His sacrifice in vain. A people are raised up who deeply appreciate it. The hopes and fears of untold billions of all ages are summed up in that final assurance of atonement effected and realized.

The text assures us that He will have a world-wide body of people who reflect the beauty of His character. Of themselves they will have no innate goodness, but as broken scraps of otherwise worthless mirror can dazzle one’s eyes with the sun’s rays, so each believer in Christ will beautifully reflect a facet of His perfect character.

If God “so loved the world that He gave His only Son” two thousand years ago, we can be sure that He still “so loves” the world of today that He will not permit any human soul to miss hearing in some way what the Good News is. The apostle Paul calls it “righteousness by faith,” an effective motivation for a change of heart.²⁵ That final display of truth is symbolized in Revelation as “another angel coming down from heaven, having great authority, and the earth was illuminated with his glory.”²⁶ The love of God, the cross of Christ, demand the imminent

fulfillment of this prophecy. This is the next item on the world’s agenda.

The Good News reveals three glorious truths: a God who is a Heavenly Father; a Saviour who remains for all eternity a member of the human family, One with us; and a Holy Spirit who is the Spirit of Christ sent to “abide” or to stay with every human soul who welcomes His presence. A great personage like the President of our nation may seem close to us through the TV screen, but he remains a finite human being who actually can be close to only a handful in his inner circle. Christ is closer to us individually than any human being can be because He comes in the presence of the Holy Spirit.

How can anyone be depressed if he or she will believe such Good News?

²⁴ Vs. 12.

²⁵ Galatians 5:5, 6.

²⁶ Revelation 18:1.