

Why Does God Allow Bad Things Happen to Good People?

by Doug Hamilton

Lesson One: The Clarifications of the Question

"Why does God allow bad things happen to good people?" This is one of the most common questions that come up in the Christian faith. The reason for this is because faithful Christians, living for Christ and trying to do the best they can, experience great events of suffering. When those events arise, the results can be devastating.

- A middle-age Christian couple were relaxing at their home one evening. It was a night like every other night of their Christian lives. There was a knock at the door around 8 PM and they wondered who could it be. Upon opening the door, they found a somber-looking police officer. Their hearts fell to the bottom of their being as they learned their teenage son just died in a car accident a few miles from their home. "Why does God allow bad things happen to good people?"
- A Christian couple was expecting the birth of a child. The crib was purchased, the room painted and the name of the child was chosen. They thanked God everyday for the coming blessing, but it would not be, for the child died in the womb. "Why does God allow bad things happen to good people?"
- A worldly man gives his life over to Jesus. He changes his life around and makes remarkable changes. He enjoyed his church family and God's word. Things were going well for him. In his spiritual prime he was cut down with disease. "Why does God allow bad things happen to good people?"
- A city in the Bible Belt, filled with souls that love Christ, is destroyed by a tornado and results in dozens of deaths, including children. Hearts are broken as they lose their homes and bury their loved ones. "Why does God allow bad things happen to good people?"

This question runs through the minds of many fine Christians. It is also what often goes through the minds of unbelievers. Some will call the existence of God into question. "If God is good, then why does He allow bad things to happen to me, a good person?" I have personally met numerous people that forfeit their faith or further imbed in their unbelief when tragedy struck. They gave up on God at the moment when they should have come closer to Him than ever.

The Reason for the Study

The focus of this study is not to come up with all the answers, for nobody could make such a claim in matters like this. Rather the study is to better comprehend what is behind our understanding and misunderstandings concerning the question.

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A Few Things to Clarify

Why does God allow bad things happen to good people? We must first put the question into the proper perspective by making some clarifications. This will be the focus of part one of this study.

Clarification #1: Stop labeling yourself as GOOD.

In Matthew 19:17 Jesus replied to a man, "*Why are you asking Me about what is good? There is only One who is good...*" This should remind us that there has never been a good person before God, except His only begotten Son. Jesus is the only One with Whom God was well-pleased (Mt 3:17; 12:18). All others of all-time are all-pitiful in the eyes of an all-loving God. We all need redemption from our sins.

- Isaiah 64:6 "...all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment..."
- Romans 3:10 "There is none righteous, no not one."
- Romans 3:23 "...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..."
- Romans 5:8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

We are all in need of forgiveness from God. "Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?" If "good people" are defined by their perceived innate goodness, then stop deceiving yourselves. We must never forget that nobody in God's eyes is a good person. Christ is the goodness to be found in people. He is the propitiation for our sins (1 John 2:1). We are cleansed by Him, through Him and for Him. It is all about Him, not me, not you, not someone else, but ONLY Him! We would not have the reason, nor the strength, nor the hope to do anything GOOD apart from Him had He not died for us first, for we love him because He first loved us (1 John 4:19). We all deserve the horrible death on the cross, but Christ made it possible to be delivered from it.

It is good when someone comes to Christ. It is good when people choose to serve God with all their heart, soul and mind (Matthew 22:37). It is good when someone chooses to resist sin in their lives. Those are all good things. If that is your definition of a good person, then great, but that still does not eliminate bad things from occurring in our lives. Clarification #1: Stop labeling yourself good because you recognized a good thing in Christ.

Clarification #2: Stop labeling others by circumstances.

Something of interest occurs in John 9. Jesus passed by a man in the crowd who was born blind. Someone yelled out a question, "*Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he would be born blind?*" They had already come to the conclusion that this horrible situation must have come about because of someone's sins. They believed that God foresaw the future evil and pre-punished him OR that the parents must have been

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sinners and were being punished with a blind son. Even after Jesus had healed him, the leaders clung to their faulty label saying to the man, *"You were born entirely in sins, and are you teaching us?"*

- It was an assumption of sin in Job's life that was offered by Bildad, Zophar and Eliphaz as an explanation of circumstance (Job 4:7; 8:20).
- It was the populace that reasoned the presence of evil in the lives of the Galileans that were crushed by the tower of Siloam (Luke 13:1-4).
- It was the island natives that concluded Paul was a sinner when he was bitten in the hand by the serpent (Acts 28:2).

I am so glad that this does tactic does not happen today! (LOL). Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people? Sometimes in our efforts to understand this question, it is easier to look at the suffering and seek natural consequences. Often our suffering is connected to our bad decisions in life. Even beyond that is our need and desire to want to redefine the person in an attempt to understand why God allows bad things to happen to good people.

There are sinful, safe and stupid decisions that all of us make in this life. They can all bring about suffering in the end. Be careful about labeling people by the circumstance.

- When hearing someone is suffering with lung cancer, why do we typically ask "Did they smoke?" How do you feel when you realize he never did? How did you feel upon finding out that he worked in a factory that had cancer-causing asbestos or lived in a basement with radon gas as a child?
- When hearing that a person died in a car accident, why do we typically ask, "Was he wearing a seatbelt, speeding or distracted?"
- When a shooting occurs in the city people tend to assume it must have been over a drug deal. Why?
- When someone suffers with diabetes it must be because they have abused food, right?
- When someone suffers with homelessness it must be because they are lazy, right?

I am persuaded that we long to quickly understand the answers to the question "Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?" We want simple rule that are black and white. We want to be able to have a quick answer by attempting to change the question to the statement like "God allowed these BAD things to happen to BAD people."

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God wants us to struggle with this question and find the deepest of answers. The danger in seeking to label people with circumstances is that it clouds our judgment and leads us to questioning our own motives in Christ. Jesus said in *Mt 5:45 for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous*. What is going to happen to you, good person, when the troubles of this life kick you to the curb? Will you immediately jump to the conclusion that it must be something that you did wrong and that you must be a loser? Do you want others to do it to you? Be ever so careful not to label people by a circumstance. It is shallow; it is not loving; it is dangerous.

Clarification #3: Stop labeling all "bad things" as bad things.

I once heard of a very godly man in a foreign country which was hostile to Christianity. They passed a law that said you could not evangelize and convert others to Christ, but he did it anyway. The government officials caught up to him, locking him up in prison and threatening death. The Christians of that area were terribly upset and began to question "Why does God allow bad things like this to happen to good people like him?" They automatically assumed that being in prison was a bad thing, not remembering the words of Jesus in *Matthew 5:10 "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*. There were also some of the Christians there that said he should have just laid low and not said a word. They emphasized that his carelessness landed him in prison and that he brought it on himself.

When the godly man heard that his fellow Christians were grieving over the bad news of his imprisonment, he secretly sent a message back to them. He said they were viewing the "bad things" which God allowed in a bad light, for they did not see the truth concerning the matter. They did not understand that you cannot label all bad things as BAD things, for often the bad things in the eyes of man are really good things in the eyes of God. I would like to read to you a portion of the message this brother in Christ wrote to his Christian friends concerning his "bad things" imprisonment.

I want to report to you, friends, that my imprisonment here has had the opposite of its intended effect. Instead of being squelched, the Message has actually prospered. All the soldiers here, and everyone else, too, found out that I'm in jail because of this Messiah. That piqued their curiosity, and now they've learned all about him. Not only that, but most of the followers of Jesus here have become far more sure of themselves in the faith than ever, speaking out fearlessly about God, about the Messiah.

-Philippians 1:12-14 *The Message Bible*

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The godly man, Paul the apostle, informed the Philippian church that not all "BAD THINGS" that happen to the Christian are really bad things through the eyes of God. The result of being locked up in prison led many of the guards to change their perception of Christ and has emboldened the Christians in their faith. Those were two incredibly great things that resulted in the "bad thing" that occurred in his imprisonment.

God, who causes all things to work together for the good of those who love Him (Romans 8:28), sees the "bad things" in a totally different light than we do. He allows the "bad things" to occur for a multiplicity of reasons. In the next lesson we will examine the many good reasons that God allows bad things to happen to good people. For now we must focus on three clarifications to the question.

1. Stop labeling yourself as good.
2. Stop labeling others by circumstances.
3. Stop labeling "bad things" as bad things.