

## Suffering

### Getting started

1. I was listening to a sermon from a minister at St Barnabus, Broadway. He was preaching about suffering and made the statement: "All suffering flows out of humanity's rejection of God as described in Gen 3." Agree or disagree? Why/why not?



2.
  - (a) Have you ever burnt yourself when cooking?
  - (b) Did you suffer pain?
  - (c) Was that suffering the result of humanity's rejection of God? Why/why not?
  - (d) What if you didn't suffer pain when you burnt yourself, would that be a good thing or a bad thing? Why?
3.
  - (a) Is gravity a good thing or a bad thing? Why?
  - (b) If you slip from a cliff and hurt yourself, is that the result of humanity's rejection of God? Why/why not?

### Bible

4. Read Acts 27:1-28:6.  
Context: Paul is arrested in Jerusalem but appeals to Rome because he is a Roman citizen. On the way to Rome they are shipwrecked on Malta.
  - (a) What suffering is described in this story?
  - (b) Is any of this suffering the result of humanity's rejection of God? What has caused the suffering?
  - (c) God made the world with gravity, storms, snakes and humans who feel pain. Do you think these things existed before Adam and Eve sinned i.e. before the Fall? Why/why not?

5. Read Ps 104.

Ps 104 describes Creation as well as the world as it existed for the psalmist. Is there any hint that the entrance of evil has visibly effected how creation functions? Why/why not?



6. The problem of evil is described as a problem because a good God has made a good world and he wants his creation to flourish but nevertheless there is evil and suffering in the world. So far in this study I've tried to say that not all suffering comes from the humanity's rejection of God. Now we will look at what effect the Fall had in bringing suffering into the world.

Read Gen ch 3.

Context: God has created the cosmos and put Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden which has trees and rivers. The one restriction is that they must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

(a) What might your reaction have been if you had read Gen ch 3 for the first time after reading Gen chs 1 and 2 for the first time?

(b) What does this say about free will before the Fall?

(c) How does the origin of evil relate to free will?

(d) What are the consequences of the Fall?

Note on Gen 3:16: "pains in childbearing" (NIV) is not a biological change as most translations suggest. The vocabulary is not talking about childbirth but about the painful circumstances by which children are brought up in a dysfunctional world.

From a lecture by Iain Provan called "On Living in a Blighted World" at Scots Presbyterian Church, Sydney, 13/8/2016.

(e) What do the words "greatly increase" tell you about pain and suffering *before* the Fall?

(f) Read Ps 113, taking particular note of v 9.

What does Ps 113:9 tell you about the relationship of mothers with their children?

(g) One view is that there is a complete breakdown of the relationship between God and people as a result of the Fall and you need Jesus to reconcile people with God. Read Gen 4:4, 13-16, 5:24, 6:9.

What do these verses tell you about the relationships between God and Abel, Cain, Enoch and Noah?

(h) Similarly, God's curse on the ground (Gen 3:17) does not involve a complete breakdown in mankind's relationship with the earth. Read Gen 5:29, 9:20-21, Ps 128.

What do these verses tell you about the relationships between mankind and the earth?

Similarly, the power struggle between the man and the woman (Gen 3:16b) does not mean that all humanity has to be like that e.g. Song of Songs has no power struggle or darkness and the garden imagery may suggest a reversal of the curse in their love.

The Biblical authors knew about darkness and that we were born in the midst of dysfunction and chaos but Biblical faith does not regard it as inevitable that we must go on living in these ways and, in fact, the opposite is the case – the people of God are called not to live in those ways but to live in a different way in God's kingdom.

From Iain Provan's lecture "On Living in a Blighted World" at Scots Presbyterian Church, Sydney, 13/8/2016.

## To finish

7. Read Matt 5:11-12, John 15:18-20, Rom 8:16-18, 2 Cor 4:16-18, 1 Pet 4:12-13, 19.

A Bible study called "The Word on . . . Suffering" by Kerry Nagel, 26/27 November 2016, concludes with "The passages above suggest that suffering is normal for a Christian, especially suffering for the name of Christ."

(a) Suffering for the name of Christ may have been normal for Christians in the first century but is suffering for the name of Christ normal for Christians in Australia in 2016?

(b) What aspects of Christianity in Australia in 2016 may result in Christians being given a hard time either because of the church's "brand" or because of things prominent Christians (e.g. Fred Nile, Cory Bernadi) have said or done?

(c) Is this persecution deserved or is this suffering for the name of Christ?

(d) What can we do to alleviate this problem?