

If God ... Why Evil?

By Peter Bocchino - President, Legacy of Truth Ministries

The Who Behind the What

Tragedies such as the World Trade Center drive emotions to the breaking point and force us to answer one of the toughest questions, "Where is God in all of this suffering?" Of course, the simple answer is, "God is where He has always been, allowing acts of freedom to have their consequences and waiting for people to recognize their need for Him." As true as this answer may be, it still leaves most people, including me from time to time, emotionally disappointed. It certainly would not be my response to someone who may have lost a loved one as a result of some dreadful tragedy.

What is God like? Does He care about people who suffer? Why didn't He stop the bombing in Oklahoma City, or at least keep the children safe through it? Why doesn't He intervene in situations like Rwanda or Bosnia, or at least mitigate the amount of human suffering? At times like these, skeptics are not alone in trying to comprehend God's

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whereabouts. If we are ruthlessly honest, we would admit our bewilderment too. These calamities certainly force many of us to reevaluate some of the convictions we have about the nature and character of God. It may be a well-kept secret among evangelical Christians, but most of us know it to be true in our hearts. In fact, it may result in a serious modification of our orthodox Christian faith. Many people will actually change their view of God in an effort to explain their experiences. While C.S. Lewis was grieving the death of his wife, he noted:

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In your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give a reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15).

Not that I am (I think) in much danger of ceasing to believe in God. The real danger is of coming to believe such dreadful things about Him. The conclusion I dread is not, "So there's no God after all," but, "So this is what God's really like. Deceive yourself no longer" (Lewis, *A Grief Observed*, p. 5).

It is important to understand why apologetics involves more than just an academic preparation of the mind. Although the ability to think on one's feet is critically important, it is equally imperative to have both personal and spiritual depth. We must be fully aware that the nature of the battle is multi-dimensional—that is, intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual. The best apologetic to a lost world is living a life that reflects the character

of Christ. Effective apologetics (*what I do*) is directly related to my character (*who I am*). *The who behind the what* is a priority in apologetics. We must endeavor to model the character of Christ toward skeptics, while refuting and correcting the errors in their arguments. Hence, the exhortation to Christians living and suffering in a hostile, pagan society:

There are three fundamental character traits essential to the understanding and defense of the truth of the Gospel. The first trait is obedience. If Christ is the Lord of our hearts, then we should lovingly submit our wills to him by obeying his commands. According to the New Testament, knowledge is revealed through obedience.

Professor Howard Hendricks makes the following observation, in *The Seven Laws of The Teacher*.

In the spiritual realm, the opposite of ignorance is not knowledge, it's obedience. In the New Testament understanding, to know and not to do is not to know at all (p.70).

The second character trait is humility. If Christ is our teacher and we are his students, then we must sit at his feet and listen to him. It is a humbling experience to be honest and say, "Lord why do you allow these things to happen? Teach me because I don't understand." Unfortunately, humility is not something we impute to ourselves. God humbles us through trials and sufferings in order to make us sensitive to His truth. As we read the New Testament it is evident that God prepares us for ministry with real life situations. Effective apologetics requires a humble and sensitive spirit for comprehending the deep truths of God.

As we obey His word, God gives us knowledge--the ability to *apprehend His truth*. In humbling ourselves before Him, we get a deeper level of understanding--the ability to *comprehend His truth*. However, for us to be effective apologists, knowing and understanding truth is not enough. We must have the wisdom, that only comes through close communion with God, to know when and how to *apply His truth*. Wisdom comes from a deep compassion for people that only God confers upon us as our hearts are one with His. As compassionate people we will treat others with gentleness and respect as we speak the truth in love.

Only God can ultimately calm the deep turmoil and emotional struggles in the hearts of people. If we focus on *who we are* through obedience, humility and compassion, God will bless *what we do* by using us as channels

of truth and grace. Apologetics involves the discipline of philosophy. However, effective Christian philosophy also demands modeling the character of Christ. Our questioners ought to be able to see Christ in us, the only hope for a lost world. His presence in us ought to be observed by those He brings to us as we answer their questions.

Guy Doud, the 1986 National Teacher of the Year, authored a book entitled *Molder of Dreams*. In it he reflects upon his conversion and writes about the tremendous influence his eighth grade math teacher, Mr. Kopka, had on his life. He said,

Mr. Kopka never pushed his faith on me. His testimony was the example of his life. I've since learned a poem that applies to Mr. Kopka:

Sermons We See

I'd rather see a sermon than hear one any day;
I'd rather you walk with me than merely tell the way.
The eye's a better pupil and more willing than the ear,
Fine counsel is confusing, but example's always clear (p. 83).

Hence, character precedes content in apologetics; but what about the answers to questions concerning the nature and character of God in light of evil and injustice? It was Peter Kreeft who reminded us that,

Legacy of Truth: If God ... Why Evil?

There is nothing more pointless than an answer to a question that is not fully understood, fully posed. We are far too impatient with questions, and therefore far too shallow in appreciating answers (Kreeft, *Making Sense Out of Suffering*, p.27).