

*I form the light, and create darkness:
I make peace, and create evil:
I the LORD do all these things.
(Isaiah 45:7)*

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Enigma of Evil and Divine Justice

The persistent presence of evil in the world has been perplexing believers in every age. If there is a good God, why does He permit evil? Is He not powerful enough to prevent evil? Many people say that they do not believe in God because they do not see how a loving God could possibly allow evil and suffering among his creatures. This is probably the most frequently raised objection to belief in God. This objection is particularly real to someone who has experienced “undeserved” evil first hand – such as an experience of being raped, an experience of being brutally assaulted because of mistaken identity, an experience of the personal loss of a loved one in an earthquake (natural evil) or in a premeditated murder (moral evil). A believer may become bitter and even turn atheistic in circumstances such as these. Some may say that evil is an illusion, but to someone who has encountered it, evil is real indeed. If there is a God, why is He (seemingly) not bothered at all in the daily events of the world most of the time?

In many an attempt to find the answers to this “problem of evil” many believers are careful not to attribute the reason for the presence of evil directly to God. Out of reverence, we attempt to shield God from being the cause of evil. But is this logical, necessary and realistic? Is this a denial of an obvious conclusion? Accepting that evils are part and parcel of life and accepting the belief that God exists and He is the One who created everything, then the logical conclusion is that He must be responsible for all that He created, including evil.

Since we are creatures created in God’s own image, we possess freewill, as most of us acknowledge. And creatures who possess

freewill are free not only to love God but also to hate, reject or ignore Him, and to act in any manner they so wish. Human nature being what it is, some if not much of such free acts have doubtless been the cause of moral evils – to oneself as well as to others. A drunkard, one might say, causes harm to himself and his habit of getting drunk causes hardship to his own family. Both harm and hardship are aspects of evil. Evil obviously comes also from our own lusts (*James 1:14-16*) resulting from our own free actions. Yet without freewill we would be incapable of entering into a personal meaningful relationship with fellow humans and with God. Human freedom is therefore said to be essential to sustaining a personal relationship with God and man. Quite obviously, there is much to commend this view.

What about natural evil such as earthquake, landslide and flood? These have frequently been called “acts of God” – implying that God directly and willingly caused every one of them. Did not God create the world as it is? If so, is He not ultimately responsible for the risks of calamities? Some would say that this is a fallen world, a result of the “original sin” of our first parents who should therefore be blamed for the resultant evil we all now experience. If only they had not eaten of the forbidden fruit...! If only ...! Maybe we should blame Satan as well.

Being quite used (in my early years) to thinking that God was the author of good and not of evil, it came as a surprise to me on seeing scriptures that say God Himself created evil!

I form the light, and *create darkness*: I make peace, and *create evil*: I the LORD *do all these things*.
(*Isaiah 45:7 KJV*)

Behold, I have created the smith who blows the fire of coals, and brings forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. (*Isaiah 54:16*)

See now that I, even I, am he, There is no god with me. I kill, and I make alive. I wound, and I heal. There is no one who can deliver out of my hand. (*Deut 32:39*)

As I reflected on the above and other similar scriptures, it is evident that God does not evade responsibility for His creation and all that

happens therein. It is clear to me that there is no need for His creatures to defend God unnecessarily, and as a consequence limit our sight on only a small part of the whole picture. A poem*¹ written by Sydney Carter in 1915 seems to point to the crux of the matter – the plan of God:

You can blame it onto Adam,
You can blame it onto Eve,
You can blame it on the apple,
But that I can't believe.
It was God that made the Devil
And the woman and the man,
And there wouldn't be an apple
If it wasn't in the plan.

Yes, all that was created and occurring must be in accord with the overall plan of God. Satan did not come around to frustrate God's good works. It is hard to believe any creature could ever do that, as God is supreme. What then is the plan? If we look into the book of Genesis, some early clues can be extracted from it.

Among God's creation was a tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which was forbidden to our first parents. They may eat the fruits of other trees but not those of this forbidden tree, so they were told shortly after they were created. There was a warning given: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. (Hebrew: dying thou shalt die)" (*Gen 2:17 KJV*)

The serpent (representing Satan) was introduced and it was "more subtle than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made."

And the serpent said unto the woman: "Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which [is] in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your *eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*" (*Gen 3:2-5 KJV*)

We all know what happened next: Eve and Adam ate, as the tree appeared “good for food, and that it [was] pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make [one] wise.” Their eyes “were opened” and they knew they were naked and they made a covering of leaves to cover themselves. God came and checked on them, and found the parties guilty of disobedience.

The serpent beguiled Eve and was by God “cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field” and “upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life.” God said further: “And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (*Gen 3:14-15 KJV*).

To the woman, God said: “I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire [shall be] to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.” (*Gen 3:16 KJV*)

And to Adam God said: “cursed [is] the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat [of] it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou [art], and unto dust shalt thou return. (*Gen 3:17-19 KJV*)

Yahweh God made coats of skins for Adam and for his wife, and clothed them. (*Gen 3:21*)

And the LORD God said: “*Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil*: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore, the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.” (*Gen 3:22-24 KJV*)

Let us now observe a few points from the narrative and be prepared to face the issues squarely. All things were created by God and what He had newly created He called ‘good’ and ‘very good’ in Genesis

chapter 1. God was happy with His new creation, effected over six days.

How Satan the devil came about was not mentioned in the Genesis account. Some commentators believe that Satan was originally a good angel but pride entered into him and he fell along with some other angels to become the leader of this renegade group of spirit beings. However, we read in the book of Genesis (3:1) that the serpent as such was one of the creatures God created.

Whichever the case, Satan was there in the form of (or speaking through) a serpent at the time of the creation of Adam and Eve. The newly created couple must have been in a state of innocence, without experience and placed in paradise on earth where they had everything going for them. How were they to learn? Were they to simply enjoy good carefree life in paradise? Were they to be spoon-fed all their lives?

God gave an injunction “do not eat it” along with the reason “you will die if you eat it.” Did Adam and Eve understand clearly what God said? Satan contradicted God by saying “you will not die if you eat it” (a lie) followed by saying “you will be as gods, knowing good and evil if you do” (a truth, surprisingly, as confirmed by God after the event). Satan mixed a lie with a truth and the couple fell for his subtlety. How could a pair of “young” minds match the skill of a subtle Satan? The conclusion is foregone. The couple might have gone against God’s expressed will, but they did not know of God’s hidden intention – that they eat of the tree and suffer the consequences.

Here was a single tree producing two contrasting qualities: good *and* evil. Our first parents and all their offspring after them are to learn to know and experience good and evil by means of contrasts. We do not know light without darkness, neither do we appreciate joy without sorrow, comfort without pain. Contrasts seem necessary and intended for our learning in the order of things God planned. Adam and Eve probably know about light and darkness from the daily recurrence of day and night. But they did not know good although they were surrounded by it since there was no contrast with evil before the serpent came along. Therefore, God provided the means for the experience of good and evil – so that in the end man may appreciatively respond to His love and likewise to interact with

fellowmen in a spirit of love. Love of God and love of neighbours. These two great guidelines for living (on which all moral laws derive) seems to be the object lesson for man's life experience first set in motion in the Garden of Eden.

Here again in *Genesis 3:22* we learn that man is *to become like God*, to know good and evil. The theomorphic image of man is reinforced, surprisingly, *after* "the fall" which was anticipated. If man had not eaten of the forbidden tree, he would not have become more like God, strange as this may sound. This conclusion appears plainly inescapable if we believe the scriptures quoted. Compare the words in italics in the two verses *Gen 3:5* (those spoken by the Serpent) and *Gen 3:22* (those spoken by God).

Going back to chapter 1 of Genesis (*1:26-28 KJV*), we are reminded that man is made in God's image (and this is repeated for emphasis):

And God said, Let us make man *in our image, after our likeness*: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his [own] image, *in the image of God* created he him; male and female created he them. And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

Can we find subsequent scriptures to confirm that the "fall of man" is within the preordained plan of God? Yes. In *Romans 11:32*, we read:

For God hath concluded them all (mankind) in unbelief,
that he might have mercy upon all.

In *Isaiah 46:9-10*:

Remember the former things of old: for I [am] God, and [there is] none else; [I am] God, and [there is] none like me, *Declaring the end from the beginning*, and from ancient times [the things] that are not [yet] done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure.

In *Rom 8:19-21 (NIV)*:

The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. *For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it*, in hope that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.

From the Genesis narrative, we see that God made coats of skins to cover the nakedness of Adam and Even after their act of disobedience (*Gen 3:21*). The coats must have been made from an existing animal (a lamb) killed for the purpose. This presages the need and plan for a Redeemer to come onto the worldly scene subsequently to die for mankind. Moreover, the “enmity” placed by God between the serpent and the woman and between the serpent’s seed and the woman’s seed (*Gen 3:15*) alludes to the continuing tussle (for a period of time until the consummation of God’s plan) between good and evil and the need for Christ’s redeeming sacrifice – which was foreknown or pre-planned.

In *Rev 22:13*, Christ (long after his resurrection and ascension into heaven) says:

I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

Children of God

There are many scriptures which indicate that humans are to become children of God, again reinforcing the theomorphic view of man, as emphasised in this book. Some of these scriptures are:

But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become God’s children, to those who believe in his name: who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.
(*John 1:12-13*)

For you are all children of God, through faith in Christ Jesus.
(Gal 3:26)

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are the children of God.
(Rom 8:14)

Children of God are to learn lessons in this life to prepare them for future work on earth and in the heavens after this life:

For they can't die any more, for they are like the angels, and are children of God, being children of the resurrection.
(Luke 20:36)

and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ; if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified with him.
(Rom 8:17)

that the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God.
(Rom 8:21)

It is for discipline that you endure. God deals with you as with children, for what son is there whom his father doesn't discipline?
(Heb 12:7)

The above last verse from the book of Hebrews provides the key to the existence of evil, to all the sufferings that all of us encounter in this life. The existence of evil seems to be needed as a temporary measure to bring about an end desired by God, an end that results in us becoming full-fledged children of God.

What is sin and its effects (wages)?

Sin is often defined as transgression of the law, of God's instructions, or lawlessness.

Everyone who sins also commits lawlessness. Sin is lawlessness.
(1John 3:4)

The end result of sin is death. Death is contrasted with eternal life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Rom 6:23)

Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned. *(Rom 5:12 CLV)*

We recall that if Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he would die. Adam did not die immediately after eating the forbidden fruit, but the death process was then initiated. This dying or ageing process is passed on to all his children (mankind). Growth followed by decay and death – mortality. This seems to be the physical basis for the sins of mankind, as *Rom 5:12* indicates.

Death

Death is a cessation of an individual's life, the dissolution of the individual identity back into the raw ingredients from which it was composed. A living animal becomes a corpse and decays into dead matter and soil. Likewise man. Man's spirit returns to God, his sensations (soul) disappear and the body decays. We have covered this in chapter 4.

Sweat and toil is the lot of mankind by God's intention (*Gen 3:17-19*), not by accident or chance. In the mercy of God, death follows a relatively short lifespan of sweat and toil of man. He then awaits his resurrection, a form of judgement and, being cleansed by fire, an eventual glorification (or salvation) to become a full-fledged mature son of God at the end of God's plan if not earlier. I will quote scriptures that present and support this view as we proceed.

Contrary to what I believed earlier, I discovered that today is not the only day of salvation for everyone. The traditional rendering of *2Cor 6:2* is:

For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now [is] the accepted time; behold, now [is] the day of salvation.

The article “the” is not in the original Greek. Two literal translations (YLT and CLV) give the rendering of the last phrase as “a day of salvation” in the above scripture. If this is not the only day of salvation, then there must be future days of salvation.

Universalism (in brief)

The most comprehensive set of supporting scriptures for universal salvation comes from *1Cor 15:20-28*:

But now Christ has been raised from the dead. He became the first fruits of those who are asleep. For since death came by man, the resurrection of the dead also came by man. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then those who are Christ’s, at his coming. Then the end comes, when he will deliver up the Kingdom to God, even the Father; when he will have abolished all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy that will be abolished is death. For, “He put all things in subjection under his feet.” But when he says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that he is excepted who subjected all things to him. When all things have been subjected to him, then the Son will also himself be subjected to him who subjected all things to him, that God may be all in all. (*1Cor 15:20-28*)

Every verse in the above scriptures is pregnant with meaning. The last chapter of this book will meditate on the topic of “universalism” in depth.

“Those who are Christ’s” at the present time is the first batch of people to be saved. This is to be followed by others in later time periods.

Time Periods

That there are ages planned by our Heavenly Father for the salvation of all is obscured by inconsistent translation of the Hebrew *olam* and

the Greek *aion* in the popular versions. Both these words are usually translated eternal or everlasting. In the original Hebrew and Greek contexts, these words usually refer to a period of time, an age, with a beginning and an end, and it can be as short as three days. Refer to Appendix 1 for a brief exposition of the ages (*olam* and *aion*).

For an in-depth treatment of the topic of Universal Salvation, check out “Universalist’s Book of Reference” 1853 Edition by E.E. Guild available from www.tentmaker.org.

Another stumbling block is the erroneous doctrine of Hell which mars the character of God. This subject has been treated in chapter 4.

In the common concept of divine punishment of the wicked in hellfire, it is argued that God is holy and He must punish those who of their own freewill chose to sin and rejected the salvation offered by God. They have been given their chance. This argument in effect says that God is willing to save all, but is impotent to do so. It precludes the consideration or possibility that the loving and powerful God is able to convert His enemies into friends. Moreover, this concept ignores the obvious: that the punishment does not befit the crime.

Divine Justice

Our popular perception is that those who sin without repentance will be condemned eternally. The Bible tells me that God’s judgment and “condemnation” is only temporary, and it is not alien to the judicial system of mankind, which is essentially derived, historically, from God’s laws given to the Israelites of old.

Paul tells us to submit to the civil authorities because they are appointed by God.

Let every soul be in subjection to the higher authorities, for there is no authority except from God, and those who exist are ordained by God. Therefore he who resists the authority, withstands the ordinance of God; and those who withstand will receive to themselves judgment. For rulers are not a terror to the good work, but to the evil. Do you desire to have no fear of the authority? Do that which is good, and you will

have praise from the same, for he is a servant of God to you for good. But if you do that which is evil, be afraid, for he doesn't bear the sword in vain; for he is a servant of God, an avenger for wrath to him who does evil. Therefore, you need to be in subjection, not only because of the wrath, but also for conscience' sake.

(Rom 13:1-5)

For this reason, you also pay taxes, for they are servants of God's service, attending continually on this very thing. Give therefore to everyone what you owe: taxes to whom taxes are due; customs to whom customs; respect to whom respect; honor to whom honor. Owe no one anything, except to love one another; for he who loves his neighbor has fulfilled the law.

(Rom 13:6-8)

God even equates His chastening to that of a human father.

You shall consider in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so Yahweh your God chastens you.

(Deut 8:5)

Parental chastening is alike God's chastening; it is done with a view to correction of the wrongdoer. No man in his right mind chastens his children with torture.

God chastens to heal (e.g. *Isaiah 19:22*).

In our judicial system, an incarcerated man is usually given a prison term of a limited period, e.g. 10 years. A person serving a prison term is not dissimilar to the kind of judgment God will mete out to men. Our popular creed has added too much to God's judgments. In scripture, all the "judging against" of mankind sits very well within the context of the time periods in the outworking of God's plan which has not ended. It is only when Paul talks about the consummation point that condemnation of or "judging against" anyone has ended. Therefore, it is not forever – when everybody will have been amended, fully reconciled to God.

The foundation of God's judgments and righteous laws has been laid out to the Israelites in the Old Testament scriptures.

Behold, I have taught you statutes and ordinances, even as Yahweh my God commanded me, that you should do so in the midst of the land where you go in to possess it. Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people. For what great nation is there, that has a god so near to them, as Yahweh our God is whenever we call on him? What great nation is there, that has statutes and ordinances so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day? Only take heed to yourself, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things which your eyes saw, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life; but make them known to your children and your children's children;
(Deut 4:5-9)

Look at the just law concerning bond servants.

If your brother, a Hebrew man, or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, and serves you six years; then in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. When you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty: you shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, and out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress; as Yahweh your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a bondservant in the land of Egypt, and Yahweh your God redeemed you: therefore I command you this thing today. It shall be, if he tells you, I will not go out from you; because he loves you and your house, because he is well with you; then you shall take an awl, and thrust it through his ear to the door, and he shall be your servant forever. Also to your female servant you shall do likewise. It shall not seem hard to you, when you let him go free from you; for to the double of the hire of a hireling has he served you six years: and Yahweh your God will bless you in all that you do.
(Deut 15:12-18)

There is a law of equal treatment concerning strangers.

If a stranger lives as a foreigner with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who lives as a foreigner with you shall be to you as the native-born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you lived as foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am Yahweh your God.

(Lev 19:33-34)

Note also the law regarding debtors.

At the end of every seven years you shall make a release. This is the manner of the release: every creditor shall release that which he has lent to his neighbor; he shall not exact it of his neighbor and his brother; because Yahweh's release has been proclaimed.

(Deut 15:1-2)

Widows and orphans are not to be taken advantage of.

You shall not take advantage of any widow or fatherless child.

(Exodus 22:22)

For Yahweh your God, he is God of gods, and Lord of lords, the great God, the mighty, and the awesome, who doesn't regard persons, nor takes reward. He does execute justice for the fatherless and widow, and loves the foreigner, in giving him food and clothing. Therefore love the foreigner; for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt.

(Deut 10:17-19)

Punishment of the wicked is not to go beyond 40 stripes.

If there be a controversy between men, and they come to judgment, and *the judges* judge them; then they shall justify the righteous, and condemn the wicked; and it shall be, if the wicked man be worthy to be beaten, that the judge shall cause him to lie down, and to be beaten before his face, according to his wickedness, by number. Forty stripes he may give him, he shall not exceed; lest, if he should exceed, and beat him above these with many stripes, then your brother should seem vile to you.

(Deut 25:1-3)

Even the law regarding animals injured by human negligence is prescribed.

If a man opens a pit, or if a man digs a pit and doesn't cover it, and a bull or a donkey falls into it, the owner of the pit shall make it good. He shall give money to its owner, and the dead animal shall be his.

(Exodus 21:33-34)

"An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth"

The above phrase has at times been quoted by critics out of context and wrong impressions have been given (such as tit for tat). It actually refers to just punishment and fair compensation in the Old Israelite Laws, and some details (such as quoted above) are given in the Bible. A more complete phrase is: "eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burning for burning, wound for wound, and bruise for bruise" *(Exodus 21:24)*.

Further examples that illustrate the above "fair compensation principle" are:

If a man strikes his servant's eye, or his maid's eye, and destroys it, he shall let him go free for his eye's sake.

(Exodus 21:26)

If he strikes out his male servant's tooth, or his female servant's tooth, he shall let him go free for his tooth's sake.

(verse 27)

If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull shall surely be stoned, and its flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the bull shall not be held responsible.

(verse 28)

But if the bull had a habit of goring in the past, and it has been testified to its owner, and he has not kept it in, but it has killed a man or a woman, the bull shall be stoned, and its owner shall also be put to death.

(verse 29)

If a ransom is laid on him, then he shall give for the redemption of his life whatever is laid on him. Whether it has gored a son or has gored a daughter, according to this judgment it shall be done to him.
(verses 30-31)

If one man's bull injures another's, so that it dies, then they shall sell the live bull, and divide its price; and they shall also divide the dead animal. Or if it is known that the bull was in the habit of goring in the past, and its owner has not kept it in, he shall surely pay bull for bull, and the dead animal shall be his own.
(Exodus 21:35-36)

If a man steals an ox or a sheep, and kills it, or sells it; he shall pay five oxen for an ox, and four sheep for a sheep.
(Exodus 22:1)

If the stolen property is found in his hand alive, whether it is ox, donkey, or sheep, he shall pay double.
(verse 4)

If a man causes a field or vineyard to be eaten, and lets his animal loose, and it grazes in another man's field, he shall make restitution from the best of his own field, and from the best of his own vineyard.
(verse 5)

For every matter of trespass, whether it be for ox, for donkey, for sheep, for clothing, or for any kind of lost thing, about which one says, 'This is mine,' the cause of both parties shall come before God. He whom God condemns shall pay double to his neighbor. (Exodus 22:9)

None of the above scriptures refer even remotely to "revenge" or "tit for tat." The thought behind them is fair compensation.

Cities of Refuge

After the death of Moses, Joshua was chosen to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. Among the things that Joshua was to do was to set up cities of refuge (God mentioned to Moses earlier) where

any manslayer that killed a person unintentionally might flee to for safety.

Yahweh spoke to Joshua, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, saying, 'Assign the cities of refuge, of which I spoke to you by Moses, that the manslayer who kills any person accidentally or unintentionally may flee there. They shall be to you for a refuge from the avenger of blood.

(Jos 20:1-3)

He shall flee to one of those cities, and shall stand at the entrance of the gate of the city, and declare his cause in the ears of the elders of that city. They shall take him into the city with them, and give him a place, that he may live among them.

(Josh 20:4)

If the avenger of blood pursue after him, then they shall not deliver up the manslayer into his hand; because he struck his neighbor unintentionally, and didn't hate him before. *(Josh 20:5)*

He shall dwell in that city until he stands before the congregation for judgment, until the death of the high priest that shall be in those days. Then the manslayer shall return, and come to his own city, and to his own house, to the city he fled from.

(Josh 20:6)

An example of unintentional killing is given:

This is the case of the manslayer, that shall flee there and live: whoever kills his neighbor unawares, and didn't hate him in time past; as when a man goes into the forest with his neighbor to chop wood, and his hand fetches a stroke with the axe to cut down the tree, and the head slips from the handle, and lights on his neighbor, so that he dies; he shall flee to one of these cities and live. *(Deut 19:4-5)*

The Law of Moses was very strict:

One who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death,
(Exodus 21:12)

Provision is made for those who unintentionally killed another, as seen in the above scriptures, as here in the next verse, we see that God Himself assumes responsibility for the accidental killing:

but not if it is unintentional, but God allows it to happen: then I will appoint you a place where he shall flee.

(Exodus 21:13)

The phrase “God allows it to happen” in *WEB* is translated more literally as “God delivers him into his hand” in several other translations.

(YLT) and God hath brought to his hand

(MSG) if it was an accident, an ‘act of God’

Humans frequently consider major catastrophes as acts of God. Here in revelation, this idea seems to be present and it points to the responsibility of God for all the risks inherent in His creation, particularly the accidental deaths of all humans. These “acts of God” could not refer to some inscrutable process of determinism, as revelation also admits of the concepts of “time and chance” happening to all, as we have seen in the previous chapter. The above verse clearly refers to an unintentional non-malicious act, which is a catastrophe or calamity by the nature of things. The verse would therefore be more accurately translated as: God “catastrophised” him into his hands, or possibly God “calamitised” or “outcomed” or “risked” him into his hands (if such verbs could be used in the English Language to translate the Hebrew *’ânâh* word for word). In all nine usages of the word *’anah* in the Old Testament, negative connotations are always indicated. The word “risk” would fit well into all these instances. The relevant part of the verse (Exodus 21:13) could therefore appropriately read “but God risked him into his hands.”

The obvious answer is that full responsibility is assumed by God for the catastrophes and risks allowed in the nature of His creation. Hence there was the provision of the cities of refuge. And He has provided the Remedy, ultimately. The person who died accidentally (as well as all other deaths) will be raised to life again eventually and more than compensated for with glorious eternal life (see the last

chapter), where there will be no such catastrophes in the new order of things.

The manslayer was considered a free man upon the death of the high priest, who prefigures Jesus Christ, the true High Priest (*Hebrews 3:1, 4:14, 6:18-20*) for the refuge of mankind.

The above sampling of laws given to ancient Israel demonstrates the just judgments of God. These laws do not come anywhere near in any aspect to the popular doctrine of hellfire torment.

Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near to me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and *their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men.*
(*Isaiah 29:13*)

How apt this scripture seems to describe the current situation in the world today. The “burning” in “hell” as mentioned in the Bible is not the type envisioned by orthodoxy, as we have covered in an earlier chapter. The current teaching (though by no means accepted by every believer) has a strong sway on people because we have been exposed for many years under the traditions of men. Our feelings seem to be benumbed by such a teaching.

And no wonder, because we also believe in the impassibility of God, as taught in classical theology. That is, God has no passions, or God’s emotions and feelings are extremely unlike human ones. Yet, in reading the Bible even cursorily, one can find that the Bible God is portrayed with human emotions, sometimes very strong ones too.

Christ is said to be the express image of the Father. And He experienced all the emotions that humans experienced, as we see described in the New Testament. We are also told that Christ came to earth to reveal, not hide, the Father. Therefore, there would be much likeness between Christ’s emotions and those of His Father’s. If God sees His children doing serious wrongs, can God avoid being not grieved?

In *Genesis 6:5-6*, we read that God was “grieved to His heart” in seeing that “every imagination of the thoughts of [man’s] heart *was* only evil continually”.

In *Ephesians 5:30*, believers are exhorted “not to grieve the Holy Spirit”.

In *John chapter 11*, there was a person named Lazarus whom Jesus loved. He died and there was mourning for him. When Jesus came to the wake, he was naturally touched by those weeping for Lazarus, and Jesus wept too (before He raised Lazarus from the dead).

It is sometimes argued that God “sovereignly chooses” to have these emotions, that He can “emote” them in any manner as and when He likes, not involuntarily but intentionally purposeful. It is hard for me to envisage a genuine God by such arguments, which quite obviously are presented to square with the erroneous hellfire doctrine, in effect implying that God’s love is not true love, that God can deaden his emotions on looking at endless sufferings, as He is supposed to be impassible. But God must inherently possess these natural emotions, even as His creatures possess them, as we have inferred from the astounding scientific discoveries described in chapter 2, not to mention strong scriptural support. I cannot understand how an emotionless God choose to have emotions. Neither can I understand how a less-emotional God could choose to have more emotions. God self exists, He does not choose to exist. He did not come from nothing. God cannot *not* be in being what He is, in the nature of His self-existence. He cannot deny Himself. Emotions are unavoidably inherent in a living God, not a dead one. And there are numerous scriptures portraying God with emotions. God’s children, made in His image, are more like Him than we imagine. Conversely, God is like His children, His mirror images, in more ways than we have been taught to believe.

God has given man (made in His image) conscience and moral sense (See *Rom 2:14-15*). Our own feelings of love and pity are therefore a safe guide to understanding God’s feelings.

Not infrequently, when a parent chastises his children, he too feels the pain in the act of discipline. Likewise, it hurts God when He chastises His people. In *Isaiah 63:8-9*, we are told that in the afflictions of those He loved, God Himself was also afflicted (suffered

similarly). God cried too! The parental sorrow of God is evident in the following scripture:

Daughter of my people, gird you with sackcloth, and wallow yourself in ashes: make you mourning, as for an only son, most bitter lamentation; for the destroyer shall suddenly come on us. (*Jer 6:26*)

The “us” in the above scripture refers to God and Israel. God puts Himself on the same level as Israel, sharing Israel’s suffering. This assures us that God chastens in love and to heal. God felt the sorrow in His heart when He disciplined His children. Note God’s exclamation in *Jeremiah 12:7* – “I have forsaken my house, I have cast off my heritage; I have given *the dearly beloved of my soul* into the hand of her enemies.”

Evil and the Cross

The trials and traumas of the present life are many, amidst occasional moments of joy. To the vicissitudes of nature is added the selfish actions of humans, the destructiveness of their war instruments, and this problem is compounded by the schemes of the evil spirits. Pain and sufferings are real, whether caused by chance events or by premeditated motives from men, beasts or spirits. Some persons may suffer these more than others. Rightly or wrongly, many may think that this is an unjust world. Some even say: if God is God he is not good, if God is good he is not God.

But, which sufferer can gainsay God when the greatest suffering of all time was borne by God’s own Son? When each of us come to realise the reality of “The Passion of Christ,” we will all bow our knees in admiration and respect and sing praises to the One who knew (and more than experienced) our trials – and by divine implication had borne them all.

If God shares our suffering, why would He conceive a plan that would result in His own suffering? The question is no longer academic: why do good people suffer or why do innocent children suffer? Rather, why has God permitted a horrific human history of blood, tragedy, pain and mental anguish that would just tear at His heart of feelings?

The ultimate answer, to the author, must refer back to God's first act of creation reflected in the concept of *ex-Deo*. He gave of Himself that others might live (come into existence). God Himself cannot die to become another; so the best He could do He did – He gave away portions and portions of Himself. He sacrificed His "flesh" (spirit substance) so to speak! Portions of Him died to become others. Love is an emotion that expresses itself in giving life (existence) to others. The first Other that came to be granted life is Christ (*John 5:26, 8:42, Rev 3:14*). Christ becomes God's "only begotten Son" (*1John 4:9, John 3:16*). To demonstrate this concept of *ex-Deo* vividly for the sake of all mankind, Christ did what His Father could not do; He in real terms fully "emptied Himself" (*Phil 2:7-8*) of His divine nature to become the least human entity (an embryo in the womb of his surrogate mother*²). He grew up, lived a normal human life acquainted with sorrows, suffered and died in agony under torture on the cross. This sacrifice of the Son gives to us more dramatically a glimpse of the sacrifice first offered by the Father. The air we breathe, the food we eat, the things we enjoy, all came from God's sacrifice of His Being for the life of all. Greater abundance for all is yet in store in the future.

In view of Christ's personal sacrifice that brings home the first sacrifice of God, Christ is highly exalted by God and given "a name above every name" (*Phil 2:9-10*). Along with this pre-eminence of Christ among all creatures, all judgment too is given to Christ (*John 5:22*) by virtue of all the sufferings that He endured and are familiar with personally. He lived and suffered as a human, and therefore He knew what human life and suffering is. He experienced it. If anyone suffered, he could perhaps see that there is Someone else who suffered more. We find comfort in the hope that we are groomed to become full-fledged children of God in God's plan.

For whom the Lord loves, he chastens, and scourges every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you endure. God deals with you as with children, for what son is there whom his father doesn't discipline? But if you are without discipline, of which all have been made partakers, then are you illegitimate, and not children. Furthermore, we had the fathers of our flesh to chasten us, and we paid them respect. Shall we not much rather be in subjection to the Father of spirits, and live? For they indeed, for a few days, punished us

as seemed good to them; but he for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness. All chastening seems for the present to be not joyous but grievous; yet afterward it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been exercised thereby.

(Heb 12:6-11)

This is the history of the generations of Noah. Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time. Noah walked with God.

(Gen 6:9)

When Abram was ninety-nine years old, Yahweh appeared to Abram, and said to him, "I am God Almighty. Walk before me, and be blameless.

(Gen 17:1)

Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.

(Matt 5:48)

Then Jesus said to his disciples, "If anyone desires to come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.

(Matt 16:24)

For it became him, for whom are all things, and through whom are all things, in bringing many children to glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

(Heb 2:10)

whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus;

(Col 1:28)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which will be revealed toward us. For the creation waits with eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed. For the creation was subjected to vanity, not of its own will, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself also will be

delivered from the bondage of decay into the liberty of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now. Not only so, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for adoption, the redemption of our body.

(Rom 8:18-23)

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, through the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. For as the sufferings of Christ abound to us, even so our comfort also abounds through Christ. But if we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation. If we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you the patient enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer. Our hope for you is steadfast, knowing that, since you are partakers of the sufferings, so also are you of the comfort.

(2Cor 1:3-7)

But because you are partakers of Christ's sufferings, rejoice; that at the revelation of his glory you also may rejoice with exceeding joy.

(1Peter 4:13)

The story of Job

In the Bible, we notice that God Himself agonises over the evils that men do. Yet, being sovereign, He not only allows evil but directly uses it to achieve His ends. A case in point is the poignant story of Job, a righteous patriarch of antiquity, who was afflicted severely in a series of losses (loss of children, wealth and then health) in a test of his faithfulness to God. His sufferings were the result of a wager between God and Satan, the wager being initiated by God Himself, but unknown to Job. Job was a man "blameless and upright, and one who feared God, and turned away from evil" (*Job 1:1*). He was prosperous and had everything going for him. So, was this prosperity (as Satan subtly alleged) the only reason for Job's faithfulness? Satan was allowed by God in the testing of Job, just as Satan was also an instrument of God in the Garden of Eden in the testing of the first human couple.

In a quick succession of losses of property and all his children (1:13-19), Job took the matter calmly.

Then Job arose, and tore his robe, and shaved his head, and fell down on the ground, and worshiped. He said, "Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. Yahweh gave, and Yahweh has taken away. Blessed be the name of Yahweh." In all this, Job did not sin, nor charge God with wrongdoing.
(Job 1:20-22)

Job was then stricken with a severe disease, and his wife seeing his anguish asked him to "renounce God, and die." But Job retorted:

"What? Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?" In all this Job didn't sin with his lips.
(Job 2:9-10)

Job recognized that both good and evil comes from God. He did not "miss the mark" or fail to realize that God's ways are beyond man's understanding. In the pains of the disease that he was tormented with, he longed for death. He knew he was blameless in his life by the standards of the day, and he could not comprehend why he was so severely afflicted (*chapter 9*). He wanted to know why God contended with him (10:2), and he desired to reason with God (13:3). He wanted to know what sin if any that he committed to merit the pains he suffered (13:23). He vigorously expressed his blamelessness to three friends who came to visit him. He had a firm hope that he would yet be released from his misery and an opportunity to speak with God (14:13-15).

Yet it seemed to him that "there is no justice" (19:7), a phrase that is often uttered in deep sufferings. Notwithstanding his just complaints, he strongly believed that his Redeemer lives and one day he would literally see God in his flesh (19:25-26), believing also there is a judgment day in the future (19:29). Looking at his own distressing state, he could not help complaining that the wicked seemed to live to old age and waxed powerful (21:7-15). Job apparently knew that his complaints might be considered rebellious yet he wanted to see God to find the answer to his predicament (*chapter 23*). As pain was prolonged, his cry quite naturally became more vigorous.

A fourth friend came into the scene to remind him that a person's righteousness could not be more than his Creator's and that Job should wait for Him (35:2, 14). After all, there are actions by God which we could not comprehend (37:5). God finally answered Job out of a whirlwind, pointing out the wonders of the creation that Job could not understand (*chapters 38-41*). God did not answer Job's questions on why he was made to suffer. God did not point out any sin that Job had committed. Yet Job submitted in repentance to his outbursts without further complaints. In the end, Job received more physical blessings than he had lost (42:12), and perhaps gained a deeper appreciation of God's ways, and learned patience in an intimate way, being moulded through sufferings towards perfection.

The mention of a "ransom" in *Job 33:24* is an inspired insight that points quite obviously to a saviour. In later scriptures (*Heb 2:6-12*), we read of the One Who was made perfect through sufferings, and in Whose sufferings all believers participate to some degree.

Not only this, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering works perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope; and hope doesn't disappoint us, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us. (*Rom 5:3-5*)

Job did not lose sight of the hope in the thick of his sufferings.

But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives. In the end, he will stand upon the earth. After my skin is destroyed, then in my flesh shall I see God, Whom I, even I, shall see on my side. My eyes shall see, and not as a stranger. My heart is consumed within me. (*Job 19:25-27*)

Whatever losses (such as the loss of lives) that could not be compensated to Job (or to anyone for that matter) in his lifetime will yet be more than amply compensated in the far future at the consummation of the divine scheme of things. Every loss of human life will be recovered and more than restored. After all, it is the Father who loses his child. The straying sheep is the Shepherd's loss; the missing coin is the Owner's loss. See the last chapter.

But as it is written, "Things which an eye didn't see, and an ear didn't hear, which didn't enter into the heart of man, these God has prepared for those who love him."

(1Cor 2:9)

It may be objected that if God is in control of everything, and if He will save everyone in the end, He is just playing a game. It is admittedly true that the Divine Potter does whatever He desires with the clay (Rom 9:21). If this be a "game" it is but a game of love, and since it is so seriously played as to involve the untold sufferings, agony and torturous death of God's own begotten Son, it no longer can be considered a game. The imparting of life to those brought into existence to share the sorrows and joys and subsequent glory is but an educational process in the exhibition of Divine Love which can only be fully appreciated when God comes to dwell with men. The moulding of the clay is not a game; it is serious work (John 5:17). Through the sufferings of both, God and man are reconciled.

Footnotes:

**1. Quoted in a sermon given by Edwin A. Lane in November 2002 in Milton.*

http://users.rcn.com/jpmilton/Sermons/2002/20021117-Evil.htm#_top

**2. I first heard of this concept from the late Dr Ernest L Martin.*

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