

Defending the Faith



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April 2017

Why Does God Allow Evil and Suffering?

There are people suffering everywhere all the time. They suffer from pain, illness, loss, heartache, anxiety, fear and depression. Why must we suffer in this life? Why does evil exist? These questions have been raised time and time again, when considering the question "Does God exist?" Many refuse to believe in God simply because, if God exists and if He is a loving God, why does He allow suffering? They are angry at God. They ask why God even created evil in the first place.

God did *not* create evil. He is a loving God whose divine love is perfect, unconditional and unfathomable. Because He is a loving God, He is not capable of any evil. Evil entered our realm of existence because God gave us the gift of free will. The human race is responsible for the evil in this world. We are free to choose good or evil. Both good and evil acts have consequences. When we act in love, we spread joy and blessings. However when we commit evil acts, we cause suffering to ourselves and to others. We are not only affected by the consequences of our own choices, but our choices affect others, as well. Furthermore, we are affected by the outcomes of the choices made by our fellow human beings.

True and perfect love is only possible, if one is capable of choosing to love and give of themselves unconditionally. Without free will, we would be like robots constrained by our programming. Just as a robot is not truly capable of making a choice due to his programming, we would not be capable of choosing to love without free will. We were created to love. We were created to love God and to love all of our neighbors, our fellow human beings. When we choose to act in love, we are obeying God's will. When we choose to act contrary to God's will, we are forsaking love. Christ said, "*You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets*" (Matthew 22:37-40). These are the only two commandments Christ gave us because, if you love God and everyone, you would follow all of the other commandments. You would not steal from someone you truly love. You would not lie or cheat or gossip. You would not covet things because you do not love "things." You would not envy others because you would be happy for them.

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When God first created Adam and Eve, He offered them everything in Paradise, well, everything except the fruit of one tree. Lucifer, God's most glorious angel chose to rebel against God and when he did, he became determined to rule over humans as their god. Therefore, he promptly began tempting Adam and Eve to eat of the forbidden fruit. Eve explained, "*but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden, nor shall you touch it, or you shall die'*" *But the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not die; for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.'*" (Genesis 3:3-5). The serpent tempted Adam and Eve with pride, the desire to be like God.

From that moment forward, the dominoes began to fall. The consequences of evil choices commenced. Through this first sinful act, death entered the world. It not only affected Adam and Eve and all their descendants, including us, but it affected the entire creation. Even animals and plants die. We are all interconnected in this earthly existence. Therefore, the evil acts of one can cause suffering to many. Once evil was set in motion, it continued to affect all human beings even to this day because people continue to sin. They continue to forsake love. Evil follows the principle of cause and effect. Like the first domino in a series of events, the first act of rebellion against God set in motion all events that have led up to this moment. The darkness of evil spreads like a cancer causing hearts to harden from pride, bitterness, and unforgiveness, which cause further evil acts.

Can this cycle be broken in this world? The only way to halt the effects of evil is to respond to evil with love. Christ entered our realm of existence to halt the cycle, but not all have joined His Church of faithful believers. And even we, who have come to love Christ, struggle with sin. Therefore, evil continues in this world. However, loving Christ *does* change the cycle for individuals. A relationship with Christ can bring joy and peace into our lives. It can protect us from evil, but sometimes even those who love Christ are affected by the evil around us. We are often be saddened by the suffering we experience or observe in this world.

God is not capable of causing illness, pain, or suffering. He is a good and loving God who cannot bear evil and the suffering it causes. Nonetheless, why does God allow suffering? After all, He is God and can do anything. This is true, but God will not override our free will. As a loving God, He will never force us to love Him. Therefore, He allows events to take their course. This is necessary to allow us the gift of free will. Suffering is the result of living in a world of evil. Without suffering from the consequences of evil, we can never truly comprehend the beauty and perfection of genuine love. Just like dipping our finger into boiling oil can teach us never to do it again, God uses the consequences of sin to teach us the value of love. "*We know that all things work together for good for those who love God, who are called according to his purpose*" (Romans 8:28). Humans are the cause of evil and suffering, but God, in His mercy, turns evil into good, for those who love Him as He did with Joseph, the son of Jacob.

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Joseph was sold into slavery by his jealous brothers. He suffered for thirteen years as a slave in Egypt, but throughout those years He remained faithful to God. God gave Joseph the gift of interpreting dreams. Joseph correctly interpreted the Pharaoh's dream and was rewarded with a position as second in command to Pharaoh. He was placed in charge of the food supplies in Egypt. God knew the end from the beginning. Joseph was responsible for saving the lives of many, including his family, because he knew that seven years of plentiful harvest would be followed by seven years of drought, and he could plan the distribution of food supplies accordingly. When he was finally reunited with his brothers, he forgave them and told them, *"Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today"* (Genesis 50:20).

The capacity to love is the greatest treasure we possess. There is nothing more important and more rewarding. We suffer from all sin, our own and the sins of others, even those who came long before us. History is just a vast web of events leading up to this moment. It is not pain or suffering, which determine our destiny. It is how we respond to the pain and suffering in our lives. *"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good"* (Romans 12:21). It is God's will that we respond to suffering and evil by always doing good and showing love. According to Paul in Romans 5:3-5 *"We glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; And patience, experience; and experience, hope: And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us."* When we suffer, we seek God, and He teaches us how to endure the suffering. He teaches us patience. He allows us to experience His love through suffering by comforting us. He teaches us how to trust Him by working good in our lives out of the evil we endure. As He heals our suffering, we are brought closer to Him in a more intimate relationship. Our experiences also prepare us to be a blessing to others when we share the wisdom we gained. This is why Paul could say *"We glory in tribulation."* It is in the midst of our suffering that we experience God. We experience God's love!

We cannot fully understand the perfect, divine love of God. As hard as it is to believe, our God came into this reality and visited us. He came in person to offer us an incomprehensible love and nothing more! It is up to each and every one of us to make the decision to accept His love or reject it. And what does He ask of us in return? He only asks us to love Him and to love our neighbors. God asks us to share His love of God with others through our own actions. During this Lenten season pray for others, forgive, and show love. Remember, Christ said, *"Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened"* (Matthew 7:7-8). God answers seeking hearts.

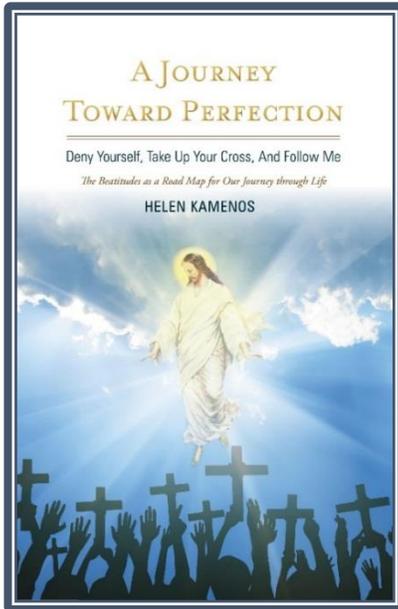
The next issue of **Defending the Faith** will focus on what it really means when we say God is Holy.

Helen Kamenos
Readers Favorite Author

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Reviews, Reviews, Reviews

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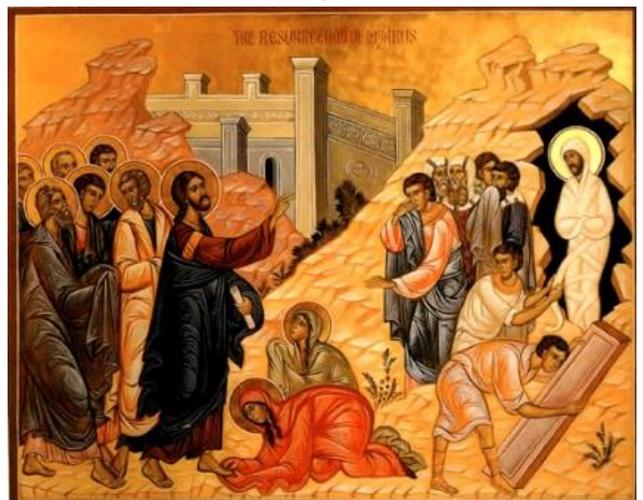
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April Book Bubble – Author Insights

The Raising of Lazarus

John 11:32-35

When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, “Lord, if you had been here, my brother (Lazarus) would not have died.” When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, “Where have you laid him?” They said to him, “Lord, come and see.” Jesus began to weep.



Those Who Mourn

To read this excerpt from my book with author insights, just follow this link:

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