

Article: JAE260

WHY DOES GOD ALLOW BAD THINGS TO HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE?

This article first appeared in the Ask Hank column of the *Christian Research Journal*, volume 27, number 3 (2004). For further information or to subscribe to the *Christian Research Journal* go to: <http://www.equip.org>

Christian celebrities who appear on shows such as *Larry King Live* are commonly asked why bad things happen to good people. At first blush, it may seem as though there are as many responses as there are religions. In reality, however, there are only three, namely, pantheism, philosophical naturalism, and theism. *Pantheism* denies the ultimate existence of good and evil because in this view god is all and all is god. *Philosophical naturalism* (the worldview undergirding evolutionism) supposes that everything is a function of random material processes, and thus there can be no such thing as good and evil in an ultimate sense. *Theism* alone has a relevant response — and only *Christian* theism can answer the question satisfactorily.

First, Christian theism acknowledges that God created the *potential* for evil when he created humans with freedom of choice. We choose to love or hate, to do good or evil. The record of history bears eloquent testimony to the fact that humans of their own free will have actualized the reality of evil through their ungodly choices.

Furthermore, without choice, love is meaningless. God is neither a cosmic rapist who forces His love on people nor a cosmic puppeteer who forces people to love Him. Instead, God, the personification of love, grants us freedom of choice. Without such freedom, we would be little more than preprogrammed robots.

Finally, the fact that God created the potential for evil by granting us freedom of choice will ultimately lead to the best of all possible worlds — a world in which “there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain” (Rev. 21:4 NIV). Those who choose Christ will be redeemed from evil by His goodness and will forever be free from sin.

If Christianity Is True, Why Are So Many Atrocities Committed in the Name of Christ?

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matt. 7:21–23 NIV).

This is a classic smokescreen question often asked to avoid having to grapple with the evidence for authentic Christianity. At best, it involves a hasty generalization. At worst, it’s a way of “poisoning the well.”

First, Christ anticipated this question long ago when He proclaimed that His followers would be recognized by the way they lived their lives (John 15:8); thus, to classify as Christian those who are responsible for instigating atrocities is to beg the question of who Christ’s disciples are to begin with. As Jesus pointed out, not everyone who calls Him *Lord* is the real deal (Matt. 7:21–23).

Furthermore, this question implies that Christianity must be false on the basis that evil atrocities have been committed in Christ’s name. There is no reason, however, why we can’t turn the argument around and claim that Christianity must be *true* because so much *good* has been done in the name of Christ. Think of the countless hospitals, schools, universities, and relief programs that have been instituted as a direct result of godly people who take the sacred name of Christ upon their lips.

Finally, those who cite atrocities fail to realize that the validity of Christianity does not rest on sinful men and women but rather on the perfection of Jesus Christ alone (Heb. 7:26; 1 Pet. 2:22). Moreover, the fact that professing Christians commit sins only serves to prove a basic premise of Christianity — namely, “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23 NIV); thus, all are in need of a Savior (1 John 3:4–5).

For further study, see Joni Eareckson Tada and Steven Estes, *When God Weeps* (Zondervan, 1997) and R. C. Sproul, *Reason to Believe* (Zondervan, 1982).

— Hank Hanegraaff