

Tsunami and the Theodicy

Selected Scripture



I'm sure that you all are aware of what happened last Sunday. As we were experiencing a snow storm that caused us to cancel church, half way around the world around 150,000 people lost their lives to a tsunami. 12 countries were affected by this deadly wave. The World Health Organization says up to five million people in the Indian Ocean region are homeless and are unable to get basic requirements they need to stay alive. The international health organization has said the tsunami death toll could double if epidemics broke out in the affected countries.

Whenever tragedies like this occur, people begin to question and attack God. I want to read to you parts of an article that appeared in the "Sydney Morning Herald" (subscription), Australia - Dec 29, 2004, written by Dr Edward Spence, who is a philosopher at the Center for Applied Philosophy and Public Ethics, at Charles Sturt University. The article was entitled: "[*Waves of Destruction Wash Away Belief in God's Benevolence*](#)":

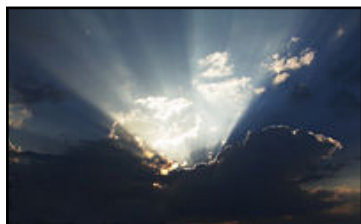


'Why did you do this to us, God? What did we do to upset you?' asked a woman in India this week, a heart wrenching question asked in common these past few days by Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus and Christians. Nothing could have prepared us for what happened when the tsunami unleashed its terror. So we seek answers where answers are hard to come by, in either secular or sacred realms.

Traditionally, the Judeo-Christian God, considered the most supreme and perfect being in the universe, has been ascribed the following necessary attributes: omniscience (all-knowing), omnipresence (present everywhere at all times and at once), omnipotence (almighty and powerful) and benevolence (all good and caring).

How, then, did a God as powerful and benevolent as this allow such a thing to happen? If he is benevolent then he cannot also be omnipotent, for a God who has both these attributes would have wanted to, cared to, and been able to prevent such a catastrophe.

Perhaps, though omnipotent, He is not benevolent. That might explain why, although it was within His power to stop the tsunami, He simply chose not to; God has His own reasons, and we are not to ask why. However, this answer will not suffice since by definition God is perfect. Being perfect, He must of necessity not merely be omnipotent but benevolent as well.



Even if solutions are forthcoming to these philosophical conundrums, humanely speaking they make little sense. Perhaps that is why some people remain skeptical about the presence of any divine providence ruling over us.

Down through the centuries people have hurled many such accusation against God. I'm sure you have heard things such as, *"If God is love, how could He allow that to happen?"* This is an accusation against God's love. The Bible says that God is love, but many question that. Some say, *"It's not fair that innocent people suffer and babies die."* Have you ever defended God against

people's accusations? I hope so. Many people's view of God is far from biblical. We, as God's children, need to know and proclaim the truth of who God is. When we defend the righteousness and justice of God, we are giving a "[Theodicy](#)." A theodicy is a vindication or defense of God. To vindicate means to:

1. *Clear from criticism, suspicion, blame.*
2. *Defend against opposition. It is to say that what God is doing is absolutely just and righteous. It is to proclaim the God of the Bible.*

The book of Habakkuk is in part a theodicy, it is a vindication of God's justice in using a wicked heathen nation to chastise His chosen people. Malachi is in part a theodicy, it is a vindication of God's justice in allowing His people to still be under foreign domination and to be in poverty while the wicked heathen are living so prosperously.

This morning I would like to give you a theodicy; a vindication of God's sovereignty and goodness. Dr Edward Spence writes, "*How, then, did a God as powerful and benevolent as this allow such a thing to happen? If He is benevolent then He cannot also be omnipotent, for a God who has both these attributes would have wanted to, cared to, and been able to prevent such a catastrophe.*"

Spence is in effect saying, "If God is both powerful and good, why did He allow this suffering, this much pain, this much heartache in Asia? God is either good and not all powerful, or He is powerful and not all good. You can't have it both ways." Well, Spence is wrong! The Bible, from beginning to end, teaches the absolute goodness and sovereignty of God.

The Bible teaches that **God is sovereign**. By sovereign we mean that God possesses and exercises supreme authority and control in all creation, including man.

Modern political science and modern religion hold to a theory that sovereignty resides in the individual. Left to ourselves, we tend to immediately reduce God to manageable terms. We want to get Him where we can use Him. We want a God we can in some measure control. This is not the God of the Bible. Pink summed it up this way: "*The god of modern religious thought no more resembles the supreme sovereign of the Bible than does the dim flickering of a candle resemble the glory of the noon day sun.*"

When we say that God is sovereign, we're saying that God has an absolute right to rule over everything:

1 Chronicles 29:11-13 (NASB) *"Thine, O LORD, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Thine is the dominion, O LORD, and Thou dost exalt Thyself as head over all. ¹² "Both riches and honor come from Thee, and Thou dost rule over all, and in Thy hand is power and might; and it lies in Thy hand to make great, and to strengthen everyone. ¹³ "Now therefore, our God, we thank Thee, and praise Thy glorious name.*

Psalms 47:7-8 (NASB) *For God is the King of all the earth; Sing praises with a skillful psalm. 8 God reigns over the nations, God sits on His holy throne.*

Isaiah 46:9-11 (NASB) *"Remember the former things long past, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning And from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, And I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; ¹¹ Calling a bird of prey from the east, The man*

of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely I will do it.

Revelation 19:6 (NASB) *And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns.*

Psalms 115:3 (NASB) *But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases.*

God could not do whatever He pleased if He were not sovereign. God is the only person in the universe who can do whatever He pleases.

The Scriptures show us that God exercises sovereign rule over the entire physical universe, over plant and animal creation, over the nations of the earth, and over all individuals. Let's look at what the Scripture says about God's rule over the physical universe which would include tsunamis.

Scripture tells us that God controls the Sun, wind, rain, hail, snow, ice, and floods. The heavenly bodies, the sun, stars, and planets obey His will:

Joshua 10:12-14 (NASB) *Then Joshua spoke to the LORD in the day when the LORD delivered up the Amorites before the sons of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, "O sun, stand still at Gibeon, And O moon in the valley of Aijalon." ¹³ So the sun stood still, and the moon stopped, Until the nation avenged themselves of their enemies. Is it not written in the book of Jashar? And the sun stopped in the middle of the sky, and did not hasten to go down for about a whole day. ¹⁴ And there was no day like that before it or after it, when the LORD listened to the voice of a man; for the LORD fought for Israel.*

The Bible is written to men, so God uses here the language of observation. We speak of a sunset or a sunrise, but we know that it is really an earth revolving. God literally stopped the earth from revolving. In another incident, God opened up the earth and swallowed Nadab and Abihu and then closed it up.

The Bible clearly teaches that God controls the weather:

Job 37:10-13 (NASB) *"From the breath of God ice is made, And the expanse of the waters is frozen. ¹¹ "Also with moisture He loads the thick cloud; He disperses the cloud of His lightning. ¹² "And it changes direction, turning around by His guidance, That it may do whatever He commands it On the face of the inhabited earth. ¹³ "Whether for correction, or for His world, Or for loving kindness, He causes it to happen.*

Please note here that God uses the weather for correction, or for blessing. The weather brings judgment on some people by ruining their crops, flooding their possessions, and drowning them. Other times the storm clouds water the soil and thus demonstrate His love.

On his Web site, "Watch.org," Bill Koenig reflects this idea of the tsunami being a judgment of God: *"The Biblical proportions of this disaster become clearly apparent upon reports of miraculous Christian survival. Christian persecution in these countries is some of the worst in the world." Eight of the 12 countries hit - Malaysia, Burma, Bangladesh, Somalia, Maldives, Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia, he says, "are among the top 50 nations who persecute Christians."*

I think it is always dangerous to try to interpret providence. But the Scriptures do clearly teach that the weather is used by God as judgment:

Psalms 147:16-18 (NASB) *He gives snow like wool; He scatters the frost like ashes.¹⁷ He casts forth His ice as fragments; Who can stand before His cold?¹⁸ He sends forth His word and melts them; He causes His wind to blow and the waters to flow.*

Genesis 6:17 (NASB) *"And behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish.*

The Scriptures teach us that all weather—good and bad—is under the direct control of God. Whether it is a flood that destroys everything on the earth or a devastating tsunami that kills hundreds of thousands or a gentle spring rain, it is an act of God. The Bible teaches us that God controls all the forces of nature, both destructive and productive, on a continuous, moment-by-moment basis.

God calls ALL the shots, He rules over all. Why is that? What gives God the right to call all the shots; what gives Him the right to do as he pleases? Creation!

Romans 9:20-21 (NASB) *On the contrary, who are you, O man, who answers back to God? The thing molded will not say to the molder, "Why did you make me like this," will it?²¹ Or does not the potter have a right over the clay, to make from the same lump one vessel for honorable use, and another for common use?*

God defends His sovereignty on the basis of **creation** in the book of Job. If you were to come home and find your house burned down to the ground with all your belongings, and you had no insurance, how would you respond? Would you question God? What if one of your children died, or all of your children died, would you question God? What if you became ill and could no longer work, and you had no insurance, would you question God? What if you lost everything in one cataclysmic moment—your job, your cars, your house, your savings, your children. How would you respond?

In the book of Job, we have a true story about a real man who lost it all. Let's look at how he responded:

Job 1:20-22 (NASB) *Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head, and he fell to the ground and worshiped.²¹ And he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away. Blessed be the name of the LORD."²² Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God.*

Notice that Job didn't view God as passive, he didn't say, "The Lord let this happen" or "God allowed Satan to do this to me." He said, "The Lord has taken away." He viewed this disaster as from the hand of God, and his response is **worship**. In the midst of the worst calamity, he worships God. He recognized that everything he had, God gave to him, and so if God decided to take it all away that was okay with him.

We all think God is good when he gives us what we consider as good, but He is good all the time, even when he brings calamity upon our lives. This is an incredible man! Job's response is nothing short of amazing. How would you do in his sandals? As this trial went on it began to wear on Job. He begins to question God:

Job 10:2 (NASB) *"I will say to God, 'Do not condemn me; Let me know why Thou dost contend with me.*

Job 31:35 (NASB) *"Oh that I had one to hear me! Behold, here is my signature; Let the Almighty answer me! And the indictment which my adversary has written,*

Job asks, "Why is this happening to me? Show me? I've lost everything except my wife, why? He gets no answer, just the arguments from his peers. In chapter 38 God speaks. He doesn't answer Job's questions, He asks some questions of His own:

Job 38:1-5 (NASB) *Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, ² "Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? ³ "Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me! ⁴ "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding, ⁵ Who set its measurements, since you know? Or who stretched the line on it?*

Job has absolutely no right to question God. In a series of questions on cosmology, oceanography, meteorology, and astronomy, God challenged Job's competence to judge His control of the world. God in effect says, "I created everything, I own everything, and I control everything, who are you to question me?" Notice Job's response in:

Job 42:1-6 (NASB) *Then Job answered the LORD, and said, ² "I know that Thou canst do all things, And that no purpose of Thine can be thwarted. ³ 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?' "Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, Things too wonderful for me, which I did not know." ⁴ 'Hear, now, and I will speak; I will ask Thee, and do Thou instruct me.' ⁵ "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; But now my eye sees Thee; ⁶ Therefore I retract, And I repent in dust and ashes."*

Job says, "I understand that You are God and You are sovereign, please forgive me. I was wrong for not recognizing Your sovereign right to give and to take away. I hate myself. How could I ever question you?"

God is the sovereign creator of all that exists. Everything has come from Him and He has the right to take it all away. Do you understand that?

Dr. Spence said, *"If He is benevolent, then He cannot also be omnipotent."* We have seen from Scripture that God is absolutely sovereign over all. But the Bible not only teaches that God is sovereign, it also unquestionably teaches that He is good:

Psalms 100:5 (NASB) *For the LORD is good; His loving kindness is everlasting, And His faithfulness to all generations.*

Psalms 135:3 (NASB) *Praise the LORD, for the LORD is good; Sing praises to His name, for it is lovely.*

Psalms 145:9 (NASB) *The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.*

Exodus 34:6-8 (NASB) *Then the LORD passed by in front of him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in loving kindness and truth; ⁷ who keeps loving kindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." ⁸ And Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship.*

The goodness of God is that essential perfection of the divine nature which inclines Him to deal bountifully with His creatures. The biblical concept of God's goodness focuses on concrete experiences of what God has done and is doing in the lives of His people. Scripture affirms that God is and does good.

If we had to narrow it down to one quality to which goodness points, it would be the quality of **generosity**. Generosity means: "a disposition to give to others in a way which has no mercenary motive and is not limited by what the recipients deserve, but consistently goes beyond it." God's generosity in bestowing natural blessings is acclaimed in Psalm 145:

Psalms 145:9 (NASB) *The LORD is good to all, And His mercies are over all His works.*

Psalms 145:15-16 (NASB) *The eyes of all look to Thee, and Thou dost give them their food in due time.¹⁶ Thou dost open Thy hand, and dost satisfy the desire of every living thing.*

The psalmist's point is that since God controls all that happens in His world; every meal, every pleasure, every possession, every bit of sun, every night's sleep, every moment of health and safety, and everything else that sustains and enriches life is a divine gift.

Does the fact that God is good mean that He is some kind of celestial Santa Claus who gives us everything that we want and overlooks all our sins? No! The Scriptures also teach that God judges sin, He disciplines his children:

Romans 11:22 (NASB) *Behold then the kindness and severity of God; to those who fell, severity, but to you, God's kindness, if you continue in His kindness; otherwise you also will be cut off.*

When we take for granted and ignore God's goodness, we will experience His judgment, His chastening. His goodness should cause us to praise Him and live in gratitude toward Him.

What about when bad things happen like a tsunami, is God still good? Yes, God is good -- all the time!

Psalms 52:1 (NASB) *(For the choir director. A Maskil of David, when Doeg the Edomite came and told) (Saul, and said to him, "David has come to the house of Ahimelech.") Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man? The loving kindness of God endures all day long.*

Romans 8:28 (NASB) *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*

We can't see the big picture, so, too often we don't see things as good, but if we understand that our **God is good all the time**, we will learn to **trust Him** in every situation of life.

Now, if God is good and sovereign, why did He cause the tsunami to kill around 150,000 people and leave 5 million suffering? Why does a good sovereign God cause so much suffering? God is good and God is sovereign, but He also has other attributes. One attribute of God that people don't seem to like to talk about is that God is **holy**. People don't like to think of God as a Holy God who hates and punishes sin. The absence of an understanding of God's holiness is the reason people question God. Holiness is the primary attribute of God. He emphasized His holiness especially in the Old Testament times:

Leviticus 11:44 (NASB) *'For I am the LORD your God. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy; for I am holy. And you shall not make yourselves unclean with any of the swarming things that swarm on the earth.*

Psalms 22:3 (NASB) *Yet Thou art holy, O Thou who art enthroned upon the praises of Israel.*

The Lord is called "The Holy One" some thirty times in Isaiah alone. The biblical concept of holiness has two primary meanings. The first meaning is simply: "apartness or **separateness**." That which is holy is set apart from common things. It is different; it is other. To say that God is holy is to say He transcends the entire creation. The second meaning of God's holiness refers to His **purity**. There is no moral blemish, no defect, no stain of wickedness to mar His character. Habakkuk illustrates this aspect of God's holiness:

Habakkuk 1:12-13 (NASB) *Art Thou not from everlasting, O LORD, my God, my Holy One? We will not die. Thou, O LORD, hast appointed them to judge; And Thou, O Rock, hast established them to correct.¹³ Thine eyes are too pure to approve evil, And Thou canst not look on wickedness with favor. Why dost Thou look with favor On those who deal treacherously? Why art Thou silent when the wicked swallow up Those more righteous than they?*

God's holiness is linked to His righteousness and justice. The righteousness and justice of God is that aspect of God's holiness manifested in His treatment of His creatures.

Psalms 97:2 (NASB) *Clouds and thick darkness surround Him; Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne.*

God is holy and just, and He **must** punish sin. Even the slightest sin defies the authority of God, insults His majesty, and challenges His justice. Because of our sin, we all deserve God's WRATH according to:

Romans 1:18 (NASB) *For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness,*

God's wrath in the Bible is never capricious, self-indulgent, or irritable. God's wrath is always judicial; the wrath of a judge administering justice. Each person gets exactly what he deserves. Wrath denotes God's resolute action in punishing sin, and it is the active manifestation of His hatred of sin. God is holy and His holiness demands that He not tolerate unholiness.

God's wrath is the just response to ungodliness and unrighteousness. Ungodliness is from the Greek word *asebeia* which means: "not being rightly related to God." We were made to be godly. Any sin makes us ungodly by making us wrongly related to God. Romans 3:10 and Romans 3:23 bear this out: *"As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one"; "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God."*

Unrighteousness is from the Greek word *adikia*, and it means: "injustice"; it has to do with our treatment of our fellow man. Jesus set the standard for our relationships:

Matthew 22:37-40 (NASB) *And He said to him, "YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND."³⁸ "This is the great and foremost commandment.³⁹ "The second is like it, 'YOU*

SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' ⁴⁰ ***"On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets."***

Man does not live up to this commandment of God; man is unrighteous and unjust. You see, believer, the only thing any human being **deserves** is wrath; the only thing **God owes any human is wrath**. If we really understood the depth of our sin and the holiness of God, we would thank God every day that He hasn't killed us. We would thank God for His mercy and grace. But if we see ourselves as **deserving** good things from God, then we do not see God as merciful and gracious. First we take mercy for granted, then we assume it, and finally we demand it, as if God owed it to us. Then, whenever God acts in justice, we complain that He is unjust.

How often do we question God's motives and actions? In light of the fact that God is in control of everything, does it bother you when you read of or hear of destructive events; things such as the tsunami? Do events like that make you question God? What do you think of God when you hear of events like that? Isn't it pride when we question God? Isn't questioning Him saying, *"I would have done it differently."* It seems like we are constantly questioning God. When a loved one dies, we respond with, *"God, that isn't fair! How could You do that? That person deserved to live, I need him."* In bad situations, we think, *"God, how could You let this happen to me? How could I be going through a divorce?" "How could I be so sick?" "How could I be without a job? "Why me? It's not fair, I deserve better."* We question God's justice, which is a heinous sin, because God is just.

We look at disasters, and we wonder why God does those things. But we are looking at life from a wrong perspective. We are looking at it from our humanistic view that thinks that **God owes us certain things**. Let's go back to the beginning and see if we can't correct that thinking. God said to Adam and Eve at the beginning:

Genesis 2:17 (NASB) but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat from it you shall surely die."

In other words, God said, "You sin, you die!" God created man to glorify Himself, but man rebelled and disobeyed God. Did Adam die the day he sinned? Yes, he died **spiritually**. Man's problem is spiritual. He is separated from God because of his sin. In this state of spiritual death, he is under God's wrath. If we approach all of life from the perspective of the standard set at creation - sin brings spiritual death which puts us under the wrath of God - we realize that all of life is full of God's mercy. But we are so accustomed to mercy and grace, we're so used to not being punished that we abuse mercy and grace; whenever God does display His wrath, we think that He's unjust.

We all deserve spiritual death according to Romans 6:23: ***"The wages of sin is death."*** Have you ever sinned? Are you spiritually dead? Not if you have put your trust in the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ. God's redemption of man is pure mercy! Praise God for His mercy, because you don't deserve it. We deserve spiritual death, we deserve wrath, we **deserve eternal damnation**. Anything short of that should cause us to be grateful. Whenever we see God act in justice, or when things aren't going according to our plans, we shouldn't question God's fairness. We should realize what we really deserve and be grateful that God is merciful.

A perspective of God's holiness and our sinfulness will change how we act to the circumstances of life. If we loose our job, we should be thankful that we ever had one. If a loved one dies, instead of feeling cheated because of our loss, we should be grateful for the time we had with him or her. We don't deserve one moment of happiness. We deserve wrath. So let's thank God for **all** of His mercies.

As we develop a proper Biblical perspective, we will understand that whatever God does is just and fair. God is sovereign, and He is good, but He is also Holy. And as a Holy God, He has a right to punish sin; all sin, every sin. All who do not trust in the Lord Jesus Christ are under the wrath of God and deserve nothing but wrath:

John 3:36 (NASB) *"He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him."*

When we look at natural disasters such as the tsunami, we must feel for those who are suffering, and we should do what we can to help. But we should never question God's character. He is the benevolent, holy, Sovereign Creator who has the right to do what He wills with His creation. May our response to disaster be that of Job's - worship! Naked we came from our mother's womb, and naked we shall return. The LORD gave us all we have, and the LORD has the sovereign right to take it all away. Blessed be the name of the LORD.

This message preached by [David B. Curtis](#) on January 2, 2005. [Tape #309b](#).



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