

17. How can a loving God let something so awful happen?

Colossians 1:19-20

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Awful things have happened. Some of the experiences of the injured and bereaved, and the sights seen by police and hospital staff on that Wednesday afternoon would be enough to convince many people that there cannot be a God of love.

After the Asian Tsunami on Boxing Day 2004, many concluded that there could no longer be any argument for the existence of a loving God.

When T.V. pundits talk like that, it's tempting to go on the offensive. Atheism has far greater difficulties in the face of suffering. Specifically, it has problems accounting for why suffering is a bad thing.

From an atheist point of view, what's the big deal if nature takes its course and a tsunami kills hundreds of thousands of people? Faced with the incalculable grief of losing a family member, the belief that family ties are little more than a concern for the preservation of the mating colony is a little weak.

Everyone has a hard time accounting for suffering, but not everyone acknowledges that.

As Christians we know that the question "Why suffering?" is the hardest one we face. It has been addressed, intellectually and in painful experience, in every generation of Christian history.

At last, when Jesus returns and establishes the new creation, it will be fully answered. For now we have to wait.

"That's laughable, a cop out", says a critic. "If God knows the answer, why's he keeping you guessing? That's cruelty upon cruelty".

I would like to turn the question back on the person asking it: "Do you think that suffering is so insignificant that a short answer will do?" God takes suffering so seriously, that only eternity will give him the platform to explain it to us in full.

In the meantime, we have sure proof of just how seriously God takes the issue of suffering. He has shown himself committed not just to addressing the question, but to removing the thing itself.

What I mean is that in Jesus Christ, God shed his blood in order to reconcile the world to himself. In love, he paid a very high price to guarantee that one day suffering will be a thing of the past. With such a strong commitment to addressing the problem, we can't doubt that he will follow through.