

The Trouble with Christianity: Why It's So Hard to Believe It Suffering: If God is good, why is there so much evil in the world?

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1

SCRIPTURE | 1 Peter 1:3–12 (NIV)

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. ⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. ⁷ These have come so that your faith — of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire — may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. ⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the goal of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

¹⁰ Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, ¹¹ trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. ¹² It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. Even angels long to look into these things.

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2

FOR REFLECTION

One of the most difficult things for any human being to wrestle with is the reality of human suffering. Many have challenged Christianity with the argument that, if there is suffering and evil in the world, then God is either good but powerless or powerful and not good, but certainly not good and powerful. However, the truth is that not believing in Christianity makes dealing with suffering even more difficult. Without a God, there is no hope that evil will one day be corrected or that suffering will one day disappear. Violence and suffering are simply a normal part of the world, not an alien intrusion that will one day be wiped out forever.

In the passage above, the apostle Peter writes to the Christian church during a time of intense suffering. His purpose is to provide the resources they need to deal with that difficult reality. These verses acknowledge that being a Christian doesn't mean a person won't suffer. However, the suffering will have some meaning and redemptive effect. Christians will experience suffering in this life but they have been given resources to deal with it in hope when it comes.

1. Verses 3 – 5 talk about one specific resource the gospel provides to help a Christian endure suffering. What is that resource? Pick apart the verses a bit, and consider why this is an appropriate resource during suffering. If the resurrection means that all things will be made new or that all evil will come to an end, how does that help during an experience of suffering?
2. Verses 6 – 9 describe some of the redemptive outcomes that result from suffering. How does suffering refine the Christian; that is, how does it change his or her character and faith? Are there ways your character has been shaped by suffering? Is it similar to Peter's teaching or different?
3. Verses 10 – 12 discuss the writings and teachings of the prophets (which have been recorded in the Bible). What was the central teaching of the prophets according to these verses? What was the purpose of this teaching? Most significantly, what resources are available to a believer in the midst of suffering?
4. Verse 12 talks about the fact that "even angels long to look into these things." If angels long to look into the truths of the gospel, what might that imply about the gospel? What might that imply about how we should "look into" the story of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?