

# *God's Problem: Review and Solution*

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## **Abstract**

This paper, we provide a review and critique of Bart Ehrman's *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question – Why We Suffer*. Contrary to Ehrman's titular assertion, the Bible does indeed provide a coherent answer as to why suffering exists, which we also present and discuss in brief.

## **1 Review**

“Where is God now?” inquires Dr. Bart Ehrman in his 2008 book, *God's Problem*.<sup>1</sup> The subtitle of the book is what really commands attention, as it continues: “*How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question - Why We Suffer*”. The further one delves into the book, however, the more one will discover that this is substantially inaccurate. A title that would more accurately reflect the book's content and thought would be: “*My Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Why We Suffer to My Personal Satisfaction*”. Indeed, the very chapter layout belies the thesis of the book, where Chapter 2 is entitled, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God: The Classical View of Suffering,” Ch. 4, “The Consequences of Sin,” Ch. 5, “The Mystery of the Greater Good: Redemptive Suffering,” Ch. 6, “Does Suffering Make Sense? The Books of Job and Ecclesiastes,” and finally Chapters 7-8, where Ehrman discusses apocalyptic views. So in reality, Ehrman has conceded the imprecision and untruth of his thesis statement before he has begun. As a result, his book ends up primarily as an exercise in egotistic complaints against the biblical view of God, unsupported claims to the moral high ground and a capacity to judge set up by poor exegesis, and false dilemmas set up against the God of the Bible.

Ehrman begins by describing how, despite a thorough theological education, including a degree from Moody Bible Institute, graduate work under the great Bible scholar Dr. Bruce Metzger, and a stint as a pastor in a Baptist church, the question of theodicy became one of the two principal pressures that drove him to apostasy - that is, a rejection of the Christian faith he had once professed. In laying out his initial case, he anticipates the aforementioned irony - that the Bible does indeed provide various answers to the problem of evil and suffering, but opines that they are mutually

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<sup>1</sup>Bart D. Ehrman, *God's Problem: How the Bible Fails to Answer Our Most Important Question - Why We Suffer* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2008).

exclusive and contradictory. This is a grave claim, and one would expect to find a great deal of serious biblical exegesis to substantiate it, especially given Ehrman's tremendous qualifications as a Biblical scholar. Unfortunately, the book contains a good deal more bad exegesis than good. An example of this comes in the chapter treating the biblical book of Job. Ehrman says:

The narrator then moves to a heavenly scene in which the 'heavenly beings' (literally; the sons of God) appear before the Lord, 'the Satan' among them. It is important to recognize that the [*sic*] Satan here is not the fallen angel who has been booted from heaven, the cosmic enemy of God. Here he is portrayed as one of God's divine council members...But he is not an adversary to God: he is one of the heavenly beings who report to God.<sup>2</sup>

Admittedly, Ehrman's formation and degrees are in **New** Testament, but it is strange to see someone ignore the status of Satan in the rest of the Old Testament, as accuser (Zech 3), deceiver (Gen 3), and enemy of the covenant people of God (1 Chron 21). For that matter, Ehrman seems to overlook the fact that Satan in Job 1 and 2 in effect asks permission, twice, to destroy Job's life and thus entice him to curse God, a terrible sin. Then again, Ehrman does little better in New Testament concepts, such as: "But the view that Jesus was himself God is not a view shared by...the Gospels of Matthew, Mark or Luke."<sup>3</sup> Ehrman has apparently forgotten about Luke 18:19, Mark 2:7, or Matthew 28:20, among numerous other examples.<sup>4</sup>

One must credit Ehrman with his correct identification of numerous of the biblical themes and responses to the problem of evil and suffering. The disagreement arises when he asserts that these explanations are mutually contradictory, but unfortunately, the book barely even attempts to prove this allegation. Apparently, they just are, and that is that. But the reader must pose a very important question, and the following illustration will make use of one of Ehrman's favorite examples of "gratuitous suffering" - that of a large-scale natural disaster, such as the tsunami of December 2004. Let us take the biblical explanations in order of their appearance in Ehrman's table of contents, and ask whether each explanation could be **part** of a greater, coherent whole?

- **People suffer because God is punishing sin.** Because Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, everyone who has since lived is under the condemnation that leads to death, born as a sinner and a rebel enemy of God (cf Romans 5:7-8 and James 4:4). As the Judge of sinners (John 3:17-18), God claims this: "I am He, And there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and give life. I have wounded and it is I who heal, And there is no one who can deliver from My hand" (Deut. 32:39). The book of Revelation is clear that one day God will judge all evil with finality and redeem the repentant and indeed the entire Earth by recreating it (such that there will no longer be destructive natural disasters - Rev. 21:1,4, cf. Is. 65:17),

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 273.

<sup>4</sup>For an in-depth treatment of the deity of Christ, including His self-testimony to His own deity, see Robert L. Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 212-312; for Jesus' self-testimony in the synoptics (as well as in the Gospel of John) specifically, see pp. 214-237. A more accessible, though weaker treatment is given by Charles C. Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Chicago: IL, Moody Press, 1999), 284-286.

but that time is not yet come. In the meantime, God claims for Himself as the holy lawgiver and judge. Finally, let us consider that the law and evil exist to drive one to guilt over his sin and press him toward the Savior, especially when one sees the punishment meted out more obviously against someone else.

- **People suffer as a result of sin done against them by others.** Adam and Eve were expelled from paradise, and in bringing forth children, bring them forth in sin with a sinful nature (cf. Rom. 5:12), and eventually suffer physical death. Though each human ratifies Adam's choice with his or her own, it all started with Adam, and that includes natural disasters.
- **The greater good and redemptive suffering.** Obvious examples of heroic self-sacrifice and self-endangerment to rescue others stricken by a disaster would not be possible without the presence, first, of the disaster. Charitable outpourings of aid and workers further illustrate the redemptive power that God exercises in the world.
- **Mystery, as in Job and Ecclesiastes.** Who can doubt that many answers to the problem of evil are mysterious? God does not always show His hand, and a poorly-argued book from a 21st-century religious studies professor does not trump God's authority. And of course, if God's reasons for allowing a natural disaster are mysterious and unknown, how could Ehrman know that they contradict the others?

Are any of these reasons mutually contradictory? Let the reader judge whether this contention, which is the main thrust of Ehrman's book, holds any merit.

The unsupported assertions and judgment calls that Ehrman makes would more nearly approach credibility if he had at least made an effort to argue for an objective standard by which a human can know right from wrong and good from evil. As it stands, however, the pattern for most of the chapters is to give his take on the biblical teachings in question and then to say "are we really to think this way about God?" or "this is surely not the answer." As an example, let us continue with Ehrman's treatment of Job:

But I refuse to believe that God murdered (or allowed the [*sic*] Satan to murder) Job's ten children in order to see whether Job would curse him. If someone killed *your* ten children, wouldn't you have the right to curse him? And to think that God could make it up to Job by giving him an additional ten children is obscene.<sup>5</sup>

In response to this kind of argument, the biblical Christian might simply pose a series of simple questions:

1. Quoting God: "Will a faultfinder contend with the Almighty? Let him who reproves God answer it... Now gird up your loins like a man; I will ask you, and you instruct Me. Will you really annul My judgment? Will you condemn Me that you may be justified?" (Job 40:2, 7-8). Why would anyone take seriously the attempt by a mere man to accuse God of wrongdoing? Will a creature that cannot even exist on its own argue with the One who gives it existence (Job 40:14)?

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<sup>5</sup>God's Problem, 275. Emphasis original.

2. On what basis do you assert that God's putting a sinful person to death is "murder"?
3. Who is claiming that God's blessing Job with a further ten children is meant to "make it up to him"?
4. What, if any, is the nature of the distinction between Creator and creature?
5. If God does not exist, how does one define or identify "the right to do" anything?
6. Just how do you know what is obscene, that is, morally reprehensible, and what is not?

Questions 1 and 4-6 in particular are fundamental; none of these are meant to dismiss the critic of the God of the Bible, but rather to actually begin the conversation and discuss issues of real substance. Unfortunately, Ehrman never ventures past this type of surface-level, emotional (one might even say, visceral) critique. He does not like it; ergo, it is wrong.

Perhaps it is best that the final chapter of the book fits consistently (that is, it is consistent in its downward spiral into near irrelevancy) with what preceded it, as Ehrman prepares to grapple with the question of "*Why We Suffer*" and give his readers the answer that has eluded them, despite the Bible's best attempts to answer the question. This answer has no doubt satisfied Ehrman after his rejection of the Bible, which was caused in large part by his dissatisfaction with the Bible's own answers to this question. Given that he "...can't believe in (the biblical) God anymore, because from what I now see around the world, he doesn't intervene,"<sup>6</sup> what is this overarching, satisfying answer to the problem of suffering? Live better. It is almost insultingly childish in its naiveté:

To live life to the fullest means, among other things, doing more. There does not have to be world poverty. The wealth could be redistributed...<sup>7</sup>

People do not *have* to be bigots, or racists...I think we should work hard to make the world - the one we live in - the most pleasing place it can be for *ourselves*.<sup>8</sup>

Unfortunately for the reader, significant biblical explanations of suffering are left waiting until this final chapter. Among such explanations are the idea that God chastens those He loves,<sup>9</sup> and that God has indeed entered our sorrow by taking on human flesh and dying on the Cross. These explanations only receive blurbs the length of a few sentences. While the biblical Christian can look suffering people in the eye, tell them that their suffering has real, eternal meaning, and tell them of a loving Savior Who left Heaven behind to die a horrible death to save wretched, suffering enemies of God and adopt them as His own, what possible fulfillment does Ehrman's alternative offer?

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 276.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 277. Emphasis original.

<sup>9</sup>Though it is mentioned, the purpose of this fatherly discipline is left unstated. Scripture teaches that God chastens us for our good (Heb. 12:5-6,10), and that the ultimate good for which all of God's fatherly discipline has been designed is our holiness in conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:28-29, Heb. 12:10).

## 2 A Biblical Solution to the Problem of Suffering

As detailed in the previous section, Ehrman surveys a number of Biblical explanations for suffering. He finds them all wanting, and vacuously claims that they are mutually contradictory. Despite Ehrman's disapprobation, the Biblical explanations he studies do in fact explain the existence of various kinds of suffering in various contexts. However, there is a higher-level explanation that accounts for all suffering, and provides a solution to the "problem of suffering" that Ehrman presents in the first chapter. Ehrman claims<sup>10</sup> that the following three propositions are logically incompatible:

- God is all-powerful.
- God is all-loving.
- There is suffering.

It is often claimed that the solution to the seeming incompatibility of these propositions is found in asserting the libertarian free will of man. Ehrman critiques this commonly-used defense,<sup>11</sup> and rightly so.<sup>12</sup> However, there is an explanation for how these propositions are not incompatible that Ehrman does not address. Such an explanation begins by asserting the absolute sovereignty of God, and the doctrine of the two wills of God.<sup>13</sup>

### 2.1 The Two Wills of God

The doctrine of the two wills of God states that God has a will of precept, and a will of decree. The will of precept concerns God's approval or disapproval of certain things, including what He enjoins as moral duties and prohibitions - things that men ought and ought not to do. This follows from Scriptures that state that certain individuals do not do God's will.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, the will of decree pertains to those things that God has decided from eternity past to bring about.<sup>15</sup> Thus, while the will of precept can be violated, the will of decree cannot.

The solution to the problem of suffering detailed here follows from a simple principle: that there is a difference between a whole and its parts. The God of Scripture is not schizophrenic or fickle – He is the unchangeable I AM, and is not subject to the vicissitudes of the fallen human mind.<sup>16</sup> However, what God wills concerning a complex entity need not be what He wills con-

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

<sup>12</sup>Traditional Evangelical approaches to theodicy attempt to solve the problem by asserting the libertarian free will of man. Such approaches are logically inconsistent and Biblically inadequate, as demonstrated by Gordon H. Clark, *God and Evil: The Problem Solved* (Unicoi, TN: The Trinity Foundation, 2004).

<sup>13</sup>An accessible Scriptural defense of this doctrine is given by John Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah Books, 2000), 313-340. A more technical treatment is given by Francis Turretin, *The Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, trans. George Musgrave Giger, James T. Denison, Jr., ed. (Phillipsburg, NJ: Prebyterian and Reformed, 1992), 220-231.

<sup>14</sup>Matt. 7:21, 12:48-50, 1 Jn. 2:7.

<sup>15</sup>Is. 53:10, Ac. 2:22-23, 4:27-28.

<sup>16</sup>1 Sam. 15:29, Mal. 3:6, Heb. 1:12, 13:8.

cerning its components. To assert otherwise is to commit the fallacy of division,<sup>17</sup> since what is true of the whole is not necessarily true of the parts. It is consistent with Scripture, as well as historic theology, to assert that God's decree is a unified whole.<sup>18</sup> That is, that in eternity past, God conceived of the whole of creation and its temporal history (together a *world*<sup>19</sup>) as one complex entity. That is to say that God did not proceed through a series of steps in deciding what to decree, but that His decree is an eternally complete whole to Him. Thus, what God wills concerning the content of His decree, as a whole, is not necessarily what He wills concerning the individual things and events that are a part of that whole.

These concepts can be stated more precisely. The two senses of God's will (decree and precept) can be stated as follows for the purposes of this analysis:

- **WD** (Will of Decree): That sense in which God decides to bring something to pass.
- **WP** (Will of Precept): That sense in which God approves of, or disapproves of, or feels a certain way towards a thing.

Scripturally, God **WD**-wills that of which He sufficiently **WP**-approves.<sup>20</sup> Since God's decree is a unified whole, God **WP**-wills this world in such a sufficiently-approbatory manner that He decided to bring it to pass. However, just because God approves of this world as a whole, does not mean that He approves of the individual things and events that comprise it. For instance, God hates sin,<sup>21</sup> yet He decrees that sins be committed.<sup>22</sup> How is this possible? The solution is that God **WP**-disapproves of the sins themselves, and the acts in which they are committed, yet when the entirety of this world is taken into account, He **WP**-approves of the whole.<sup>23</sup> And since He sufficiently **WP**-approves of the whole, God **WD**-wills it to come to pass. Thus, if one takes the two wills of God into account, a solution to the problem of suffering arises.

## 2.2 Suffering is Not a (Logical) Problem

Ehrman's three supposedly-incompatible propositions can be restructured into an argument that explains how suffering is not a problem for a theology that accepts the above formulation of the two wills doctrine. The argument is as follows:

1. God is all-powerful.
2. Thus, God brings to pass all that He **WD**-wills.

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<sup>17</sup>Irving M. Copi and Carl Cohen, *Introduction to Logic* (10th Ed.), (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1998), 197.

<sup>18</sup>Louis Berkhof, *Systematic Theology* (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1958), 102.

<sup>19</sup>The term *world*, in this context, denotes the entirety of what God created (or could have created), extended in time. An appropriate neologism for this concept is a *cosmos-history*.

<sup>20</sup>Ps. 115:3. Also, Ps. 135:6, and Dan. 4:35.

<sup>21</sup>E.g., Pr. 6:16-19.

<sup>22</sup>Since He decrees all that comes to pass (cf. 1689 LBCF, III.1).

<sup>23</sup>For a similar line of thought, see John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of a Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs, CO: Multnomah, 1996), 39-40.

3. God is all-loving.
4. Thus, God **WP**-wills that acts and instances of suffering, considered in and of themselves, do not occur.<sup>24</sup>
5. God's glory is uppermost in His own affections.<sup>25</sup>
6. God determines that this world, as a whole, glorifies Himself to such a degree that He **WP**-wills that it occur, to such a degree that He **WD**-wills that it occur.
7. Thus, this world is actual (from (2) and (6)).
8. This world, as decreed, contains suffering.
9. Thus, suffering exists.

The above argument demonstrates how the existence of suffering is not only consistent with the existence of the God of the Bible, who is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent, but that the existence of suffering follows from His existence and attributes.

### 2.3 How then is God Glorified?

One might ask, however, why God is more glorified in creating a world in which there is suffering than in creating a world in which there is not. The first answer to such a question is that God is not obligated to explain Himself. While God does reveal some things to us for our benefit and edification, He has seen fit to not reveal a number of things that we would like to know.<sup>26</sup> As God's dialog with Job<sup>27</sup> testifies, we cannot justifiably put God in the dock, and presume that He is in the wrong until He explains Himself to us. Even if God had not explained how He is glorified by suffering, such a state of affairs would provide no justification for questioning His goodness. Nevertheless, He has chosen to reveal some principles that explain why He has chosen to decree a world in which suffering exists.<sup>28</sup>

God is glorified through the expression of His attributes.<sup>29</sup> He is also glorified through the joy that His people receive by beholding His attributes expressed.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, the measure of God's commitment to the joy of His people is arguably the measure of His commitment to His glory.<sup>31</sup> It is easily conceivable that God is glorified in creating a wholly-good world,<sup>32</sup> in healing the sick,<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>24</sup>God's omnibenevolence is seen in that He only **WP**-wills good to occur, in and of itself. For God to be malevolent, He would have to **WP**-will for suffering to occur, in and of itself. But God only wills for suffering to occur as a result of sin. Thus, God is not malevolent, since He does not **WP**-will suffering, in and of itself.

<sup>25</sup>That is, God regards His glory as of first importance above all other things. For a logical and Scriptural exposition of this vital doctrine, see John Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1998).

<sup>26</sup>Dt. 29:29.

<sup>27</sup>chs. 38-42.

<sup>28</sup>That God has in fact decreed such a world is seen in Is. 45:7, Am. 3:6, Lam. 3:37-38, and Ex. 4:11.

<sup>29</sup>Christopher Morgan and Robert Peterson, eds. *The Glory of God* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 153-187.

<sup>30</sup>Piper, *Desiring God*, 45-50.

<sup>31</sup>Piper, *God's Passion for His Glory*, 33-34.

<sup>32</sup>Gen. 1:31, 1 Tim. 4:4.

<sup>33</sup>Examples in Scripture abound, such as Matt. 8:14-17, Jn. 4:43-54, etc.

and in redeeming the lost.<sup>34</sup> Such things display God's genius, His design, His compassion, His mercy, His grace, and His goodness, and it is easy to take joy in such things. But what about cursing the world and its inhabitants to decay and suffering because of sin?<sup>35</sup> What about the eternal condemnation of unrepentant sinners?<sup>36</sup> How is God glorified in a world that contains such things?

It should first be noted that if God is indeed glorified in the expression of His attributes and His people's recognition of them, then He is glorified by that which expresses His attributes all the more clearly. Sin and suffering are a stark picture of what ought not to be, and as such, they provide a contrast that makes it clearer what ought to be. The existence of things at variance with God's attributes makes the recognition of His attributes all the more clear. Thus, sin and suffering help us to see God's holiness and goodness more clearly, by providing a contrast, much the same way that a white object is more clearly seen when contrasted against a dark background.

Furthermore, God is in the business of overcoming evil with good.<sup>37</sup> The whole history of redemption testifies to the fact that God is working to bring good out of the evil and suffering that mankind has brought upon itself. The end result of this process is a New Heaven and New Earth in which goodness and righteousness will reign, and in which sin and suffering will never again be found.<sup>38</sup> Thus, God is glorified in this world, with its sin and suffering, because He will overcome that sin and suffering, to His glory. If there were no sin and suffering, then God's goodness in healing and redemption would never be displayed. But the existence of sin and suffering serve a good purpose in providing a context in which God can be glorified through the expression of His attributes.

But what about unrepentant sinners? Why not ensure that they are saved, and avoid an eternity of conscious torment in Hell? Wouldn't this glorify God more than their condemnation? While it is easy to think this way, the Bible provides a different answer - specifically, that God is glorified in displaying His wrath and power against those sinners who refuse to repent, and that in so doing He shows the riches of His mercy and grace to those who are objects of His mercy.<sup>39</sup> The display of God's wrath provides a backdrop from which God's mercy can be properly appreciated by its recipients.<sup>40</sup> This can be further seen in the fact that God's wrath and justice are not poured out upon His vessels of mercy, and thus they can never have any personal experience of such attributes being expressed. The backdrop of such attributes being eternally expressed against a subset of deserving humanity<sup>41</sup> provides a background for the recipients of God's mercy, whereby they can

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<sup>34</sup>Matt. 1:21, Mk. 10:45, 1 Ti 1:15, etc.

<sup>35</sup>Gen. 3:17-19, Rom. 8:20-21.

<sup>36</sup>Lk. 13:3, Jn. 3:18,36, Rev. 20:15, 21:8.

<sup>37</sup>Jn. 9 is a good example of this (see v. 3). Also cf. Rom. 12:21 - given that God is about this work Himself, it is no surprise that He commands us to be about it as well.

<sup>38</sup>Is. 25:6-8, Rev. 21:1-5.

<sup>39</sup>Rom. 9:22-23. These verses imply that God desired to show His wrath to the unrepentant, for the purpose of making His glory known to His vessels of mercy. For a rigorous exposition of this passage, see John Piper, *The Justification of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 1993), 204-216.

<sup>40</sup>Piper, *The Justification of God*, 214-216.

<sup>41</sup>The idea is that it is not enough merely for Christ to suffer for all men, but that some deserving, unrepentant sinners should suffer for their own sins. See Oliver Crisp, "Is universalism a problem for particularists?" *Scottish Journal of Theology* 63 (2010): 1-23.



more clearly see God's attributes expressed, and thus more fully glorify God in beholding such an expression. Thus, the unrepentant sinner also serves to glorify God in this world containing sin and suffering.

## 2.4 So what is the Christian to Do?

Given that an explanation for the existence of suffering can indeed be provided, how should the Christian then respond to personal suffering? How should the Christian respond when tragedy strikes home? Every person is unique and each situation different, so, it is hard, if not impossible, to put forth a set of hard-and-fast rules for how to cope in various trials and hardships. Nonetheless, some general principles applicable to all trials and hardships can be inferred from Scripture.

First, we should remember that nothing happens outside of God's sovereign decree. If hardship befalls us, it is because it was God's will (of decree) for it to do so. However, we should also remember that God is working all things to our ultimate good, in conforming us to Christ's image.<sup>42</sup> In doing so, God is glorifying Himself in us, and making us holy. This is a blessing that we should not be quick to discount. We should also remember that conformation to Christ's image requires God's fatherly discipline and correction. We are corrupted by sin to the core, and it often takes painful circumstances to bring us to see our sin for what it is and motivate us to put it to death.<sup>43</sup> Such discipline is painful at present,<sup>44</sup> but its end result is further conformity to the image of Christ.

Lastly, though, we should remember that our joy in God is found in His glory, and that the more we glorify Him, even through suffering, the greater our cup of joy in Him will be. Deuteronomy 29:29 states that "the secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law." Even if we can't see how everything works together in the details (the hidden things), we can praise God in faith, knowing that He is working all things, even our own personal pains and calamities, to His glory (for this much has been revealed), and if it is to His glory, then it will be to our greater joy in all eternity. For inasmuch as God's glory is the source of our joy, then anything that reveals His glory to a greater degree will bring us a proportionally greater degree of joy due to seeing His glory revealed in it. Thus, if our blessings glorify God, we should praise Him for His blessings. And if our sufferings are given to glorify God, then we should be faithful and praise Him for what He has brought, even though it be painful. We can praise Him, because we know that we will see His glory all the brighter on the other side of this life, for bringing His people through seasons of both blessing and hardship. Thus, because we know that God's glory is the source of our eternal joy, and that God is glorified in our suffering, we can wholeheartedly say with Job: "The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord...Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job. 1:21, 2:10).

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<sup>42</sup>Rom. 8:28-29. God works all things to the good of His people, but as v. 29 suggests, that ultimate good is their conformation to the image of Christ.

<sup>43</sup>We are commanded to mortify sin (cf. Rom. 8:13, Col. 3:5), but mortification is a painful process.

<sup>44</sup>Heb. 12:5-11.