



"The problem of reconciling human suffering with the existence of a God who loves, is only insoluble so long as we attach a trivial meaning to the word 'love.'"

—C.S. Lewis

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The Great Wave and God

A vital understanding we can reach from the many articles that appeared in the media following the recent devastating tsunami in Southeast Asia is the appalling ignorance of God's involvement in the minds of the inhabitants of Western-world cultures. We can easily see the lack of knowledge in many who either attend a Christian church infrequently or not at all. We can accept as a given that those better-educated among us—who have spent time seeking an answer to this question but have chosen to accept a [faith](#) in "scientific" answers—would conclude that "[God](#)" was not involved at all. But is it not galling, indeed angering, that renowned people from [the world](#) of Christian religion cannot give a forthright and true answer straight from the Book inspired by God Himself?

In a January 2 article in the *London Sunday Times*, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams, made a number of statements that cast strong doubts about his belief in the Scriptures:

Of course this makes us doubt God's existence. . . . The traditional answers [to human suffering] will get us only so far. . . . [Christian

answers do not] go very far in helping us, one week on, with the intolerable grief and devastation in front of us. . . . Wouldn't we feel something of a chill at the prospect of a God who deliberately plans a programme that involves a certain level of casualties?

If one cannot go to the God of creation for answers, where can one go? The overall thrust of Dr. Rowan's article was to make excuses for God, excuses that contained a measure of accusation. Does God need anybody making excuses for Him regarding His operation of His creation? Obviously, no, but it helps our acceptance of life's events if we have greater understanding.

The Bible presents God as the immutable, sovereign Ruler of everything that is. He has made everything for His pleasure, not ours. He is the purposeful, all-wise, understanding, and loving Governor whose every act is done for the overall good of all concerned. Abraham Lincoln was correct in his observation, made during the Civil War, "The Almighty has His own purposes." God is perfect in His perspective and judgments. He is most certainly not fickle.

On the other hand, the Bible presents mankind as flawed by a spirit that is "enmity against God; for it is not subject to the [law of God](#), nor indeed can be" ([Romans 8:7](#)). Bluntly put, mankind is at war against God. Mankind was not made this way but *became* this way. Thus, God and man are, in many cases and in many ways, at opposite poles. How can man be converted to God's point of view in all things? We must change, not Him. However, the evidence of man's history is clear: Man has a difficult time loving God with all his heart, soul, and mind, and his neighbor as himself. How should God remind mankind that he is falling tragically short of these ideals?

It is interesting that, in many cases when disasters occur and articles questioning God appear in the media, there is an unwritten assumption that mankind is somehow the innocent victim of a cruel, judgmental, and vindictive God. However, the Bible answers twice—and bluntly, "There is none who does good [or, *righteous*], no, not one" ([Psalm 14:1](#), 3; [Romans 3:10](#), 12). "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" ([Romans 3:23](#)), and "The wages of [sin](#) is death" ([Romans 6:23](#)). When one understands this

within the stark reality of legality, God owes mankind nothing but death because of the way we have treated His creation, which of course includes our fellow man.

In Amos 4, God recounts disaster after disaster that He sent upon Israel to get their attention so that they would change from their self-centered, destructive conduct. Since they would not, He declares, "Prepare to meet your God, O Israel!" For behold, He who forms the mountains, and creates the wind, who declares to man what his thought is, and makes the morning darkness, who treads the high places of the earth—the LORD God of hosts is His name" ([Amos 4:12-13](#)).

The sovereign God of creation made the earth subject to floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, blizzards, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and tsunamis. These disasters serve multiple purposes. He can use them to pronounce judgment and set examples to awaken men to think seriously about their relationship with the Creator and their fellow men, bringing about positive change.

It is not wrong to question why things like the tsunami occur—in fact, that is their very purpose. Can God be blamed? Was this an act of God? Of course! He is the One who either directly created it to occur, or as sovereign Ruler and Judge, made the decision to allow it to occur as part of His purpose. However, we must never forget that at the base of the cause is man himself and the lawless conduct of his life. Does this mean, then, that those caught in the wave's devastation were greater sinners than other men? Not in the least! [Jesus](#) answers this directly, and herein lies the lesson for us.

And Jesus answered and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you [repent](#) you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." ([Luke 13:2-5](#))

Job also faced devastating losses as great as any man, but his response was that of one who trusted God: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;

blessed be the name of the LORD.' In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong" ([Job 1:21-22](#)). Job was perplexed and deeply hurt, but he accepted his lot and searched for answers. In the end, he repented of any wrong perspective of God he had. Will we?

- John W. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Would Our God Do That?](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

God's character is not all sweetness and light. Sometimes He has to be a God of judgment and vengeance. The distorted perception of Jesus as a weak, effeminate, and ineffective Savior fails to take into account Paul's revelation that the so-called stern God of the Old Testament is the same as the God of the New Testament-at times, a consuming fire. The blowing of trumpets on the Feast of Trumpets suggests 1) the giving of the Law (the code upon which justice rests), 2) that God is drawing near, and 3) judgment is coming. We must respond by repenting, being watchful and sober, and yielding to His merciful correction.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Innocent Victims?](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

We often hear of "innocent victims" dying in some tragic way, but are they truly innocent? John Ritenbaugh discusses God's perspective of the sinful, human condition.

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