Why do bad things happen to good people? This question is commonly asked in response to some tragic event that, in our opinion, unfairly touches the lives of those who are trying to live in a godly way. This question is actually indicative of an incorrect perspective of the reality of this world. The answer to this troubling question is that bad things don't happen to innately good people – in our nature we are “bad people”, not good people; there is none that doeth good, no, not one (Rom. 3:12); no one on this earth is good by nature. There is only one exception to that universal rule of original sin and man’s innate “badness” instead of goodness, and that is Jesus Christ. The truth is that bad things have only ever happened to a truly “good man” one time – when the perfectly good, sinless Son of God was unjustly condemned by men and gave up his life to save his people from their sins. Therefore, we need to ask a more appropriate question from the proper perspective. Since of all mankind is innately bad by nature, the proper question then is: “Why do good things ever happen to bad people?”

For us to be properly thankful for God’s good gifts and blessings our lives, we have to accurately understand just how bad and wicked this world really is by nature. “There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.” (Rom. 3:10-12) All men and women are horribly “bad” and wicked by nature and there are absolutely no exceptions to this total corruption, no, not one single exception. There is not a single person that does good in our lives by ourselves. We could quote multitudes of verses to emphasize the truth of total depravity and original sin, but just Rom. 3:10-18 is sufficient to clearly teach that there is absolutely no one good in our natures… no… not one.

It’s important to understand though that men do not always display their innate badness and wickedness to the fullest extent possible in this world. Someone who is dead in trespasses and sins and only has a bad, sinful nature can still obey the law and care for his mother and exchange general pleasantries at the grocery store. The societal norms and hopefully their parental upbringing teach them that is what they are supposed to do, even if they have a desire to act badly in their nature. Also, the fear of punishment for wrongdoing can prevent the bad actions of wicked men as well. That is one of the main reasons that God instituted government in this world, to “be a terror to the evil” (Rom. 13:3). The word “terror” in that verse means...
“fright, fear, alarm, or dread”. Man is bad and desires to do bad things. However, one of the main reasons the wickedness of man is curtailed and restricted in this world is because they are “afraid” of facing the punishment of government when they are caught. That’s why it is so important for the government to enforce laws in a fair and swift manner, otherwise the wicked will not fear their punishment for their crimes and be emboldened to perform the wickedness that is already in their heart.

“Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.”

(Eccl. 8:11) The heart of men is already fully set in them to do evil, and the swift enforcement of laws and government can restrict their harmful activity.

God restrains the wickedness in this world. In 2 Thess. 2:7, we see God is currently “letting” (restraining) the mystery of iniquity that is already working in this world. However, near the end of time before Christ’s second coming, God will loosen and remove his restraining influence and we will see the full badness and wickedness of this world on full display. The last days will mirror and even be worse than the days of Noah (see Matt. 24:37-39), and unfortunately we will return to a time when “God saw the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually”

(Gen. 6:5). Before Jesus’ second coming “there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time”

(Dan. 12:1). This is a glimpse of what will happen when God briefly removes his good restraining hedge and influence and allows this earth to manifest its natural disposition of abject wickedness and rebellion against everything good and against God.

We also see God’s restraining influence of the wickedness of this world in the story of Job. Satan had tried to afflict Job in the past, but even Satan knew he could not because God had “made an hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side”

(Job 1:10). Satan desired to do evil but God’s providential, protective hedge around Job personally, his house, and all his life restrained the wicked devices of Satan and his henchmen in this world. Then, God pulled back his hedge and removed a portion of his restraining influence to allow Satan to touch everything in his life except for Job himself. Satan immediately destroyed Job’s possessions, business holdings, servants, and even taking the lives of his ten children (Job 1:12-22). However, Satan could not go beyond the protective hedge that God put
Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

Written by David Wise
Tuesday, 02 June 2020 07:02 -

over Job’s health and life. Then, God removes the hedge around Job, and Satan was suffered to afflict Job but could not take his life. Satan immediately afflicts Job with grievous boils all over his body (Job 2:6-7). This shows the wickedness that can touch our lives so quickly in this world if not for the protective hedge of God’s goodness and grace. As soon as the hedge of God’s protective goodness is removed, the wickedness of this world will immediately afflict us because the natural disposition of this world is sin, evil, wickedness, and just general badness.

When the rich, young ruler came to Jesus asking what “good thing” he could do to have eternal life, Jesus essentially taught him the doctrine of man’s total depravity from Rom. 3:10-12. “Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God.” (Matt. 19:16-17) This naïve young man thought he could do at least one good thing in his life to gain eternal life. Jesus tore down his false notion of his own good ability and said you don’t even have the ability to do good — God is the only One that is good or can do good. That is why eternal salvation has to be solely by God’s sovereign grace freely bestowed upon bad sinners. If salvation was contingent upon any work that we had to perform, Jesus clarified we have no ability to do good at all.

The only way we can “do good” is “by God”. God is the only One that is good in this world (Matt. 19:17) and thus the only One that can do good. Therefore, when men are born again and regenerated and given the spiritual nature of God in their soul, now they can exhibit the fruit of the Spirit which includes “goodness” (Gal. 5:22). We have no goodness in ourselves; we are abjectly bad, wicked, and sinful. “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) dwelleth no good thing.” (Rom. 7:18) Therefore, if there is any “goodness” in man, it is by the sovereign changing of his bad nature by the Holy Spirit to allow the fruit of the Spirit of “goodness” to be manifested in his life. The source of this goodness imparted into God’s children is not by their own actions or will, but it is bestowed “from above” by God. “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.” (James 1:17) This gift of goodness in the new birth comes down “from above”, from the Father of lights, and now we have the capacity to do good in our lives.
Therefore, when we have received the good gift of the new birth from above, now we can exhibit good works in service to God. Now, we arrive at the crux of our original question – who do bad things happen to good people? Those who try to live in a good way and do good works to others, that seem to be doing everything right, why do they experience bad things in their lives? They are living good lives, but they get sick or get cancer; they lose their job and have to file bankruptcy and lose their home; their loved one or child passes away in a sudden or tragic way, or insert any manner of bad things that can come about in our lives. Why did these bad things happen to those who are living good lives? Well, that is why we have to understand the natural disposition of this world is bad, not good; sin, not holiness; wickedness, not purity. Jesus himself didn’t sugar coat how difficult this world will be for his children as pilgrims and strangers in the earth. He said, “In the world ye shall have tribulation” (John 16:33). The natural tendency of this world is tribulation, not enjoyment. However, that doesn’t mean we are to live in despair. Jesus also bookended that bleak statement with our real reason for peace and good cheer in this world – Jesus Christ and his triumphant victory over this world. “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In this world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33) Simply put, this world is bad, but Jesus’ goodness and his overcoming the world can give us peace and joy in the midst of this life’s tribulations.

Bad things happen in the lives of God’s children because of sin and all the effects of sin. These events could possibly be the result of their own sin and the corrective chastisement of God. It could be the residual ripple effects of the sins of others that touch their lives. (Why was my son killed by a drunk driver? Because someone else committed a sin of intoxication and made a bad decision and injured an innocent person.) Then, sometimes bad things happen just because of the general nature of living in a sin-cursed earth that’s natural disposition is bad, not good. We get sick because we are sinners condemned to die. We die because we are sinners. The events that cause our death may unfold in a tragic way, but still the root cause of death and sickness and brokenness and pain is the result of sin and that this world is inherently bad.

With such a gloomy picture of how bad this world really is, how can there be any good in such a wicked world? Since this world is bad, and by nature, we are wicked sinners that don’t deserve anything but God’s eternal wrath and judgment and fury, how then can any good things actually
Why Do Bad Things Happen to Good People?

Written by David Wise
Tuesday, 02 June 2020 07:02 -

 happen in this wicked world that is inhabited by sinful people? Well, God overrules the sin and wickedness of this world with his goodness from above (see James 1:17 we have already considered). It’s true that sin and badness pervasively abounds in this world, but in spite of all that sin, God’s triumphant grace overrules and defeats it. “Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20). This world is bad, but Jesus Christ’s goodness overcame this world and defeated sin and death and grace much more abounded and gave us eternal life in Christ. We don’t deserve anything from God in ourselves but his wrath and his judgment. This bad world is not fit for much other than to be one day burned up at the Lord’s second coming. In spite of all that, God still sees fit to show grace – his unmerited favor that we don’t deserve – to this bad world and the bad people in it. God loved the unlovable, had compassion upon the undesirable, and saved an elect people out of this bad world. God bestowed this super abounding grace upon sinners, not because we deserved it but because he is a good and merciful and gracious Lord.

The story of all human history is “where sin abounded, grace did much more abound” (Rom. 5:20). The natural disposition of this world is bad, sin, and wickedness, not good. The consistent theme of human and salvific history is God overruling the badness of this world with Christ’s super abounding grace. That is what happened on the cross. Sin abounded, and the sins of God’s people had to be paid for in full. However, God overruled the bad sin of this world with his abounding grace in God’s good and perfect Son paying for our sins on the cross. This is what happens in God’s providential protection in our lives as God overrules the sin of this world with his super abounding grace. The reason bad, evil things happen in this world is because after Adam’s fall, sin abounds. In spite of a world that only naturally gravitates to bad, the perfectly good Jesus Christ brought down good from above and overruled the sin of this world with his much more abounding grace. The only reason there is good at all in this bad world is because of the triumphant grace of Jesus Christ and God manifesting his goodness in this world down from above.

“Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.”
(James 1:17)