

“At a time when so many people are celebrating the coming of Christ how could God allow the senseless killing of so many innocent children?”

Yet this is a Scriptural part of the Christmas story?

Not Newtown, Connecticut (2012)
but Bethlehem, Judea (1st cent.).

Matthew 2

“¹⁷ Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, ¹⁸ “A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children; and she refused to be comforted, because they were no more.””

Matthew 18

Addresses three questions

Why do people do bad things?

They are victims of abuse!
1-7

Where is God when bad things happen?

What can we do?

Matthew 18

“⁶ but whoever **causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble**, it is better for him that a heavy millstone be hung around his neck, and that he be drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ Woe to the world because of its stumbling blocks! For **it is inevitable that stumbling blocks come**; but woe to that man through whom the stumbling block comes!”

Stumbling blocks

1. **As social beings we are not solely responsible for our actions** - Others share in the shaping of our virtues and vices.
2. **Stumbling blocks** - may lead us to act in destructive ways.
 - **Family** - inappropriate support, nurture and modeling.
 - **Society** - worldly values, expectations, and models.
 - **Church** - abusive shepherds & sheep.

1 Chronicles 21:13

“David said to Gad, “I am in great distress; please let me fall into the hand of the Lord, for His mercies are very great. **But do not let me fall into the hand of man.**””

Peter, a man not naturally given to submission, advocates submitting to human authority in the context of submission to God.

1 Peter 2

“*Submit yourselves for the Lord’s sake to every human institution*, whether to a king as the one in authority, ¹⁴ or to governors as sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and the praise of those who do right.”

But what about those leaders that are stumbling blocks - Nero, Herod, False prophets, etc.

Peter was concerned about church leaders lest they be stumbling blocks rather than building blocks.

1 Peter 5:2

“shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock.”

They can be disengaged!

They can be self serving!

They can be micromanagers!

They can be poor role models!

At the root of all stumbling blocks and stumbling is anxiety and a “rebel spirit” seeking to exalt self.

1 Peter 5:6

“⁶ Therefore *humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God*, that He may exalt you at the proper time, ⁷ casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.”

This is easier to detect in others than in ourselves.

We must clean our own house before working on our neighbors’.

All who are properly submitted to the authority of Christ have power that those who demand independence will never know and they will have grace and wisdom to:

- 1. exercise authority over others,**
- 2. submit to human authority, and**
- 3. challenge human authority.**

How do I know if I have an anxious, rebellious spirit?

God called me to be servant.

A test of Godly character is seen in how I respond when I am treated like one.

Matthew 18

“⁸ And if your hand or your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it from you; *it is better for you to enter life crippled or lame, than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the eternal fire.* ⁹ And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out, and throw it from you. It is better for you to enter life with one eye, than having two eyes, to be cast into the fiery hell.”

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They do not take personal responsibility!
8-10

Where is God when bad things happen?



What can we do?

“Between stimulus and response is our greatest power - the freedom to choose.”

What are we to throw from us?

- ✓ Our offending physical body parts?
- ✓ Besetting small sins before they bring our life to shipwreck of faith?
- ✓ Abusive elements in our lives like toxic relationships, abusive environments, etc.?

How are we to confront abusive external authority?

- ✓ **Respect the position** of authority - language, posture, timing, etc.
- ✓ Be more concerned to **correct** than confront and condemn.
- ✓ When and if you must part, **don't make a scene** or start a civil war.
- ✓ **Support, protect, and educate** victims of abusive authority.

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Where is God when bad things happen?

God seeks to save but does not violate human free will.
11-14

Human and natural disasters call for acts of God, they don't reflect them.

What can we do?

Matthew 18

“¹¹ **For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost.** ¹² What do you think? If any man has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go and search for the one that is straying? ¹³ And if it turns out that he finds it, truly I say to you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine which have not gone astray. ¹⁴ Thus it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones perish.”

Where is God when we are being abused?

- ✓ He is seeking to save the abuser.
We demand that He save us from the abuser.
- ✓ He is seeking to comfort us.
We demand justice not comfort.
- ✓ He knows that the freedom to abuse is also the freedom to repent.
We demand vengeance not repentance.
- ✓ He knows that we all share in the abuse of a fallen world.
We believe that we are innocent victims.

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What can we do?

Work for genuine repentance.
15-20

Matthew 18

1. Respect personal dignity with privacy.

¹⁵ If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, **just between the two of you**. **If** he listens to you, you have won your brother over.

2. Support the evidence with witnesses.

¹⁶ But **if** he will not listen, take one or two others along, **so that every matter may be established** by the testimony of two or three witnesses.

3. Apply pressure through the community.

¹⁷ **If** he refuses to listen to them, **tell it to the church**;

4. Match behavior with environment.

and **if** he refuses to listen even to the church, **treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector.**"

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Treat others the way God has treated us.
21-35

Matthew 18

²¹ Then Peter came and said to Him, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" ²² Jesus said to him, "***I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.*** ²³ For this reason the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a certain king who wished to settle accounts with his slaves."

³² Then summoning him, his lord said to him, "You wicked slave, ***I forgave you all that debt because you entreated me.*** ³³ ***Should you not also have had mercy on your fellow slave, even as I had mercy on you?*** "

Why does God seek to save the lost but not bring justice to those the lost have abused.

- ✓ Note that Jesus does not demand justice but rather **forgiveness** in this chapter.
- ✓ Do we demand justice for ourselves and our loved ones without realizing that **we are also abusive sinners** at some level?

Do we see the speck in our brother's eye but not the log in our own (Matthew 7)?

Are we more like the brother of the prodigal than we are like the prodigal son (Luke 15)?

Mahatma Gandhi

"An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind."

John Stott

"The longer I live the more clearly I see my own depravity and God's grace in Christ toward me."

People with Godly character

1. They understand and respect the **complexity** of sinful behavior in themselves and others.
2. They see God's hand in the **response** to evil not the prevention of free will.
3. They believe in restoration through **repentance** and seek to facilitate it in themselves and others.
4. They are able and willing to **forgive** and absorb personal loss because of God's grace toward them.