

THE MISSING COMMANDMENT

When something occurs, which we find objectionable and out of our control, we often ask: Why does God do this?

It may be a natural disaster: a hurricane, or an earthquake, or a fire, or a flood — what is deemed to be an “Act of God.”

Or it may be a serious, agonizing, or fatal illness: undeserved and with no cause identifiable by us.

Sometimes we ask when “bad” things happen to “good” people, who live (or had been living) good lives.

Or we may be unsettled by the record: for example, the complete destruction of all humankind (save for eight persons) by means of a cruel and most painful downright drowning (not just an unacceptable waterboarding), at the time of the Flood.

Genesis 6:6–8, 13; 7:4 *The Lord regretted that he had made human beings on the earth, and his heart was deeply troubled. ⁷So the Lord said, “I will wipe from the face of the earth the human race I have created — and with them the animals, the birds and the creatures that move along the ground — for I regret that I have made them.” ⁸But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord. ¹³So God said to Noah, “I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is filled with violence because of them. I am surely going to destroy both them and the earth. ⁷:⁴Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.” [NIV]*

There are also specific historic cases, such as the unequivocal command God gave to king Saul to utterly destroy all and sundry Amalekites:

1 Samuel 15:2–3 *Thus says the Lord of hosts, “I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way when they came up out of Egypt. ³Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have. Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.” [ESV]*

The seriousness and import of this command by God is emphasized by the severe divine punishment levied on king Saul, because he did not obey and slaughter all of Amalek (including children and infants), but saved Agag, their king, and a few more.

1 Samuel 15:9a *But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them. [KJV]*

God’s judgment and final punishment was:

1 Samuel 15:16a, 19; 16:14 *Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me last night. ¹⁹Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?” ¹⁶:¹⁴Now the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the Lord tormented him. [NRSV]*

Then I am tempted to ask: why does God do this? Is He not a God of love?

Yes, He is:

Romans 5:8 *But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. [NASB]*

On the opposite: we may ask why good sometimes (or even often) happens to individuals (or organizations), whom we deem unworthy, unmeritorious or even outright “bad.”

Then I am tempted to ask: why does God do this? Is He not a God of righteousness and justice?

Yes, He is, as Moses attested in his last song — shortly before dying — after having communed with the Lord for a hundred years:

Deuteronomy 32:3–4 *I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! ⁴He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. [NIV]*

Some other times, in trying to reconcile all of this and how a God of love, mercy and

righteousness would do anything to which we object (on the basis of our own standards, our common sense or our decency), my question takes the somewhat milder form: Why does God allow this?

The apostle John helps me by stating:

1 John 5:19b *the whole world lies under the control of the evil one.* [ISV]

In my distress, I realize — at last — the source of my angst and confusion: I am trying to second-guess the Lord and I am failing at it.

Next, as I search the scriptures for clarity, I find the clear and well-known commandment:

Deuteronomy 6:5 *And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.* [KJV]

But I cannot find anything like this:

And thou shalt second-guess the Lord thy God with all thine heart, etc.

That commandment is missing from the list. There was no such instruction given to Moses; rather,

Deuteronomy 6:17 *Ye shall diligently keep the commandments of the Lord your God, and his testimonies, and his statutes, which he hath commanded thee.* [KJV]

Or, as confirmed by Jesus:

Mark 12:30 *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment."* [KJV]

And the consequence of loving Him is that I will keep His commandments:

John 14:15 *"If you love me, you will keep my commandments."* [ESV]

The apostle John repeats it to us:

1 John 5:3 *For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.* [NKJV]

That is: I shall manifest my love by obeying Him.

Clearly then: it is the control of the evil one, which is the root cause.

Yet the question returns: is God not the Almighty?

He may not be the direct author of the problems and hardships, still: why does He allow them and why does He not eradicate evil altogether?

Micah 6:8 *He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord really wants from you: He wants you to promote justice, to be faithful, and to live obediently before your God.* [NET]

I am instructed to replace second-guessing the Lord with trusting Him:

Proverbs 3:5 *Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding.* [NLT]

To summarize, what I found in the scriptures is: love, obey, trust.

Those are what the loving Lord wants me to do; second-guessing Him is not His will for me.

That commandment about second-guessing God is really missing.

I have now learned never to forget that it is not there — thanks be to God.

The prophet Isaiah offers us a good insight about the missing commandment:

Isaiah 55:9 *For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.* [KJV]

"As the heavens are higher": an altogether different realm than ours — a realm that is beyond my understanding or my reach.

In this regard, the future mother of the Lord gave us all a good practical example of trusting the Lord and serving Him beyond our understanding.

Luke 1:38a *Then Mary said, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word."* [NRSV]