

Did God Abandon Sandy Hook?

We'll all remember where we were December 14, 2012 when we heard the news that 20 precious school children and 6 teachers were gunned down at Sandy Hook Elementary.

I had heard on the news that morning that police and rescue workers had been called to an elementary school in Connecticut but nothing could have prepared me for what I heard later that afternoon.

Sandy and I were driving from Corpus Christi back to Dean Chollar's home in San Antonio. Texas speed limits are quite high and we were on a road that had a limit of 75 mph. At that speed things happen real quick so you grip the wheel and really concentrate.

I turned on the radio and the announcer was giving the details that had been unknown earlier that morning. We listened in absolute shock, like I'm sure you did. And then I remember babbling "Oh no, oh no!" and my eyes started filling up with tears, which is really bad when you're going just under 80 mph.

That day caused all of us to react with our deepest emotions. Some people sat dumbfounded. They just didn't know how to even respond to something so unthinkable. Others fell to their knees in prayer.

But some had the opposite reaction. Someone in our congregation has a good friend who had been prayerfully trying to share Christ with her adult daughter for quite a while. They had had numerous discussions about the existence of God.

But as they sat together and heard the shocking news, the daughter immediately turned to her mother and said, "Don't you dare mention your God to me. I don't ever want to hear about some supposed loving God again."

The same appalling events turn some to God and others away from Him.

Stephen Prothero, is a Boston University religion scholar who wrote these words in response to the shootings: If you believe in a God who is all powerful and all good, then covering up for the Almighty at a time like this is in my view deeply unfaithful. Today is a day to shake your fist at heaven and demand answers, and then to shake it harder when no answers are forthcoming. To do anything else is in my view to diminish the idea of God, and to cheapen faith in the process.

I hope you don't think I'm being heretical here but I have to agree with one thing Prothero says, I don't think we should be covering up for God either.

God is the almighty. He's the self-existent Creator of all. He doesn't need us to make excuses for Him.

I watch some of the pastors and Christian teachers ambushed by TV news reporters and forced to make some "sound-bite spiritual explanation" for the tragedy, respond as if they had to cover for God.

There is no sound bite answer for the problem of evil and suffering in our world. Personally, I'm not sure I'd even consent to go on a TV news program to try discuss issues of pain and suffering unless they'd give me a half hour to speak with out being interrupted.

That would at least be enough time to begin to lay out the issues at hand. But in the end I don't believe any of us, whether we're Christian, Jew, Muslim, or atheist can fully and completely understand human suffering.

But while we can't completely comprehend something as unthinkable as shooting school children I believe we can begin to think through some key issues on the questions of God and the existence of evil in our world.

That's what we want to begin to unpack this morning.

I don't profess to have all the answers. There are questions that trouble me that are probably the same ones you have.

I wrestle with injustice and human suffering.

I don't understand how individuals can seem to be insensitive to the trauma they cause others. I don't understand murders, rapists, child molesters, human trafficking, and a host of other evils.

We all have a worldview. It's the lens we look through to evaluate life. This morning I'd like to challenge you to begin to look at life with a Biblical worldview.

I. Every Human Tragedy Has Its Root In Humanity's Fall

People have taken the narratives in the Bible in lots of different ways. Here at FCC we've found that the best way to interpret the Bible is simply let it speak and to take it literally.

When the Bible does speak figuratively it's usually very obvious, so we read it and simply allow the words to have their usual, customary meaning.

Turn to Genesis 2 page 2

Read verses 8-9 15-18

Read 3:6-8

The Bible clearly tells us that there is a God who made Adam and Eve.

He placed them in a luscious garden, provided for all their needs, and only gave them one restriction, which they proceeded to violate. The punishment was death.

Now you're probably thinking, "Isn't that a bit harsh for snatching a piece of fruit? The punishment doesn't seem to fit the crime."

But the crime wasn't centered in the fruit, it was rooted in disobedience to God.

And here's the point. If there's a God who made people He has the right to set the rules. God set the rules and disobedience brought death. That's how serious sin is.

We laugh about sin. Some times we don't think twice about disobeying our Creator. But God lets us know right from the start that as far as He's concerned sin is eternally consequential.

And I believe He tells us all this so we'll know how significant sin really is. God hates sin. It's an affront to His holy character. God despises sin. And He despises the pain and heartache sin brings to us. And sin pays death.

Now Adam & Eve didn't drop over dead when they ate the fruit or we wouldn't be here today. But the Bible says they did die. They died spiritually and then ultimately they died physically.

Death is actually separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body and spiritual death is the separation of an individual from God.

If we're going to begin to understand our world it's absolutely essential to grab onto the Biblical worldview tenet that when Adam sinned, he planted the seed that will continue to produce the weeds of murderous people in society.

The Bible says, *Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned.* (Romans 5:12)

The real catastrophe is the chain reaction of transgression that Adam unleashed on this planet when he sinned in the Garden of Eden.

Not that it's all his fault as if we wouldn't have done the same thing, but until then there was no death, there was no tragedy.

Yet someday God will contain the disastrous presence of sin in the darkness of hell. Every particle of evil will be compressed into the Lake of Fire.

Here's the end of the story. *And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away.*

Then He who sat on the throne said, "Behold, I make all things new." And He said to me, "Write, for these words are true and faithful." And He said to me, "It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. (Revelation 21:4-6)

That's going to happen just as surely as the hundreds of things the Bible foretold already have happened.

But here's where it gets real hard for us. We can't expect the "not yet" in the "now." Until that day, there will continue to be shootings and tragedies, and heartache because there will still be evil in the world.

The Bible says, *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.* (Romans 3:23)

Moral evil is the immorality and pain and suffering that comes because we choose as a human race to be selfish, arrogant, uncaring, hateful, and abusive.

I don't have an exact figure on this one, but I'd guess that a good 90 some percent of the world's suffering results from the sin of others or ourselves.

For example, people look at a famine and wonder where is God, but the world produces enough food for everybody to have the food they need every day. It's our own irresponsibility and self-centeredness that prevents people from getting fed.

Think about it. Is there anyone here today who can honestly say that they never caused anyone else pain and heartache in their life? By thoughtless words or unkind actions?

We all have. We've all contributed to the suffering of others in varying degrees.

Ultimately all human evil is rooted in what happened in Adam. We just follow his example.

But you say, "Wait a minute Ed, it's true that I'm not perfect and I've caused other people heartache but I wouldn't shoot someone. We're talking about a degree of evil that's light years beyond me. I can't begin to relate to that level of depravity.

Adam and Eve had a number of children but the first two were a couple of boys named Cain and Abel. Cain was jealous of his brother and killed him.

It didn't take long for that to happen. The history of our world is a history of bloodshed and fighting and sometimes those shedding the blood are common people.

It happened in Nazi Germany, it happened in the Soviet Union under Stalin, it happened in Cambodia, Rwanda. It's happening in the Middle East.

No race, culture, or religion or lack of religion has immunity.

Can I explain why one guy would take it upon himself to be executioner of 26 innocent people? I can't. I can't even begin to process what was going in the guy's mind.

What I do know is this: the Bible says, *The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?* (Jeremiah 17:9)

We live in a world that's out of wack. Sin has distorted things to the degree that when God visited our planet in Jesus Christ people brutally murdered Him.

What's amazing to me isn't that there's evil in our world. What's amazing to me is that God hasn't just incinerated the planet. What's amazing to me is that God is still forgiving all who come to Him by faith.

I. Every Human Tragedy Has Its Root In Humanity's Fall

II. The Existence Of Evil Proves The Very Existence Of God

All of us wrestle with the question why do the innocent suffer? That's the great philosophical problem of the ages that atheists have been asking theists. If there's a good God why do bad things happen?

Steven Folberg, is the senior rabbi at Congregation Beth Israel in Austin, Texas. Immediately after the horrific shootings in Connecticut the press was on his doorstep asking for theological explanations. How could a loving God allow something like this to happen?

Giving an answer to that question is no small assignment.

He said, "I saw a bumper sticker once that said, 'God is good. Evil is real. God is all powerful. Pick two.'"

He went on to say the implication of the bumper sticker was, only 2 could be true. Put all three together and people assume they're logically inconsistent. A good, all-powerful God would stop evil, right?

Right there people say, "That's it. That proves it conclusively. There is no God."

Well we need to be careful about stating a series of premises and drawing a conclusion. In logic, a valid argument with a false premise can lead to a false conclusion. This is called a valid, unsound argument.

We know that evil is real. Does that negate the existence of an all good, all-powerful God? That's a false conclusion. Here's why:

First of all, if God doesn't exist then absolute moral values of good and evil don't exist. If there is no God and we're chance products of naturalistic mechanisms then there is no standard of right and wrong.

If we're just cosmic accidents who are here by chance then life is absurd. That's why the existential philosophers Camus and Sartre wrote about the absurdity of human existence. It doesn't make sense because there's no reason for us to be here.

Trying to explain away God doesn't provide any answers. Then human life has no ultimate purpose outside of what each individual thinks. There's no eternity to look forward to. There's no punishment for the Sandy Hook shooter.

Atheism provides no hope and no answers. In fact atheism carried to its logical conclusion leads to ultimate hopelessness and despair.

If there is no God who sets value on life by creating it in His image then who's to say that Adam Lanza was wrong in what he did?

No matter how religious or irreligious we are we know instinctively that he was wrong. Why, because we're not just chance products of impersonal forces. We're made in the image of God and each life has value.

Christianity explains our moral outrage and our desire for justice.

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III. God Is Loving And All Powerful And At Work In Our World

So where was God when the Sandy Hook shootings took place? That's a legitimate question. I understand why people are asking that question.

It's one I've been asked over and over in different situations. Where was God on 911? Where was God while my child lay dying? Where was God when my wife suffered with cancer?

The Bible has an answer. **Turn with me to Psalm 139 page 609**

Read verses 7-10

"Do not I fill heaven and earth?" says the Lord. (Jeremiah 23:24)

The eyes of the LORD are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good. (Proverbs 15:3)

God is here. He's what the theologians call "omnipresence," which means He's everywhere at once.

That means that God didn't abandon Sandy Hook Elementary School at 9:30 AM on December 14th. God was there. So if God was there why didn't He stop this guy?

What I would ask someone who wants to deny the existence of God because of this tragedy is this: Are you willing to obey all the commandments of God? Will you commit yourself to always be sexually pure, always be honest, never steal, never covet what someone else has, never fulfill your lusts, never sleep with someone of your own gender,

always forgive others, always love God with your heart, mind, and soul? Always obey God in all things?

It's not going to happen. The same people who say, if God was real He would have stopped the shooter, would say I want to live my life my way.

Think about that. People don't want to obey God's commands but they want God to force others to obey His commands! Where does it stop?

None of us want God controlling every move that we make. We want to be free to make our own choices. But if I choose to get drunk and smash my car into another vehicle and kill or cripple someone else, is that God's fault? Should He have stopped me? At what point?

It is sheer hypocrisy to say, "I reject God because He doesn't fit the job description that I've personally written for Him.

God should prevent all accidents, He should prevent all disease, He should stop all crime but He shouldn't take away my free will."

God created us with an ability to choose. We can use our hand to feed a homeless person or we can use our hand to fire a Bushmaster XM15 into a classroom full of kids. That's our choice.

God in His sovereignty allows people to make choices whether they're right or wrong. Remember, we were created to love God and true love demands the ability to choose.

None of us would want to live without that freedom to make choices but when somebody else exercises their freedom of choice in a destructive way, then suddenly it's God's fault. We want to blame God.

When we start pontificating about what God should or shouldn't do based on what we see, we're a lot like an ant trying to understand a human being. Even if we could communicate with ants to some degree, their understanding of us would be almost non-existent.

Could we explain to them our feelings and emotions? Could we explain why we ponder the meaning of life and the existence of God? It wouldn't be within their capability to understand.

But then the ant says, “I don’t believe in human beings because what’s called a human being doesn’t act the way I think they should! They’re so beyond me I can’t begin to comprehend them in their totality but I’m going to reject their existence when they don’t act the way I believe they should.”

That’s the height of arrogance and absurdity!

I don’t know the specifics of all the reasons for the shootings. I doubt if we’ll ever understand what would drive someone to commit such a cowardly, heinous crime.

But I do know where God was. He was right where He was on 911 and Columbine and the Amish schoolhouse shootings. He was right where He was when His innocent, perfect, pure, holy, beloved Son was taken by wicked hands and crucified.

That’s what I know with certainty. I know that *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.* (Romans 5:8)

I know that God didn’t stay separate from our pain. This is intensely personal with Him.

He created us and has every right to annihilate every one of us. Instead He came into our world of sin and hurt and pain. He stepped into it as Jesus Christ and allowed Himself to experience the results.

He allowed His created ones to nail Him to a wooden cross and savagely murder Him. He did all of that in order to bear our sins. He did all of that to bring about our forgiveness.

Turn to II Corinthians 5 page 1135

To me this is the most astounding verse in the Bible. Talk about having some “why” questions?

Read verse 21

Think about it. If He died because the wages of sin is death, if He became sin for us at the cross, then at the cross He experienced the awfulness of every sin that’s ever been committed including the murders at Sandy Hook Elementary.

Can I explain why He didn’t stop the carnage? No, I can’t. Do I know that He put Himself into the depth of our heartache and grief? Absolutely.

If our God would do that then He can be trusted.

If our God would suffer for the very things which perplex us and bring us such agony, we can have confidence in Him, even if we can't grab a hold of all the whys and wherefores.

Why doesn't God just erase all the pain now since He suffers with compassion for His creation?

The truth is simply that we don't know. We can hazard some guesses and we'd probably be wrong. But let's say we can't give an answer to the question, "why is evil allowed?"

We need to remember that atheism and secularism don't have an answer either.

So where does that leave us?

It leaves us with this fact; Christianity alone offers hope. Even in the worst of situations, the person who has received the grace of God in salvation has the hope of a future in which death has no place.

This isn't hope as in cross-your-fingers hope, like, I sure hope the game doesn't get rained out this weekend.

In the New Testament, hope is presented as the assurance of the future. It's a noun, not a verb. We don't hope, we have a hope. We have the hope of that life which has no room for death by the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.

The Bible says, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you.* (I Peter 1:3-4)

Jesus Christ proved that He had broken the hold of death by breaking free from the tomb. Because He rose and conquered death, we who trust in Him will too.

One of the great "hope" verses in Scripture is in Romans 15:13. It says, *Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

This is God's purpose for us, to live in the sure hope that our future is secure in Him.

If there's a overriding message in all of these tragedies we've faced over the past several years it's that this world is wracked by sin and desperately needs redemption.

How about you today? Do you know the Redeemer?

The Bible says there's a heaven. The Bible says there's a hell. And the Bible says that Jesus is the only way of salvation.

Jesus said something which no one else could ever say. If Jesus were just a good man or a great religious teacher He wouldn't be saying stuff like this. He said, *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die.*

And then He asked the most important question that any of us will ever have to answer. (And you and I will have to give an answer!) *Do you believe this?* (John 11:25, 26)