

PAPER 3: The “WHYs?” of Suffering – Suffering for “God’s Glory”

The Topic of “Suffering for God’s Glory” always raises many Questions, which can be summarized and grouped as follows

1. *Isn’t God’s passion for ‘His own glory’ a rather Self-centered and selfish thing?*
2. *How can you possibly say that all things that God does ‘for His own glory’, including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good, benefit, welfare and happiness?*
3. *I would never intentionally inflict short-term, much less long-term, pain and suffering on my children. So, why would a good, loving, and caring God do it to His children?*

How can a loving and caring God decree pain and suffering for His children with the stated goal of its being ‘for His own glory’ and still be a ‘loving’ and ‘caring’ Father to them?

Why the need for pain and suffering in the first place?

I just don’t understand how any of this can be.

We can easily see that all three of our Questions are closely related and are, in fact, really just extensions of each other. There will, therefore, be a great deal of overlap in answering them.

All three of these Questions are very important Questions ...

... in that they deal with the very nature of God’s inner core being and what He is really like deep down within Himself. They deal with the motives He has for all that He does, especially where His children are concerned. We want to tread very carefully and be very thorough in answering these Questions, as their answers will go a long way toward determining not only what you think about God Himself, but also the approach that you will take in coming to terms with, pain, suffering, and death when confronted by them. Scripture proof throughout is a critical necessity.

In answering these Questions, we would make two Assertions:

Assertion 1: God is totally sovereign over ALL pain and suffering.

If pain and suffering come to us, they come by God's sovereign will and decree. There is no chance, no randomness, no "*We live in a fallen world and it rains on the just and unjust alike*" type of stoic mentality. No, ALL pain and suffering come directly by and through the sovereign, permissive will and decree of God.

We will later come to see that this is actually a very comforting thought.

Assertion 2: Whenever God seeks "*His own glory*", even when sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is also at the same time seeking His children's highest good and benefit.

Indeed, we hold that God's glory and His children's highest good and happiness are so thoroughly intertwined and bound up with each other that an increase in one will always be accompanied by a corresponding increase in the other.

In Answering our three Questions and Proving our two Assertions ...

... we will be dealing with a number of very deep, complex, intricate, multifaceted and multidimensional issues. To deal effectively with them and to keep us on track as we go through them ...

We will set-up and follow a structured Six Step Process

Step 1: Define exactly what "*God's Glory*" and "*suffering for it*" is, means, and implies

Step 2: Provide Proof for Assertion 1: "*God is totally sovereign over ALL pain and suffering.*"

Step 3: Answer Question 1, "*Isn't God's passion for 'His own glory' a rather Self-centered and selfish thing?*"

[Note: Steps 4 and 5 are closely related and answering them will comprise the bulk of our Paper]

Step 4: Provide a Framework for Proving Assertion 2 that ...

Whenever God seeks "His own glory", even when sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is also at the same time seeking His children's highest good and benefit.

Step 5: Answer Question 2, “How can you possibly say that all things that God does ‘for His own glory’, including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good, benefit, welfare and happiness?”

We will answer Question 2 in Three Parts ...

Part 1: Setting out and explaining the “*reciprocal relationship*” that exists between God’s displaying His glory and an increase in the highest good and happiness of His children at the same time.

[We note that “*reciprocal*” means ... “*given, felt, or done in return ... showed, felt, or shown by both sides ... given or felt by each toward the other ... given, performed, felt, etc., in return*”

Part 2: Showing how the “*reciprocal relationship*” works by taking in-depth looks at

- a. The Nature and Motives of God in Displaying His own Glory
- b. The Nature of Natural Unregenerate Man
- c. The Nature of Regenerate Man
- d. The Origin, Nature, Extent, and Depth of the Christian’s Personal Relationship with God

Part 3: “Putting it all together”

Our final “Step” in Answering our Three Questions and Proving our Two Assertions is

Step 6: Answer Question 3:

I would never intentionally inflict short-term, much less long-term, pain and suffering on my children. So, why would a good, loving, and caring God do it to His children?

How can a loving and caring God decree pain and suffering for His children with the stated goal of its being ‘for His own glory’ and still be a ‘loving’ and ‘caring’ Father to them?

Why the need for pain and suffering in the first place?

We will answer Question 3 in Five Parts ...

Part 1: By revisiting the “*Reciprocal Relationship*” that exists between God’s displaying His glory and an increase in the highest good and happiness of His children at the same time

Part 2: By showing how we “*glorify God*” in our pain and suffering

Part 3: By referring you to “*Suffering and ‘The Intolerable Compliment of God’s Love’*” (Taken from *The Problem of Pain* by C. S. Lewis)

Part 4: By showing “‘*Why?*’ *it is necessary for God to use pain and suffering to achieve ‘His glory’ and our ‘highest good’*”

Part 5: By giving a very brief Conclusion

**So, let’s start our Six-Step Process of Proving our Two Assertions
and Answering our Three Questions**

**Step 1: Define exactly what “*God’s Glory*” and “*suffering for it*” is, means,
and implies**

If we are going to “*suffer for God’s glory*”, we should most certainly know what “*God’s Glory*” is, means, and implies.

Concerning God’s “*glory*” we read in the Bible ...

“Give unto the LORD the glory due to His name” (Psalm 29:2)

*“Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us,
But to Your name give glory” (Psalm 115:1)*

But what exactly does the term “*God’s glory*” mean and imply?

We learn from the “*Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms*” that ...

The term “*glory*” itself, as related to God, is defined as ...

“Exalted praise and honor. Glory is an attribute of God”

The term “glory of God” is defined as ...

“The divine essence of God as absolutely resplendent and ultimately great (Rev. 21:23). The praise and honoring of God as the supreme Lord of all (I Cor. 10:31; Phil. 2:11).”

The term “glorification of God” means ...

“The praise and worship of God.”

The term “glorified with Christ” means ...

“The promise of sharing in Christ’s heavenly glory given to those who share His sufferings on earth (Rom. 8:17).”

From “*The Pocket Dictionary of Theological Terms*” we see “glory” defined as ...

“A biblical term used in reference to the unapproachable and mighty manifestation of the immediate presence of God. The Biblical concept of glory carries with it connotations of inexpressible beauty and majesty. At the same time it implies an absolutely pure and terrifying ‘holiness’ confronting the sinfulness of humans.”

From those who have written about God’s “glory” ...

Charles Spurgeon says ...

“God’s glory is the result of His nature and acts. He is glorious in His character, for there is such a store of everything that is holy, and good, and lovely in God, that He must be glorious. The actions which flow from His character are also glorious; but while He intends that they should manifest to His creatures His goodness, and mercy, and justice, He is equally concerned that the glory associated with them should be given only to Himself.”

John Piper states that the “glory” of God is ...

“... the public display of the infinite beauty and worth of God ... the radiance of His holiness, the radiance of His manifold infinitely worthy valuable perfections”

Such is the “glory” of God variously defined.

As humans we cannot add to God's glory.

We can only exalt in it, and respond to it.

We can “*glorify*” God’s name through our praise, worship, faith, trust, and patient endurance in time of affliction.

We can also “*glorify*” his name through our lives and our “*good works*” ...

“Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16)

We are told that those who “*suffer with Him*” will be “*glorified together*” with Him

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” (Romans 8:16-17)

We can *behold* His glory, “*glorify*” His name and even be “*glorified together*” with Him, but we cannot add to His “*glory*”.

God can manifest both Himself and His glory to individual men, as in the cases of Abraham, Job, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, David, and Peter, James, and John in the Transfiguration.

And He can manifest a veiled glimpse of Himself and His glory to all mankind ...

“For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened.” (Romans 1:20-22).

God’s glory is His glory alone and is at the absolute pinnacle of perfection.

God is very “*jealous*” concerning His “*glory*”, especially that it not be given to another.

Indeed, He Himself enshrined and recorded His “*jealousy*” for His name and glory in the Second Commandment, written by His very own finger ...

“You shall not make for yourself a carved image ... For I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God” (Exodus 20:4,5)

... and, elsewhere ...

*“I am the LORD, that is My name;
And My glory I will not give to another” (Isaiah 42:8)*

It is not a stretch, but a Biblical truth, to say that we should weigh everything we do by how it affects God’s glory. God’s glory should be an all-consuming passion for the Christian ...

“Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.” (I Corinthians 10:31)

**We also need to understand that there are two kinds
of “suffering for God’s glory”**

There is a general “suffering for God’s glory” in which we “suffer with Him” ...

“The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.” (Romans 8:16-17)

And, there is a special “suffering for His sake” – which is a high privilege that is “granted” to people going through persecution ...

“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29)

To “suffer for His sake” has its origins in active and overt persecution (where permitted) and ridicule and mockery elsewhere (as in modern day America).

Our Lord tells us that both kinds of suffering can be *intellectual* as well as *physical* ...

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11-12)

Whether we are “*suffering for God’s glory*” in general or “*suffering for His sake*” in particular, we “*glorify*” God by exhibiting faith, trust, and patient endurance while continuing to pray for relief.

In return for exhibiting patient endurance and trust in Him, we receive many spiritual benefits and rewards, and, grandest of all, we will be “*glorified together*” with Him at the consummation of all things.

Our next Step in Answering our Three Questions and Proving our Two Assertions is ...

Step 2: Provide Proof for Assertion 1, “God is totally sovereign over ALL pain and suffering.”

It is clearly taught in the Bible that God personally decrees all pain and suffering that comes to pass.

We read, for instance, that God Himself purposely makes the “*mute ... deaf ... blind*”

“So the LORD said to him, ‘Who has made man’s mouth? Or who makes the mute, the deaf, the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the LORD?’” (Exodus 4:11)

“And His disciples asked Him, saying, ‘Rabbi, who sinned, this man or His parents, that He was born blind?’

Jesus answered, ‘Neither this man or his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him.’” (John 9:2-3)

We read where God declares Himself to be sovereign over calamities, darkness, killings, and woundings ...

“If there is calamity in a city, will not the LORD have done it?” (Amos 3:6)

*“I form the light and create darkness,
I make peace and create calamity;
I, the LORD, do all these things.” (Isaiah 45:7)*

“Now see that I, even I, am He,

*And there is no God besides Me;
I kill and I make alive,
I wound and I heal;
Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.” (Deuteronomy 22:39)*

We note again that God “*grants*” a special kind of suffering to His children, a suffering born of persecution ...

“For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake” (Philippians 1:29)

“As it is written:

*‘For Your sake we are killed all day long;
We are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.’” (Romans 8:36)*

Even today throughout the world God’s people are subject to mass killings “*for His sake*”, for simply believing in Him.

We should also mention God’s sovereign control over the pain and suffering of Job, which, we will take up in Paper 5, “*God’s Answer to Job’s ‘Why?’ – and Job’s reaction to it.*”

Considering all the above, we can certainly see how people might come to think or ask the three Questions that we are considering in this Paper ...

- 1. Isn’t God’s passion for ‘His own glory’ a rather Self-centered and selfish thing?*
- 2. How can you possibly say that all things that God does ‘for His own glory’, including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good, benefit, welfare and happiness?*
- 3. I would never intentionally inflict short-term, much less long-term, pain and suffering on my children. So, why would a good, loving, and caring God do it to His children?*

How can a loving and caring God decree pain and suffering for His children with the stated goal of its being ‘for His own glory’ and still be a ‘loving’ and ‘caring’ Father to them?

Our next Step in Answering our Three Questions and Proving our Two Assertions is ...

Step 3: Answering Question 1 – *“Isn’t God’s passion for ‘His own glory’ a rather Self-centered and selfish thing?”*

Note: *We are going to take a somewhat different approach to answering our three Questions by supposing that we are having a discussion with a Christian who understands the sovereignty of God but is very much troubled by our three questions. We will give him the name “Questioner”.*

“Questioner” opens with Question 1 ...

“Isn’t God’s passion for ‘His own glory’ a rather Self-centered and selfish thing?”

We would answer, first, *“You are partly right. ‘God’s passion for His own glory’ is a very ‘Self-centered thing.’”* He is, after all, God, and He Himself has repeatedly told us He is a “jealous” God and wants the truth about Himself and His glory to be correctly known and understood by all, and in no way attributed to another. So, yes, God’s passion for His glory is a very “Self-centered” thing.

We would answer, second, that though God’s passion for “His own glory” is a very “Self-centered thing”, it is not a “selfish thing” in the pejorative sense that it would be for anyone other than God. Indeed, in Questions 2 and 3, we will see that God’s passion for His own glory is a very good, proper, and loving thing for Him to have and that it actually works very much to His children’s personal and spiritual benefit, gain and happiness.

But, for now, we will show 4 Proofs that “God’s passion for His own glory” is not a “selfish” thing in a pejorative sense. We will do this ...

1. By briefly looking at some of God’s inner core character traits and attributes as revealed in Scripture and seeing their total incompatibility and inconsistency with God’s being ‘selfish’ in a pejorative sense.
2. By considering that God is immutable and could never act contrary to or go against His own inner core attributes of being “good, loving, and just”, thereby ensuring that all of His actions toward His children must always be “good, loving, and just” and never “selfish”.

3. By showing how God has absolutely nothing whatsoever to gain from a relationship with us to be “*selfish*” about.
 4. By noting that we can summarily dismiss all thoughts of “*selfishness*” on God’s part toward His children by simply looking to the cross of Calvary
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For Proof 1 that God is incapable of acting selfishly toward His children, we look at what God is like in His inner core Being and nature so as to see what motivates Him and what His relationship with His children must be like.

Again, this is very important as your view of God and what He is like will determine everything that you do or think about pain, suffering and death.

Some of the known “Inner Core” characteristics of God revealed in the Bible are that

1. God is “Good”.

“So He said to Him, ‘Why do you call Me good? No one is good but One, that is, God.’” (Jesus Christ, Matthew 19:17)

The Bible is very clear on God’s “goodness”. In fact, as we mentioned earlier, it is because God is “good” that we have “*The Problem of Pain*” to deal with in the first place.

2. God is “Love”

“He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.” (1 John 4:8).

Because “*God is love*” in His very nature, He is and must be loving in all His actions, especially those actions where His own children are concerned.

C. S. Lewis in his wonderful book *The Problem of Pain* differentiates between man’s love which is “*egoistic*” (*i.e., driven by his own needs and desires*) and God’s love which is “*altruistic*” (*i.e., an utterly unselfish concern for the welfare of others, while seeking no benefit for Himself*).

If you should wish to know the extent of God’s “love” for you or any of His children, then simply look to Calvary and see Jesus Christ, driven by pity and mercy, hanging there. having been scourged, beaten, a crown of painful thorns put on His head, spit upon, His beard plucked-out by the roots, being ridiculed, enduring the extreme pain

and humiliation of crucifixion, and bearing the curse and wrath of God and an eternity of hell in your place. Dwell on that for a while, Christian, and utterly discard any foolish thought that God could ever be uncaring or unloving or show any “*selfish*” disregard toward you or any of His children in any way.

3. God is “Just”

“Then he said, ‘The God of our fathers has chosen you that you should know His will, and see the Just One, and hear the voice of His mouth.’” (Acts 22:14)

Being just, God would never punish a child of His a second time for any sin that He has previously punished on the Lord Jesus Christ at Cavalry. Because He is “just” and because all of your sins have already been atoned for, all of God’s actions towards you, including any necessary disciplinary or training actions, can only be *beneficial* and *corrective* in nature and *never punitive*. They can only have His children’s best interest in mind.

4. God is omniscient.

God knows all things. Knowing all things, He always acts with a total, complete and infinite wisdom of all events, including even their contingencies. Being omniscient, God knows in every instance what is best for you and the best way to get the results that He desires for you.

Given the vast disparities in our wisdom and knowledge and God’s wisdom and knowledge, God’s ways will at times differ from what we might think is best for us and the best method to be used to help us attain it.

God Himself has told us of this ...

*“‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD.
‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And My thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Isaiah 55:9)*

Here we must bow to faith and trust in His wisdom and knowledge over ours.

We can, of course, certainly continue to pray to God for relief from any affliction that He has sent to us. But when doing so we should always be willing to abide by His decision in the matter and leave room for patient endurance on our part based on our

knowledge of His wisdom, His full knowledge of our situation, and the knowledge that He loves us and is accomplishing something to our own personal benefit as well as His glory through our pain and suffering.

5. God is Omnipotent.

Being *omniscient*, God knows what is best for you and the best way to accomplish it.

Being *omnipotent* He can and will accomplish all the good that He intends for you in whatever He is doing in your life. He cannot be thwarted or slowed down in any way. All things are under His sovereign control.

In sum, God is ...

Good – That is why we have “*The Problem of Pain*” to deal with in the first place

Love – If you wish to know the extent of His love, look to Calvary

Just – Because God is just and because Jesus has already paid the full price for all of your sins, all of God’s His actions towards you must always be beneficial and corrective, and never punitive

Omniscient – He always knows what is best for us and the best way to accomplish it

Omnipotent – He can and will accomplish all the good in our lives that He intends

In short, because God is “*good ... loving ... just ... omniscient ... and ... omnipotent*” in His basic nature, He could never be or act ‘*selfishly*’ toward us or in any way hurt or afflict us ‘*just for His own glory*’. [This is fully confirmed by our second Proof.]

A Second Proof for showing that “*God’s passion for His own glory*” is not, and never could cause Him to act selfishly toward His children, is that God is immutable and could, therefore, never change or deviate in any degree from any of His core character attributes, including those of being “*good, loving, and just.*”

God Himself testifies to His own immutability ...

“*For I am the LORD, I do not change.*” (*Malachi 3:6*)

... as does the author of Hebrews ...

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

One reason that God’s attributes can never change in any degree is that God’s every attribute is already at the absolute height of perfection and blessedness, and can in no way be improved upon. So, for God to act contrary to or deviate in any degree from any of His inner core attributes would be for Him to take a step down in His perfection, which is something that He cannot do.

Because all of God’s attributes are already at the height of perfection, God has nothing to gain or be “*selfish*” about. Thus, all of God’s actions toward His children must always be in line with and ruled by His inner core character traits of being “*good, loving, and just*”, and could never in any way change or be “*selfish*”.

In effect, God is Self-limited by His own perfections and immutability. Being God, He must always act in perfect accord with what He is. It is impossible for Him to do otherwise. Again, as God is “*good, loving, and just*” in His core nature, all His actions towards His children must themselves be “*good, loving, and just*”, and never “*selfish*”. They will *always* be so, because they can never change in any degree.

A Third Proof for showing that “*God’s passion for His own glory*” is not, and never could, cause Him to act selfishly toward His children is that there is absolutely nothing that God could ever gain in any way from a relationship with us to be “*selfish*” about.

The Apostle Paul states concerning himself ...

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells.” (Romans 7:18)

Any “*good*” that is found in us had to have come from God and was not a part of our unregenerate nature.

God, on the other hand, exists in a state of infinitely perfect bliss and goodness and needs nothing to make Him happier, better, more complete, or more fulfilled. In short, there is absolutely no benefit whatsoever that God can or could derive from us or from having a relationship with us. There is no attraction or goodness to be found in us that would attract Him to us. Indeed, at the time He chose to save us, we were His “*enemies*” and were “*at enmity*” with Him. We neither sought after Him or revered Him. His love for us is and always must be a purely “*altruistic*” love that will always seek our good, and never be “*selfish*” in any way.

For our Fourth and most conclusive Proof that “God’s passion for His own glory” could never result in selfishness towards His children, we simply ask you to direct your eyes and thoughts to the cross of Calvary ...

We would repeat what we said above ...

If you should wish to know the extent of God’s “love” for you or any of His children, then simply look to Calvary and see Jesus Christ, having been scourged, beaten, a crown of painful thorns put on His head, spit upon, His beard plucked-out by the roots, hanging on the cross and being ridiculed, enduring the extreme pain and humiliation of crucifixion, and bearing the curse and wrath of God and an eternity of hell in your place. Dwell on that for a while, Christian, and utterly discard any foolish thought that God could ever be uncaring or unloving or show any “selfish” disregard toward you or any of His children in any way.

So, in answer to Question 1 ...

“Isn’t God’s passion for ‘His own glory’ a very Self-centered and selfish thing?”

... we would reply that God’s passion for “His own glory” is very rightfully and righteously “Self-centered”, but that, especially where His children are concerned, God’s passion for “His own glory” never has been, and never could be, “selfish” in a pejorative way. In short, we may say with certainty that ...

God would never afflict His children with pain and suffering “solely for His own glory” with no thought at all to their good, benefit, welfare and happiness.

Again, if you have any doubts at all, simply look to the cross of Cavalry.

It bears repeating one last time that since two of God’s inner core character attributes are those of ‘love’ and ‘goodness’, we can know for certain that God never would and never could do anything to His children that is not ‘loving’ and ‘good’ for them, simply because all of His actions and decrees, including those of sending pain and suffering to His children, must proceed from and be filtered through His inner core attributes of ‘goodness’ and ‘love’, immutable attributes that can never change in any way, and can, thereby, only work to the benefit and good of His children that are afflicted by them.

God’s love for His children is and always will be a purely *altruistic* love that always seeks the best for them. For they are His personally adopted children, children who are spiritually

united to His Son, children who are indwelt by His Holy Spirit, and children who are beloved members of His Son's bride, the church. He could never act "*selfishly*" toward them in any way. God not only has, but must by His very nature and perfections, have the welfare of His children uppermost in His mind in every action that He takes concerning them.

We will, of course, speak much more to this point in our Answer to Question 2 and our Proof of Assertion 2.

We readily admit that, so far, none of this tells us WHY we have pain and suffering, but it does tell us, for certain, that God's MOTIVE behind sending them is for our own good, benefit, welfare and happiness.

**Before moving on to Step 4 of our Six-Step Process for
Answering our three Questions and Proving our two Assertions ...**

... let's briefly review our Three Questions concerning "*The 'Whys?' of Suffering – God's Glory*" and the Two Assertions that we and made concerning them

Our Three Questions were ...

1. *Isn't God's passion for 'His own glory' a rather Self-centered and selfish thing?*
2. *How can you possibly say that all things that God does 'for His own glory', including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good, benefit, welfare and happiness?*
3. *I would never intentionally inflict short-term, much less long-term, pain and suffering on my children. So, why would a good, loving, and caring God do it to His children?*

How can a loving and caring God decree pain and suffering for His children with the stated goal of its being 'for His own glory' and still be a 'loving' and 'caring' Father to them?

Why the need for pain and suffering in the first place?

Our Two Assertions concerning them were ...

Assertion 1: *God is totally sovereign over ALL pain and suffering.*

Assertion 2: Whenever God seeks “His own glory”, even when sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is always at the same time seeking His children’s highest good, benefit and joy.

So far, in Answering our Three Questions and Proving our Two Assertions, we have ...

In Step 1, defined exactly what “*God’s Glory*” and “*suffering for it*” is, means, and implies ...

In Step 2, provided Proof for Assertion 1, that “*God is totally sovereign over ALL pain and suffering.*”

In Step 3, answered Question 1, “*Isn’t God’s passion for ‘His own glory’ a rather Self-centered and selfish thing?*”

We noted earlier that our next two Steps, Steps 4 and 5, go together and will take up the bulk of our Paper.

But even though Steps 4 and 5 are so closely related, they are different in nature, and will therefore be treated as different Steps:

Step 4 deals with our Assertion # 2, a foundational Assertion on our part ...

“Whenever God seeks ‘His own glory’, even when sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is always at the same time seeking His children’s highest good and happiness.”

Step 5 deals with our Question 2, a common question by skeptics (and many Christians)

“How can you possibly say that all things that God does ‘for His own glory’, including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good, benefit, welfare and happiness?”

So, let’s start with Step 4, which is to ...

Step 4: Provide a “background framework” for Proving Assertion 2 ...

“Whenever God seeks ‘His own glory’, even when sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is always at the same time seeking His children’s highest good and happiness.”

As Assertion 2 is a much more complex, multidimensional, and involved Assertion than Assertion 1, its proof will necessarily be much longer and weightier than the proof for Assertion 1.

So, in Step 4 we are setting up a “background framework” for answering Question 2 and proving Assertion 2. In fact, we really need to answer Question 3 and then “Put it all together” in order to sufficiently prove Assertion 2 and answer Question 2.

Proving Assertion 2 might appear daunting at times

It is certainly “*solid food*” and not “*milk*”. But the Apostle Paul commands us to pursue “*solid food*” and not simply remain a “*milk*” Christian ...

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.” (Hebrews 5:12-14)

[Note: Our last Paper in this series is Paper # 9: From “Milk” to “Solid Food” – The Joyous and Glorious Road to “Full Age” Christian Maturity (Hebrews 5:12-14)]

So stick with us, as we go through the process of experiencing the joys and delights of discovering exactly how it is that ...

“Whenever God seeks ‘His own glory’, even when sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is always at the same time seeking His children’s highest good and happiness.”

As we want you to be like the “*fair-minded*” Bereans who were commended by Paul because they did not settle for the mere declaration of Assertions, but “*searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so*” (Acts 17:10-11), we have provided much Scripture proof throughout our discussion.

Our next Step in Answering our Three Questions and Proving our Two Assertions, a Step very closely related to Step 4, is ...

Step 5: Answering Question 2 ...

“How you can possibly say that all things that God does ‘for His own glory’, including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good, benefit, welfare and happiness?’”.

To do so, we will return to our discussion with “Questioner” ...

“Questioner” responded to our last discussion with ...

“OK. I can accept that God must, and always will, be loving to His children and would never make them suffer just ‘for His glory’ alone or be ‘selfish’ toward them in any way. But that still does not explain how all things that God does ‘for His own glory’, including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good, benefit, welfare and happiness?’”.

Well, to be honest, it does, at first glance, certainly seem that “sending pain and suffering to His children for His own glory” and “being a caring and loving Father to His children” are contradictory. But a lot of times things are not what they seem on the surface.

[NOTE: Let’s be sure to keep in mind that THE Question in Question 2 IS ...

“How can you possibly say that all things that God does ‘for His own glory’, including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good and betterment?”

... and IS NOT ...

“Why does God deem it necessary to use pain and suffering in the first place?”, which we will take up later in Question 3.]

Again, our aim in answering all three of our Questions and proving our two Assertions is to show you that “God’s passion for His glory”, even when it involves sending pain and suffering to His children, is not a “selfish” thing that is somehow at odds with their highest good and happiness.

OK. Let’s get back to Question 2, which, again, is ...

“How can you possibly say that all things that God does ‘for His own glory’, including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good, benefit, welfare and happiness?”

Question 2 is a good and fair Question that we will answer in three Parts:

In Part 1 we will show the “*reciprocal relationship*” that exists between God and man, the relationship that is the foundational cause of God’s displaying His glory producing an increase in the highest good and happiness of His children at the same time

In Part 2 we will show how that “*reciprocal relationship*” actually works by looking at ...

The Nature and Motives of God in Displaying His own Glory

The Nature of Natural Unregenerate Man

The Nature of Regenerate Man

The Origin, Nature, Extent, and Depth of the Christian’s Personal Relationship with God

We note again that the term “Natural Unregenerate Man” means that this person remains in the “natural” estate in which he was born. He is an “unsaved” person.

A “Regenerate Man” is a man who has been “born again” (i.e., he has had his heart “regenerated” by the Holy Spirit). He is a “saved” person.

In Part 3 we will, hopefully, “*tie it all up together*” before moving to Question 3.

So, let’s start with Part 1 of answering Question 2 which involves ...

Showing the nature of the “reciprocal relationship” that exists between God’s displaying His glory and an increase in the highest good and happiness of His children

We will start our look at the “*reciprocal relationship*” by referencing two excellent works that explain in detail how God’s seeking “*His own glory*” is equivalent to His seeking the highest good and happiness of His children. The books are ...

The End for Which God Created the World by Jonathan Edwards

God’s Passion for His Glory by John Piper, which is based on and contains the full text of Jonathan Edwards’ book *The End for Which God Created the World*.

[We would note in passing that many historians consider Jonathan Edwards to be the greatest intellect ever produced by this country.]

In their books, both Edwards and Piper describe the nature of the “*reciprocal relationship*” that exists between God’s display of His glory and the increased goodness and happiness of His children. It works like this ...

- a. God is glorified in the display of His own handiwork – BOTH in the universe and in us individually ...
- b. As His glory emanates, flows, and diffuses outward, it is received, praised, and immensely enjoyed by His redeemed creatures who with their new hearts and new natures now have the restored capacity to derive great happiness and rejoicing from the display of His glory
- c. Most wonderful of all, God Himself receives back delight and happiness from His creatures’ happiness and rejoicing in Him and in His handiwork, not because our praise and rejoicing in Him was something He lacked, wanted or needed, but because He simply chose to receive it and delight in it as such

In sum, both Edwards and Piper hold that God’s manifestation of His glory and man’s increased joy and happiness in His display of that glory are two points joined together to the same end.

Having briefly summarized what the “reciprocal relationship” is ...

Let’s move to Part 2 of answering Question 2

... and show how the “reciprocal relationship” actually works ...

Piper opens his book by giving us his reason for using and recommending Edwards’ book in the first place ...

“My personal reason for making the book more accessible is to join God in pursuing the invincible end for which he created the world. That end, Edwards says, is, first, that the glory of God might be magnified in the universe, and, second, that Christ’s ransomed people from all times and all nations would rejoice in God above all things.

Both Piper and Edwards claim that God created the world for two reasons:

That He might display the manifestation of His glory to His people

That His emanating glory might be received, praised, and enjoyed by the creatures He has made, with their rejoicing and happiness being increased in and by the display of His glory

These two points are very important to understanding how the “*reciprocal*” relationship works.

Piper continues ...

But the depth and wonder and power of this book is the demonstration that these two ends are one. The rejoicing of all peoples in God, and the magnifying of God’s glory are one end, not two.” (John Piper, God’s Passion for His Glory, page 31)

Again – This is exactly what we have asserted above – that God’s seeking His own glory and God seeking man’s highest happiness and good are joint ends working to the same goal.

Edwards’s biographer confirms this line of thought ...

“From the purest principles of reason, as well as from the fountain of revealed truth, he [Edwards] demonstrates that the chief and ultimate end of the Supreme Being, in the works of creation and providence, was the manifestation of His own glory in the highest happiness of His creatures.”

Piper picks up on this point and relates it to his own ministry ...

“‘The manifestation of His own glory in the highest happiness of His creatures.’ Virtually everything I preach and write and do is shaped by this truth: that the exhibition of God’s glory and the deepest joy of human souls are one thing.”

“Keep in mind what I am illustrating. The further up you go in the revealed thoughts of God, the clearer you see that God’s aim in creating the world was to display the value of His own glory, and that this aim is no other than the endless, ever-increasing joy of His people in that glory” [Emphasis mine]

And so, we see again that both Piper and Edwards agree that ...

... there is a mutual, shared, interlocking and reciprocal relationship between God’s seeking His own glory and God’s seeking the highest good and happiness of His

people at the same time – such that they are different, but joint, aspects of the same end.

To get a better grasp on how and why the “reciprocal relationship” actually works, i.e., how it is that ...

“... whenever God seeks ‘His own glory’, even when sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is at the same time seeking His children’s highest good and happiness”

... we must first wade through a great deal of background material on ...

- a. The Nature and Motives of God in Displaying His own Glory
- b. The Nature of Natural Unregenerate Man
- c. The Nature of Regenerate Man
- d. The Origin, Nature, Extent, and Depth of the Christian’s Personal Relationship with God

Let’s start with ...

a. The Nature and Motives of God in Displaying His own Glory

Both Piper and Edwards have shown us that God’s motive in creating the earth was to display the manifestation of His glory to His people such that His emanating glory might be received, praised, and enjoyed by the creatures He has made, with their rejoicing and happiness being increased in and by the display of His glory. In short, God’s motive in seeking and displaying His own Glory is at the same time seeking man’s highest benefit, happiness and good.

[Note: We are in this Paper necessarily limited in space and time and would suggest that if you would like a more in-depth explanation of the “reciprocal relationship” you should purchase John Piper’s book God’s Passion for His Glory which also contains the full text of Jonathan Edwards’ book The End for Which God Created the World.]

In order to see how “*whenever God seeks ‘His own glory’, even when sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is at the same time seeking His children’s highest good, benefit, welfare and happiness*”, we will look next at ...

b. The Nature of Natural Unregenerate Man

To be able to grasp and comprehend the nature of the Christian’s relationship with God and how God’s seeking His glory always results in the highest benefit and good to His children, there are two “*essential realities*” that we have to understand about the nature of natural unregenerate men ...

The first “*essential reality*” is that natural unregenerate men are “*dead in trespasses and sins*” and will never look for or search after the one true God on their own. Unless God sovereignly moves to redeem them, and, by His “*grace*” alone, gives them the “*gifts*” of “*faith*” and “*repentance,*” no natural unregenerate man would ever seek after the one true God or come to choose or decide for Him on their own.

The second “*essential reality*” is that not only are natural unregenerate men “*dead in trespasses and sins*”, but also that there is absolutely no inherent “*good*” whatsoever to be found in natural unregenerate men to attract God’s attention to them. Again, unless God had sovereignly moved to redeem them, they would never have chosen or decided to go to Him on their own.

The twin implications of natural unregenerate men being “*dead in trespasses and sins*” and “*containing no inherent good whatsoever*” are vital for understanding the nature of the Christian’s relationship with God and how God can seek His own glory and the highest happiness of His children at the same time.

Because of the importance of our two “Essential Realities” to our overall discussion, we want to give sufficient Scriptural proof concerning them.

Our first “essential reality” concerning the nature of Natural Unregenerate Man was that

Natural unregenerate men are “dead in trespasses and sins” and will never look or search after the one true God on their own. Unless God sovereignly moves to redeem them, and, by His “grace” alone, gives them the “gifts” of “faith” and “repentance,” no natural unregenerate man would ever seek after the one true God or come to choose or decide for Him on their own.

As Scripture proof we offer ...

“No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him (John 6:44)

*“You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit”
(John 15:16)*

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

“... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world ... having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace.” (Ephesians 1:4-6)

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God”. (John 1:12-13)

“And not only this, but when Rebecca also had conceived by one man, even by our Father Isaac (for the children not yet being born, nor having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works but of Him who calls), it was said to her, ‘The older shall serve the younger.’ As it is written, ‘Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated.’” (Romans 9:10-13)

*“I have reserved for Myself seven thousand men who have not bowed the knee to Baal.”
(Romans 11:4)*

“... without Me you can do nothing” (Jesus Christ, John 15:5)

“We love Him because He first loved us” (I John 4:19)

“For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion’. So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy.” (Romans 9:15-16)

Our second “essential reality” concerning the nature of Natural Unregenerate Man was that ...

Not only are natural unregenerate men “dead in trespasses and sins”, but also that there is absolutely no inherent “good” whatsoever to be found in natural unregenerate men to attract God’s attention to them. Again, unless God had sovereignly moved to redeem them, they would never have chosen or decided to go to Him on their own.

As Scripture proof we offer ...

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (The Apostle Paul, Romans 7:18)

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.” (Jesus Christ, John 6:63)

“For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish.” (Galatians 5:17)

“What then? Are we better than they? Not at all. For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin. As it is written:

*‘There is none righteous, no, not one;
There is none who understands;
There is none who seeks after God.
They have all turned aside;
They have together become unprofitable;
There is none who does good, no, not one.’
‘Their throat is an open tomb;
with their tongues they have practiced deceit’;
‘The poison of asps is under their lips’;
‘Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness.’
‘Their feet are swift to shed blood;
Destruction and misery are in their ways;
and the way of peace they have not known.’
‘There is no fear of God before their eyes.’” (Romans 3:9-18)*

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive” (Colossians 2:13)

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

“For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing’ (1 Corinthians 1:18)

“And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” (II Timothy 2:24-26)

“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” (Ephesians 4:17-19)

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8:5-8)

The implications of these two “Essential Realities” (that natural unregenerate men are “dead in trespasses and sins” and contain “no good whatsoever” within themselves) for understanding the nature of the Christian’s relationship with God and how God can seek His own glory and the highest good and happiness of His children at the same time are very direct, for they make it abundantly clear ...

First, that if we are to have any relationship at all with the one true God, He will have to establish it for us on His own, and on His own terms.

Second, and this is very important, since there is no “good” whatsoever to be found within natural unregenerate men, any “good” that natural unregenerate man experiences or comes to have will have had to have come from God Himself, as He is the only other possible source of it. In short, there is no true good or happiness for man to be found outside of God, which means that God, and God alone, is man’s “Good”!

Clearly, given natural unregenerate man’s nature, if natural unregenerate man’s broken relationship with God is to be restored, God Himself will have to restore it. If natural unregenerate man is to be saved, he will need an entirely “new heart”, one fitted for a new relationship with God. Ezekiel foretells of this ...

“And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.” (Ezekiel 36:26-27)

In our quest to see how *“whenever God seeks ‘His own glory’, even when sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is at the same time seeking His children’s highest good and happiness”*, we will next look at ...

c. The Nature of Regenerate Man

Regenerate man is *“a new creation”*. He has been *“born again”* and has been given an entirely *“new heart”* that is receptive to the things of God.

Our Lord Himself told us three times of the necessity of this *“new birth”* ...

“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (John 3:1, 3:3, 3:7)

The Apostle Peter writes ...

“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to His great mercy, He has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead ...” (I Peter 1:3)

“... since you have been born again, not of perishable seed but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God” (I Peter 1:23)

Indeed, the change brought about by natural unregenerate man’s having been *“born again”* is so radical that Paul terms the regenerate Christian to be a an entirely *“new creation”* ...

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.” (II Corinthians 5:17)

We must keep in mind just how great and extensive man’s *“fall”* was ...

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (The Apostle Paul, Romans 7:18)

“And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh ...” (Colossians 2:13)

“But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” (I Corinthians 2:14).

“For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God.” (Romans 8:5-8)

Man’s fall was so total that in order to fit natural unregenerate man for a new, loving relationship with Himself, God *had to* completely make him over into a “new creation” ...

A “new creation” in which God the Holy Spirit ...

has removed his old “heart of stone” and given him a new “heart of flesh” ... and ...

has given him the “gifts” of “faith” and “repentance”, both of which he has freely and willingly exercised.

A “new creation” that ...

has been legally adopted into the family of God, who now bids him to call Him “Father”

has been spiritually united with Christ and is a part of His bride, the church

has had the righteousness of Christ imputed to his account in God’s court of law, such that when God looks at him, in judgment or otherwise He beholds the righteous face of His own dear Son, and not his sins.

has been indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, who works with him “to will and to do according to God’s good pleasure”.

has come to have a proper and holy “fear” of God, a “fear” akin to that of a child for a loving parent – a fear that perfects love and deters him from sin, a fear that is the opposite of the servile fear of punishment.

One can certainly see how Paul could truthfully write that regenerate man has been “born again” and is an entirely “new creation”.

**Regenerate man’s “new creation” transformation has a great bearing
on our “reciprocal relationship” discussion**

Because the Christian has been “*born again*” and is a “*new creation*”, because he has been redeemed and restored from the fall and been reconstituted with an entirely new regenerate heart, he now ...

Has a soul that is most satisfied in God above all else

Rejoices in Him above all else ... and ...

Derives great pleasure and happiness from beholding His glory

It is as Augustine has said ...

“Because God has made us for Himself, our hearts are restless until they rest in Him.”

This is the new “*nature*” of regenerate man, a nature that finds its “*delight*” and “*rest*” in God alone.

We note that it is true that this “new creation” with its regenerate heart can still fall hard, long, and deep into sin. We think of King David, King Solomon and others who as devout children of God have fallen long, hard, and deep into sin. But a true Christian cannot long remain content in His sin but will come to a full repentance and cry out to God along with King David ...

‘Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me by your generous Spirit.’ (Psalm 51:12)”

OK ... Before we move on to our fourth background consideration as to how the “reciprocal relationship” works, let’s pause to remember that our goal is to answer Question 2, which is ...

“How you can possibly say that all things that God does ‘for His own glory’, including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good and benefit.”

To answer Question 2, we made Assertion 2 that ...

“Whenever God seeks ‘His own glory’, even when sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is always at the same time also seeking His children’s highest good, benefit, welfare and happiness. Indeed, we hold that God’s glory and His

children's highest good, benefit, welfare and happiness are so thoroughly intertwined and bound up with each other that an increase in one will always be accompanied by a corresponding increase in the other.

We have proceeded to Prove our *Assertion 2* and Answer *Question 2* by showing that both Jonathan Edwards and John Piper (two experts on the subject of “*God's Glory*”) taught that there is a mutual, shared, interlocking and reciprocal relationship between God's seeking His own glory and God's seeking the highest good and happiness of His people at the same time – such that they are different, but joint, aspects of the same end.

To help us understand “*how this can be*” ...

We have so far looked more deeply into three background considerations ...

1. The Nature and Motives of God in Displaying His own Glory

... which are that His emanating glory might be received, praised, and enjoyed by His redeemed children

2. The Nature of Natural Unregenerate Man

... which is that they are “*dead in trespasses and sins*” and contain “*no good whatsoever*” within themselves such that if they are to have any relationship with God at all, He will have to establish it for them on His own.

3. The Nature of Regenerate Man

... who is by God's grace an entirely “*new creation*” with a “*new heart*” – a heart that has been fitted by God for His Holy Spirit to indwell, a heart that is most satisfied in God above all else, a heart that rejoices in Him above all else, and, very importantly, a heart that derives great pleasure and happiness from beholding His glory.

We are now ready to look more deeply into our fourth background consideration for showing how the “reciprocal relationship” works, which is ...

d. The Origin, Nature, Extent, and Depth of the Christian's Personal Relationship with God

When we looked at the nature of Natural Unregenerate Man, we established [with significant Scriptural proof] that natural unregenerate men are “*dead in trespasses and sins*” and would never choose or decide for God on their own. We also showed that there is no “*good*” whatsoever to be found in natural unregenerate men, both of which clearly shows that if we are to have any relationship at all with the one true God, He will have to establish it for us Himself, on His terms. We also stated that any “*good*” whatsoever that comes to reside in man will have had to have been put there by God Himself, for He is the only other possible source of it.

Our conclusion was that ...

“... there is no true good or happiness for man to be found outside of God. In fact, God, and God alone, is man’s ‘Good’!”

With this background, let’s look to ...

“The Origin, Nature, Extent and Depth of the Christian’s Personal Relationship with God”.

We will start by considering the nature of relationships themselves ...

If two or more people have a relationship of any kind with each other, it can only have started in one of two ways:

They mutually decided to have a relationship – each agreeing to the terms of the relationship. Marriage would be a good example.

The other way is where one party unilaterally imposes the relationship on the other – which is sometimes called a “suzerain” style relationship, treaty or contract. In a *suzerain style* treaty one party establishes the relationship without the prior consent of the other and exercises control over the other, and might or might not allow varying degrees of freedom to them. One country taking over and occupying another country in a time of war would an example.

The Origin and Nature of our relationship with God is of the second, or *suzerain*, type.

There have actually been *two* suzerain-style treaties between God and man.

In the first, God created us without asking us beforehand if we wanted to be created or if we wanted to have a relationship with Him. Rather, upon our first parents’ creation, God immediately established a suzerain relationship over them, and, as they were the federal

heads or representatives of all their descendants to come, it was established with all of future humanity as well (including us). This treaty between God and our first parents was in the nature of a covenant of works and had one very crucial stipulation ...

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree in the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’” (Genesis 2:16-17)

Both of our first parents disobeyed God’s command, one through being deceived, the other doing so knowingly. Their existing relationship with God was immediately and completely broken, with both immediately coming to fear Him and trying to hide from Him. As a result of the breach of their suzerain treaty with God, both Adam and Eve died spiritually the instant they disobeyed and also immediately began the process of physical decay that would ultimately lead to their physical deaths (God being merciful not to impose physical death immediately, but to allow time for His grace and mercy to be extended).

And so, rather than leaving them to their own self-imposed penalty of death and destruction, God in His mercy and grace established a second *suzerain* treaty with them and with all of future humanity as well, this one a covenant of grace.

We note that the word “*grace*” means an undeserved, unmerited, unearned, and unasked-for *gift*. Confirm ...

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

The one requirement for attaining God’s promise of eternal life in the new suzerain treaty is the exercising of saving faith on our part.

OK – Having looked at the Origin and Nature of the Christian’s relationship with God, we now want to look at ...

The Extent and Depth of the Christian’s Relationship with God

Many Christians have never really meditated very deeply on the nature and depth of their relationship with God, which is really a quite marvelous relationship that is full of many wonders. We spoke of it a little above.

All Christians of course know God as their Creator and know that He redeemed them from slavery to sin at a great personal cost to Himself.

But as wonderful and great as our creation and redemption by God are, there is still a great deal more to our personal relationship with our sovereign God beyond that. For example ...

God the Father, the Creator of the universe, has legally adopted you into His family and has bidden you to call Him "*Father*", with all the personal endearment that the term implies.

God the Son, your Savior and Kinsman-Redeemer, is now your elder Step-Brother. He is also in a very real *spiritual union* with you and you are also a *part of His bride*, the church.

God the Holy Spirit, the Agent of your regeneration (i.e., the Agent of your "*new birth*"), has replaced your old heart of "*stone*" with a new heart of "*flesh*" – a new "*heart*" able to recognize His glory and one fit for Him to dwell in. He has also given you the "*gifts*" of "*repentance*" and "*faith*", guides your sanctification process, "*keeps*" you at all times, and *actually resides within* you.

An additional very important aspect of our deep relationship with God is that when we were justified by God's grace in His heavenly courts, God made two legal imputations, not just one ...

In the first imputation, God legally and forensically imputed [accounted or reckoned] all of our sins to Christ on the cross, who paid the full penalty for them. This left us "*Not Guilty!*" in God's heavenly court.

The second imputation by God was the imputation of the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ to our account. Many people miss the significance and the depth of this second imputation. That God imputed the righteousness of Jesus Christ to our account means that when God beholds us in judgment (or any other time as well), He does not see our sins, but the righteousness of His own dear Son in whom He very much delights. What a comforting thought for us at all times.

So, due to God's two legal imputations in His heavenly court, we are not only "*Not Guilty*" but are also legally and forensically accounted "*Righteous*" as well. Our righteousness is a "*foreign*" righteousness to be sure, that of Jesus Christ credited or imputed to our account, and not an inherent righteousness (such that we are holy in and of ourselves); but it is a legally valid and unshakable righteousness nonetheless. It is a very deep and personal righteousness of and from God Himself that adheres to us.

And so, just as we have been adopted by God the Father and are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, we have an equally in-depth relationship with our Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ ...

1. As we are in true spiritual union with Him
2. As we are a part of His bride – the church
3. As we are covered with His righteousness – such that when God looks upon us, He sees only the face of His own dear son and not our sins

Such is the origin, nature, extent, and depth of the Christian’s personal relationship with God.

“Putting it all together”

Our Goal for Step 5 was to satisfactorily answer Question 2 ...

“How can you possibly say that all things that God does ‘for His own glory’, including sending pain and suffering to His children, are at the same time also done for their good, benefit, welfare and happiness?”

[Again, we are dealing here only with the “reciprocal relationship” and are deferring the “Why pain and suffering?” issue till later in the paper.]

We stated that ...

“... the foundational cause of a display of God’s glory at the same time producing an increase in the highest good and happiness of His children is the “reciprocal relationship” that exists between God and man.

To better understand the nature of the “reciprocal relationship”, we took background looks at ...

The Nature and Motives of God in Displaying His own Glory

The Nature of Natural Unregenerate Man

The Nature of Regenerate Man

The Origin, Nature, Extent, and Depth of the Christian’s Personal Relationship with God

In going through our background material ...

... we developed three beautiful and wonderful “*truths*” of the “*reciprocal relationship*” between God and man that show “*how*” and “*why*” a display of God’s glory will at the same time produce an increase in the highest good and happiness of His children

The three “truths” are ...

1. There is no “*good*” whatsoever to be found in natural unregenerate man
2. God, simply because it was “*the good pleasure of His will*” to do so, sovereignly chose to set His love on a specific number of natural unregenerate men, to redeem them from their bondage to sin through the death of His Son, to give each of them a “*new heart*” and make them into a “*new creation*”, to establish a “*reciprocal relationship*” with them, and to delight in them
3. God is our “*good*”

Let’s briefly review each of our three “*Truths*” and see how they help us “*Put it all together*”

Truth # 1 is very simply that ...

- 1. There is no “*good*” whatsoever to be found in natural unregenerate man**

We need to remember that there was nothing in our fallen nature or makeup to in any way attract God’s attention to us.

As the Apostle Paul said ...

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (Romans 7:18)

... and, as our Lord Jesus Christ said ...

“It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing.” (John 6:63)

In fact, as mentioned earlier, we were, at the time God chose to redeem us, His “*enemies*” and were “*at enmity*” with Him.

Thus, if we are to have a relationship with God at all, He would have to establish it Himself.

Our Truth # 2 is that ...

- 2. God, simply because it was “*the good pleasure of His will*” to do so, sovereignly chose to set His love on a specific number of natural unregenerate men, to redeem them from their bondage to sin through the death of His Son, to give each of them a “*new heart*” and make them into a “*new creation*”, to establish a “*reciprocal relationship*” with them, and to delight in them**

In short, God’s simply, sovereignly, and unconditionally chose to redeem and establish a close relationship with a fixed number of natural unregenerate men. That He did so was due entirely to His pure, unmerited, and most undeserved grace, love, and unfathomable mercy.

Confirm ...

“... just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.” (Ephesians 1:4-6)

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast.” (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Thus, we see again the purely “*altruistic*” nature of God’s love for us – a love that gains nothing for its own self but gives very much to the object of its love. And He did it all for no other reason than it was His mere “*good pleasure*” to do so.

God simply chose to establish a relationship with us, set His love on us, redeem us from sin at the price of His own dear Son’s death, adopt us into His family, establish a very real spiritual union with His Son for us, make us a part of His Son’s bride, the church, give us an entirely new heart, a heart fit for Him to actually dwell in, give us the “*gifts*” of “*faith*” and “*repentance*”, cover us with the righteousness of Christ, and to “keep” us at all times “*by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time*” .

And so, by God’s grace, the redeemed Christian has been “*born again*” and is a “*new creation*”. He has been redeemed and restored from the fall and has an entirely “*new heart*”, a heart fitted for God Himself to dwell in. Best of all, redeemed man’s new relationship with God is very close – He has been legally adopted by God the Father, is in true spiritual union with God the Son, and is actually indwelt by God the Holy Spirit.

Most importantly for our purposes of understanding the inner workings of the “reciprocal relationship”, the redeemed Christian now has a soul that is most satisfied in God above all else, that rejoices in Him above all else, and that derives great pleasure and happiness from beholding His glory.

Our last “beautiful” – and most “wonderful” truth – is that ...

3. God is our “good”

Whereas there is no “good” whatsoever to be found in natural unregenerate man and Paul has told us concerning the fleshy remnants of the “old man” that still indwell a regenerate Christian ...

“For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells” (Romans 7:18)

... any, and all, “good” that comes to man, even later as a redeemed Christian, had to have come from God Himself, as there is no other source for it. And so, for the redeemed Christian, it is truthfully and wonderfully said that “God is our good!”

That “*God is our good*” is the foundation and strength of our “*reciprocal relationship*” with God, and is itself the reason that any display of God’s glory results in His children’s highest good and happiness. For, since “*God is our good*” and is the only source of any “good” that comes our way, if God wants to do His children ‘good’, He must magnify and glorify Himself to us, for there is no inherent “good” within us on which He can build.

As so beautifully stated by Edwards,

“... if God would do us good, he must direct us to his worth, not ours.”

Edwards goes on to further establish the nature of the link between God’s “glory” and the creature’s happiness in a most beautiful way ...

“God in seeking his glory seeks the good of his creatures, because the emanation of his glory ... implies the ... happiness of his creatures. And in communicating his fullness for them, he does it for himself, because their good, which he seeks, is so much in union and communion with himself. God is their good. Their excellency and happiness is nothing but the emanation and expression of God’s glory. God, in seeking their glory and happiness seeks Himself, and in seeking himself, i.e., himself diffused, he seeks their glory and happiness.

Again, because man's true happiness and goodness are found only in God, and not from within himself, any extension of God's glory will result in an increase in the Christian's joy, delight, and happiness. Thus, the Christian finds his greatest good and enjoyment in rejoicing in God's displaying of His glory, either before or within himself, through the increase of the satisfaction that our souls find in Him.

Thus do we see the mutual, shared, and interlocking nature of the "*reciprocal relationship*" between God's seeking His own glory and God's seeking the highest good and happiness of His children. They both occur at the same time, such that God's glory and our happiness are joint, but different, aspects of the same end, that end being ... according to Edwards ...

"... the manifestation of His own glory in the highest happiness of His creatures."

"Thus" Edwards continues "it is easy to conceive how God should seek the good of his creature ... even his happiness, from a supreme regard to himself; as his happiness arises from ... the creature's exercising a supreme regard to God ... in beholding God's glory, in esteeming and loving it, and rejoicing in it.

Again we see the strong nature of the relationship between God's glory and man's happiness

"God's respect to the creature's good, and his respect to himself, is not a divided respect; but both are united in one, as the happiness of the creature aimed at is happiness in union with himself." (Jonathan Edwards, The End for which God Created the World).

**Having gone over our three "Truths" and seeing how they interrelate,
let's get back to our general discussion ...**

You will remember that the interlocking "*reciprocal relationship*" described above was the reason John Piper gave for writing his book *God's Passion for His Glory* and for including the full text of, and centering his book on, Edward's essay, *The End for which God Created the World*.

As related by Piper ...

"My personal reason for making the book more accessible is to join God in pursuing the invincible end for which he created the world. That end, Edwards says, is, first, that the glory of God might be magnified in the universe, and, second, that Christ's ransomed people from all times and all nations would rejoice in God above all things.

But the depth and wonder and power of this book is the demonstration that these two ends are one. The rejoicing of all peoples in God, and the magnifying of God's glory are one end, not two." (John Piper, God's Passion for His Glory, page 31)

And, again ...

"Keep in mind what I am illustrating. The further up you go in the revealed thoughts of God, the clearer you see that God's aim in creating the world was to display the value of His own glory, and that this aim is no other than the endless, ever-increasing joy of His people in that glory"

And so, we see how God's seeking "His own glory" and sharing that glory with us results in an increase in our "happiness" and "good" at the same time.

And, just as wonderful, the increase in our happiness and good from sharing in God's displaying of His glory has the "reciprocal" effect of increasing God's glory, delight and happiness in us.

God derives "happiness" or delight not only from His "supreme regard of Himself" (i.e., His glorifying Himself), but He also takes great delight from our rejoicing in His display of His glory as it causes us to "exercise[e] a supreme regard to God ... in beholding God's glory, in esteeming and loving it, and rejoicing in it."

[We note again that it was not because God lacked or needed something that He now receives from us, it was simply that God chose to delight in us and our rejoicing in Him.]

Thus we see the *reciprocal* nature of how God's own "happiness" is increased by His creatures' increased happiness in the display of His own glory before them. As mentioned earlier, God also delights to behold both the face of His own dear Son and the handiwork of His Spirit in us as well.

—

Once again, the "reciprocating relationship" between the display of God's glory and an increase in man's good and happiness achieves both ends as ...

God displays His glory and handiwork both in the universe and in us

As His glory emanates, flows, and diffuses outward, it is received, praised, and enjoyed by us, His creatures, who derive great happiness and rejoicing from and in it

Reciprocally, God Himself receives back delight and happiness from His creatures' increase in their happiness and rejoicing in Him due to His display of His glory.

And so, it continues. Redeemed man is most happy, fulfilled and satisfied in God when He displays His glory either before or in us, and the consequent increase in our happiness in sharing with Him in the glorifying of Himself, itself glorifies Him and increases His happiness.

Most wonderfully, the greater our experience of God's glory, the greater is our individual happiness through the enjoyment of God. This is summed up most beautifully in Edwards' statement ...

"The love of God for sinners is not His making much of them, but His graciously freeing and empowering them to enjoy making much of Him."

Again, this is precisely why God's passion for "*His own glory*" is not "*selfish*" in the pejorative sense and why God's display of "*His own glory*" can, at the same time, accomplish our highest good and happiness.

As so beautifully expressed by Edwards ...

"When we see that God's passion for his own glory leads him to share that passion with us, we also see why his passion for himself is not 'selfish' in a pejorative sense. God is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is the highest virtue and the most loving act, because in exalting himself he displays the one Reality in the universe that can satisfy our souls and he shares the very passion for that Reality that satisfies him. The object of our happiness is God, and our happiness is God's happiness. No greater happiness can be conceived." (Jonathan Edwards, The End for which God Created the World).

Let us note again, the critically important statement ...

"God is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is the highest virtue and the most loving act, because in exalting himself he displays the one Reality in the universe that can satisfy our souls and he shares the very passion for that Reality that satisfies him. The object of our happiness is God, and our happiness is God's happiness."

Thus, “God’s passion for His own glory and His passion for my joy in Him are not at odds,” because in “displaying the value of His own glory”, God’s “aim is no other than the endless, ever-increasing joy of His people in that glory”

And, again we see the full truth of Edwards’ comment ...

“God is the one being in the universe for whom self-exaltation is the highest virtue and the most loving act”

And so, God’s aim in displaying “His glory” is not *selfish* in the pejorative sense, but has as its accompanying goal “the ever-increasing joy of his people in that glory.”

We will see in our last Step, Step 6, that whenever God seeks His own glory in us, *even in pain and suffering*, He is just as committed to seeking our “eternal and ever-increasing joy in Him as He is to His own glory.”

Step 6: Answer Question 3

Questioner comes back with the three concerns of Question 3 ...

“OK, I can see and accept, for the most part, the Assertion that ‘All things that God does ‘for His own glory are at the same time also done for His children’s good, benefit, welfare and happiness’ – except I still have problems when it comes to pain and suffering”.

I would never intentionally inflict hard pain and suffering on my children. So, why would a good, loving, and caring God inflict even short-term, much less long-term, pain and suffering on His children?

And, really, when you think about it, “Why?” the need for pain and suffering in the first place? Aren’t there other ways?

I really just don’t understand how any of this can be.

We would begin by saying that these are fair Questions with which we all struggle at times.

We will answer ...

By revisiting the “*Reciprocal Relationship*” that exists between God’s displaying His glory and an increase in the highest good and happiness of His children at the same time

By showing how we “*glorify God*” in our pain and suffering

Part 3: By looking at C. S. Lewis’s “*Suffering and ‘The Intolerable Compliment of God’s Love’*” (Taken from *The Problem of Pain* by C. S. Lewis)

By showing “‘*Why?*’ *it is necessary for God to use pain and suffering to achieve ‘His glory’ and our ‘highest good’?*”

**But we first want to give a word of caution on the manner
in which we should ask these Questions.**

We want to tread very carefully in our manner and attitude of asking these questions, lest we bring God’s rebuke of Job upon ourselves ...

*“Who is this who darkens counsel
By words without knowledge?” (Job 38: 2)*

*‘Shall the one who contends with the Almighty correct Him?
He who rebukes God, let him answer it.’” (Job 40:1-2)*

**In asking God questions concerning His use of pain and suffering, whether in general
or in our lives in particular, there are appropriate and in appropriate ways to do it ...**

We should always approach God in all things with faith and trust in Him ...

It is appropriate to ask the three questions above, provided they are asked in a sincere attempt to understand God and His ways with men.

It is appropriate for us to ask God “*Why?*” in particular He has afflicted us if we do it in the manner of sincerely wanting to learn from our experience, to learn any lesson that He might be trying to teach us through our affliction, or to see if there are any changes that need to be made in our lives.

It is appropriate to continue to ask God for relief from our pain and suffering as long as we ask in the manner of our Lord ...

“O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will.” (Matthew 26:39)

But some things are inappropriate ...

It is not appropriate for us to “*contend with ... correct ... or rebuke*” God

It is not appropriate or permissible in any degree for us to drag God before our own personal bar of justice and demand an explanation from Him or to tell Him that He has unfairly or unjustly afflicted us

There are times when we must simply trust God’s judgment and rest in His wisdom and in His known and proven love for us. We have only to look to the cross to know that He deeply loves us and cares for us and is worthy of our full trust and faith in Him. Sometimes we must patiently endure afflictions in the knowledge that He who has infinite wisdom and loves us with an everlasting love will most certainly do what is best for us, best for our own good, and best for His glory (which, as we have seen, is also for our own highest good).

We strongly suggest at this point that when you finish Paper 3, you read our next Paper, Paper 4, titled, “WHYs of Suffering – Job”.

Again, this does not mean that you should cease repeatedly praying for relief from your affliction, whatever it is, only that while continuing to pray for relief, we should rest and trust in God’s wisdom and love for us.

So, let’s return to Questioner’s three questions

“OK, I can see and accept, for the most part, the Assertion that ‘All things that God does ‘for His own glory are at the same time also done for His children’s good, benefit, welfare and happiness’ – except I still have real problems when it comes to pain and suffering”.

I would never intentionally inflict real pain and suffering on my children. So, why would a good, loving, and caring Father inflict, even short-term, much less long-term, pain and suffering on His children?

And, really, when you think about it, “Why?” the need for pain and suffering in the first place? Aren’t their other ways?

I really just don't understand how any of this can be.

To answer ...

Let's first consider

"How we can actually glorify God in our pain and suffering."

... and then look at

"Why?" would a loving and caring God do this? "Why?" is it necessary for God to use pain and suffering to achieve 'His glory' and my 'highest good'?"

So, "How exactly do we 'glorify' God in our pain and suffering?"

Whatever else Christians might disagree on, we should all be able to agree that ...

1. God really is "good"
2. God really does "love" His children
3. God really is "fully worthy" of our "faith" and "trust" in Him

Because we believe these three things to be true, we "*glorify God*" by exercising faith and trust in Him no matter what our circumstances, including even the circumstances of prolonged pain and suffering. By patiently enduring in faith and trust in Him, we bring glory to His name, jointly share with Him in the display of His glory in us, and, for our part, draw nearer to Him and come to enjoy a much fuller relationship with Him.

Questioner then responds with "OK. But again ...

"Why?" would a loving and caring God do this?

"Why?" is it necessary for God to use pain and suffering to achieve 'His glory' and my 'highest good'?"

As stated at the opening of our Paper, no one can say, for sure, exactly '*Why?*', in particular, God chose to use pain and suffering to accomplish His perfect ends in our lives.

But we can put forth two very highly probable reasons as to why He did so ...

First, because “*We need it!*”

Second, because “*He is allowing some of us the inestimable privilege of sharing in the suffering of Christ*”

We will take both of these up shortly.

But, first, though we cannot say with certainty exactly “Why?” God chose to use pain and suffering in our lives; there are some things that we can say “for certain” about His use of them ...

We can say for certain ...

1. That because God is “*good*” and “*loving*” He would never hurt us needlessly or more than is necessary to accomplish His perfect goal in us

We can say for certain ...

2. That God loves us dearly and will always seek our best interests and highest good even in times of pain and suffering. Again, if you have any questions or doubts on that matter, then look to the cross of Calvary.

We can say for certain ...

3. That being omniscient, God knows exactly what is best for us and the best way to achieve it.

We can say for certain ...

4. That we need to remember to make allowance that God’s “*thoughts*” and “*ways*” are much “*higher*” than our “*thoughts*” and “*ways*”.

He Himself has told us ...

*“‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the LORD.
‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways,
And my thoughts than your thoughts.’” (Isaiah 55:8-9)*

... which means that at times there will be things that He will do that we, because of our finite and limited mental and reasoning capabilities compared to His, simply cannot understand or comprehend, which, again, leaves room for our exercise of faith and trust in Him.

We can say for certain ...

5. That Scripture, our own reason, and past experience all tell us that He is fully worthy of our “*faith*” and “*trust*” in Him.

We can say for certain ...

6. ... from our look at Job, that when we are in God’s heavenly presence, we will have no questions or complaints to lay before Him and will actually not wish to have one minute of our earthly ordeals changed. No, like Job, we will stand there in awed silence before the greatness of His transcendent majesty and His grace in our lives, and stare in wonder at the beautiful tapestry that He has woven of our lives and how He has used all our times of pain and suffering to our good and to the good of others. We will be eternally grateful that He did what He did.

We can say for certain ...

7. That there will be many great rewards that God will give us for our faith and trust in Him and our patient endurance in the midst of pain and suffering – though rewards will probably be the least part of our rejoicing when we behold His face and more fully see what He has done for us and others through any pain and suffering we have endured.

So, though we cannot really say with certainty “exactly ‘Why?’”

... God chose to use pain and suffering in our sanctification process and to draw us nearer to Himself, we can, because of the seven points outlined above, know for certain that for His own good reasons, God, in His wisdom, chose to use pain and suffering as a good and necessary element to accomplish His perfect ends in our lives.

We can say for certain that He deemed it best to do so and that, we, as His children, should, in faith and trust, accept that it is best that He does so, and that it is to our highest good for Him to do so.

Questioner: OK, but, again, I still want to know why it is necessary for Him to use pain and suffering in the first place and what possible benefits we can derive from enduring pain and suffering?

Both of these Questions bring us back to our two “very highly probable reasons” for God’s choosing to bring pain and suffering into His children’s lives ...

1. First, we need it.

We have seen that God, as our Redeemer and adoptive Father, in His love for us, means for us to be sanctified and holy ...

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification.” (1 Thessalonians 4:3)

And we have seen that any increase in our sanctification, as it draws us nearer to God, increases our highest good and happiness.

We have been raised and live in a culture that has at best “marginalized” God while exalting the felt needs and self-esteem of man, which, along with the remnants of the “old man” residing within us, cannot help but give even mature Christians a strong tendency toward being very self-centered and materialistically driven. So, quite often pain and suffering are needed as the only way that God can fully get our attention to wean us from an inordinate love of the world and of ourselves and teach us what really is good and best for us.

And so, because God loves us and cares for us, He will give us what we need to help us along in our sanctification process and to help us draw nearer to Him, including pain and suffering, if necessary, rather than what we might want.

This is what C. S. Lewis has called the “Intolerable Compliment” of God’s love for His children

In his book *The Problem of Pain: How Human Suffering Raises Almost Intolerable Intellectual Problems*, in looking at the nature of God’s love for His children, C. S. Lewis first differentiates between love and kindness and then goes on to make the very important point that “God’s Love” for us involves much more than expressing “mere kindness” to us

“If God is Love, He is, by definition, something more than mere kindness. And it appears, from all the records, that though He has often rebuked us and condemned us, He has never regarded us with contempt. He has paid us the intolerable complement of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense.”

In his use of the word “*contempt*”, Lewis is saying that God does not just consider us to be some lower order of being whom He can simply appease, give what they want, tolerate their imperfections, and then just leave alone and take no further account of them.

No. God has a much higher love for His redeemed children, considering them to be the apex of His “very good” creation. We were bought at the price of His Son’s life. We are a people on whom He has chosen to set His very deep and eternal love, a people whom He loves enough to give what they “*need*” to be conformed to His image, rather than what they might “*want*”, a people to be made and molded to be like Himself in order to fit them to spend eternity with Him. In short, He gives them the highest possible of all imaginable loves.

Thus we have Lewis’s wonderful statement ...

“He has paid us the intolerable complement of loving us, in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense.”

Commenting further on the “*intolerable compliment*” of God’s love, Lewis continues ...

“We are, not metaphorically but in very truth, a Divine work of art, something that God is making, and therefore something with which He will not be satisfied until it has a certain character. Here again, we come up against what I have called the ‘intolerable compliment.’”

This is the crux of Lewis’s statement that God loves us “*in the deepest, most tragic, most inexorable sense*”. To God we actually are a “*divine work of art*” that He not only loves but adores and greatly cares for, a “*work*” that He will not be “*satisfied*” with or “*rest*” from until we exhibit the “*certain character*” that he wants us to have – He wants us to be Holy as He is Holy, He wants us to be like our elder Elder-Brother, Jesus Christ, He is our Father and He wants us to bear the Family Image.

Plus, there are many very important Spiritual Benefits to be gained from pain and suffering

John Flavel, the great Puritan Presbyterian minister and author from the 1600s, gives us a list of eight sets of reasons as to why God ordains suffering for His children and the spiritual benefits to be derived from it. They are ...

Reason 1: To Reveal, Deter, and Mortify Sin

Reason 2: To Produce Godliness and Spiritual Fruit

Reason 3: To Reveal the Character of God

Reason 4: To Relinquish the Temporal for the Eternal

(1) *By loosening the believer's grip on temporal and earthly things*

(2) *By showing the believer the vanity of this world*

(3) *By revealing the true nature of comfort*

(4) *By making the believer long for heaven*

Reason 5: To Produce a Sincere Faith, Devoid of Hypocrisy

Reason 6: To Encourage Fellowship with God through Word, Prayer, and the
Sacrament of the Lord's Supper

Reason 7: To Bear Witness to the World

Reason 8: To Cultivate Communion with Christ, the Greatest Sufferer

*(Taken from Suffering & Sovereignty, John Flavel and the Puritans on Afflictive Providence,
by Brian H. Cosby)*

We would note again that none of this is meant to trivialize your pain and suffering. As Lewis says, pain is real and pain hurts. We are only trying to remove the intellectual aspects of your suffering by laying before you the love and superior wisdom of God in order to strengthen your hope, faith, love, and trust in Him.

Our other reason as to why God might send pain and suffering to some of His children is that ...

2. He is allowing them the inestimable privilege of sharing in the suffering of Christ

"For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake." (Romans 8:16-17)

We note again that to "suffer for His sake" is a high privilege that is "granted" by God to us and occurs during times of active and overt persecution (where permitted) and ridicule and mockery elsewhere (as in modern day America).

Our Lord has repeatedly warned us of this ...

“If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you ...” (John 15:18-20)

“Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.” (Matthew 5:11-12)

Even now the martyrs for Christ are under the very throne of God Himself, a very high and exalted position.

In sum ...

Whatever means, including pain and suffering, that God in His wisdom chooses to use to move us closer to Him and to increase our perception and enjoyment of *“His glory”* is very beneficial to our spiritual welfare, good and happiness. The nearer we draw to God, the greater our perception and enjoyment of His glory, and the greater our joy, delight, and happiness in Him.

Indeed, while we remain on earth, there could be no greater benefit and reward for us than to draw nearer to God, even through pain and suffering, if God deems pain and suffering as the best means to use for us ...

To grow in faith and trust of Him,

To more fully develop the fruit of the Spirit in our lives,

To increase our sanctification

To grow into a fuller assurance of our salvation.

Both of our *“probable reasons”* for God’s use of pain and suffering

“We need it” ... and ...

“He is allowing us the inestimable privilege of sharing in the suffering of Christ”

... show “*how it can be*” that whenever God seeks “*His own glory*” in sending pain and suffering to any of His children, He is at the same time seeking their highest good and happiness. As we have said, God’s glory and His children’s good and happiness are so thoroughly interrelated that an increase in one will always produce a corresponding increase in the other.

In conclusion, concerning the “*Why?*” of God’s use of pain and suffering to accomplish His ends, I can only repeat and agree again with C. S. Lewis’s statement given earlier

“I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. That is what the word means. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design.”

And so, we see again the reciprocal nature of God’s rejoicing in the display of His own glory and, at the same time, achieving His children’s highest interests and good through the use of pain and suffering ...

In affliction, we glorify God by our faith and trust in Him, as expressed in our patient endurance of affliction and by our rejoicing in Him and His love despite all circumstances to the contrary.

We, in turn, are reciprocally blessed by an increase in our enjoyment of and delight in God and His glory as we draw nearer to Him in faith and trust, even in times of pain and suffering. [As mentioned earlier, the enjoyment of God is the only happiness with which our souls can be fully satisfied.]

The display of God’s glory and our consequent joy in it are for Edwards a foretaste of heaven

“Heaven will be a never-ending, ever-increasing discovery of more and more of God’s glory with greater and ever-greater joy in Him.”

As we said earlier, when in heaven we behold God’s face and see the wonderful tapestry that He has woven of our lives, and the purposes and ends He has accomplished in it even through pain and suffering, we would not wish to change one minute of our suffering, but will only fall down in praise before Him for what He has done in us and that He has allowed us to share in the sufferings of Christ.

A fitting summation and conclusion to our Paper

... on how God in seeking His own glory also seeks the highest good and happiness of His creatures at the same time comes from Piper's excellent work *God's Passion for His Glory*

"The importance of this vision in Edwards argument has to do with the fact that God's glory and our joy are one great goal in creation. Edwards is at pains to show that God's last end in creation is both the display of his glorious fullness, on one hand, and the blessing of his creatures with infinite joy, on the other hand. These are not separate ends but one. 'The happiness of the creature consists in rejoicing in God, by which also God is magnified and exalted.'"

Edwards's central insight – that God created the world to exhibit the fullness of his glory in the God-centered joy of his people – has made all the difference for me."

(John Piper, God's Passion for His Glory, page 160)

Let also pray that it will do the same for us.

Soli Deo Gloria

Appendix 1: What does God consider to be the most important thing that He wants us to know about "His glory"?

The only time in the Bible that God was requested to "Show me Your glory" was by Moses in Exodus 33:18 ...

"And he said, 'Please show me Your glory.'

God's response to Moses's request was remarkable and singularly informative ...

Then He said, 'I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the LORD before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.' But He said, 'You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.' And the LORD said, 'Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put

you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see my back; but My face shall not be seen.’” (Exodus 33:19-23)

We need to grasp the significance of just what God the Father has said here.

When God the Father, in response to Moses’s request to *“Please show me Your glory”*, condescended to show Moses a veiled glimpse of *“all My goodness”* and to *“proclaim the name of the LORD before you”*, *“while My glory passes by”*, of all the things that God might have chosen to say, He specifically chose to proclaim His total and utter sovereignty in the salvation of man, i.e. ...

“I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion” (Exodus 33:19).

Lest there be any question at all about what God actually did say or mean here, Paul, in Romans 9:14-18, quotes the Exodus 33:19 passage, and beyond all doubt shows that God is most certainly speaking of His total sovereignty in the salvation of man ...

“What shall we say then? Is their unrighteousness with God? Certainly not! For He says to Moses, ‘I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion.’ So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy. For the Scripture says to the Pharaoh, ‘For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I may show My power in you, and that My name may be declared in all the earth.’ Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.” (Romans 9:14-18)

So, beyond a shadow of a doubt, according to Paul, when God stated to Moses ...

“I will have mercy on whomever I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whomever I will have compassion”

He proclaimed nothing less than His total sovereignty in and over the salvation of man, the conclusion of the matter being, according to Paul ...

“So then it is not of him who wills, nor of him who runs, but of God who shows mercy”

... and ...

“Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens” (Romans 9:16, 18).

That the one and only thing that God chose to disclose about Himself in response to Moses's request to *"Please show me Your glory"* was to show him a veiled glimpse of *"His goodness"* and to *"proclaim the name of the LORD"*, *"while My glory passes by"*, was to proclaim His total sovereignty in the salvation of man shows that it is an extremely and singularly important matter to Him and is thereby a very serious and weighty topic for our own deep consideration.

Treat it accordingly.

For a fuller treatment of the "WHYs?" of Suffering

... we suggest that you look at all four of our Papers on the subject

Paper # 2: The "Whys?" of Suffering – General Reasons

Paper # 3: The "Whys?" of Suffering – Suffering for God's Glory

Paper # 4: The Many "Whys?" of Job's Sufferings – God's Answer and Job's Reaction

Paper # 6: On Facing Suffering and 'Suffering Well'

Our Paper 5 is "On Facing Death ("the last enemy") and 'Dying Well'
