

Why Does God Allow Wars?

By Herbert W. Armstrong
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MORE people have asked me this question than any other: Why, if there be a God, does God allow wars and all this human suffering and anguish? Why such terrifying world conditions as we face now?

People put it to me this way: If God is good, if God is love, if God is merciful, he wouldn't want people to suffer like they do on this earth, would he? And, if God is Almighty, if he has all power, he could stop it. He could prevent it. Then, why doesn't he?

I want to make plain to you what you may never have heard or thought of before. The God I believe in—the God that I know exists, because I can prove it!—is the God who created all things. He is the Creator not only of matter, but also of force, of energy, of all the laws that exist: the laws of chemistry, the laws of physics—spiritual laws as well as physical laws to regulate man's life and man's happiness.

God created man in his image, and for a purpose that almost no one seems to understand. Did you ever stop to think and wonder why you were born? What is this purpose that God is working out?

In Genesis 1, beginning with the 24th verse, God said: "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind. ..." That is, the little puppy grows up in the image of its parent dogs, same form, same shape. And now, the next verse: "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . ." In other words, after our form, our shape, our image. God is reproducing himself! God has endowed man with powers that no animal possesses.

An animal can't design, originate, plan and execute, using free volition, and then carry out or execute what it has thought out and designed and planned. A bird builds a nest. Gophers dig holes. Beavers build dams. But did you ever realize that one beaver dam is like another? And that they have been the same from the beginning? Every bird builds the same kind of nest that its kind of birds have always built.

We have been given some of the powers of God. Thank God, he limited our powers. Look at how we've misused what God has given us, and think what we might have done if God had given us more power.

The next point that I want you to realize is this: The first chapter of Genesis is telling us only of a material, a physical creation, not of a spiritual creation. Man is the clay model. God merely made the clay model to begin fashioning something greater that he has in mind. In Genesis 2:7 we learn out of what God made man. God is Spirit. But he didn't make man out of spirit. Rather, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life [the word

breath comes from the same Hebrew word that refers to the breath in the nostrils of animals]; and man became a living soul." It doesn't say that man has a soul, but man is a soul.

We're the clay model. God is the Great Potter. So we read in Isaiah 64:8: "But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand."

Not so long ago, I was in one of the great potteries in England, where very fine bone china is made. I noticed a potter making vases with his hands. I talked with him for a while. He said that it took him 30 years to learn how to do it. He is a master craftsman. The clay, I noticed, had to be of just a certain thickness. It had to be plastic, too, so he could move it and bend it. It had to give and to move in his hands. If it was too stiff, he couldn't use it, if it was too thin, he couldn't do anything with it. It had to be just right. That's the way we have to be: plastic!—yielding in the hands of God, just as that clay yielded in this man's hands. God made us free moral agents. And God made us so that we can resist—we can stiffen up and harden up against him—or we can accept him and we can yield. God made us so that we must choose on that point. God is not going to do anything with us if we resist. So, then, what are we?, We are an unfinished piece of God's workmanship!

Creation was not completed in the time of the garden of Eden and the creation of Adam and Eve. It was only begun there. That was the material, the physical creation. God was, then, only beginning his real creation—which is a spiritual creation—of creating something spiritual out of man who has been made mortal, out of the dust of the ground.

We were born, all of us, from Adam. Adam was not in the spiritual image of God, as most people seem to think he was. He lacked God's perfect spiritual character. He was not made of the same substance as God. Adam was made of the dust of the ground but God is Spirit.

So far as composition is concerned, we have only been bearing the physical image, not the spiritual. But we are in the form and shape of God. We can receive his spirit, his character and bear his image, spiritually. God is reproducing himself! I wonder if you can begin to realize that wonderful truth.

And so, now, what is God? God is perfect, spiritual character. That's what he is. God has all power, but what God is, is perfect, spiritual character. Character cannot be automatically created by fiat. Neither can character be inherited from father or mother to child. What is perfect character? Character, perfect character, is the ability of a separate entity to come, FIRST, to the knowledge of the truth, and of the right as opposed to the wrong; and SECOND, to make the decision to choose the right instead of the wrong; and THIRD, to exercise the will and the self-discipline to do the right instead of the wrong.

God is the perfect character. God has all knowledge. God always chooses the right. God never does wrong. We were put here to build character until we become like God. Animals have instinct, but animals do not develop righteous character.

Character involves such characteristics as love and patience, humility, tolerance, mercy, wisdom, initiative and right doing through free choice. So, God of necessity made man the clay model. He made man a free moral agent, so that man must make his own decision. God has decreed that we must decide. He doesn't force us to obey him or come under his government.

There could be no character any other way. And to do that God had to allow man to do wrong. Now, get that! To fulfill his purpose, God had to allow man to be able to do wrong. Character must be developed by experience. It can't be created automatically. Experience requires time; and so God set apart a total of 7,000 years to carry out his purpose. The first 6,000 years—as there were six days of material creation—are for man's way of going contrary to God. Then there is going to be a 1,000-year day of spiritual rest, when Jesus Christ is coming to rule this earth God's way and rule it with a rod of iron. The whole world will be full of the knowledge of the Eternal God.

God's law or way is love. Love is always away from self—not toward self. Never lust or anything of that sort. The opposite way is lust and greed, that's all toward self—vanity! And it leads to the system in this world—competition and strife—yes, the getting way, the accumulating, the taking way.

And that is the cause of wars. Why does God allow war and human suffering?

We have competition. Everything is competition in this world. Everything is carried along on the selfish, the getting, basis—greed and vanity. To prevent the evils of competition and wars today God would have to cram his religion down our throats. Our way, the violation of the law of God, the law of love, is causing war, human anguish and human suffering. God had to allow it (to let us have our own way) in order to fulfill his purpose of creating holy character.

The only way that God could stop war would be to stop the cause. He would have, in effect, to cram his religion down our throats—down the throats of all humanity.

There wouldn't be any free moral agency; there wouldn't be any character and God's purpose could never be fulfilled. That's why God allows wars, and that's why God allows suffering. To prevent it would be to prevent the very purpose that God is working out here below.

Do you know that man learns by suffering? Did you ever hear of anyone learning that the stove was hot by putting his finger on it? We do learn by experience. And do you know that Jesus Christ learned by experience?

Turn to Hebrew 5:8-9. "Though he were a Son, yet learned he [Christ] obedience by the things which he suffered; and being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him."

Experience develops character—either good or bad. If we're going to have good character it comes through experience. If we develop bad character—and man has done that, of course—God provided for that too, because "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son" that we can repent. We can come to him and have all of the sin forgiven. We can be given a new and a clean start, receive God's Spirit, and let the power of God come into us and clean us up and make us what we ought to be.

Job understood this. Turn to Job 14:14: "If a man die, shall he live again? all the days [answered Job] of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." He was speaking of a resurrection when he was going to be changed. "Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee. . . ." And, do you know that Jesus

said, "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life. . ." (John 5:28-29).

Job said: "Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee. . ." Here is the point I want you to notice, ". . . thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands"—the last part of verse 15. In calling him from the grave in a resurrection, Job said, God will have a desire to the work of his hands. Job knew that he was an unfinished piece of God's workmanship. Yes, man is the work of God's hands.

I want you now to notice Ephe-sians 2:10: "For we are his workmanship . . ."—we, of course, means Christians in New Testament language. "We are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works [not very many people believe that today], which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." Yes, in good works. That's in the New Testament.

The spiritual creation is still going on today. That's the purpose of your life—to learn that very lesson. To repent of your wrong ways, your sins, to accept Christ as your Savior; and to start on the way that is the way of character, the way of good, righteous, holy, spiritual character—the way of God. And that you can become the very born son of God.

Only those who overcome and grow in this life—after we do repent, and after we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, and after we have received his Holy Spirit and are walking by his Spirit, will reign with Christ over the nations. "He that overcometh [said Jesus], and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations: and he shall rule them [the nations] with a rod of iron" (Rev. 2:26-27). And then again in Revelation 3:21: "To him that overcometh [Jesus said] will I grant to sit with me in my throne." He is going to rule the entire world; and we, if we qualify, are going to rule with him. We're going to be kings and priests with him. He was the firstborn of many brethren. You can be one of those brethren!