

Impossible With God

People have always tried to come to terms with the idea that the God who loves us allows terrible things to happen to us. Some have concluded that God does not exist; others, that he is not good. Still others may concede that though God has his own brand of lofty righteousness, it is devoid of love for his creatures. If God is all-powerful, the reasoning goes, then he has the power to stop the mayhem. And if he does not do so, then he must not love us after all.

Why else would bad things happen to good people?

A new slant on this problem of suffering was offered when Harold Kushner's book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* was published. Kushner argued that the reason God does not stop the evil is that he can't. God is good, he does love us, but he is unable to keep us from suffering.

Kushner may be partly right.

The Bible has much to say about God's goodness and love. But it is the thought that God's power is limited that raises eyebrows. After all, God's invincible power and might are brought home to us in the Bible too.

But there are times when inability to do something reflects on neither the goodness nor the power of the person in question. There exists a logical "can't" as well as a "can't" for lack of power. I, for instance, can't make two plus two equal five. And I doubt that God can either. Because, given the principles of mathematics on which the universe is established, the sum of two plus two is a given.

The Bible tells us that "with God, nothing shall be impossible." (Luke 1:37). Yet there are things he cannot do. One of the things God cannot do is lie. It is "impossible for God to lie" (Hebrews 6:18). Why can't God lie? Doesn't he know how? Maybe lying is impossible for the same reason we can't change the sum of two plus two. It just isn't in the nature of things.

This may also be why he can't make our lives easier. It's hard for us to see this as a logical impossibility, but maybe it is.

Could God have made Jesus' life easier? Jesus desperately wanted him to. One of the most heart-rending passages in the Bible is Jesus' plea "Oh my Father, if it is possible, let this cup be removed from me!" (Matthew 26:39).

Was it possible? Could God have kept Jesus from suffering? How deeply the Almighty wanted to! "Now is my soul troubled... Father, save me from this hour" Jesus pleaded, while yet recognizing the paradox: "but for this very reason I came to this hour" (John 12:27).

"Shall I not drink the cup my Father has given me?" (John 18:11) Jesus said to Peter, who himself was ready to save Jesus from the mob. "Do you not think that I cannot now pray to my

Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? (Matthew 26:53). God had the power. But the choice was Jesus’.

We understand even less than Jesus why some things are logically impossible for God to do. Jesus prayed for the cup to be removed from him, but he didn’t know if it was even possible. What was not possible was for Jesus to act in total love and obedience and yet escape the terrible choice he had to make.

Freedom of choice is one of the things that God has made part of our nature. There are consequences to having that freedom -- consequences for us, and consequences for God. We can’t logically have freedom of choice, and yet have God make the choices for us.

And we can’t love without freedom of choice. The two go together. Jesus’ willingness to die proved forever that he loves us, for “greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friend” (John 15:13).

Because of the principles on which God based our world, some things we might earnestly desire him to do for us are impossible. But something else was impossible too: though Jesus died, it was not possible that death should hold him (Acts 2:24).

You might say it was impossible for God to leave Jesus in the grave. Jesus struggled to understand why God had forsaken him (Matthew 27:46). And we too often wonder, “where is God when we need him?” But the resurrection gives us hope that God is indeed there, and that “all things” – life itself – are possible with God.

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