

QUESTION & ANSWER SERMON - PART 2

Peter Foxwell. The Cornerstone Church. August 16, 2026.

Dismiss the Middle School

STUDY GUIDE

As you came in this morning, you should have received a bulletin. Inside, you'll find a simple study guide you can use in a few different ways: to follow along with today's teaching, to reflect on during your personal devotions this week, or to spark conversation in your small group.

More resources are available online. [The link is in your study guide.](#)

Let's get started on today's teaching ...

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Summer is coming to an end too quickly. And that means it's almost time for our small groups to get going again.

Small groups are a wonderful, safe place to make friends and find support and encouragement in your faith journey.

Groups are at the heart of the Cornerstone family. It's where a lot of the energy and momentum you feel on Sundays comes from, so I highly recommend joining a group this fall.

Please go to the Welcome Center after the service to find more information about the groups and sign up for the group that feels right for you.

There is also a QR code on the backs of some chairs that you can use.

We also need more hosts and facilitators. Hosts provide the location and organize the room and the food (if that's part of the meeting). Facilitators oversee the prayers and Bible Study. If you're interested or need more information, please talk to **Joe Sabo**.

Each group is different, so take a moment to find out more at the Welcome Center.

QUESTION & ANSWER SERMON - PART 2

Today, we're on week two of the Question and Answer sermon. You sent in so many good questions that really we could go for another couple of weeks, but we won't. So, thanks for showing such great interest.

I'm very excited to dive in, so let's get started on Question One.

QUESTION ONE

Question: Why did God permit evil and suffering to enter the world, and why doesn't he stop them?

Answer: Great question. This is theology's toughest question.

I've got a four-part answer. Very briefly:

Part 1: The Sources of Evil and Suffering

Genesis chapter three tells us that evil and suffering entered the world when the devil tempted Adam and Eve and they rebelled against God. God responded by pronouncing a curse on the devil and consequences on the man and woman.

Romans chapter five summarizes those consequences:

Romans 5:12 (CSB) Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, in this way death spread to all people, because all sinned.

That tells us why we die.

Romans chapter 8 explains why the world is dangerous:

Romans 8:20-22 (CSB) For the creation was subjected to futility — not willingly, but because of him who subjected it ... 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together with labor pains until now.

God's judgment on human sin has resulted in terrible consequences for the world such as natural disasters, disease, and animal suffering and death.

Hebrews 12 introduces us to God's fatherly discipline of his children:

Hebrews 12:7 (CSB) Endure suffering as discipline: God is dealing with you as sons. For what son is there that a father does not discipline?

God wants to help us live godly lives, and sometimes he needs to get our attention so that we get back on track. Discipline might involve pain, loss, or failure. **It never feels good, but it is for our good.**

Charles Spurgeon makes some insightful comments about God's discipline in our lives:

In the family of grace there is discipline, and that discipline is severe enough to make it an evil and a bitter thing to sin.

The Lord will chasten His best beloved servants if they cease from full obedience to His laws...

The punishment of sin is everlasting, but the fatherly chastisement of it in a child of God is but for a season. The sickness, the poverty, the depression of spirit, will pass away when they have had their intended effect.

Our present grief is meant to bring us to repentance, that we may not be destroyed with the wicked.

Charles Spurgeon, Faith's Check Book for August 14.

Now, if we summarize those passages, we could say that the sources of evil and suffering are: God's judgment, God's fatherly discipline, the physical world, the devil, and human choices.

Part 2: The Limits To Our Understanding Of God, Evil, And Suffering

All of which makes me scratch my head. Why does God allow this?

Do you remember Job, the righteous man in the Bible who lost everything and suffered terribly? He tried to understand. He demanded God give him answers. He was just like us; that's exactly what we do when life hurts.

Listen how God finally replied to Job's demands:

Job 38:1-4 (CSB) Then the LORD answered Job from the whirlwind. He said: 2 Who is this who obscures my counsel with ignorant words? 3 Get ready to answer me like a man; when I question you, you will inform me. 4 Where were you when I established the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding.

One study Bible comments:

Job has been speaking beyond what he truly knows, because he, as a finite human, is in no position to speak accurately about God's plans for the world or for him personally (CSB Baker Illustrated Bible Study Notes).

We don't have the information or the intellectual capacity to understand the problem of evil and suffering. To my knowledge, no philosopher or theologian has solved the problem.

Deuteronomy 29:29 (CSB) The hidden things belong to the LORD our God,

So, essentially, we're in the dark about a lot of stuff.

Part 3: God Will Eradicate Evil and Suffering in the End

God will end pain and sorrow in the new creation.

Revelation 21:3-4 (CSB) Then I heard a loud voice from the throne: Look, God's dwelling is with humanity, and he will live with them. They will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and will be their God. 4 He will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; grief, crying, and pain will be no more, because the previous things have passed away.

God has the last word. He will make all things new, right, and beautiful. That makes us desperate for a Savior and homesick for heaven, which are good things.

Part 4: A Possible Explanation

Here is one possible explanation for the presence of evil and suffering:

Any world in which humans have moral freedom - that is, the freedom to choose to do right or wrong - will inevitably result in people making evil decisions leading to suffering in the world.

Why did God give us moral freedom? Maybe in God's mind, it's better to create humanity with moral freedom than to make us like robots.

And God has a plan to end evil and suffering. We don't know why it's taking so long. We don't know all the details of God's sovereign plan and purpose, but we do know that God has intervened through Jesus Christ to bring an end to sin, death, suffering, and the devil.

And, in the end, when we finally learn everything God planned and did, we will understand and bow down to him in worship and adoration.

QUESTION TWO

Question: Who decided what books are in the Bible? Why do different denominations have more books included?

Answer: Great question. This is a complicated topic, so I'm skimming the surface in my answer. So, again, I have a four-part answer:

1. The Inspiration of the Bible

Let's begin with a reminder of the Christian understanding of Scripture:

2 Timothy 3:16 (CSB) All Scripture is inspired by God...

Inspired means breathed out in the sense that it is God's speaking. We breathe out words. So Scripture, or the Bible, is God's speech or word.

Paul was referring to the Old Testament, but the apostle Peter describes Paul's writings as Scripture in 2 Peter 3:15-16.

So, since Paul wrote the majority of the New Testament, that's an indication that all the New Testament writings were included in the Bible because those early Christians considered them to be God's word, God-breathed, or inspired in a way that other writings are not.

2. The Process of Identifying Inspired Writings

What was the process of identifying inspired writings and collecting them into a single book we call the Bible?

We don't know the process used for the Old Testament. Scholars believe Jewish religious leaders recognized most of the Old Testament as Scripture around 400

BC, when Ezra returned from the Babylonian exile. The remaining books were recognized sometime in the first century AD.

The New Testament's books were all written before the end of the first century. They circulated among Christian communities and were gradually recognized as God-breathed. A list of 27 books appears in 150 AD. Athanasius of Alexandria mentions the same books in 367 AD. Various regional church councils also recognize the list around the same time.

3. The Criteria Used For Including Writings In The New Testament

What were the criteria used for including writings in the New Testament? Early church leaders applied several tests, developed especially in the second century as false or competing writings circulated:

- **Apostolicity:** The book had to be written by an apostle or someone under direct apostolic authority and supervision.
- **Orthodoxy:** Its content had to conform to the "rule of faith" — the core apostolic teaching already recognized by the churches.
- **Catholicity** (universal reception): The writing needed to be broadly recognized and used across many churches, not merely a single local congregation.
- **Traditional/liturgical use:** Books consistently read aloud in worship across regions carried strong evidence of their authoritative standing.

4. Why Do Some Christian Traditions Have More Books?

All Christian traditions agree on the same 27 New Testament books. However, disagreement exists about the Old Testament, depending on which ancient source the list is drawn from. Protestants tend to rely on the Hebrew Masoretic

text, which contains 39 OT books. Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox tend to rely on the Greek Septuagint, a Greek translation of the OT, which contains additional books we call the Apocrypha or Deuterocanonical books.

So, the Roman Catholic Bible has 46 OT books. The Eastern Orthodox Bible has either 49 or 51.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Bible has 46 OT books and 35 NT books. The extra books in the New Testament are mainly about church government, and the Ethiopians consider them helpful, but not inspired.

Protestants generally believe that the Apocryphal books are useful but not authoritative.

OK? I hope that's helpful.

I received so many more excellent questions, some of which are so long and complicated to answer that I decided to leave them be for now. Maybe we'll get to them another time.

I'm truly sorry about that.

If you're desperate for an answer, please talk to me.

Now, I'd like to answer some questions that only need a quick answer ...

LIGHTNING ROUND

Question: What did Jesus mean when he said:

Matthew 7:1-3 (CSB) Do not judge, so that you won't be judged. 2 For you will be judged by the same standard with which you judge others, and you will be measured by the same measure you use. 3 Why do you look at the splinter in your brother's eye but don't notice the beam of wood in your own eye?

Answer: Don't be judgmental. Don't be self-righteous and critical. Don't tear people down.

The clue is in verse 3, which compares a splinter to a beam of wood. When we act like we're all that, that we have no struggles, and we're superior, it's hypocritical and unhelpful because we all have issues.

Jesus was NOT saying that we accept and approve of everything. No, many Bible passages teach us to be discerning.

He was saying he hasn't appointed his followers as the moral police. We don't always have to speak. When it's necessary to correct someone, we must do so only with a loving heart and the intention to help, not to hurt.

And yes, that is really hard to do and often leads to conflict. So, be humble, careful, and prayerful. Ask the Lord, "Do you want me to say something?" Don't just dive in like a busybody. Wait for God's green light, and the right time and place.

Question: What is the sovereignty of God, and what are its implications?

Answer: Ephesians 1 gives us an insight into God's sovereignty:

Ephesians 1:11 (CSB) ... according to the plan of the one who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will ...

God has a plan and a purpose, and he is working everything in the universe to accomplish it.

That does not mean that we are robots. Sovereignty is not the same as determinism or fatalism.

No, God is so powerful, intelligent, and determined that he accomplishes his plans despite human choices, the devil's scheming, and every other contingency.

One major implication of God's sovereignty is the assurance of salvation. What the Lord began in us, he will complete. Romans 8 is memorable:

Romans 8:28-30 (CSB) We know that all things work together for the good of those who love God, who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, so that he would be the firstborn among many brothers and sisters. 30 And those he predestined, he also called; and those he called, he also justified; and those he justified, he also glorified.

Question: What does it say in the bible in regard to burial or cremation?

Answer: The Bible says nothing directly about burial or cremation.

We're free to choose, so pray about it, and bear in mind the following:

- Even in death, the human body should be treated with respect and dignity.
- All bodies, whether buried or cremated, eventually return to dirt and dust.
- When the general resurrection happens at Christ's return, everyone will be raised with eternal bodies. God can raise people from the ocean, from scattered ashes, and from grave vaults.

1 Corinthians 15:42-44 (NLT) Our earthly bodies are planted in the ground when we die, but they will be raised to live forever. 43 Our bodies are buried in brokenness, but they will be raised in glory. They are buried in weakness, but they will be raised in strength. 44 They are buried as natural human bodies, but they will be raised as spiritual bodies.

Question: What happens when a Christian dies in the Lord?

Answer: Our biological bodies die and return to the ground. Our spirit or soul continues to live and is immediately in the presence of the Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:1 (NLT) For we know that when this earthly tent we live in is taken down (that is, when we die and leave this earthly body), we will have a house in heaven, an eternal body made for us by God himself and not by human hands.

Christians say, "Absent from the body, present with the Lord."

Question: Who are the rulers and authorities in Ephesians 3:10? Are we being watched by these beings?

Ephesians 3:10 (CSB) This is so that God's multi-faceted wisdom may now be made known through the church to the rulers and authorities in the heavens.

Answer: The rulers and authorities in the heavens are most likely angelic beings - both holy and fallen - who rule over myriads of other angels in the unseen realm (Ephesians 1:21; 6:12).

Yes, they can see what God has done to create the church through the saving work of Christ, but I'm not confident that they are watching us individually as much as they see the advance of the gospel, more and more people getting saved, and the church spreading to every nation that the devil once dominated.

The holy angels rejoice in that. The fallen angels tremble in fear.

Question: Can Satan tempt more than one person at a time?

Answer: No. Satan is not like God. He is a limited creature, an angel, so he can only be in one place at a time.

However, he can lay traps, spread lies and deception, carry out schemes, and send multitudes of fallen angels and demons to tempt us.

Ephesians 6:11-12 (CSB) Put on the full armor of God so that you can stand against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers of this darkness, against evil, spiritual forces in the heavens.

CONCLUSION

OK. I think we must leave it there. I still have pages of unanswered questions, and I'm sorry if I didn't get to yours.

You'll want to be here next Sunday when I attempt to answer two very difficult and important questions that you sent me: 1) Has the church replaced Israel? 2) Should Christians support the modern State of Israel?