

### III. THE ROOT CAUSES OF HUMAN SUFFERING

#### A. Unbiblical Views of the Causes of Suffering

1. In Harold Kushner's best-selling book, When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Kushner, formerly a rabbi of a congregation of six hundred families in a suburb of Boston, presents a unique view of the Biblical book of Job. Rabbi Kushner writes (pp. 36-43):

The Book of Job is probably the greatest, fullest, most profound discussion of the subject of good people suffering ever written. . . . To try to understand the book and its answer, let us take note of three statements which everyone in the book, and most of the readers, would like to be able to believe:

- A. God is all-powerful and causes everything that happens in the world. Nothing happens without His willing it.
- B. God is just and fair, and stands for people getting what they deserve, so that the good prosper and the wicked are punished.
- C. Job is a good person.

As long as Job is healthy and wealthy, we can believe all three of those statements at the same time with no difficulty. When Job suffers, when he loses his possessions, his family, and his health, we have a problem. We can no longer make sense of all three propositions together. We can now affirm any two only by denying the third.

If God is both just and powerful, then Job must be a sinner who deserves what is happening to him. If Job is good but God causes his suffering anyway, then God is not just. If Job deserved better and God did not send his suffering, then God is not all-powerful. We can see the argument of the Book of Job as an argument over which of the three statements we are prepared to sacrifice, so that we can keep on believing in the other two.

Job's friends are prepared to stop believing in (C), the assertion that Job is a good person. . . They want to believe that God is good and that God is in control of things. And the only way they can do that is to convince themselves that Job deserves what is happening to him . . .

Job, for his part, is unwilling to hold the world together theologically by admitting that he is a villain . . . Job is absolutely sure that he is not a bad person. He may not be perfect, but he is not so much worse than others, by any intelligible moral standard, that