

# Answering the Problem of Evil and Suffering

Dr. Mark Farnham



**APOLOGETICS**  
FOR THE CHURCH

**Question: How do we reconcile a loving, omnipotent God with evil and suffering in this world?**

1. Some unbelievers who have suffered greatly or lost loved ones have charged that this is an irrefutable case against the existence of God.
  - a. “Couldn’t God have made a world in which evil and suffering didn’t exist?”
  - b. “I would never hurt my children needlessly, so why does God?”
  
2. The answer to these objections starts with an examination of the assumptions behind the question
  - a. It is assumed that suffering is necessarily bad
  - b. It is assumed that people are basically innocent so that suffering is somehow unfair
  - c. It is assumed that evil and suffering cannot result in good that will make it worthwhile
  - d. BUT, it is also assumed that there is a difference between good and evil
  - e. There is a standard by which we can judge between good and evil
  - f. This standard can be known and ought to compel people
  - g. There is meaning to the events in the world and to the suffering of people
  
3. Inadequate Answers
  - a. Non-Reality of Evil—Buddhism teaches that suffering is simply an illusion.
  - b. Deserved Punishment—Hinduism teaches that suffering is deserved.
  - c. Fatalism—Islam teaches *inshallah*—“if-God-wills-it”: whatever happens is Allah’s will.
  - d. Purposelessness—Atheism teaches that suffering has no purpose, so get through it ASAP
  - e. Weakness of God—God does not overcome all evil because he cannot, even though he wants to.
  - f. Free Will—Man has free will, and therefore, God has nothing to do with evil because he cannot interfere without impinging on man’s free will.
  - g. “Christian” Fatalism—God is in control, and therefore you cannot avoid suffering. Don’t let it get you upset. Just stoically accept it, because all things work together for good. So, actually it’s a blessing. It’s nothing to cry over.
  
4. A Christian Answer

- a. God is the standard for his own actions—whatever he does defines concepts of justice, goodness, love, and mercy.
  - b. God does not need to explain his actions to us. He does not defend himself for giving Adam a wife who led him into sin (Gen. 3:12), or when he tells Abraham to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22), or when Job wants answers (Job 23:1-7; 31:35ff; 40:4-42:6).
  - c. As fallen, finite, and created beings, we cannot understand the reasons of a perfect, infinite, and uncreated God (Ezek. 18:25).
5. An even better Christian answer is that God may have a perfectly good reason for allowing evil and suffering that we cannot know or comprehend.
- a. The standard atheistic view assumes that God could not possibly have a good reason for allowing evil and suffering, yet cannot prove that assertion in any way.
  - b. The Christian answer says that with man's limited reasoning, he cannot possibly know whether or not God has good reasons for allowing suffering.
  - c. The Christian response to the standard atheistic view might look like this:
    - i. Premise 1: If God were all-powerful, he would be able to prevent evil.
    - ii. Premise 2: If God were all-good, he would desire to prevent evil.
    - iii. Premise 3: But there is evil.
    - iv. *Premise 4: God may have a morally sufficient reason for allowing evil that we don't know about*
    - v. *Conclusion: Therefore, God may allow evil for reasons we don't know, and still be all-powerful, all-good*
6. Ultimately only the Christian worldview validates that suffering is genuine, yet not meaningless.
- a. God triumphed over evil and suffering (John 11:35).
  - b. God himself experienced the greatest suffering in order to ensure an end to suffering.
7. Ultimately only the Christian worldview has grounds to call evil what it is, to see evil as really destructive and awful as it really is, and to provide hope for future judgment on those who perpetrate evil.
- a. God hates evil and has nothing to do with it (Hab. 1:12; Jam. 1:13-17).
  - b. Evil is the enemy of God and all he has made.
  - c. Non-Christian views minimize evil, fail to recognize it as such, or are unable to give distinctions between good and evil.
  - d. God ultimately overcame evil by the death of his Son, Jesus. Jesus conquered the consequence of sin—death—by his resurrection. He makes it possible for us to overcome evil by copying his example (Rom. 12:17-21; John 11:25).

**Recommended Resources:**

Dirckx, Sharon. *Why?: Looking at God, Evil, and Personal Suffering*. London: The Good Book Company, 2013.

Keller, Timothy. *Walking with God through Pain and Suffering*. New York: Dutton, 2013.

Orr-Ewing, Amy. *Where Is God in All the Suffering?* Oxford: The Good Book Company, 2020.

Piper, John, and Justin Taylor, eds. *Suffering and the Sovereignty of God*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006.