



## #1 – The Problem of Pain and Suffering?

Why would a good God allow good people to suffer?

### Not-So-Key Definitions (for this question, but worth knowing):

**Atheist** Rejects the belief that any deities exist, specifically that the evidence in their opinion supports the position that there are no deities, or no evidence for a dimension or realm apart from our obvious detectable universe.

**Agnostic** Does not commit to a belief either way in the existence of deities. Might seem like a cop-out, but this group is typically more intellectually honest than atheists. They are reserving the right to take a position until they see more evidence. Belief in God is not seen as relevant or worth considering at this time.

**Materialism** The belief that nothing exists except matter and energy in the detectable, observable universe.

**Naturalism** Everything arises from natural properties and causes, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted.

**Free-Will** The belief that human individuals have the capacity to make actual choices between one or more courses of action. That our futures are not predetermined, we make real choices with real consequences and responsibilities and rewards.

**Pre-Destination** The belief, especially among Christians, that God has decided our future before we were born. Often called Calvinism, but also believed by Martin Luther, and finds its origins in the philosophy of 4<sup>th</sup> century brilliant but crazy Catholic monk Augustine.

Catholics reject Pre-Destination, and so do Pentecostals, Methodists, Wesleyans, Eastern-Orthodox and some other groups. About 70% of Protestant groups fully embrace Pre-Destination in their theology (including: Lutherans, Calvinists, Reformed, Anglican, Presbyterian, almost all Baptists, and Episcopalians)

# The Classic Pain Question

Here is the question as posed by a non-Christian on Huffington Post<sup>1</sup>:

**How can a loving, yet omnipotent God permit evil and suffering in the world?** A God that allows suffering to continue is either...

- a) not all-powerful (not omnipotent) and is thus unable to prevent the suffering;
- b) not loving because this God has the power to prevent suffering but is unwilling to do so;
- c) not all-knowing (not omniscient) because God only is aware of the suffering after it has already occurred and it's too late to prevent it.

**The conclusion is, therefore, that the Christian God does not exist**, because the clear existence of suffering contradicts the existence of an all-knowing, all-powerful, and good and benevolent being.

(Note, in theology, this question and its answer is called the “Theodicy” You know... in case you want to Google it or love having more labels to memorize)

**So what is wrong with this “proof”?**

Tip: Whenever you encounter an argument or question that seems to ring true, but a small voice in the back of your head says otherwise, you should pause and examine how the words are being used. There is almost always a false, hidden definition in the argument.

**Errors: Suffering must be bad.**

**Suffering and evil are permanent.**

**Holding a Materialistic worldview (basically we are wet computers) yet believing love and justice are real things.**

On this last one, remember that in a “post-modern” world, there are no absolutes, but post-modern people always fall back on absolute truths whenever it is convenient for them to do so.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeffrey-small/why-must-evil-and-sufferi\\_b\\_857787.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeffrey-small/why-must-evil-and-sufferi_b_857787.html)

## The Christian Answer:

- The question is framed to prove that the Christian God does not exist. Namely that pain is evidence for the Atheist / Evolutionist / Materialist / Naturalist worldview.



So the scale appears to be tipping in their direction...

- But is this the case? Only if you don't really think about the question very much. Atheists love to bring up the question of pain, but they don't really want to talk about it for very long.
- **For the atheist, the question of pain becomes very uncomfortable the more you talk about it. For the Christian, the question of pain becomes very exciting the more you talk about it.**

*Answering the Pain question, what level will you reach?*

### **Apprentice**

- Freedom is the answer!
- God didn't want robots, but pain is a necessary result of free-will.

### **Jedi**

- Pain is not eternal.
- God can be in the midst of our pain. He meets us at the point of need if we invite Him in.
- Belief in Pain and Love and the craving to set things right is evidence of faith. "You are on your way to belief in Jesus!"
- Understands the logical progression of God's plan from Freedom to Love to Pain to Restitution.
- Understands that the atheist version gets rid of God, but leaves us with the pain.  
Thanks a lot!

### **Jedi Master**

- Can explain the logical progression of God's plan from Freedom to Restitution.
- Explain how atheist/materialists require one to believe that pain, love, purpose and the human mind are all illusions.

- Once you get started on the question of pain, the Christian can explore how pain is the result of God empowering us to have real freedom and free-will, giving us the privilege or accepting or rejecting His plan.



- **For the Christian, freedom, love, pain and justice are real things, and we can point to their universal existence in the human condition as evidence for God.**
- **For the Atheist or Materialist or Naturalist or Evolutionist, their worldview forces them to adopt some position where Freedom, Love, Pain and a desire for Justice are all illusions.** We are just wet computers trying to obey our DNA, and none of this really matters and these things on the Christian side of the scale are not real. This is tough for them to acknowledge, and they regret bringing up the question of pain when you take them here.



## The Logical Progression of God's Plan vs the Atheist Worldview

- **For the Christian, the discussion gets deeper and better and more exciting.** We see the plan of God, starting with freedom and ending with restitution in His presence for those that choose Him!

**Freedom** gives us the option to **Love** (free will is risky, ask any parent).

↳ **Love** creates the possibility of **Pain and Rejection**.

↳ **Pain** creates a natural demand for **Justice**, we want things made right!

↳ **Justice** gives us the possibility of a **Savior** to pay the price we can't pay.

↳ A **Savior** gives the possibility of **Redemption**, our debt can be paid.

↳ **Redemption** gives the possibility of **Restitution** or right relationship.

(I skip this part unless someone asks about it)

↳ **Freedom** also creates the possibility of **Natural Pain** including disease, earthquakes, etc..

- This is why the scriptures tell us that Calvary was planned from the beginning of the world (John 1:1-4,14, Rev 13:8, Titus 1:2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tim 1:9 and especially 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:18-20)
- **Then the atheist gets the results of their side of the scale:** pain without God, and a purposeless and meaningless life. Oh, and life's short and then you die and that's it.

## When Dealing with the Pain Question...

**Do not forget the personal side of this difficult question.**

**The loss of loved ones, the trauma of life, the pain of broken homes, betrayal and rejection are very very real, and need to be answered in the sensitivity of the Holy Spirit's leading...**

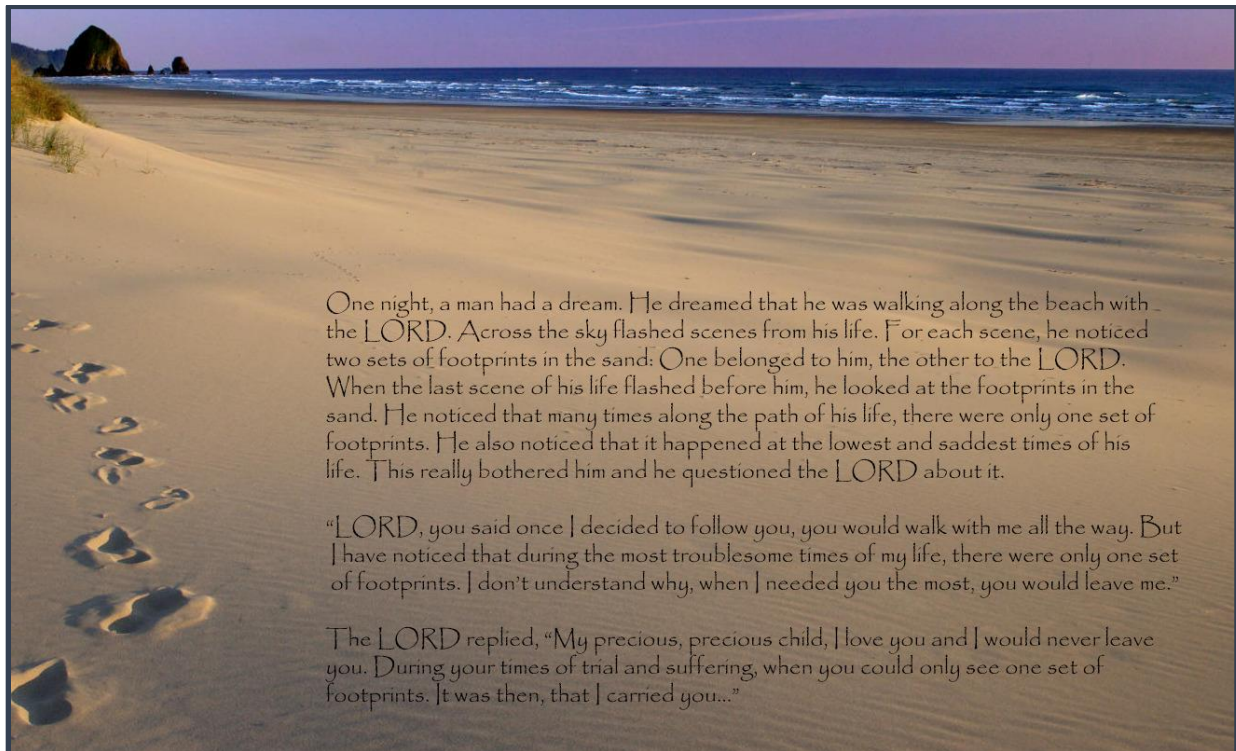
## Key Scriptures on the Question of Pain

### **Deuteronomy 31:8 NLT**

Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you.

### **Psalm 37:24-25 NLT**

Though they stumble, they will never fall, for the Lord holds them by the hand.  
<sup>25</sup> Once I was young, and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly abandoned or their children begging for bread.



### **Job 6:10 NLT**

At least I can take comfort in this: despite the pain,  
I have not denied the words of the Holy One.

### **Romans 8:17-18 NLT**

And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together with Christ we are heirs of God's glory. But if we are to share his glory, we must also share his suffering. <sup>18</sup> Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later.

### **Romans 8:26-28, 37-39 NKJV**

Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. <sup>27</sup> Now He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit *is*, because He makes intercession for the saints according to *the will of God*. <sup>28</sup> And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to *His* purpose.

<sup>37</sup> Yet in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.

<sup>38</sup> For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, <sup>39</sup> nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

### **Hebrew 4:15-16 NKJV**

For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all *points* tempted as *we are*, yet without sin. <sup>16</sup> Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

### **Revelation 21:4 NKJV**

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

# What would a Wrong Answer Sound Like?

**When you consider the question of pain and suffering,  
what is the Calvinist / Pre-Destination answer to this deep question?**

## **Remember:**

- In their worldview, your choices do not matter.  
You have no say in what you go through. God is sovereign, and He set everything in motion according to His purposes.
- So when you consider the question of pain, He wrote the script for the play of your life, and He assigned you the role and everything in it.
- Suck it up. Get over it. Or don't get over it.  
It really doesn't matter what you do, or how you feel about it.
- This is why many Christians and non-Christians remark that the Calvinist God is a jerk.
- The question of pain has no good answer, and certainly no comforting answer, from a Calvin / Pre-Destination position.



1<sup>st</sup> John 4:8-10

We find the basic declaration of God's love in 1<sup>st</sup> John 4 and throughout scripture. This is one of the primary attributes of God's character.

### Where else do we see this attribute declared?

John 3:16

- God so loved the world...

Romans 5:8

- While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Ephesians 2:4

- ...Rich in mercy, loves us with great love.

Hebrews 12:6

- Who the Lord loves He corrects.

Romans 8:39

- Nothing shall separate us from the Love of God.

John 15:13

- Greater love hath no man, than to lay down his life for his friends.

1<sup>st</sup> John 2:5

- Keeping His word lets His love be perfected in us.

### Now we see a transition in that God's love for us should also be in us, and working through us...

1<sup>st</sup> John 5:2-3

- What is His love in us? Keeping His commandments and letting Him do a work through us to love others.

Mark 12:28-30

- How do we respond as Christians and believers? Loving God with all your heart is the first and most important of the commandments.
- **This is a key principle in understanding Practical Holiness, in that Holiness for us is about relationship and love between us and God. What we do shows who we love and how much we love them.**

## Optional: What about all the pain and suffering in the world?

- Some question the love of God because of suffering in the world. Why would a loving God allow disease, evil, suffering, tragedy and pain to exist?
- It's a legitimate question, the world contains much pain. Many atheists claim the existence of suffering and pain is proof that there is no God.
- Setting aside numerous amazing arguments for God's interaction in our world, what do you get by throwing God out of the equation?
- You get rid of the intellectual question of why God would allow pain. But you don't get rid of the pain and suffering... that's still here.
- But you lose something huge by taking this step... You toss out the Biblical message of hope and redemption.
- **Is suffering somehow easier or better if there is no God?**  
(Continued next page. Warning: deep stuff ahead, get your waders on!)

- **Is suffering somehow easier or better if there is no God?**  
**I don't think so. I would rather suffer knowing there is a God and a hope of redemption than suffer without God and with no hope of eternity either.**

When considering the question of pain and suffering, I find belief in God and free will to be a more rational explanation for why we suffer than the randomness and pointlessness that atheism offers.

- **The Christian answer to pain and suffering is free will.** Free will allows us to choose God or reject His plan. It is an essential result of God's very character. God is love, and 1<sup>st</sup> Cor 13 tells us that Godly love includes certain attributes:

### **1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13:4-5 NLT**

*Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud<sup>5</sup> or rude. It does not demand its own way...*

If love does not demand its own way, then love grants the recipient the free will to accept or reject it. And that is what God grants us, the choice to accept or reject His plan for us.

But if we reject His plan, and if we are truly free to reject it, then we are also free to live through the consequences of not having His plan and His blessings in our life. If a woman rejects a man's marriage proposal, then she also rejects His offer to love, honor, protect and cherish her. You got to take the ring to get the vows. The same is true of God. He offers blessings and relationship and allows us to choose.

- **Taken to its logical conclusion, the question of pain actually opens a word picture into the entire purpose of the creation through redemption and eternity.**

(Brace yourself, this gets pretty deep... We start with freedom...)

**Freedom** gives us the option to **Love** (free will is risky, ask any parent).

↳ **Love** creates the possibility of **Pain and Rejection**.

↳ **Pain** creates a natural demand for **Justice**, we want things made right!

↳ **Justice** gives us the possibility of a **Savior** to pay the price we can't pay.

↳ A **Savior** gives the possibility of **Redemption**, our debt can be paid.

↳ **Redemption** gives the possibility of **Restitution**  
or right relationship.

(I skip this part unless someone asks about it)

↳ **Freedom** also creates the possibility of **Natural Pain** including disease, earthquakes, etc..

- It all starts with freedom and a free will which creates the option to love. Pain is a necessary part of the equation, but it leads directly to justice, salvation, redemption & restitution. The whole thing centers around love and God is love!
- **This was God's plan all along, which is why scripture declares God planned Calvary from the beginning of Creation**  
(see 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:18-20 and Rev 13:8).

## Optional Question #2 : Why do atheists bring up the question of pain and suffering?

- **So Christians have a logical progression that starts with Freedom: Freedom → Love → Pain → Justice → Savior → Redemption → Restitution**

But Christians do not claim that pain or a free will prove the existence of God. We should be clear though that pain does not prove anything for atheists either.

**The bigger question is why do atheists like to point out the existence of suffering, when they really don't believe that suffering and pain are a real thing.**

Most of us recognize at least part of the progression given above. We naturally understand that freedom gives the option to love and that love creates the possibility of pain, and that pain makes something within us cry for justice. This is valid for most theists and many atheists as well. We believe in freedom as a real thing. We believe in love, except for the ardent purist atheists like Richard Dawkins. We believe in pain almost universally. And almost all of us believe in the desire for justice. The question is: are these real things or are they just figments of evolutionary desire to propagate our DNA?

**The Christian can travel further down this road, because our worldview embraces these concepts as real and valid and part of the design and purpose of life.** The Atheist has to stop here, and actually dispute most or all of these ideas as not real actual things that exist. They are merely chemical illusions.

**The atheist, if honest, has to declare that love is an illusion or at best the label applied to a mutually beneficial symbiotic relationship** (and the chemical induced emotions generated) where two or more organisms agree to a contractual arrangement in order to support each other and further the DNA of both organisms as well as more distantly related genetic material (your neighbor's DNA, your cousin's DNA, etc..). In evolution, love is not a real thing.

**The same is true of pain. Pain is just part of the nervous system or the brain's attempt to make sense of the world while on the path to preserving your genetic lineage.** Suffering is largely just the failure of those not fit to survive. Get over it. Even freedom is up for grabs, in that atheism must conclude that we are just complicated wet computers, and if every neuron, input and output were track-able, we would know what decision you would make in any given context. You're not free, according to atheism, just a very very complicated computer.

**In Christianity, we are made in the image of God, and we are given the freedom to choose. The theist, especially the Christian, sees Freedom, Love, Pain and Justice as real things that we encounter in life. They each fit into the grand tapestry that God weaves for us. Sometimes the story hurts, sometimes a lot, but God is there, not only over the story, but in the midst of the story, in the midst of our pain, if we invite Him in.**

**The best part for the Christian is that the story does not end here, it continues past justice to the possibility of salvation, redemption and restitution!**

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If you did the optional sections - that was some deep philosophy...

**Let's get back to examining what Love is by looking at the Bible chapter that is the Gold Standard for defining love: 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 13.**

1<sup>st</sup> Cor 13:1-3

- Paul introduces this topic in the middle of the Spiritual Gifts section of the Corinthians letter (c12 to 14).

Love is more important than any Spiritual Gift.

1<sup>st</sup> Cor 13:4-8a

- **Then God speaks through Paul to give us the most amazing definition of Biblical love.**

**Let's look at the attributes of real, Godly love**

(reading from the NKJV):

Optional: Once you realize how much love and free will are connected, the Calvinist ideas of Pre-Destination become even more ridiculous.

1<sup>st</sup> Cor 13:5 says that love does not seek its own way, or in the NLT, it does not demand its own way. Since God is love, then God does not demand His own way either.

Therefore we must have a free will to choose or God is not love.

- ✓ <sup>4</sup> Love suffers long and is kind
- ✓ Love does not envy
- ✓ Love does not parade itself
- ✓ is not puffed up
- ✓ <sup>5</sup> does not behave rudely
- ✓ Does not seek its own
- ✓ Is not provoked
- ✓ Thinks no evil;
- ✓ <sup>6</sup> Does not rejoice in iniquity
- ✓ But rejoices in the truth
- ✓ <sup>7</sup> Bears all things
- ✓ Believes all things
- ✓ Hopes all things
- ✓ Endures all things
- ✓ <sup>8</sup> Love never fails.

## Very interesting list of Love's qualities.

### What isn't in the list is as important as what is...

- Love does not condone sin.  
Love is tough at times and tender at times.
- Love allows for judging and rejoices in the truth.
- Love is not driven by emotion or passion.
- This is a list about behavior, conduct and actions,  
this is not a list about feelings.
- Love is presented as a commitment.

### This is God's commitment of love towards us.

We see the attributes of 1<sup>st</sup> Cor 13 love in God's commitment. And **we should strive to show the same attributes of Godly love in how we treat each other.**

Re-examine the list and ask yourself, what can I do to show the world 1<sup>st</sup> Cor 13 love?

### Building on that thought of love as a commitment, let's turn to Romans 8.

Romans 8:35-39

- God's pretty committed to loving us. There is only one thing that can separate us from the love of God, only one thing missing from this list.
- **We are the ones given the dangerous and amazing privilege of choosing to accept or reject that love.**
- We can separate ourselves from His love.  
Nothing else can.
- What a privilege to know that God is that committed to reaching for us and preserving His relationship with us if we will just accept Him and continue in Him!!!

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**We started in 1<sup>st</sup> John 4, declaring that God is love. Returning there, we need to look at one last part of the equation.**

1<sup>st</sup> John 4:7-10

- Again: we see the declaration of His love for us.

4:11-12

- Now we are called to action, If He loved us, we also ought to love each other. The only way this world will truly see God is to see His love acting in us and through us.

4:13-15

- So if God's love is real, we should see it in God's people. We should receive His spirit and be full of His spirit. We should testify of what God has done to save this world. We should openly confess our faith.

4:18

- If we really have God's love working in us, it will oppose the fear of this world, and the lies of this world.

**But the last one is the kicker, this is the hardest one for many to let go...**

4:20-21

- **We must love each other, forgive each other, show each other the same love that God shows.**
- It isn't optional, let's look at what Jesus Himself said about this kind of love...

Mark 11:25-26

- We must forgive to be forgiven. It is that simple.

Matt 5:44-45

- **Love your enemies, what a crazy thought... But most never read v45** "that you may be the children of your Father in heaven."  
This is actually a salvation requirement.

**Love is that important. It is a central part of God's character. And it needs to become a central part of our character as Christians.**

**Can you receive Godly love if you won't show Godly love?**

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