

HOW DOES AN ALL-LOVING AND POWERFUL GOD PERMIT INNOCENTS TO SUFFER?

Introduction – The strongest argument against the monotheistic worldview and Christian faith in particular is the problem of evil. The presence of evil in the world and the suffering of innocent people challenges either God's power or His love.

Eastern mysticism sees suffering as the result of our human cravings (desires). By disciplining our mind through meditation, one discovers that suffering is an illusion.

Secular humanism accepts suffering as an unavoidable part of our evolutionary struggle to survive. They are committed to the avoidance of as much pain as possible and the maximizing of all pleasure.

There are several types of suffering. Some is self-inflicted or brought on by the actions of others. There is also natural suffering that comes from disease, accidents, tornados, hurricanes, etc.

1. Innocent people suffer harm.
 2. Therefore, God is not completely loving since he permits such unjust suffering.
 3. Or God is not powerful enough to overcome evil in all its forms.
 4. Either way, the God of monotheism is compromised and this worldview fails to explain evil.
- A. This is a misunderstanding of the sovereign nature of God.
1. Islam presents Allah as absolutely in control of everything that happens in this world. It is all predestined to occur. You cannot petition God in prayer since one's fate is already determined. We must learn to accept the will of Allah (Surah 17:16; 59:23; 74:31; 35:8). Some Christians also define God's nature in this way.
 2. The Bible presents a different vision of God.
Daniel 10:10-14
 3. The Bible says God is sovereign in the sense that He is the Creator and rightful Ruler over all creation.
The Bible clearly shows that some spiritual beings and human beings are in revolt against the rightful rules of God.
Revelation 12:7-9
Ephesians 2:1-5
- B. This problem is a misunderstanding of freewill.
- Genesis 4:6-7
1. Just because God has foreknowledge does not mean He is the cause of all human events.
Acts 2:22-24

2. Spiritual beings, including angels, also have freewill. The rebellious ones have used their powers to cause undeserved suffering through disease and natural events.

Mark 9:17-27

Matthew 8:23-26

3. Most suffering is the result of the abuse of our personal freedom to harm ourselves or others.

C. This problem is a misunderstanding of the created purpose of our world.

1. Some assume it should be a suffering-free zone or paradise on earth.
2. God clearly created this world to be perfect for soul-making, which involves freewill choices.
3. This world is a war zone where the struggle between good and evil is ongoing.
Ephesians 6:10-12

D. This problem is a misunderstanding of the nature of love, which is God's nature.

1 John 4:16

1. Love must be freely chosen, not preprogrammed or coerced.
2. Love allows spiritual beings and human beings to accept or reject God's will.
Matthew 6:9-10

Conclusion – For God to prevent all suffering, He would need to suspend natural laws and freewill. This would result in an irrational world filled with robots.

God became flesh in Jesus and suffered unjustly, even death on a cross. Jesus shared in our suffering in order to give us real hope. We never suffer alone since God suffers with us.

Hebrews 5:7-9

John 11:32-35

Reference: Gregory A. Boyd, God at War; Chad Meister and James K. Dew, Jr., God and Evil