

We believe that man was created in the image and likeness of God in innocence and without sin, but that in Adam's sin the race fell, inherited a sinful nature, became spiritually dead and alienated from God, and now man of himself is incapable of remedying his lost and depraved condition.

–First Bible Church Constitution (1965)

How does the Biblical doctrine of human beings (anthropology) relate to the problem of pain?

When God created the heavens and the earth and all that is in them, he pronounced it was good—devoid of pain and suffering. When sin entered the world, all of creation fell from this original state. With sin comes its effects: death, pain, conflict, suffering, and sorrow.

Christianity teaches two basic things about God:

1. God is all-powerful (omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent): He is able to destroy suffering.
2. God is all-good: He is willing to destroy suffering.

The Problem: Suffering exists. Therefore, there are five options:

1. God does not exist (he is not; he is our invention; atheism)
2. God exists but is not all-powerful (he is willing but not able; he is weak).
3. God exists but is not all-good (he is able but not willing; he is cruel).
4. God exists but is neither (he is not able or willing; he is apathetic).
5. God exists and he is both willing and able, therefore, suffering serves a purpose.

Options For Explaining Suffering

1. God does not exist (Option 1). The Dilemmas for Atheism:

1. Dilemma #1: Suffering proves God exists and life has *meaning*.
 - a. If there is no God, there is no creator.
 - b. If there is no creator, there is no creation.
 - c. If there is no creation, the universe/matter has eternally existed.
 - d. If matter has eternally existed, then there has been sufficient time for evolution to reach perfection.
 - e. If evolution reaches perfection, suffering will be destroyed.
 - f. Suffering is not destroyed!**
 - ee. Therefore, evolution has not reached perfection.
 - dd. If evolution has not reached perfection, then matter has not eternally existed.
 - cc. If matter has not eternally existed, there was a creation.
 - bb. If there was a creation, there is a creator.
 - aa. If there is a creator, there is a God.
2. Dilemma #2: Suffering proves God exists and life has *morality*.
 - a. If there is no God, God has given no moral laws.
 - b. If God has given no moral laws, there are no moral laws.
 - c. If there are no moral laws, there is no right and wrong.
 - d. If there is no right and wrong, it is not wrong to inflict suffering on others.
 - e. It is wrong to inflict suffering on others!**
 - dd. Therefore, there is right and wrong.
 - cc. If there is right and wrong, there are moral laws.
 - bb. If there are moral laws, God has given moral laws.
 - aa. If God has given moral laws, there is a God.

2. God exists but he is weak, cruel, or apathetic (non-Christian Theism, Options 2–4).

Therefore, we must assist this weak god, or appease this cruel god, or alert this apathetic god. Either way, suffering serves no purpose; has no meaning; is absurd.

3. God is all-powerful and all-good (Christian Theism, Option 5).

1. Because he is good, he will destroy evil. (Hab. 1:13)
2. Because he is powerful, he can destroy evil. (Rev. 4:8)
3. Evil is not destroyed. (Psalm 88)
4. Therefore, evil will be destroyed in the future (Rev. 20:10-15; 21:3,4; 22:3-8)
5. Implication: Suffering serves a purpose now (Ro. 8:28)

What are some purposes of suffering?

In general, pain and suffering is the gift from God that no one wants. *Pain saves lives!* Through suffering, God impresses on us that something is wrong with our world, including our own selves. Until we believe we are sick, we will never seek the cure. C.S. Lewis wrote that “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” Here are 8 purposes:

- 3.1 Suffering shows us that something is wrong. Give thanks for pain (2 Cor. 7:9-11)
- 3.2 Suffering prepares us to seek the cure. Humble yourself (Ex. 10:3; 1 Peter 5:5; 2 Cor. 12:7).
- 3.3 Suffering strengthens us to live out our purpose. Endure for life (Jas. 1:2-4; 1 Tim. 4:8; Ro. 5:3,4).
- 3.4 Suffering toughens our trust in the God who calls us. Seek Him (1 Peter 5:10).
- 3.5 Suffering corrects us when we wander. Come back home (Heb. 12:10,11).
- 3.6 Suffering keeps us from the “heaven on earth” error. Travel light (Phil. 3:20,21; Phil. 1:20,21).
- 3.7 Suffering deepens our ministries. The right to be heard (Heb. 2:18; 4:15; 2 Cor. 1:6,8,9).
- 3.8 Suffering is the only way to know, love, obey, and exalt Christ (1 Pet 2:21; Acts 5:41; Heb 2:10).

Our Conversations on Suffering

- Unbeliever: If Christianity is true, why is there suffering?
- Believer: There is a purpose for our suffering.
- Unbeliever: What is the purpose?
- Believer: The Bible presents at least thirty possible purposes for suffering (see document).
- Unbeliever: None of these purposes satisfy me.
- Believer: What would it take to satisfy you?
- Unbeliever: For God to stop suffering.
- Believer: So if suffering ceased today, you would embrace Christianity?
- Unbeliever: Probably not.
- Believer: So suffering really isn't the issue?
- Unbeliever: Apparently not. I just don't believe Christianity is true.
- Believer: If Christianity is *not* true, what is the purpose of suffering?
- Unbeliever: I don't know
- Believer: *Why do you have less problems with a belief system that offers no plausible purposes for suffering than you do with a belief system that offers at least 30 plausible purposes for suffering?*