

➤ God established the laws of the universe for our well-being, freedom, and significance.

➤ Therefore, God is not free, morally, to change the laws He established for our good in order to stop all temporal suffering.

God did not bring suffering about, and does not presently want it to exist, but cannot justly stop most suffering because He would violate the freedom and significance of man to do so. So then, God is completely good, kind and just even though innocent people suffer.

Besides producing great suffering for himself and other people, man, with his free will, has separated himself from God. But even though we have used our freedom to separate ourselves from God, God loved us and made a way, through Jesus Christ for all men (including you) to come back into relationship with Him.

You can be forgiven for all your sins, enter a relationship with God, and have eternal life if you meet these conditions from God's Word:

1. Acknowledge that you have rebelled against God. ("All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." Rom. 3:23)

2. Turn away from your lifestyle of selfishness. ("Repent for the forgiveness of your sins." Acts 2:38)

3. Commit yourself to living the way God commands you to live—loving God, and loving others as yourself. ("Love the Lord your God, and love your neighbor as yourself." Mark 12:30, 31)

4. Ask God's forgiveness for your sins. ("If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins." I John 1:9)

5. Take your hands off your own life and allow Jesus to be your master. ("If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." Rom. 10:9, 10)

# Why do the Innocent Suffer?



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## WHY DO THE INNOCENT SUFFER?

If God loves us, then why are innocent children born deformed? Why is there war? Why do people die in earthquakes, tornadoes, floods, and hurricanes? Doesn't God care about plane crashes, heart attacks, cancer, or AIDS? If God loves us so much, why doesn't He do something about suffering?

The philosopher David Hume put it this way:

“Is He willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then He is impotent.

Is He able but not willing? Then He is malevolent.

Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?”

Dialogues Concerning  
Natural Religion, part 10

Christians claim that God is both loving and powerful. But if suffering exists in the world, then either God is loving, but not powerful enough to stop suffering, or God is powerful enough, but doesn't love us. It would seem as if He cannot be both loving and powerful, or suffering would not exist.

This leaves us with two questions:  
1) Where does suffering come from?, and  
2) Why does God allow suffering to continue?

The problem of the innocent suffering is a question of *freedom* and *significance*.

## FREEDOM

When God created man, He made man in His own image, like Himself, and gave man a free will. God could not control man, or man would lose His freedom. This would have been a wonderful situation except that man decided to

use his freedom to rebel against God. In this rebellion, men destroyed themselves, brought a curse on the earth, and produced great harm in the lives of other innocent people. God never intended that man would rebel or bring such disaster on himself, but man chose to destroy the world with his own free will. Thus, the presence of suffering in the world is the result of man's freedom.

But even though man has brought suffering on himself and other innocent parties, we still have to ask why God doesn't do more to stop this pain. If God loves us, then why doesn't He intervene more often to help the innocent who are suffering?

Just as the problem of the presence of suffering is answered by man's freedom, so the question of God's allowing pain is answered by man's significance.

## SIGNIFICANCE

Man is significant because he makes significant, free choices. The only way a person can determine the significance of a choice is by the consequence of the choice. We understand a choice to be good because it results in the well-being of the beings involved, or evil because it results in the ill-being of the beings involved.

Also, a person can only know which choice to make if the consequences of the choices remain the same. If the consequences of our choices could change from one time to the next, we would eventually have to stop making choices, or we might hurt someone we were trying to help. If an injection meant to save a person's life could change to become a poison, the doctor could never feel free to give anyone an injection. Thus, if the consequences to our choices were not consistent, we would lose our freedom.

This means that the order of the universe must be based on law and not miracle, law being the rule and miracle the exception. So, God created us to live in an objective, stable environment that we might maintain our freedom and significance as beings. Or, to put it another way,

God established the natural laws of the universe for our well-being.

## THE DILEMMA OF GOD

But this leaves God with a dilemma. If the environment must be stable so that we might have freedom and significance, then God cannot constantly go around changing the environment. Thus, if man chooses to use his free will in a way that brings harm to another being, God is not free to simply change the laws of the natural order to spare a person from suffering. In that case, God must choose between allowing a person to suffer or taking away the freedom and significance of the human race. Obviously, it is better to maintain our freedom, significance, and dignity as a race even though we suffer temporally, than to have temporal suffering removed and lose our freedom and significance, becoming no better than animals or rocks.

Consequently, the problem of the innocent suffering is not a question about the goodness and power of God, but of the freedom and significance of man. Man has chosen to rebel against God, break His laws, and bring destruction on the earth, even though God loves us and never wanted any of this to happen. And God, in His love for us, will not take away our significance by tampering with the natural laws He established for our well-being.

Let's recap these points briefly:

- God created man in His image, having a free will, that man may be significant as a being.
- Man misused his freedom, bringing chaos and destruction on the earth.
- The consequences of a person's choices can affect other people, even innocent people.
- Therefore, the presence of suffering in the earth is man's fault, not God's.
- Man is only significant if his choices have definite consequences.
- The consequences of man's choices depend on the stability of the environment in which he lives, that is, the rule must be law, not miracle.