

The Problem of Pain and Suffering

Introduction:

- I. Though we have *scientifically* studied the existence of God and found it to be only reasonable that he exist, some still disbelieve because of the question of pain, evil, and suffering.
- II. The famous Greek philosopher Epicurus put it this way, referring to any omni-benevolent, omniscient being:
 - a. “If God were all-good and all-powerful, there would be no pain and suffering. Since there is suffering, one of two cases must be true: Either he is good, but unable to remove the suffering, or he is powerful, but unwilling to remove it, thereby showing himself not to be all-good.”
 - b. This question has shaken the faith of many people, but it, like all of the skeptic’s questions, can be answered conclusively.
- III. After studying this lesson, the student will be able to give an answer for the evil, pain, and suffering in this world, even though we have an omni-benevolent, omniscient God.

Discussion:

- I. The issue is not as superficial as some might suppose.
 - a. Many see the evil and pain, and they say that God should remove that pain.
 - b. Their mistake is not searching out the cause and purpose for that suffering.
 - c. A story is told of a teacher who asked the classroom this same question. He was met with another question: “Teacher, do you believe in *cold*?” The teacher laughed and said that he did. Next came another question: “Do you believe in darkness?” Then the teacher ridiculed the student and told him to get to the point. Here it is:
 - i. There is no *cold*, except in the absence of *heat*.
 - ii. There is no *darkness*, except in the absence of *light*.
 - iii. There is no *evil*, except in the absence of *God*.
 1. I think this illustrates the point well. Suffering exists not because people *believe and follow* God. It exists because some people *do not believe nor obey* God.
 - d. Much suffering is the fault of mankind.
 1. Some cultures in Africa and Asia worship cattle. Several of these cultures are starving, and yet they are in the midst of *hundreds* of healthy, edible cows. Out of their misdirected worship, they are starving themselves and their children.
 2. Some cultures in the Mesopotamian region live in the desert that was once called the “Fertile Crescent.” Their ancestors did not take care of the land, and as a result, it remains an infertile desert.
 3. Those who drink themselves into liver problems or smoke themselves into emphysema bring their maladies upon themselves.

4. Even the innocent suffer because of the wicked. Drunk drivers kill innocent mothers, children, and fathers every day.
5. Natural disasters cause pain and suffering because of the natural laws that are in effect. If a Christian and atheist walk in front of the same train, it will kill both of them, regardless of their faith. However, God can not be blamed.
 - a. We know that walking out in front of a train leads to death. We know that hurricanes are dangerous.
 - i. Since we *know* this, we can *prepare* for it and protect ourselves.
 - ii. Therefore we can not blame God for our suffering from natural disasters. He has given us the knowledge to prepare for them. That *proves* his goodness to us!
- e. The cause of suffering is not all that should be considered when we suffer.
 - i. The Bible teaches us that suffering has a purpose in many cases.
 1. In James, we learn that trials lead to patience, and in turn, completeness.
 2. Job suffered so that God could show Satan that Job was faithful.
 - ii. We use suffering (and fear of suffering) to prevent injury.
 1. When we touch something hot, it hurts, but that keeps us from leaving our hands there, incurring further injury.
 2. When we drive at night, we use headlights because we are afraid of having an accident or hitting someone.
 - a. In these ways, suffering is beneficial because it helps keep us from further suffering.
- f. Finally, suffering is not always for the wicked in this life. The innocent suffer as well.
 - i. This is looked upon as unfair, because a loving God would at least look after those who follow him.
 - ii. However, in doing this God is shown as fair, because he is still allowing our free will to decide whether we follow him.
 1. If he made our lives easy because we were Christians, it would be easy to decide to be a Christian, and very little sacrifice is made.
 2. God wants us to *choose* him no matter the cost, not because he rewards us (As Satan accused Job of being faithful because God put a hedge around him).
 - iii. How is this impartiality fair? How can the sun rise on the good and evil, and rain on the just and unjust?
 1. I do not want to live in a “fair” universe. Do you?
 - a. In a fair universe:
 - i. ANY time your car accidentally goes over the speed limit, you get a ticket.
 - ii. EVERY time you do something wrong, you get punished for it, because EVERYONE knows.

- iii. ANY sin you have EVER done prevents you from going to heaven.
 - 1. That's fair!
 - 2. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8).
 - a. Now that is not fair!
 - i. We did something wrong and deserve punishment (Ro. 3:3)
 - ii. Christ did nothing wrong and was punished.
 - iii. Hebrews 5:8 – “Though he were a Son, yet he learned obedience by the things which he suffered.”
 - b. But at the same time it is fair for us.
 - i. Once we have realized we have sinned (when we would turn to God), it is too late; we have already sinned. There is no way for us to go to heaven.
 - ii. God is *fair*, because he gives us ALL a second chance, by his grace, that we may do what we are supposed to do.

- II. Furthermore, this impartial treatment is vindicated at judgment, when some people are rewarded for their righteousness, and others are punished for their wickedness.
 - a. Though this is what solves the problem of evil in this life, it still makes some ask the question: How could a loving God send people to hell?
 - i. Take, for argument's sake a murderer.
 - 1. If society were to say to him, “We know you did something wrong, but we'll forgive you; we do not want to see anyone suffer.”
 - a. We can easily see inconsistency here. Those who have done things *worthy* of punishment are not pitied when they *are* punished.
 - b. Likewise, God has a law. His covenant with mankind is based on faith and love, and they who make light of that covenant or blatantly reject God's law are *subject* to the punishment incurred under such circumstances (the punishment God has promised for them: hell).
 - ii. Now let us return to their question concerning evil; why are there evil people here?
 - 1. Well, what is the justice of a good God with evil people?
 - a. The justice of a good God is that he *punishes* evil people.
 - b. This answers their question!

Conclusion:

- I. As a result of this study, we have concluded a few things.
 - a. Suffering is a part of this world.
 - b. This suffering is caused by several factors:
 - i. The foolish choices of us or others cause suffering.
 - ii. Natural laws cause suffering (which in many cases is preventable).
 - c. This suffering is not unfair
 - i. God does not cause one group to suffer more than another.
 - ii. This impartiality is vindicated at judgment when those who make poor choices with their lives are punished and the ones who make good choices rewarded.
 - d. Having concluded these things about suffering, a possible reason for not accepting the possibility of suffering in a God-controlled universe is the refusal to accept *responsibility* for poor choices.
 - i. Many people do not want to suffer in this life (or the next), so they rule out a God that would judge them for these choices.
 - ii. This refusal does not by any means disprove the existence of God. It merely proves their refusal to believe he exists.