

# Human Suffering



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ATHEISM

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CREATION VS. EVOLUTION

EXISTENCE OF GOD

All one has to do is walk through the halls of the nearest hospital or mental institution to see people of all ages suffering from various diseases and illnesses. Suffering is everywhere, and thus such questions as the following inevitably arise. “If there is a God, why am I afflicted with this illness?” “If there is a God, why was my son not allowed to see his sixteenth birthday?” “If there is a God, why are my parents afflicted with Alzheimer’s disease?” These and hundreds of similar questions have echoed from the human heart for millennia. They are as old as the first tear and as recent as the latest newscast.

For many people, the existence of pain and suffering serves as a great obstacle to belief in God. Skeptics and infidels, both past and present, have held that the existence of evil is an embarrassment for those who believe in God. One philosopher, J.L. Mackie, in an article titled “Evil and Omnipotence,” set out to show “not that religious beliefs lack rational support, but that they are positively irrational,” and “that the several parts of the essential theological doctrine are inconsistent with one another.”

How do theists reconcile the presence of suffering with the existence of an omnipotent and all-loving God? Some have argued that illness and other kinds of suffering are illusory and spring from a false belief. Others have maintained that no explanation is necessary, because mere mortals should not have to justify the ways of God to men. But most Christians acknowledge that suffering is real and that it is a problem that deserves careful attention. Even though man cannot explain in specific detail all of the reasons for human suffering, the Bible gives enough answers to allow man to come to grips with the problem in general. Contrary to what many in this world believe, there are a number of logical reasons why people experience mental and physical pain. One of the main reasons is rooted in the fact that God is love (1 John 4:8), and that love allows freedom of choice.

Adam and Eve were presented with a choice in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16-17). Israel was given the choice of serving the Lord or foreign gods (Joshua 24:15). Even today, man is a free moral agent with the ability to make his own choices (Revelation 22:17). God did not create man as a scientist creates a robot that automatically follows his master’s instructions without the choice of doing otherwise. Would God be loving if He created intelligent beings and then programmed them to slavishly serve Him? God granted mankind free will as an expression of His love. Sadly, **man frequently brings suffering upon himself because of the wrong decisions he makes.** The apostle Peter wrote: “But let none of you **suffer** as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other

people's matters" (1 Peter 4:15, emp. added). When people suffer the consequences of their own wrong choices, they have no one to blame but themselves.

Man also suffers because of **the personal wrong choices of others**. If God allows one person freedom of choice, He must allow everyone that freedom to be consistent in His love for the world (God is no respecter of persons—Acts 10:34). Uriah the Hittite suffered because of David's sins (2 Samuel 11), and ultimately was killed because of David's attempt to hide the wrong decisions he had made. All of Egypt suffered because Pharaoh decided to keep the Israelites in Egypt when Moses told him to let them go (Exodus 7-12). Today, families may suffer because a father is thrown in jail for drunk driving. In such a case, he is the cause of the family's suffering. If a man smokes all of his life and then eventually dies at an early age because of lung cancer, both he and his family suffer because of his decision to smoke. God is not to blame for man's personal wrong choices, nor is He to blame for the wrong decisions that others have made.

We today also suffer on occasion because of the **personal wrong choices of former generations**. If man is able to reap benefits from the work of former generations (medical discoveries, technological advances, etc.), then it is only logical that he be able to suffer the consequences of the sins of former generations. [Although man does not inherit the sin of Adam, he does suffer because of the choice Adam made to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.] Who is partly to blame for millions starving in third-world countries today? Answer: Some of their ancestors. Years ago, because people accepted the false doctrine of reincarnation, they began teaching that it was wrong to eat cows because they might be eating a long-dead-but-now-reincarnated relative. The doctrine of reincarnation has deprived millions of people throughout the world of good health. Is God to blame when people will not eat the meat that could give them nourishment?

When one experiences suffering in his life, it often is because he has chosen to sin. He might be suffering the consequences of his own wrong decisions, the wrong decisions of others, or the wrong decisions of former generations. But regardless of the reason for the suffering he endures, God is not to blame.

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