If there is a God of love why is there so much suffering?

This is one of the most common objections to the Christian faith. Many Christians have either never thought out an answer or have come up with very superficial one – laying themselves open to Satan's insinuations.

This is also a major reason why so many Christians have a very weak understanding of the **love of God**.
It is probably the main reason why people in the western world don't believe in God.

There is an inbred illogicality. It is an observable fact that there is a great deal of suffering in the world. Why is this distasteful? It is because we measure it by a certain standard. Where do we get this standard? Clearly the origin is the concept of a **good God**. If there are no absolutes – a casual universe – then suffering is no longer a problem. Suffering is only a problem for those who believe in a good God.

Nine Basic Assertions

1. Even if we remove God from our worldview, on the grounds that there is so much suffering, we still have the problem of accounting for suffering.

If suffering is just part of chance operating then it should be no problem – just bad luck – a product of evolution. But we **all** find it objectionable. It doesn't fit into the worldview of most people. Our feelings tell us it shouldn't happen. Both our mind and our feelings are conditioned by a standard – a value from outside this observable universe – something imported. The value is, *"I shouldn't suffer, feel pain, hunger etc."*

This is supra-cultural and universal. We measure our experience by this **value**. But this value/standard is invalid if there is nowhere to get it from!

Count Sade said: *"Everything that is, is right"* – i.e. without an external reference point even sadism is right! Sadism is only **wrong** if there is a source of values **outside** the universe that can be drawn upon to judge the world scene. This is possible if there is a God and another world in which **values** exist.

Wiggenstein (one of the great philosophical thinkers of the 20th century) fled to the UK from Vienna at the beginning of World War II. He was a porter at Guy's hospital and then went to Cambridge University. He was somewhat of an eccentric. Here are some quotes from his **Logico Philosophicus**:

a. The sense of the world must lie outside the world.

b. If there is any value that does have value, it must be outside the whole of what happens and what the case is.

c. The solution of the riddle of life in space and time must be outside space and time.

Therefore if there is nothing outside space and time, then there is no meaning to anything – no right or wrong – no values at all. This is a **single-decker worldview.** But we cannot live like this!

A double-decker worldview is where God is the source from whom we get our **values** in space and time. God gives meaning and significance to the world. God, by definition, is outside space and time. Most people haven't thought through the issues adequately to arrive at this very fundamental position: **If there is no God there is no suffering.**

2. If it is wrong for God to have made man able to suffer so much, then it is wrong for man to procreate.

This is a complaint against God for making man live in a world where there is suffering. If this is true then we should not have any children. How can we do the very thing for which we judge God!? Both mankind and our children are pitched into this "vale of tears" without being asked and without being given any warning. Yet people continue to procreate – why?

3. On the whole the world is good and there is much evidence for the existence of a good God.

- There is much to enjoy and laugh about.
- There are many pleasures – beauty and harmony.
- Goodness is something we recognise and enjoy. We are glad when good is done to us.
- However there is evidence (observable) contrary to the concept of a good God – i.e. not everything is good. But it is good empirical procedure to follow the line of strongest evidence – i.e. if there is 70% for 'good' and 30% for 'evil' then we pursue the 'good' in order to arrive at a logical

conclusion – follow the line of preponderance of evidence for a good God. What sort of evidence?

- The existence of love
- The existence of rational thought
- The existence of morality and conscience – cultural rules limiting choices
- Anger and frustration at man's evil actions – a sense of injustice and unfairness
- Games, play and humour
- Beauty
- The ability to trust order in the universe – the basis of science – and each other
- Hope
- Mystical experiences
- Prayer and answers to prayer

These are some of the evidences in the universe pointing towards a good God. It is not logical to look at the minority evidence of evil as Baudelaire did: *"If there is a God, He must be the devil".*

4. Even the existence of evil and the resultant suffering testifies to the supremacy of goodness and order.

A simple illustration: In a beautiful medieval cathedral that has been bombed there is still a vast amount of evidence of the beauty that once was – the symmetry, the perpendiculars, even the gargoyles testify to the glory of a lovely cathedral even though it now lies in disorder and ruin overrun by grass and weeds.

The disorder testifies to what once was and what might have been. There is sufficient beauty and order that we can project backwards from the ugliness. Seeing the potential for beauty in the ugliness screams at us that **something has gone wrong!!**

Order and beauty are observable out of ruin and destruction. Order and beauty rarely come about by chance – second law of thermodynamics.

We can use the same argument with the universe. The Biblical worldview is that a God of goodness and love created a **good** world but **something has gone wrong!** Beauty and order have been disrupted and marred, resulting in observable chaos and suffering.

5. God's answer to the problem of suffering (e.g. Job ch. 38-42) includes pointing out the complexities of the universe. Job is somewhat overwhelmed. God almost seems to be pulling Job's leg:

"Where were you when I created the world?" (38:1-7)

The implication is that the universe is vastly complex and we do not know everything therefore we lack perspective – the **OMF** principle: **O**NE **M**ORE **F**ACTOR

Our objections are tinged with self-pity and self-interest.

An example: A Medical School in the Middle East imported an advanced NMR machine costing hundreds of thousands of pounds. It was installed and working. A small fuse box seemed to be irrelevant and in the way and so was removed. After a while the machine would not work! A technician was flown out from Switzerland. In ten seconds he had put back the fuse box and the machine worked!

6. God and man both agree that some degree of pain is necessary in our world.

a. If you approach a fire and feel nothing you will get burned! Pain cells are a great protective measure.

b. Feelings of vertigo when standing on a cliff top warn us to be careful.

c. Sickness should warn us that something is going wrong. So there needs to be a certain degree of suffering to act as a warning to preserve our lives.

The threshold on the continuity between pleasure and pain is not easily marked. Squeezing hands can be pleasurable but the physiological and anatomical mechanism is the same as that giving pain if the hand is crushed! Therefore a degree of **feeling** is essential.

The problem is the threshold of tolerance and who determines this? Where is the upper limit, so that when we have reached this limit we should not receive any more pain? We can feel so much pain that we faint. There are mechanisms that block memories or even death.

Our complaint is the level of the threshold of pain. Man says that God has set it too high! However, some forms of cancer give no pain until just before they kill you. We are shocked and we don't like this!

The argument on suffering is often related to the threshold limits of suffering. Both God and man agree that there is a point when too much suffering can be inflicted on a human being.

7. The majority of evil is moral evil – i.e. evil that originates in man – man perpetuates that evil.

An example: In 1975 the UN Commission set up an in-depth enquiry into the major sources of suffering in the world. It was a realistic attempt to meet the problems of:

- **Famine** – better distribution of our food resources
- **Illiteracy and ignorance** – people need teaching
- **Poverty** – the redistribution of wealth and work
- **Health** – W.H.O. – the possibility of a world health service
- **Population control**

To cure all these problems, in terms of finances, all that was needed over a 5-yr period (1975-80) was the amount of money the USA and USSR spent in one year on atomic warheads and nuclear research – **that's all**!! All that money spent over a 5-year period would cure the problems of the world.

The majority of human suffering comes from man – either our indifference or our failure and unwillingness to get together to resolve these kinds of issues. We can see that it would be easy to deal with all major problems and eliminate this kind of suffering from the earth. But we don't do it and we won't do it because of vested interests, greed and self-interest.

There are 'natural' disasters. But don't blame God for:

- Cyclone disasters in Bangladesh – it would be cured if it was Holland!
- Desertification and famine in the Sahel – we have the knowledge and the finances to prevent loss of life in these areas.
- Loss of life through earthquakes etc. We know where earthquakes are likely to happen and we know how to build earthquake-proof housing.

In fact, **Christians are numerous enough and rich enough to make a significant impact on the situation but we don't!**

Governments won't do it – but they could.

Christians should and can – but will we?

An illustration

You can give a boy a construction kit – tools etc. Instead of making something useful, he takes a screwdriver and pokes it into his sister's eye! We have enormous potential in our hands to correct evil and build a wonderful world but we ruin it! Hence suffering.

Our real problem is not suffering. It is our relationships as people!

8. Moral evils are our fault, but even the so-called 'natural' evils are, to some degree, necessary for man if he is to have true free will.

An example: The randomness of nature teaches us to choose between good and evil as well as to obey specific commands. In the Garden of Eden God gave Adam and Eve a specific command – not to eat the fruit of a particular tree. He might have said a number of things which are **basically revealed truths.**

Revealed truth is one source of knowledge enabling us to choose between good and evil by the commands that God gives. The Old Testament Law is the summation of God's commands. We all need **guidelines** in order to know how to **behave** and live. A great deal of life is learned behaviour. Sometimes what we learn is wrong and so the results are wrong.

In addition to revealed truth, rules of behaviour from the outside show there is **another way** that God has provided for us to learn.

An example: When walking along a pebbly beach with your wife, quite randomly a sharp pebble hits you in the instep and really hurts. Now you have a choice – either let your wife walk on so that she also gets hurt (surely bad things ought to come to us equally) or you can say, *"Don't tread there the stones are sharp and you will get hurt!"*

So, by your choice, as a consequence of stepping on a stone and feeling pain, you learn how to be altruistic towards other human beings. We learn goodness by the randomness of the situations that life presents to us. A certain degree of these kinds of random natural causes making us suffer can be didactic and teach us to be moral and good. A certain number of random natural problems are spurs to us to learn and develop the earth. One example would be the developments in medical science in response to sicknesses.

Part of our calling as human beings is to govern the earth so that the very best can be produced:
Standing on pebbles ⟹ shoes and pavements

The divine goal is the "City of God" – streets paved with gold! The natural randomness of events gives opportunity for creativity and helps us reach our highest potential. Pain is a great motivator.

9. God's government of truly free agents cannot be by might and coercion – a driving power from behind. It is rather by love and wooing – drawing by desire from the front.

The first form of government is safe, tidy, law and order. You can find many examples of this in the insect world – beehives: dictatorial, coercion, manipulation and programming.

The second form is very risk and untidy but has great potential. It is government by love and attraction which you can resist if you want. A person being wooed or courted can always say, *"No thanks!"* This is free will operating. When it comes to human beings, God has chosen to run the universe the second way.

These are the nine introductory statements. They introduce us to a number of propositional statements about God. Here is a summary of the above:

Summary or Review

Everyone has to face the problem of suffering, but Christians have the problem more intensely than anyone else because they believe in a God of goodness and love. Here are some examples:

Hindus believe suffering is an illusion because all is an illusion – the world – my body etc. The only thing that is real is the soul of the universe and that is God. Nirvana is to be lost into that soul – an extinction of self in the oneness of deity. Hinduism is not renowned for alleviating suffering since suffering is illusionary.

Buddhists have basically the same problem. Why is there so little humanitarianism in Buddhism? It goes back to a worldview on the value of human life. Buddhism sees self-consciousness simply as a curse. If you lose your self-consciousness you stop suffering. Through its 8-fold path Buddhism is trying to eliminate all self-consciousness – lose your identity and individuality and you cease to suffer.

Muslims believe that everything that happens is ordained by God. Therefore suffering is for our discipline and so suffering is always right.

Animists believe that we are suffering because of evil spirits. There is a supreme deity but either he is indifferent or powerless. He is no help in the situation and it is best just to appease the evil spirits. Suffering comes because the evil spirits have been offended in some way. (At least they see that God is not the source of evil!)

Deists have a mechanistic view of God. God is indifferent to human suffering. God wound up the clock and left us to it. The only way to deal with suffering is through rational thought and action. There is no-one else to help.

Atheists believe suffering is part of the whole developing system brought about by chance. It is part of what is. There are no answers.

But to Christians suffering is a **real problem** because we say **God is love, God is almighty, God is good, God is our Father** – so why do Christians suffer?

Wouldn't you do something for your suffering child? Of course I would stop his suffering if I could! So why doesn't God?

A classic statement of the dilemma is in "La Peste" by Camus. There is a plague in Algiers. Lots of people are dying. The doctor is working very hard because he is a humanist and the rat exterminator, also a humanist, is working very hard. The priest doesn't know what to do! Should he fight the plague and possibly fight against God. This priest has an Islamic view of God – He is the cause of all things. This is a gross mis-representation of the Christian view, but, sadly, it is a very commonly held misrepresentation. What would Jesus have done?

Jesus was totally against every form of human deprivation and suffering that brings pain, disease and agony. In his 3½ years of ministry on earth every form of human problem was brought to Jesus – sickness, death, social deprivation of lepers, the demonised, the hungry, the frightened. All were dealt with. Jesus had authority over all these things.

In Jesus we see God's heart revealed – **He is totally against human suffering**. For six hours on the Cross Jesus totally identified with man in his suffering. Jesus Himself suffered. God presented Himself to man bodily in Jesus. Because we think bodily, this was to enable us to grasp who God really is and not make theological abstractions.

Our God is a God who:

- Sometimes **doesn't** do things for particular reasons (cf. 30 yrs. silence in Jesus' life).
- Always wants to do something for the very good reason that He loves us.
- Has identified Himself with us so that He has suffered in all points like we have. He bore our grief and sorrows and our sins. He suffered more than all.

The priest in La Peste was wrong. There is no dilemma. We should always fight against evil.

In our theology of God – especially in systematic theology – we have to remember that **Jesus is the full revelation of God.** It is a mistake to start with God concepts and try to fit Christ into them. We so often take human attributes of power, justice, judgement, moral purity etc. and extrapolate them to infinity. This is our concept of God. From this we derive our worldview and somehow we have to squeeze Jesus into this picture!

To do this creates all sorts of difficulties quite unnecessarily! One result is a huge and abstract god that we have created through speculation. Jesus is squeezed into a small part of this god with difficulty. If we are not very careful we cannot even squeeze Jesus in! Hence the Christless Christianity advocated by many.

We have to begin with the fact that we have been confronted by Jesus – a person in history whose humanity is vastly superior to any other person. As we begin to recognise who Jesus is, we discover that we have indeed found God. We are compelled to fall on our knees and cry out, ***"My Lord and my God!"***

This is how the disciples came to their conclusion about the deity of Christ. This is how most of us come to an appreciation of Jesus. We are attracted by His person as a man and discover that He is the door to an understanding of God and to coming into a relationship with God.

If this is our understanding, then our view of Jesus is going to keep on growing. There is no need to squeeze Him into abstract ideas. Jesus will squeeze out the abstract! He is the One who **made all things** and **sustains all things**. Jesus is the One ruling in the nations. So we see not a smaller and smaller Jesus in the huge abstraction, but a bigger and bigger Jesus excluding abstraction!

Suffering and evil must be viewed **Christo-centrically**. In Jesus we have **a revelation of the God who actually is!** It is Jesus who gives meaning to the apparent contradictions, paradoxes and conundrums in this issue!

Note again

a. For 30 years Jesus did no miracles.

b. For 3½ years Jesus showed His attitude to all suffering by the way He attacked it. He demonstrated that His heart is compassionate towards all human suffering.

c. For 6 hours on the Cross Jesus identified totally with human suffering – all our sorrows, all our grief, all our sin. He bore it all in His own body on the tree.

This is the God we worship! We have to begin with Jesus! If you come to the problem with poor doctrines of a philosophical nature, it only gets more difficult.

Things that need to be removed before we gain deeper understanding

God did not create evil

You can't imagine Jesus making something that would cause suffering and be basically against the human race. If you do not have Jesus in view, but only an abstract God, then it is possible to think of God as the origin of good and evil (an Islamic concept).

The Old Testament, without the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ, also gives a less than perfect revelation of God. The Old Testament sometimes gives the impression that God is causing suffering, sickness, war etc. People notice this and it causes them to speak of the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament as if they were different Gods! Marcion thought so in the 3rd century and dismissed the Old Testament. Many have followed him (the principle of abrogation).

Did God create evil? – a look at 3 Old Testament passages:

1. Isaiah 45:7

Remember that the Old Testament is not a complete revelation in itself. God spoke to us finally and completely in His Son. This is not to disparage the Old Testament by saying that it is incomplete, nor do we believe in the abrogation of the Old Testament. However, we do have to qualify and add to the Old Testament the full revelation in the New Testament. Jesus, who is the 'light', brings light to many an obscure passage in the Old Testament – this is one such passage.

Verse 7 – What does this verse mean?

"I form the light and create darkness; I cause shalom (peace, well-being) ***and create disaster*** (evil)***"***

The first phrase gives much help to the second phrase. God created the light, but His creation of darkness is not of the same order or operation. Light is positive – darkness is the absence of light. Darkness is not 'creatable'! By creating light, a distinction is made between darkness and light. Light destroys darkness. You can't create a bulb that makes darkness. You merely turn off the light.

"Creating darkness" is a poetic way of saying:

- Light has come
- This is what happens when the light goes off

Darkness is not an entity. It is an absence of light. Light is an energy form that you can put into a situation.

The next statement in Hebrew parallelism is to be seen in the same way:

"I cause peace and create evil."

God says, I "make" peace (shalom) = harmony – well-being – order – all things sweetly relating to each other – wholeness – lack of conflict – beauty – ease of life-style.

To create peace requires energy – 2nd Law of Thermodynamics and Entropy. Therefore God puts energy into the world to create shalom – peace – order. However, if God ceases to put in energy, then there is chaos and increasing randomness. Peacelessness is: calamity – evil – disorder.

Therefore: **Darkness is the absence of light – calamity is the absence of shalom.**

This is a key Old Testament concept – a Biblical understanding of evil. By creating shalom, the opposite becomes evident. When God withdraws His energetic hands, then chaos and darkness result. When God feeds in His energy the result is love – light – hope – peace – order – goodness.

If God withdraws energy because of sin, the result is evil – disintegration – chaos. This is not a positive action on God's part. God does not positively create evil. It is true that God is responsible because He takes His hands away. But God has to take His hands away on moral grounds. The universe runs by God's rules. Ultimately He takes responsibility for everything. This is part of the Biblical concept of sovereignty.

You can't blame God if you fall off a cliff and break your leg. If so, then you blame Him for gravity! We know about gravity and so we should not jump off cliffs. In fact we don't blame God for the law of gravity. We see it as neutral. We can use gravity by co-operation with it.

God has made a universe in which, on the basis of moral considerations, certain unpleasant things may happen. Gravity may cause broken legs. But this is very different from God throwing you off a cliff! God doesn't do this. Evil happens when God withdraws His blessing on moral grounds because of sin.

We can see this in the Old Testament concept of sacrifice – continuously cleansing the camp, the tabernacle and the people by the shedding and sprinkling of blood. This was the only way in which God could continue to pour out His blessing, love, peace etc. If there is sin in the camp then God has to withdraw and the result is suffering. Cleansing releases God to continue to bless and bring order.

2. Amos 3:6

Here is a list of cause and effect.

"When disaster comes to a city, has not the Lord caused it?"

Amos is referring to the fact that war is on the horizon. God has withdrawn His protection from His people because of their sin. As always, God is the ultimate cause, but He is not responsible for the babies dashed against the walls and all the horrors of war. He doesn't make it happen. (Ps. 139) Neither, in a sense, does He allow it! He departs because of sin, ***"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all"*** (1 Jn. 1:5).

Therefore God cannot do dark things. God is pure, good and holy. He is utterly good and totally incapable of causing suffering except in the positive sense of pain – i.e. as a warning and to chasten (didactic). God is not malicious or arbitrary in the area of pain. It is man who does evil things when God removes His protection.

An illustration

God is light. God has created a universe and man stands in the light of God. But man chooses to turn away from God and this casts a shadow. Man is a creative being so he builds a box with a lid on it. He jumps into the box and shuts the lid! Now he is in the dark because the light is excluded.

The darkness in which man lives is not the creation of God. It is the result of his own actions. This is close to the Biblical view of sin and evil. The Old Testament describes this in poetic words, but these statements have to be interpreted in the light of the full revelation in Christ.

Much of what God has created can be misused, but He is not the author of the misuse!

An example:

God creates trees ⇨ wood ⇨ walking stick
⇨ club

- A walking stick can help Uncle Fred.
- It can also be used as a club to gain money by extortion.

In a final sense God is the prime mover of all. He made the molecules and the forces that interact when wood molecules impact bone molecules. He made the molecules and He sustains them so that they always work in an ordered fashion. What goes wrong is not the interaction between the wood and the bone but rather the relationship between Uncle Fred and me.

Wrong relationships cause the misuse of materials/resources and this brings suffering.

Conclusion:

- God does not create evil, nor does He ordain it.
- Evil isn't a self-existing entity. It is found in man's actions in his poor relationships with others.

3. 2 Sam. 24:1 and 1 Chron. 21:1

"God incites David to number Israel" – Israel had sinned. The numbering of Israel led to the death of 70,000 people!

"Satan stood up against Israel and moved David to number Israel".

There is an apparent contradiction, but in fact both statements are correct. In architecture you can have a horizontal ground plan and also a vertical drawing. They look very different but they make sense together.

These are statements from two different viewpoints. When put together they give the full dimensional picture.

1st statement – God is angry with Israel and speaks about the ultimate cause of all things which is always God.

2nd statement – Satan appears to be the cause and he is speaking about the immediate cause.

An example: a TV programme

The ultimate cause is the laws of physics and the dramatic creativity of man.

The immediate cause is that you switched on the set after checking the schedule.

God is the ultimate cause of all because He maintains all things moment by moment. He maintains with great consistency – i.e. with order. This orderliness creates a platform for **men and women to operate freely**.

Gravity operates consistently. If it didn't we couldn't **be free**. Note that God doesn't operate mechanistically like a clock that you wind up – but **dynamically**. Robert Boyle, of Boyle's law, clearly saw the **dynamics** of God's control. He helped Isaac Newton to see it as well. Both were committed Christians.

Scientific laws are based on the consistency of God. Miracles take place because of a slight change in the orderliness of the universe. **This is possible because God has a dynamic relationship with the universe** – not a mechanistic one. This means that **God is always the ultimate cause of all** and therefore He is responsible.

Then the LORD said to him, "Who has made man's mouth? Who makes him mute or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the LORD?

Ex. 4:11 is understandable in this way. However **God is not the immediate cause.** He never interferes in the moral government of the universe. He **overrules in amoral issues** – hence miracles. **God never interferes with our moral choices.**

God maintains a consistent platform for things to exist. God allows evil to exist. **He allows moral choices to be made even though they cause great suffering.** The **immediate** cause is Satan working on human pride. The two statements give an in-depth understanding of the problem of suffering. This is the all-important perspective. We see that there are not 2 gods: one of the Old Testament and one of the New Testament. Rather the New Testament throws light on the Old Testament revelation.

God can't do everything – i.e. there are some things that God cannot do

"With God no word is devoid of power." Luke 1:31

God cannot deny Himself

- " lie
- " tempt or be tempted with sin

Why can't He do these things? It is because they are **logical impossibilities.**

- God cannot make a four-legged tripod.
- God cannot make a genuine £5 note. Why not? It would be a perfect forgery! £5 notes are only made by the Treasury – i.e. produced by man.
- **God cannot make a free-willed human being into a pre-determined human being.**

Sometimes we make God into a dustbin of contradictions. When in a dilemma and faced with a contradiction we just say, ***"With God all things are possible!"*** – even if it is illogical. Is God a mass of contradictions? By no means! To suggest such is not honouring to God. **God is not irrational.** The Christian **God is rational**.

Logos and logic have the same root meaning:

"In the beginning was logic (logos) and the logic was with God and the logic was God."

God is logical. Don't ever rest in contradiction. Pursue truth. God is truth. God can never do anything that is a logical impossibility.

If God makes a human being in His own image, **that human being is to be free to make choices.** God doesn't interfere with those choices. He **could** interfere, but then the human being would no longer be free.

In Psalms David says, ***"Do not be like the ass that needs a bit to be put in its mouth to show which way to go and to make it go."*** Ps. 32:9

If God was to save people who don't want to be saved then, in effect, He has put a bit in their mouths to drag them to heaven against their wills. He would not have saved a man, He would have saved an ass! God doesn't want to fill heaven with asses. Man must be able to make his own determinative choices.

This means that God limited Himself when He made human beings. He took a huge risk! He took the risk of men not doing all that He wants to do and human beings can still limit God. An example of this would be Jesus in Nazareth unable to do all He wanted to do (Mt. 13:58). God has a problem. He wants all to be saved but He cannot violate the 'freedomness' of man.

Finally

Five statements beginning with "God is love"…

- **God is love and this necessitates the possibility of human suffering.**

It is because God is love that suffering is possible! This is the reverse of most people's thinking. Because God wanted the best for us, He made us free creatures able to enter into a love relationship with Himself. You must be free in order to love. The ultimate in enjoyment is being involved in love relationships – sharing our personalities at a deep level.

God wants to relate to us in love. He made us in His image so such a deep relationship would be possible. **But to enter into this relationship we have to be free.** However in this freedom we have the possibility to choose darkness!

- ✓ We are free to build a box and jump into it.
- ✓ We are free to cause pain and suffering in this world.
- ✓ We are free to do hateful things.

Another possibility: Couldn't God have made a universe where there was freedom of choice, but every time we made a bad choice God interfered to minimize the consequences of that bad choice. If this was so, then no pain would come from disobedience.

An example: I am about to hit Uncle Fred on the head with my club. God rearranges the molecular structure so it feels like a feather. **This would be constant miraculous intervention so that no suffering would occur.** God could do that, but if He did, we would no longer be free-willed human beings that can be involved in love relationships. If what we want to accomplish with our wills is being prevented, we are manipulated and mocked. Free human beings don't exist in a vacuum. They can only operate in a universe where there is order and cause and effect. If, through constant miraculous intervention, everything was arbitrary, we could never

make rational choices! We can only be free in a predictable universe. In heaven I think we will see that our kind of universe is the only possible one for a free agent to be free – the best of all possible worlds! This does not exclude miracles – but they are miracles!

An Analogy

In Chess there are definite rules and moves by the various pieces. One rule is that if you touch a piece you must move it or forfeit the move. To play the game you must stick to the rules. If you touch a piece when playing with a friend and then regret it, he may forgive you and let you move another piece. You broke the rule but the game goes on. A miracle is like that! However, if you change the rules frequently and arbitrarily there is no game. Miracles are exceptions.

- **God is love and so He cannot stop all the trouble.**

If you push the call button on an airplane at the wrong time it is annoying for the stewardess but there are no serious consequences. If you push a button wrongly on a nuclear power station the result could be devastating – a nuclear holocaust! The 'crime' is the same – pressing the button, but the consequences are vastly different.

(a) **God wants all men to repent** – even Nebuchadnezzar repented.

(b) **God cannot be fair if He does not treat all the same** – small-time sinners don't upset many people. Big-timers upset many! He is fair in His justice.

- **'God is love' is a challenge to our responsibility.**

John 9: 1-3 (Remember there is no punctuation in the Greek)

"It was in order that the works of God might be displayed in Him, we must work the works of Him who sent me, as long as it is day."

The man was not born blind so that Jesus could come along and heal him and bring glory to God. That is not what the text says. Take note of the "we". Every time we see human suffering and deprivation, we have a responsibility to do the works of God – i.e. heal.

- **God is love and in the end it is going to be worth all the suffering.**

This is a reasonable statement to take in faith. Paul says: ***"This present suffering is not worthy to be compared with the glory to be revealed in us."*** (Rom. 8:18)

"Our present light affliction works for us an exceeding, eternal weight of glory." (2 Cor. 4:17)

God will totally compensate! How? We don't know. Compare one minute in a dentist's chair with a day walking in the mountains – a lovely day passes fast – it feels like an eternity in the dentist chair! All who have suffered will be totally compensated by God.

- **God is love so He is the greatest sufferer of all.**

This is what the Cross means. He bore our griefs and sorrows. He was afflicted with all our afflictions. Parents know how much it hurts when they see their children suffering. God knows and has entered into our suffering. Romans 8 says that the Spirit groans within us – the universe groans. There is a corresponding 'groan' in God to the groan in the universe. He suffers in all our sufferings.