**Christian Apologetics:**

**Answering the Hard Questions**

**Our Outline:**

**I. Hard Questions Which Are Not Principally Theological**

**II. Hard Questions Which are Theological in Nature**

1. **The Trinity and Christology.**
2. **The Qualities of God.**

**C. Predestination/Original Sin.**

**D. The Question of Evil.**

**E. The Problem of Pain and Suffering.**

**F. Violence and Slavery in the Old Testament.**

**G. The Problem of Judgment and The Problem of Hell.**

**Resources and “required” reading:**

**“The Problem of Suffering” by C. S. Lewis**

**Essay: The Problem of Pain and Suffering. John Oakes**

**Extra Credit (on approval)**

**Suggestions: “Life in the Son” Robert Shank**

**“Troubling Questions for Calvinists” by F. Lagard Smith**

**“Is God a Moral Monster?” Paul Copan Baker Books**

Most of the non-theological criticisms posed toward Christianity are relatively easily answered.

But there are a few exceptions.

A sample question just last week:

I am the son of a Baptist minister and admit that I long ago dismissed "Christianity" as the most convoluted, indefensible patchwork of complete nonsense perpetrated on mankind in the last 2000 years. I believe this as strongly as you apparently do your inheriting the Jew god from the magnanimous Jesus (oh, we lucky Gentiles!) I do not say this aggressively or argumentatively, but with complete honesty. I know, as you should, that everything from belief in one god (an Egyptian idea--Amun) to the original Sumerian flood story to the Zoroastrian belief in a god of evil ("Satan") was taken from other sources and has nothing to do with the "chosen people." You know the "Bible" is absolutely replete with irreconcilable contradictions; yet, you find it rewarding to engage in apologetics, like this is somehow virtuous--to make up excuses, to reassure less astute people so they might continue to believe a dead Jew is going to make them live forever. Again, not to attack, but out of curiosity, is the money that good? There is no evidence for Christianity (except of the manufactured kind) and it's hard for me to accept you don't already know this. Really, why the charade?

Would an infallible god PREORDAIN to have to kill himself in order to appease himself? Would an all-powerful god somehow suffer from a communication problem which compels him to recruit some primitive Jews to write his biography?

I. Evidence for Jesus being who the Bible claims he is.

a. His claims: No significant question (but see below on the Jesus Myth)

b. His fulfillment of prophecy: No significant question. (They try to go after each prophecy one at a time to deflect the question)

c. His miracles: The strongest argument: We know that there are no miracles.

(circular reasoning)

d. His resurrection: No significant argument.

e. The Jesus myth claim. Response: Let’s look at the examples. This is a red herring!!!

II. History and Archaeology

Most of the arguments are that we do not have proof of this (for example proof of the Exodus)

What we have to establish is the reliability of the Bible as history—lack of contradictions.

The best example that I know of:

Remaining things for which we have no evidence, Quirinius Luke 2:2.

In this case, the minor nature of the example shows us something!

Quirinius was governor (actually legate) of Syria AD 6-9

In 12 BCE he was named [consul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Consul), a sign that he enjoyed the favour of [Augustus](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Augustus).

He was in charge of Roman military matters in Syria, which placed him over the legions in Judea as well, on 2 different occasions: 6-4 BCE and 6-9 CE.(Zondervan KJV Study Bible p1448)

Some years later, he led a campaign against the Homonadenses, a tribe based in the mountainous region of [Galatia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Galatia) and [Cilicia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cilicia), around 5 - 3 BCE, probably as legate of Galatia. He won by reducing their strongholds and starving out the defenders.[[2]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quirinius#cite_note-1) For this victory, he was awarded a [triumph](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roman_triumph).[[3]](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quirinius#cite_note-2)

III. Science. No science errors in the Bible! But…

(anthropology and Adam)

What was the hominid species that rejected god? I know that that Neanderthals wore clothes (before the fall we were naked), and that they even buried their dead and decorated gravestones. And they are known to exist 200,000 years ago. Does this mean that the fall happened to Neanderthals?

IV. Existence of God

There is no significant argument against the existence of God. Shermer vs. Jacoby: No God is the fall-back argument—it gets the benefit of the doubt.

Argument against: (Who created God?)

V.

How We Got the Bible/Bible Changed

Scribes and translators are not inspired.

Most of this is smoke screens. The NT is extremely reliable.

VI. Contradictions I can think of two out of hundreds claimed for which there is a reasonable case they might be bona fide contraditions. **Only two!!!!**

**Matt 10:10, Luke 9:3 vs Mk 6:8**

**Matthew 27:9-10**

There are 2 scriptures I want to mention briefly the first is Matt 27:9-10 ' Then what was spoken by Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled: “They took the thirty pieces of silver, the price set on him by the people of Israel, and they used them to buy the potter’s field, as the Lord commanded me.” The question here is this appears as a miss quote that Matthew is quoting Zechariah while attributing the quote to Jeremiah. Is this an error on the part of the writer?

I have looked at literally hundreds of claimed contradiction in both the New and the Old Testaments. In the final analysis, I have found exactly two which I find to be difficult to work out without what will appear to be an ad hoc explanation. One of these two is the Jeremiah statement in Matthew 27:9-10. The only other is the carry a staff versus not carry a staff direction for the sending out of the twelve. So, are these bona fide "contradictions" and therefore "errors"? If they are technically errors, what does that do to our doctrine of inerrancy? My answer is I am pretty sure both of these are not actual errors, but my solutions, in both cases, will sound a bit ad hoc. In other words, they sound like answers created, not out of the evidence, but as a convenience because of a presupposition (in this case, that the original texts are without factual error).

As for the Jeremiah thing, two possible explanations present themselves. One is that, in fact, Jeremiah did say this, and the speaker and audience are aware of this, even if we, two thousand years later, are not privy to this information. Another possibility is that there was a copyist's attempt to correct a perceived error which happened so early that we do not have any remaining evidence of the original. For me, given the fantastic evidence for the "inerrancy" of the original scriptures in point of fact, I find that the New Testament documents deserve the benefit of the doubt, even in the two cases that I know of which are hard, at first glance, to explain. Therefore, I lean rather strongly toward the conclusion that there is something going on of which we simply are not aware, such as the two possible solutions I list above. I will admit that my explanation is partially motivated by a presupposition, but in this case, the presupposition is extremely well supported by the weight of the evidence. I believe that Matthew 27:9-10 is not an error in the original

ad hoc A scribe changed the original?

VII. World View

Evil done in the name of Christianity.

Another question from the same gentleman this week:

You have every right to expect a more respectful tone. I should never have sent that e-mail. I guess the bottom line is that a good many of the questions I saw submitted prejudiced my opinion of your readers; plus, I do not view Christianity as a socially healhy phenomenon--I think it hurts far more than it helps, that it retards our growth globally. To prolong its survival isn't an attractive proposition for me. Otherwise, I'm obviously wrong to pidgeonhole you because most of what you believe with regard to science is entirely correct.

Thank you for replying after my having been so rude. I have marveled for some time that anyone who does the research would be willing to defend what seems so clear to me to be false. That's my fault not yours.  You know the history of Christianity is a sorry one (as are all three Semitic-based religions), and I'm sure you don't equate pogroms, witch burnings, wars, inquisitions, etc. with the teachings of Jesus; but my point is more that an infallible god necessarily has prior knowledge of his actions and that the results of his imperfect creation would be what we see around us. The results were preordained because they couldn't have been otherwise. So, we either have a fallible god or an irrational one. Blaming an imperfect creation for its preordained imperfection (because we supposedly had an opportunity to review all your biblical quotes) is not a convincing argument for me. Foreknowledge/predetermination is, for me, inseparable--or, at the very least, splitting hairs. The results are the same. Again, thanks for your time and tolerance.

Response: When Christians do such things, they are disobeying the one whom they claim to believe in.

Look as science, slavery, human rights, women’s rights, etc.

**II. Hard Questions of a Theological Nature**

Before we look at the hard questions, let us consider the question of world view. What is the biblical view of the world? What is it we are defending?

**What is a “Worldview”?**

Quite simply, one's world view is the perspective one uses to process and interpret information received about the world.  James W. Sire[[1]](#footnote-1) put it this way, "A world view is a set of presuppositions (ie. assumptions) which we hold about the basic makeup of our world."

1. *Worldview definition*: “A worldview is a commitment, a fundamental orientation of the heart, that can be expressed as a story or a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic constitution of reality, and that provides the foundation on which we live and move and have our being.” (James Sire, *The Universe Next Door,* 4th ed., 2004)

Resources:

Sire, James W. *The Universe Next Door*: *A Basic Worldview Catalog*. 4th ed. Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter Varsity Press, 2004.

Copan, Paul. *True for You, But Not for Me*. Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1998.

N. T. Wright. *Simply Christian.* HarperOne 2006.

Alister McGrath. *Theology: The Basics,* Wiley-Blackwell, 2004.

My criteria for a “good” world view.

A. It is true. In other words, this world view is consistent with reality. It is consistent with what we know to be true based on our own experience. (It matches what we know about human beings, what we know from science, it works)

B. It answers satisfactorily the questions people really want answered.

Does a supernatural presence exist and if so what is its nature?

What is the nature of external reality—the world around us?

What is my value as a human being?

**What happens to a person at death?**

How do we know what is right and wrong?

What is my purpose?

**What is the nature of my relationship, with the "prime reality?"**

**Why is there suffering?**

**Why is there evil?**

C. It causes those who hold to it to be better people than they would otherwise have been if they held to competing alternative world views.

How do we define better? We can probably use those criteria that most world religions have in common, at least in theory.

So, what is the Christian world view? I will attempt to describe it by a series of propositions, each of which will be expanded somewhat, using biblical passages by way of support.

**1. The physical world is: a. real b. created out of nothing (ex nihilo) and c. essentially good.**

Genesis chapters 1-3 is in my opinion the most brilliant little piece of philosophy I have ever read. “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” (Genesis 1:1). As the Hebrew writer put it, “By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible.” If this statement is true, then animism, polytheism, pantheism, dualism, naturalism, nihilism, and postmodernism are all proved untrue. Just as significant to the Christian world view is this: not only did God create the physical universe, but this creation was essentially good. The way God puts it in Genesis 1:31, “God saw all that he had made, and it was very good.” Eastern philosophy has the physical world to be an ephemeral illusion. Greek philosophy agrees, adding that the physical world is decaying and essentially evil. Naturalism agrees that it is real, but denies that there is a supernatural reality which created it. It certainly is not “good,” as such a description in meaningless in a random accidental universe. When God says his creation was good in its entirety, this does not deny the existence of evil. The question of evil will be addressed below.

**2. There exists a parallel unseen spiritual reality which is not limited to or defined by the physical reality. Human beings have a spiritual aspect to their nature.**

The fact that God, one who is “invisible,” created the universe establishes that there is a non-physical reality which is at least in some sense greater than the physical. The physical universe is real, but it is not all there is. Jesus confirmed this idea. “God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:24) Acknowledging that there is a spiritual reality is not the same as dualism. Dualism has the world being governed by more or less evenly matched forces of good and evil. It is also not naturalistic monism, which denies the existence of spiritual reality entirely. We have a soul and a spirit. That we are created “in the image of God” (Genesis 1:27) is a spiritual rather than a physical claim. It is not a statement of our equality with God, but rather a description of our spiritual nature. I have a body, but I am not a body. “I” exist, and “I” am not defined by the chemicals which compose my body. Consciousness is not a mere epiphenomenon as naturalism requires. Our God-likeness has to do with our spiritual nature, our possession of a soul, our inherent understanding of good and evil, our ability to create and to love.

**3. The creator of both the physical and spiritual realm is the God who is revealed and who reveals himself in the Bible.**

Not only did God create the physical universe (Genesis 1), he also created the spiritual—the heavenly realms. In Colossians 1:15-16 Paul says of Jesus, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers of rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. God has made himself known to his people “from what has been made.” (Romans 1:20), but he has also revealed himself and his will in the Hebrew and Greek scripture. Most particularly, he has revealed himself through his Son, Jesus Christ; the image of God. “In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son.” (Hebrews 1:1-2). No one has ever seen God, but God the only Son who is at the Father’s side, has made him know.” (John 1:18) God has revealed himself to us through creation, through the Old and New Testaments and through the person Jesus Christ.

**4. Human beings have both a physical and a spiritual nature, but the spiritual nature is more essential as it is eternal.**

Our physical nature is obviously more apparent to us than our spiritual nature, but this fact is deceptive when compared to our ultimate reality. Like Jesus said, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell.” (Luke 12:4-5) As Paul put it, “We fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:18)

**5. God cannot be easily defined but he can be characterized by certain qualities. God is love, God is just, God is holy, God is omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent.**

What God is he is fully and infinitely. God is not merely loving: he is love. Love defines and determines all his actions toward us. From a human perspective, this seems to conflict with his justice and his holiness. God is not merely just: he is justice. He is incapable of an unjust act, even if we feel his love and his justice are in apparent conflict. God is holy, in him there is no darkness at all (1 John 1:5). These are facts about God. How does this affect our world view? In every way. Every act in our life and in the lives of our neighgors is subject to the justice of God. This has a profound effect of how we view our own lives and how we should respond to injustice. “Do not take revenge,… ‘It is mine to avenge; I will repay,’ says the Lord.” If God really is love, then this has an unfathomable effect on how we understand the events which surround our lives. All of them are either caused or permitted by an omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent God who acts toward all out of love.

**6. Although all God’s creation, including the physical world is good, evil does exist. Such evil is the result of freedom of will given to created beings and their subsequent decision to use that freedom to “sin” (defined as transgressing the will of God).**

This brings us back to Genesis. The story of Adam and Eve is the story of us. God gave us everything for our pleasure and enjoyment. Why? Because he loves us and because he wants us to love him. But what did we all do? We rebelled and chose to do things which are unholy. As Augustine put it, evil is not a thing in and of itself. If it were, that would be dualism. Rather evil is good which has been corrupted by free moral agents. Something which was created for good purposes is turned for evil. Nothing God created is evil, but some of what God created is capable of doing evil. God gave us a choice. He asks us to “choose life” (Deuteronomy 30:19), but many of us choose rebellion. The physical laws which are discoverable by science are not the only “natural laws.” There are moral laws as well, and they are as inescapable as the law of gravity. Rebellion against God’s holiness produces suffering in this world (Exodus 20:5-6), both on those who sin and on those around them. This is the answer to the “problem” of pain, suffering and evil.

**7. Because of God’s justice and his holiness, those who choose to rebel against him will ultimately be judged and separated from God for eternity.**

Not only does our choice to rebel and to sin bring on temporary physical and emotional suffering in this life, it also brings judgment in the world to come. “For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat.” (Romans 14:10) “’The Lord will judge his people.’” It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:30-31). God cannot be mocked. He is patient and kind, and he wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1 Timothy 2:4), but “the wages of sin is death.” Again, as with all the qualities of God, this fact is unavoidable. God does not change or compromise his holiness. It has been said that God does not send people to hell, but he accepts their choice to rebel and be eternally separated from him.

**8. The solution to evil and its eternal consequences is provided by God through the atoning substitutionary sacrifice of Jesus Christ.**

This is the essence of the gospel. As was prophesied, “the Lord laid on him the iniquity of us all.” (Isaiah 53:6) “By his wounds we are healed.” (Isaiah 53:5). “But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (Romans 5:8). God’s holiness and justice were not superseded or violated in this substitutionary death. “He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies the man who has faith in Jesus.” (Romans 3:26). Biblically, this is a theological fact. How does this affect one’s world view? If this is true, then everything is different. Suffering makes sense. The existence of evil makes sense. Our innate and universal sense of justice makes sense as well. Yet, we can live as free men and women, not using our freedom as an excuse to do evil, but using this gift of freedom to love and serve others (paraphrasing Galatians 5:13-15) without living in constant fear of judgment when we fall short, as we inevitably will do.

Christianity offers answers to the big human questions:

* The Problem of Sin (the substitutionary death of Jesus)
  + Romans 7:24,25
* The Problem of Suffering (compassion)
  + Matthew 9:35-36
* The Problem of Death
  + 1 Corinthians 15:54-56

Other World Views:

Hinduism

* Maya. The physical world is an illusion.
* Brahman. Universal soul.
* The goal: Nirvana; oneness with the universal soul which is within yourself.
* The Hindu world view has man looking inward, not outward.
* Evil is the denial of Atman—of God in you

Buddhism:

The Four Noble Truths of Siddhartha:

* Suffering is not getting what one wants.
* The cause of suffering is desire which leads to rebirth.
* The way to end suffering is to end desire.
* The way to the end of desire and of suffering is the eight-fold path.

(Right viewpoint (the four noble truths), Right values, Right speech, Right actions, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness, Right meditation

* Buddhism encourages dispassion, not compassion.

Islamic Worldview:

God is very distant from mankind

In Islam, Allah determines everything, even who will choose to follow him. Sura 2:142, 6:39 6:125

Inshallah God willing. It is God’s will that people suffer.

Islam: Salvation is earned through the efforts of those who were pre-selected by Allah to inhabit a very sensual paradise.

Christianity: Salvation is granted by the grace of a loving God to those who, through faith and repentance and baptism accept that love.

Naturalism/Scientific Materialism

* The belief that the only reliable or valid instrument to deciding the truth or even the value of any proposition is the scientific method.
* No basis for ethics or morality, no supernatural, no God, no truth (except that found by science), no consciousness, no “I.” Justice is a figment of our imagination.
* Scientific Materialism accepts only one reality: the physical universe, composed as it is of matter and energy.  Everything that is not physical, measurable, or deducible from scientific observations, is considered unreal. Life is explained in purely mechanical terms, and phenomena such as Mind and Consciousness are considered nothing but epiphenomena - curious by-products, of certain complex physical processes (such as brain metabolism)

Postmodernism: The end of truth. There is no truth. Truth, if it exists, is determined by those who accept it. No basis for morality, ethics, objective good and evil.

Now, let us get to our first “Hard Question” of theology

**A. The Trinity.**

This was, arguably, the biggest apologetic problem for the church in the first three centuries.

A special problem with Muslims!!!! We are accused of being polytheists or tritheists. To the Muslim, the Christian idea of Trinity is a scandal! Is this true?

Let me be honest here, I believe we as Christians are vulnerable on this front. Let me share why.

The “Trinity” is not logical!

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God…. 1:14 The Word became flesh and took up residence among us.

To the Greeks, the idea that God would become flesh was outrageous. Their God was distant, removed, unchangeable, incapable of emotion, etc…

As is the “god” of Islam, Hinduism, etc.

John 1:14 The Word became flesh and tabernacled (feast of booths) among us.

How could this be?

Answer: This is a mystery!!!! Do not tempt to rationalize it!!!!

All other religions in the world have us groping toward God and a distant God sending emanations toward us.

Who reaches out to whom?

Works salvation: Man reaches out to a distant “god.” Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Jain, Sikkhism, Islam, etc.

Grace salvation: God reaches out to man: (Judaism) Christianity

The Trinity: God reaches out to us.

Apologetics of the Trinity:

* **Bottom line, the trinity is a mystery. We cannot defend it as a logical concept.**

**About the trinity: “It’s not logical it’s Godgical” P. Chacon**

Christian theology is not always rational, but it is never irrational.

The Trinity, as other aspects of God is a mystery.

1Timothy 3:16

‘‘Beyond all question, the **mystery** of godliness is great:

He [God] appeared in the body,

was vindicated by the Spirit,

Was seen by angels,

was preached among the nations,

Was believed on in the world,

was taken up in glory’’.

[A possible "early creed" of the church]

This scripture is telling us that we cannot completely understand the infinite God with our finite minds.

[Mystery: Romans 16:25 gospel a mystery, Ephesians 1:9, Ephesians 3:3-9 The Messiah a mystery, Colossians 1:26-27 the mystery: Christ in you Colossians 2:2 Christ a mystery]

We will get into trouble if we try to make God "reasonable", or "easily understood". God is complex. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts as the prophet pointed out in

**Isaiah 55: 9**

**"As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.**

Nevertheless, God has made a revelation of Himself in the Bible, which we can accept or reject as we please.

**1 Corinthians 1:19-20**

The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing. Greeks look for wisdom. “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise.” Where is the philosopher? Where is the debater of this age? Hasn’t God made the world’s wisdom foolish?

Ezekiel 18:25 God does not defend his justice system as logical.

**Scriptures which support monotheism:**

1. **“There is no one like Yahweh our God." Exodus 8:10**
2. **"Yahweh, He is God; there is no other besides Him." Deuteronomy 4:35**
3. **"Yahweh, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other." Deuteronomy 4:39**
4. **"See now that I, I am He, And there is no god besides Me" Deuteronomy 32:39**
5. **"Hear, O Israel! Yahweh is our God, Yahweh is one [echad]!" Deuteronomy 6:4**
6. **"You are great, O Lord God; for there is none like You, and there is no God besides You" 2 Samuel 7:22**
7. **"For who is God, besides Yahweh? And who is a rock, besides our God?" 2 Samuel 22:32**
8. **"Yahweh is God; there is no one else." 1 Kings 8:60**
9. **“…You are the God, You alone, of all the kingdoms of the earth..." 2 Kings 19:15**
10. **"O Lord, there is none like You, nor is there any God besides You" 1 Chronicles 17:20**
11. **"You alone are Yahweh." Nehemiah 9:6**
12. **"For who is God, but Yahweh? And who is a rock, except our God" Psalm 18:31**
13. **"You alone, Lord, are God." Isaiah 37:20**
14. **"Before Me there was no God formed, And there will be none after Me." Isaiah 43:10**
15. **"‘I am the first and I am the last, And there is no God besides Me." Isaiah 44:6**
16. **"Is there any God besides Me, Or is there any *other* Rock? I know of none." Isaiah 44:8**
17. **"I am Yahweh, and there is no other; Besides Me there is no God." Isaiah 45:5**
18. **"Surely, God is with you, and there is none else, No other God." Isaiah 45:14**
19. **"I am Yahweh, and there is none else." Isaiah 45:18**
20. **"Is it not I, Yahweh? And there is no other God besides Me, A righteous God and a Savior; There is none except Me." Isaiah 45:21**
21. **"I am God, and there is no other; *I am* God, and there is no one like Me" Isaiah 46:9**
22. **"And Yahweh will be king over all the earth; in that day Yahweh will be *the only* one, and His name *the only* one." Zechariah 14:9**
23. **"The foremost is, ‘Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one Lord; " Mark 12:29**
24. **"you do not seek the glory that is from the one and only God?" John 5:44**
25. **"I and the Father are one." John 10:30**
26. **"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God" John 17:3**
27. **"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one" John 17:22**
28. **"since indeed God is one" Romans 3:30**
29. **"to the only wise God, Amen." Romans 16:27**
30. **"there is no God but one" 1 Corinthians 8:4**
31. **"yet for us there is *but* one God, the Father, from whom are all things and we *exist* for Him; and one Lord, Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we *exist* through Him." 1 Corinthians 8:6**
32. **"Now a mediator is not for one *party only;* whereas God is *only* one." Galatians 3:20**
33. **"There is one body and one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all." Ephesians 4:4-6**
34. **"You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder." James 2:19**
35. **"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God" 1 Timothy 1:17**
36. **"which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen." 1 Timothy 6:16**
37. **"For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus," 1 Timothy 2:5**

**Jesus is God: The Deity of Jesus**

**Jesus created the universe**

**Gen 1:1**

**1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.**

**John 1:3**

**3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.**

**Heb 1:2**

**2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.**

**Col 1:16-17**

**16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.**

**John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning.**

**John 1:3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.**

**John 8:56-58 Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."**

**"You are not yet fifty years old," the Jews said to him, "and you have seen Abraham!"**

**"I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!"**

**Col 2:9: the fullness of deity For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form,**

**Heb 1:3: The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.**

**Jn 14:8-10: He who sees Me sees the Father.**

**Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." 9 Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'? 10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work.**

**Jesus is called God**

**Heb 1:8 When God brings his firstborn into the world, he says, "Let all God's angels worship him." In speaking of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, his servants flames of fire." But about the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever, and righteousness will be the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has set you above your companions by anointing you with the oil of joy."**

**Phil 2:6-8 Jesus existed in the form of God. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped,**

**Jn 20:28 'My Lord and My God’ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!“**

**Isa 7:14 ‘A Child Will Be Born And His Name Is Called "Emanuel: God with us“**

**Isa 9:6 "A Child Will Be Born And His Name Is Called "Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace"**

* **The “apologetics” of the trinity is that God became a man so that he could reach out to us—so that we could know Him.**
* Tertullian AD 160-220 Coined the word “trinity” about AD 200
  + The Father and the Son are different “not in condition, but in degree; not in substance, but in form; not in power, but in aspect”

Q: Is the trinity biblical?

No, it is Tertullianical.

Q: What is the doctrine of the Trinity?

Early developments in Christian theology were motivated by two things:

1. Apologetics in response to Greek philosophical criticism of Christianity.

2. Answering challenges to orthodox theology from heretical teachers.

A second century Roman creed (said at baptism)

I believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, and in Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, our Lord, and in the Holy Ghost, the holy church and the resurrection of the flesh.

The Greek problem: God cannot change. For them it was very difficult to accept God taking on flesh.

God cannot change and God cannot feel emotions.

Greek critics: How can God become a baby? Who was taking care of the universe while God was an infant?

Did Jesus know he was God when he was 5 years old?

Was Jesus able to work miracles when he was 3 years old?

What happened at Jesus’ baptism?

To what extent did Jesus limit his divine power while in the body?

Heresies:

Most or all the heresies in the first five centuries were attempts to make the trinity rational. The lesson: We should not try to make the trinity rational?

Well, then, how do we defend it?

The Word of God became flesh!!!! God dwelt among us. God came to us so that we could come to him!!!

1. **Ebionites: (poor ones)** A mainly Jewish sect which claimed Jesus was a mere man. Theodotus, Artemon.

1. **Adoptionism:** deity came upon a human being Jesus by adoption at his baptism and left some time before the crucifixion. Before this event, Jesus was a human being. Period. Then he was “adopted” as the Son of God at his baptism.

Many adoptionists deny the virgin birth

Ebionites (poor ones), Theodotus, Artemon Mark 1:10

Q: How should we think about this? When did Jesus acquire knowledge that he was God?

Luke 2:41-51. Jesus aware he is special.

**Gnostics:** Cerinthus. Jesus a “demiurge” an emanation of God

The church saw all these as descended from Simon Magus.

God entered the person we know of as Jesus at his baptism. God left Jesus before his crucifixion.

Valentinus,

**Docetists:** literally “to appear.”

Jesus was wholly divine. He did not have a human nature at all. He only seemed to be human.

Marcion 2nd century.

Origen tended in this direction. God’s nature cannot change. How can the divine become human?

**Patripassianism;** It was God the Father who was born of Mary.

**Arianism:** (Jehovah’s Witness today) Jesus was a created being. He was not merely man, but he was not deity.

The Church Councils settled these issues.

For example Council of Nicea AD 325 settled the Arian heresy

**Modalism.**

Fatherhood, sonhood and spirit are different modes of the one person, appropriate to the situation.

**Monophysitism**

Jesus has one nature, and that is divine. “Two natures before the (hypostatic) union, but after it, one nature. Reduced humanity of Jesus to a shell. “God in a bod.”

**Diphysitism (Nestorianism)**

Two separate persons in Jesus: one divine, one human.

Doctrine of the Trinity:

**Church Councils**

**Nicaea AD 325**

The question of Arianism. Jesus is fully divine. He is of the same substance (consubstantial) with the Father.

Arius said Jesus was of a similar nature

Nicene Creed (actually published after Constantinople)

We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, begotten of the Father before all worlds; God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God; begotten, not made, being of one substance (homoousios, of the same substance, consubstantial) with the Father, by whom all things were made.

Who, for us men and for our salvation, came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Spirit of the virgin Mary, and was made man; and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate; He suffered and was buried; and the third day He rose again, according to the Scriptures; and ascended into heaven, and sits on the right hand of the Father; and He shall come again, with glory, to judge the quick and the dead; whose kingdom shall have no end.

And I believe in the Holy Ghost, the Lord and Giver of Life; who proceeds from the Father and the Son; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spoke by the prophets.

And I believe one holy catholic and apostolic Church. I acknowledge one baptism for the remission of sins; and I look for the resurrection of the dead, and the life of the world to come. Amen.

Of the same essence homoousios vs of similar essence homoiousious

Constantinople AD 381 Confirmed Nicaea. Holy Spirit also consubstantial (or one substance) with the Father and the Son. (less important because the Roman bishop did not attend. The Western church virtually uninvolved.

**Christology:**

Ephesus AD 431 Jesus has both a human and a divine nature, but is one person.

Antioch (two natures) versus Alexandria (two natures, but later one nature)

Condemned Nestorianism. Deposed Nestorius, bishop of Constantinople. Emphasized the human nature of Jesus as separate from his divine nature. Nestorius: The “one nature” is his divine nature. Two natures before the union but one nature after the union.

Condemned Pelagius, in favor with Augustine. Pelagius supposedly said that salvation is at least in part a matter of human effort—that grace alone is not sufficient for salvation.

Chalcedon AD 451

After a thoroughly embarrassing “Robber Synod,” at which armed monks of the Alexandrine school intimidated the Antiochenes and an emmisary of Leo was beaten to death, a council was called. It confirmed the council of Ephesus and more carefully defined the “two natures” doctrine.

“In agreement with the holy fathers we all unanimously teach that we should confess that our Lord Jesus Christ is one and the same Son; the same perfect in Godhead and the same perfect in manhood, truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body; consubstantial with the Father in Godhead and the same consubstantial with us in manhood; like us in all things except sin; begotten of the Father before all ages as regards his Godhead and in the last days the same, for us and for our salvation, begotten of the Virgin Mary, the theotokos (as opposed to the Christotokos of the Nestorians) (the God-bearer, the mother of God) as regards his manhood; one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, made known in two natures without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the difference of the natures being by no means removed because of the union but the property of each nature being preserved and coalescing in one person and one substance, not parted or divided into two persons but one and the same Son, only begotten, divine Word, the Lord Jesus Christ; as the prophets of old and Jesus Christ himself have taught us about him, and the creed of fathers has handed down.

Believe it or not, the framers of this formula fully intended to leave the nature of Jesus as a mystery.

Without confusion, without change protects against Monophysitism, which teaches that Jesus’ nature changed when he took on human form. Monophysite = one nature (only the divine nature) This became the Coptic Church. This was the Alexandrine position.

Without division, without separation protects against Nestorianism, which would make a distinction between the divine and the human nature of Jesus—separating Jesus into two persons. This was the Antiochine position.

Thus, the Council declared that in Christ there are two natures; each retaining its own properties, and together united in one subsistence(hypostasis) and in one single person.

The “hypostatic union”

As the precise nature of this union is held to defy finite human comprehension, the hypostatic union is also referred to by the alternative term **"mystical union."**

Which nature of Jesus was tempted by sin? Could Jesus be tempted by sin before he took on a body?

Such things may best be kept as a mystery.

**C. Predestination, Original Sin, Free Will and the Problem of Evil**

The criticism: God cannot both foreknow and be sovereign without predestining our path. This is in contradiction with the idea of the grace of God.

Criticism: The God of the Bible is one who is the cause of or the creator of evil.

A question from the same young critic of Christianity quoted above:

Would an infallible god PREORDAIN to have to kill himself in order to appease himself? Would an all-powerful god somehow suffer from a communication problem which compels him to recruit some primitive Jews to write his biography?

But before we get into that, let us look at the qualities of God.

**B. The Qualities of God**

What are the chief qualities of God?

1. Omniscient.

2. Omnipresent.

3. Omnipotent.

4. Sovereign.

5. Love.

6. Holiness.

7. Just.

At first glance, logically, some of these qualities are in rather direct conflict.

How can God have all these qualities fully and simultaneously? Critics of Christianity say he cannot!

God cannot be fully loving and fully just.

Remember, that to some extent the answer is beyond human understanding: It is a mystery.

**C. Predestination, Original Sin, Free Will and the Problem of Evil**

Logically, we must choose: Either God is sovereign or we have free will.

How can God foreknow without predetermining?

Augustine chose God’s sovereignty.

* Augustine!!!!!
  + The City of God Soveriegnty
  + Total depravity
  + Monoergism (only God)
  + Predestination
  + Original Sin
  + Infant baptism required for salvation
  + Sacramentalism
  + Transubstantiation
  + City and State
  + Opposed Donatists

Augustine of Hippo. 354-430 THE great theologian of Christianity (along, perhaps with Paul and Calvin)

A quote: Augustine is the end of one era as well as the beginning of another. He is the last of the ancient Christian writers, and the forerunner of medieval theology. The main currents of ancient theology converged in him, and from him flow the rivers, not only of medieval scholasticism, but also of sixteenth century Protestant theology.

His thing: The sovereignty of God.

Really his two things: The absolute and total depravity of human beings and the absolute and total sovereignty of God.

Wrote “The City of God”

Monergism: Human agency is entirely passive in the process of redemption. God is the sole active agent in salvation.

(as opposed to synergism, in which God works with our free will to save us)

Mankind is “fallen.” We are guilty of original sin.

This doctrine was completely missing from the church fathers of the 2nd and 3rd centuries.

Gnostics were the first to develop the idea of original sin.

This solved the dual problems of predestination and infant baptism.

Augustine: an infant who dies unbaptized is damned even where no baptism is possible.

“Rightly, therefore, by virtue of that condemnation which runs throughout the mass [of humanity] is he not admitted into the kingdom of heaven, although he was not only not a Christian, but was unable to become one.”

Augustine on evil:

When accordingly it is inquired, whence is evil, it must first be inquired what is evil, which is nothing else than corruption, either of the measure, or the form or the order, that belong to nature. Nature therefore which has been corrupted, is called evil, for assuredly when incorrupt it is good; but even when corrupt, so far as it is nature, it is good, so far as it is corrupted it is evil.

Sin is not the striving after an evil nature, but the desertion of a better, and so the deed is itself is evil, not the nature which the sinner uses amiss. For it is evil to use amiss that which is good.

Augustine a “mystery of iniquity”

About Augustine: “Evil arises from the corruption of a nature which is essentially good. What is called evil is good corrupted; if it were not corrupted it would be wholly good; but even when it is corrupted, it is good in so far as it remains a natural thing, and bad only in so far as it is corrupted.”

The key, then, is free will. But Augustine said “A man’s free will avails for nothing except to sin.”

Is free will compatible with determinism? Pelagius says no.

Augustine vs Pelagius

Pelagius c. 354- 430

A British monk, responding to the worldliness in the church. Concluded that Augustine’s doctrine of predestination was the cause. Augustine: “I am helpless to do good.” God does everything. People bear no responsibility for whether or not they change. Wrote *On Nature*.Argued that Christians can live sinless lives and are responsible to do so.

Adam would have died physically in any case. His sin only brought punishment on himself. Specifically, children are born in a state of grace. Denied the need for infant baptism. Affirmed the existence of free will. “evil is not born with us, and we are procreated without fault.” Taught that we become holy through our own effort? A self-improvement program? “For Pelagius, sin was a social disease, not a genetic one.”

Q: Is Pelagius fairly represented? Did he truly believe we make ourselves more and more righteous?

[Later: Calvin vs Arminius]

Augustine: Absolute and total depravity after the Fall. Free will exists, but it has nothing whatsoever to do with whether or not we are saved. It operates after we are saved.

Pelagius (AD 354-430)

Affirmed the existence of free will. “Evil is not born with us, and we are procreated without fault.” Rejected infant baptism. Taught that we become holy through our own effort?

Thomas Aquinas 1225-1274

Did not accept strict monergism, but agreed that a response of faith and action on our part is required for salvation which is both justification and sanctification.

Thomas Aquinas:

“God, therefore, is the first cause, who moves causes both natural and voluntary. And just as by moving natural causes He does not prevent their actions from being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary; but rather is He the cause of this very thing in them, for He operates ineach thing according to his own nature.”

In other words, Aquinas believed in free will and not a strict monergism.

Thomas Aquinas: God predestines/foreordains in that he foreknows who will freely choose to be saved.

(Zwingli and Calvin: God knows because he predetermines)

**Q: What is the nature of “the Fall” of mankind? What happened in the garden?**

Puritans: “In Adam’s fall we sinned all.”

What is the meaning of Romans 5:18-19? Is it that our ultimate fate to become sinners was initiated when sin was brought into the world (Pelagius) (Romans 5:12), or is it that we literally inherit the guilt of Adam (Augustine?)

Did we inherit a tendency toward sin? A “sinful nature?” “folly is bound up in the heart of a child” Born corrupt, making sin inevitable but not guilty?

Ezekiel 18:19-21

The problem with Calvinism: If we accept double predestination then we accept that God creates evil or at the very least that God chooses evil.

* Q: What is the nature of “the Fall” of mankind? What happened in the garden?
* Puritans: “In Adam’s fall we sinned all.”
* Romans 5:12-19 What “death” is this in v. 12

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Augustinian monk. Restored theology of Martin Luther. A strong believer in predestination.

To a very large extent, the theology of the Reformation is the theology of Augustine.

Grace alone, Faith alone, Scripture alone.

“Away with James… His authority is not great enough to cause me to abandon the doctrine of faith [alone] and to deviate from the authority of the other apostles and the entire Scripture.” St. James’ epistle is really an epistle of straw, compared to these others (Romans, Galatians, John) for it has nothing of the nature of the gospel about it.”

More important for Protestantism in America:

Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531)

God’s sovereignty is the first principle of Christian thought.

Rejected Thomas Aquinas’ idea that God predestines because he foreknows what we do through our free will.

“those individuals who end up damned forever in hell are also eternally determined by God for that fate.” (double predestination)

The damned are predestined, and in so doing they become “examples of his righteousness.”

John Calvin (1509-1564) Most influential theologist in the reformation.

“Institutes of the Christian Religion”

His greatest emphasis: the sovereignty of God.

TULIP

Total depravity

Unconditional election

Limited atonement (double predestination)

Irresistible grace

Perseverance of the saints (once saved, always saved)

Reformed theology (Presbyterianism, Dutch Reformed, Baptists, Puritans)

Opposed by Arminius. 1560-1609

Arminius accused of Pelagianism (teaching that salvation is gained through, in part, human work), but he publicly rejected this teaching.

What he opposed to was Calvin’s strict predestination.

Scriptures which either teach predestination or could be used that way?

Romans 8:28-30

Romans 8:31-39 Nothing can separate us (except we ourselves because we

have free will)

John 10:27-29 No one can snatch them out of my hands…

Romans 9:10-21 (read v. 14-18)

Example of Pharaoh and Judas

Is predestination true? Yes!!!

1. God predestined all of us to be saved (but he does not force anyone)

2. Very rarely God does step in and trumps our freedom of choice for a specific purpose (Pharaoh, Judas). But even in these cases, they could have chosen to repent and to be saved.

But: Deut 30:19-20, All of Hebrews.

The biblical/Christian view:

Free Will: Because God loves us he gives us a choice. Live gives a choice. We chose to sin. The story of Adam and Eve is the story of us. Do we blame God for bringing evil into the world?

History of Predestination in America:

Jonathan Edwards

“A Sinner in the Hands of an Angry God.”

Big problems with assurance of salvation.

late 1700’s very dark, depressing.

No assurance of salvation. Salvation has nothing to do with us. **FATALISM** Church attendance very low.

Cane Ridge Revival Barton Stone rejects predestination.

Huge pendulum swing. Total assurance of salvation. Tulip soft. Predestination Light

Modern idea of “once saved always saved” results.

Once you have been saved (pray Jesus into your heart), no matter what happens after that time, you definitely will make it to heaven.

Anathema to Augustine, Luther, Calvin, etc.

Hebrews:

**Warnings against falling away.**

Hebrews 3:7-11 They shall never enter my rest.

Hebrews 3:14 We… share in Christ IF we hold firmly till the end….

Hebrews 3:16-4:11 esp. 3:16-4:1

Foreshadow of the Jews in the wilderness.

Let us make every effort to enter that rest, so that no one will fall short of it…

Hebrews 6:4-8 Who is he talking to?

* a. been enlightened (NT church “enlightened” = baptized)
* b. tasted the heavenly gift (salvation?)
* c. shared in the Holy Spirit
* d. tasted the goodness of the word
* e. tasted the coming age (saved)

That Hebrews commentary: Two audiences; Christians and Jewish believers who have not yet chosen to be baptized. (circular reasoning)

What happens to these people?

* It is ***impossible***… if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance.
* They are crucifying the Son of God all over again.
* Land that produces thorns… will be burned.

Let us be careful how we use the term “fall away.”

Hebrews 10:26-31

* Crucifying the Son of God all over again.
* Subjecting Jesus to public disgrace
* Trampling the Son of God under foot. (Heb 10:29)
* Insulted the Holy Spirit (Heb 10:29)
* Blasphemed (spoken against) the Holy Spirit (Matt 12:32)
* Committed the unforgivable sin (1 John 5:16, Luke 12:10)
* What is the “unforgivable sin?” To willfully, deliberately continue in sin. (Hebrews 10:26)

Hebrews 12:14-17

* See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and ***defile many.*** (ie. They were pure but
* become defiled)
* He could bring about no change of mind, though he sought the blessing with tears.
* Hebrews 12:25 If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth (Moses), how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven (Jesus).

Summary: A Biblical doctrine of predestination which is consistent with all the qualities of God:

**God predestined all of us for salvation.**

**God’s sovereign will is that we have free will to choose to accept or refuse the offer.**

**God predestined that Jesus would come and die to provide salvation for our sins.**

**God intervened in history to make this happen.**

**But God did not steal free will from anyone.**

**God can perfectly predestine and perfectly give free will at the same time. God is awesome!!!**

**D. The Problem of Evil.** If God is good, if God is loving, if everything God created is good and if God is omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent,… why is there evil in the world?

Seems like a good question!

Evil is a big problem for every world view!!! This is not an easy question for any of them to answer.

The Problem of Evil and Christian Apologetics: What are the alternative views?

Q: What is evil, biblically?????

Is evil just the absence of good?

Is evil a thing? (If so, then we have a form of dualism)

Evil is not simply the absence of good (like darkness is the absence of light, because there is no such thing as darkness). If there is no light, then there is nothing. Darkness is not a thing.

Did God create evil?

* Augustine: When accordingly it is inquired, whence is evil, it must first be inquired what is evil, which is nothing else than corruption, either of the measure, or the form or the order, that belong to nature. Nature therefore which has been corrupted, is called evil, for assuredly when incorrupt it is good; but even when corrupt, so far as it is nature, it is good, so far as it is corrupted it is evil.
* Sin is not the striving after an evil nature, but the desertion of a better, and so the deed itself is evil, not the nature which the sinner uses amiss. For it is evil to use amiss that which is good.
* **About Augustine: “Evil arises from the corruption of a nature which is essentially good. What is called evil is good corrupted; if it were not corrupted it would be wholly good; but even when it is corrupted, it is good in so far as it remains a natural thing, and bad only in so far as it is corrupted.”**
* **Augustine: “A man’s free will avails for nothing except to sin.”**

**Thomas Aquinas: God therefore, is the first cause, who moves causes both natural and voluntary. And just as by moving natural causes He does not prevent their actions from being natural, so by moving voluntary causes He does not deprive their actions of being voluntary; but rather is He the cause of this very thing in them, for He operates in each thing according to his own nature.”**

**In other words, Aquinas believed in free will and not a strict monergism.**

**The Problem of evil: Other World Views.**

Dualism: Good and Evil in an unending more or less equal balance

Pantheism: The physical world is evil. Evil is being tied down to the physical—it is missing the god-likeness in you. The physical is evil, but it is also an illusion. Ultimately, evil is an illusion—it is not real.

This is the response of Hinduism and of Buddhism.

Naturalism: There is no evil.

Postmodernism: Evil??? What is that? The only evil is making judgmental discrimination between truths.

Determinism/Fate God is the cause of evil. (Islam, Calvinism)

The Christian solution to “The Problem of Evil.”

Evil is very much real. It is not an illusion. Quite indirectly, it is the product of God’s love. Everything God created is good, but God loved us so much that he loved us and that he gave us a choice. We chose to abuse what is good, we chose to do evil, we rebelled, and thus evil came into the world.

At first glance, the biblical explanation of evil is a bit confusing and hard to take in.

But….Remember your alternatives:

* + Predestination/Determinism God is the cause of evil.
  + Deny evil exists
  + Physical creation is evil, but you are God, you are perfect and evil is an illusion anyway.
  + An unending battle/balance between good and evil.

Q: What about Satan?

**Questions to ask:**

**1. Who created Satan?**

**2. Was Satan created evil?**

**3. Are demons real? (Islam has jinn, which are evil spirits, created evil)**

**Jesus talked to demons (Luke 4:33-35). Apparently he believed they are real.**

**Jesus talked to Satan (Luke 4:3-12) Apparently he believed in Satan.**

Aside: Critics of the Bible claim that Satan and the devil are not part of original Judaism and are taken directly from Greek ideas.

This is partially true!!! A guy with horns and a tail comes from the Greek god Pan.

**4. How did demons become demonic? Are they “fallen angels?”**

Also note that identifying “Lucifer” in Isaiah 14 with Satan is probably bogus. Almost certainly this is a reference to Babylon, not the devil.

**5. Does demon possession still happen today? If not, why not?**

**6. What is the relationship between demon possession and free will of individuals?**

**7. If free will is the explanation of evil, then will we have free will in heaven?**

**E. The Problem of Suffering**.

THE PROBLEM OF PAIN AND SUFFERING

(and of evil)

I An apologetic/intellectual problem. How should I think about this?

II A human problem. How should I feel about this?

**I Pain and Suffering: an apologetic problem.**

The argument goes like this:

Agnostic says: The Christian God is supposed to be completely good and all-powerful.

→ The Christian God is not real.

Given the pain and suffering in the world, this cannot be true. He could be either:

A. All-powerful, but certainly not completely good.

Or

B. Completely good, but certainly not all-powerful.

This is a serious question. Possibly, this may be the single most common/significant apologetic question. It is a legitimate question.

We will see, God does not ignore this question. Not at all!!!

Kinds of suffering, but first we will be asking

a. Are they God’s “fault?”

b. Are they bad/evil? (if not, then the argument above goes away)

Kinds of suffering:

1. Acute pain, broken bones, chronic pain (cancer, etc.), burns, etc.

2. Disease, both acute and chronic. Cancer, lupus, leprosy, heart disease, malaria, etc.

3. Broken relationships Emotional devastation.

4. Poverty, hunger, etc.

5. Violence, terrorism, genocide, violent crime, political crimes.

6. Chronic fear. (point 5. above, rape, natural disasters, failure, etc.) Living under a totalitarian system. Deuteronomy 28:65-67.

7. Disappointment, feelings of failure, loss of hope, loss of job.

8. Death of a loved one, bereavement, mourning.

Many of these we will explain below but, bottom line, there are kinds of suffering that will be extremely difficult to explain for emotional reasons.

Brain cancer of a little child, birth defects, Tsunami, 2004, genocide of the Jews, Pol Pot, etc.

There is a lot of suffering in the world!!

Q: How can a good God allow these things?

A very serious question: What is the cause of all this suffering?

Is it a lack of power on God’s part?

Is it because God is not loving and good?

A strong caution here: There is no simple answer.

A serious question: Does this prove God is evil, or at least not completely good?

**CAUSES OF SUFFERING:**

**A. FREE WILL**. Note: the phrase “free will” is not in the Bible.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (exp 19-20) Now choose life.

Joshua 24:15 Choose today…

John 7:17 If anyone chooses to do God’s will…

A loving God gave us a choice.

We were made in God’s image in this sense: free will.

Would you prefer the alternative? (not living at all, or being a “robot”?)

Is it better if we did not have freedom to choose good or evil?

Illustration: parents who totally control their kids

Illustration: cats vs dogs

God wants us to choose to love him. Is that evil? You decide.

God is loving enough and powerful enough to give us a choice to love or hate, to do good or to do evil.

God took a huge risk. Why? Because he loves us. Parents take the same risk. Our kids may become career criminals and may totally reject our love. It is definitely still worth it.

Go back to Adam and Eve. Their choice led us down a bad path to sin.

**B. HUMAN SIN.**

The vast majority of all suffering can be attributed to human choice to sin.

**·** addiction, lack of self-control

**·** sexual perversion and abuse

**·** anger, violence

**·** greed

**·** pride, arrogance, jealousy, desire for control, power

**·** selfishness (but not all… AIDS, Tsunami, etc.)

God’s moral law, which cannot be violated, says such sins cause suffering, both to the perpetrator and to the victim of such sin. This is a law; as inviolable as the law of gravity.

Some reject a God of Justice. Personally, I do not!

Exodus 20:4-5 “… punishing the children for the father’s sin to the third and fourth generation.” A biblical principle.

Vs.

Ezekiel 18:19-20 Both are true…

We need to separate in our minds physical suffering and spiritual suffering (eternal judgment)

One punishment for sin is to watch the consequences of your own sin play out. (David)

Here is the real question: does the existence of these things prove that God is evil or powerless?

A very important note:

Be extremely careful to use the sin card. As a general rule, do not tell a suffering person that it is because of their sin, or even the sin of a loved one.

Q: What book in the Bible has the problem of suffering as its main theme?

(NT: 1 Peter)

AIDS is God’s way of punishing homosexuality. Do not say that!!!

Do not judge. Consider Job

Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar: You are suffering because you sinned!!

Job: not true. I am righteous. Who was right? Neither, but on suffering, Job was right.

His suffering was a test which proved Job and brought glory to God.

Another note about Job: God never explained to him why he suffered. Can you live with some ambiguity/without clear answers? That is part of faith.

**C. NATURAL CAUSES OF SUFFERING.**

There are natural physical laws, just as there are natural moral laws.

We can argue with God on this if we like, but his normal way is to establish laws which work and let them run their course. He created a universe in which galaxies, stars, planets form naturally. He created laws which created light for the planets, weather to spread around the energy, plate tectonics to recycle nutrients and replenish the atmosphere, etc.

1. Without plate tectonics, no advanced life on the earth. Look at mars. Are earthquakes evil?

2. Weather distributes energy almost evenly across the earth, waters the land, etc. No weather, no storms, no hurricanes. Are floods and storms evil?

3. Even diseases. God made bacteria, fungi, etc. with amazing abilities to recycle all kinds of nutrients. Without bacteria, we would be dead. Even genetic mutation is part of God’s plan to cause adaptation and evolution. Is disease evil?

4. Much suffering due to “natural causes” is really the result of either human unwisdom (putting it nicely) or greed. Ex: Living in a flood plain, destroying the environment, etc.

I want to focus more on suffering, but before I do, remember, there will be kinds of suffering which none of us can ever explain. Let us not be flippant. Let us not dismiss with a wave of the hand. That is definitely not God’s way (as we will see).

**ARE THESE THINGS INHERENTLY EVIL?**

**A. PAIN**

Touch burner

Tiny proportion who are born without ability to feel pain

Leprosy

Full stomach

Broken bone

Pain is good

Pain prevents wrong behavior.

This is even true with emotional pain.

**B. DEATH**

Who said death is evil?

Isaiah 57:2 God takes them away to spare them of evil.

Phil 1:21 For me to live is Christ, to die is gain.

Death is not (inherently) evil, because it is not the end. Atheist: in view of death, life is futile. Truth: Death makes life precious, including suffering.

**C. SUFFERING (most) suffering is not evil.**

1. Psalm 30:5 Weeping may endure for the night. No suffering = no joy.

ex.: being hungry makes food taste good.

Is joy joy without suffering?

2. John 9:1-3 Who sinned, this man or his parents?... that the work of God might be displayed. To give glory to God.

Q: How many of you became Christians, at least partly, because of some sort of trial and suffering God caused you to go through

3. Romans 8:28 (Virtually) all evil can be used by God, ultimately, for good. (but this does not make evil good!!)

4. Romans 5:3 suffering → character, hope James 1:2-3 trials → lack nothing spiritually. Suffering is a principle way we become like Christ. Even the world recognizes this.

5. Suffering is the natural result of doing good. 1 Peter 2:20-22, 2 Tim 3:12.

6. Coll 1:24-29 share in Christ’s suffering (so that others might come to Christ) Luke 9:23 In suffering we share with Jesus. Phil 3:10.

1 Pet 4:12-17 I Pet 4:1-2.

7. Same on a human level. Through shared suffering, we have close relationships. No atheists in foxholes. Also, life-long friendships forged there.

**Part II Suffering: a human problem.**

Our response to suffering depends on our world-view.

Hindu, Buddhist, Stoic. This world is an illusion (maya). Suffering is an illusion. Avoid suffering by escaping from this world. This will explain a lot about those societies.

Buddhism: The goal is dispassion. The cause of suffering is desire.

Muslim. Fate. It is God’s will. There is nothing I can or should do about it.

Inshallah

Atheism. USSR 20 million. China 30 million Pol Pot 2 million The individual does not matter, so suffering is not important.

Christian: This world is very real and God cares about suffering. Micah 6:8 James 1:27 **Compassion**

The Christian Response: **Compassion**

**Jeremiah 22:15-16** Does it make you a king to have more and more cedar? Did not your father have food and drink? He did what was right and just, so all went well with him**. He defended the cause of the poor and needy, and so all went well. Is that not what it means to know me? Declares the Lord.**

**Note: not just helping them, but defending their cause.**

**James 1:27** Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

For us: Single moms and old people

Prov 14:31 He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is **kind** to the needy honors God.

Not just helping, but being kind. Treating them as people, not just as a problem to be addressed.

Social Justice.

“The world is a dangerous place, not because of those who do evil, but because of those who look on and do nothing.”

-Albert Einstein

**Isaiah 58:6-7 Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?**

Illustration:

Julian “the apostate.” (332-363) Reviving pagan religion

“Atheism (i.e. Christian faith) has been specially advanced through the loving service rendered to strangers, and through their care for the burial of

the dead. It is a scandal that there is not a single Jew who is a beggar, and that the godless Galileans care not only for their own poor but for ours as well; while those who belong to us look in vain for the help that we should render them.”

Suffering is a very emotional thing. It is OK to hurt over things. Look at these men of God:

Surely suffering is problematic for you. If not, you are not real with your emotions.

God understands:

Hab 1:2-4 How long, O Lord, must I call for help, but you do not listen.

Jeremiah 12:1 I would speak with you about your justice.

Even Jesus! My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?

God, if there is any way you can take this cup from me…

God is not defensive about this. He understands this. So should we! These are real issues!

Believe it or not, God can relate. That is part of why Jesus came.

2 Cor 5:17 Heb 2:17-18 Heb 4:15

Here is the question: What is your response to suffering?

What am I willing to do about suffering?

Am I making a difference?

Am I part of the solution?

If you want to know God’s response to suffering, look at Jesus!!! John 11:35 Matthew 23:37 O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, you who kill the prophets and stone those sent to you, how often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing.

Let’s work of physical suffering, but emotional suffering is far more devastating.

What not to do:

1. Teach people to avoid suffering.

2. Tell people suffering is good for them.

3. Tell people (only) to pray about it.

4. Tell people it is their fault. (Job)

What to do:

Like Job, live with integrity despite your own suffering.

Empathy. Our suffering will allow us to help others come to Christ, and to alleviate suffering in general.

People do not want answers, they want understanding/empathy.

Let us alleviate suffering, not because it is evil, but because that is the heart of God.

Final passage:

Matt 9:36-38 Compassion

The best thing we can do to prevent suffering: Help someone to become a Christian.

**F. The problem of violence and slavery in the OT**

First of all, it is not completely clear that this is a problem of theology, but it certainly is related to the problem of evil.

Claim of the skeptic:

The God of the Old Testament is a sadistic ethnic cleanser.

We have to admit that, on some level, this seems to be a fair charge.

Ex: 1 Samuel 15:2-3 “This is what the Lord of Hosts says: ‘I witnessed what the Amelekites did to the Israelites when they opposed them along the way as they were coming out of Egypt. Now, go and attach the Amelekites, and completely destroy everything they have. Do not spare them. Kill men and women, children and infants, oxen and sheep, camels and donkeys.’”

That is tough stuff!

A few points on the subject:

1. If you are not bothered by this on some level, I am worried about you!

2. The argument assumes that physical death is bad/evil. This is a false assumption. Sin is evil but death is not. Death is a transition, hopefully, to something better.

3. This is the Creator talking here. Like the father said to his kid: I brought you into the world, and I can take you out! God has every right to do as he wills.

4. God has a perfect right to judge.

5. There is the issue of the religion of the Amelekites. Sacrificing of children, worshipping gods by having sex with a prostitute in the temple, etc.

6. The situation for the children in this situation was hopeless.

7. In the case of Amelek and other Canaanites, both God’s love and his justice demanded

that something be done.

8. Either God was going to create a nation or he was not. If God is going to have a “people,” then such people must have a physical land and must have an army.

a. God’s plan is to choose a man, then a nation, through whom to send a savior.

God’s plan to bless humanity through Jesus trumps all else.

b. It is sinful to take the life of another in anger, out of greed or selfishness, but it

is not necessarily sinful to take a life in war.

9. Everything God did to Israel as a nation was to limit their ability to wage war.

a. No authority to establish an empire.

b. No standing army.

c. No cruelty, no abuse, no rape

On slavery:

Some of the same points apply.

1. First, let us acknowledge that, on some level, God legislating slavery is troubling.

2. God accommodated rather than approved slavery.

3. All of God’s regulations with regard to slavery were to limit it. (Eph 6:9)

a. Slaves could not be bought and sold.

b. Humane treatment. Deuteronomy 23:15, Leviticus 25:14

c. All slaves were eventually given their freedom at the Jubilee year.

4. God is not concerned with physical slavery nearly so much as spiritual slavery.

5. Nevertheless, Paul asked Philemon to free his slave Onesimus in an inspired passage.

6. William Wilberforce. It was Christian influence which ended the slave trade world

wide.

A more open question: Is the God of the OT good?

Dawkins, Hitchens and Harris are the “three horsemen” of the New Atheists

Dawkins: “The God Delusion”

God is a “moral monster.” (and thus Paul Copan’s book)

God’s command to Abraham to offer his son is “disgraceful” and “tantamount to child abuse and bullying.”

This is a rather shallow critique, but to those uninitiated in the Bible, it sounds quite convincing.

Christopher Hitchens: “God is not Great”

“The nightmare of the Old Testament” The Canaanites were “pitilessly driven out of their homes to make room for the ungrateful and mutinous children of Israel.” “ OT includes warrant for trafficking in humans, for ethnic cleansing, for slavery, for bride-price, and for indiscriminate massacre, but we are not bound by it because it was put together by crude, uncultured human animals.”

Sam Harris: “Letter to a Christian Nation.”

“If the Bible is true, then we should be stoning people to death for heresy, adultery, homosexuality, worshipping graven images and other imaginary crimes.”

“The End of Faith” Consistent Christian parents ought to stone his son or daughter if she comes home from a yoga class a devotee of Krishna.

How do we respond to these things?

1. They are an exaggeration which fails to take into account the actuality on the ground.

2. They fail to take into account that the Law of Moses was intended to be a temporary measure, accommodated to the conditions on the ground, to be replaced by the Law of Christ.

Q: Does the Bible encourage:

1. Slavery.

2. Warfare and genocide in the name of God.

3. Treatment of women as inferior to men.

What about God being jealous? Is God a petty deity?

No. God’s “jealousy” is of a lover who longs for the good of the one he loves.

Jealousy which comes out of self-interest is not godly jealousy. It is sinful.

“You can’t leave me. I won’t let you!”

Hosea is a great example. God knows that if we go after other lovers we will reap destruction. He is jealous for our self-interest, not his.

It is like a husband who sees his wife drawn emotionally to another man. This will destroy the marriage.

Israel’s behavior on Mt. Sinai would be like a wife committing adultery with another man on her honeymoon.

God’s relationship with us is like a spousal intimacy.

Copan: “A marriage without the possibility of jealous when the relationship is threatened by an intruder is not much of a marriage.”

Ezek 6:9 How I have been hurt by their adulterous heats which turned away from me and by their eyes which played the harlot after their idols.

Genesis 6:6 The Lord was grieved…. And his heart was filled with pain.

This is a great God!!!

Hi, You've done a great job with the website.  I have a question.  As a practicing Christian, the greatest challenge to my faith comes from certain Old Testament scriptures. On one hand the Bible often displays wisdom and knowledge that is otherwise unknown by man at the time it was written. An example would be the references to crucifixion hundreds of years before it was devised. On the other hand, certain scripture shows the opposite. For example, Deuteronomy 22:17. That passage implies they are unaware that a girl's hymen can be broken without sexual intercourse. Allowing or setting that law could result in the stoning of someone who is innocent.  
This type of contradiction in quality of message is puzzling to me. I would be gratedul for any comments. Best Regards.

Answer:

I very much appreciate your respect for scripture.  I believe that in the problem you raise, you are making an unjustified assumption.  You are assuming that, if a very small percentage of women anatomically do not have a closed hymen, then it is wrong for God to institute the law you find in Deuteronomy.  I believe that Deuteronomy 22:17 does not prove a "science error" in the Bible.   This was the common, accepted practice for determining virginity in the culture at the time.  If anyone can supply a better means that the Jews could have used to determine virginity, then they should propose it, but I know of no better means to make this determination.   I assume that in the real situation, if a girl was found not to produce blood when having sex, the leaders would have started an investigation and not simply punished her on the spot.  In fact, I believe it is likely that the Jews were aware that this test was not infallible and used wisdom and judgement in applying it.  I cannot prove this, but believe it is likely.

God was working with fallible people, using human customs which were not infallible.  He had to provide laws to real people in real situations 3500 years ago, not something which works in our modern context.  If we take this into account, I believe it provides a reasonable answer to your question.  I do not see proof of a biblical error or a scientific error in this difficulty.

John Oakes

C.S. Lewis warns against “chronological snobbery.” The “uncritical acceptance of the intellectual climate common to our age and the assumption that whatever has gone out of date is on that count discredited.”

Genesis 1-2 established God, us, and our relationship with God.

Right away we see God’s desire for marriage, yet he accommodated the Jews.

Matthew 19:3-9 From the beginning (Genesis 2) God wanted it this way, but “because your hearts were hard” he accommodated divorce, but with a certificate (so that the woman would not be abused or accused)

But God accommodated to the culture, the time and the situation of Israel in the Near East 1400 BC.

Galatians 3:24 The Mosaic law was a “tutor” to bring us to something better.

Even now—even in the NT, God makes provision for slavery, but can anyone believe the God of the Bible approves of slavery? NO!!!!

**G. The problem of hell.**

Question: How could a loving God send those he created to hell where there is eternal suffering? This is not discipline (Hebrews 12:5-11), this is punishment.

Are you fired up about hell? (ha ha). Personally, I am not.

This is, arguably, the most difficult question about Christianity.

There is part of us which seeks and appreciates justice, but isn’t Hell over the top?

We appreciate justice unless it is applied to us. (Illustration: my aunt and the speeding ticket)

San Diego TV guy: “It Ain’t Right!!!!!

**Romans 3:10f There is no one righteous, not even one.**

**Revelation 20:15 If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. Rev 21:8 …the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death. Rev 20:10 … They will be tormented day and night for even and ever.**

**Does God choose to send us to hell? No! We choose hell and God, in his justice, accepts our decision.**

**Is suffering in hell literally eternal? Is joy in heaven literally eternal?**

Attributes of God:

* **Eternal**
* **Omnipresent**
* **Omniscient**
* **Omnipotent**
* **Righteous, Holy**
* **Love**
* **Justice**

**God is not merely loving, he is love**

**God does not merely act justly, he is justice.**

**God’s justice is as complete and awesome as his love.**

**God, in his awesomeness is fully love and fully just**

**Love and Justice**

**For God so loved the world…**

**The wages of sin is death Rom 6:23**

**The law of sin and death Rom 8:2**

**We like God’s love, but we are not so fired up about his justice.**

**Q: How can we be joyful in heaven, knowing that those we love are in torment?**

**When we reach heaven, we will understand and fully appreciate, on an emotional level, God’s justice. Rev 11:17-18 Rev 16:5-6 The elders are thankful that God’s judgement has finally come. You are just, O God.**

**Psalm 94:1-3 David How long, O Lord, must I wait for your vengeance.**

**But, there is good news:**

**God’s love met God’s justice at the cross. As far as we are concerned, love won.**

**Romans 3:21-26**

**H. The Problem of Heaven.**

1. How can we be joyful in heaven knowing that others are in hell?

2. If there is no suffering in heaven, how can there be so much joy?

3. Will there be free will in heaven? How will that work?

**Summary:**

**All the hard questions have reasonable answers**

**The Christian World View is the only one which comes even close to answering these questions.**

**But… Do not forget the role of faith. Faith is belief in things unseen…. Even the answers to hard questions!!!**

**The trinity is a mystery. God’s love is not rational, and neither is our relationship with him.**

1. James W. Sire, *TheUniverse Next Door* (InterVarsity Press, 1997) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)