



Christian Book Reports

Jim Hoffman



The Problem Defined

“If God were good, He would wish to make His creatures perfectly happy, and if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished. But the creatures are not happy. Therefore God lacks either goodness, or power, or both.’ This is the problem of pain, in it’s simplest form.” C.S. Lewis

This an accurate problem statement – but it is only accurate from the human perspective.





What God Will Do

“Meaningless combinations of words do not suddenly acquire meaning simply because we prefix to them the two other words ‘God can’. It remains true that all things are possible with God: the intrinsic impossibilities are not things but nonentities. It is no more possible for God than for the weakest of His creatures to carry out both of two mutually exclusive alternatives; not because His power meets an obstacle, but because nonsense remains nonsense even when we talk it about God.” C.S. Lewis

It is true that God can do whatever he wants, but it is not true that he will do anything.



We Cause Most Pain

“When souls become wicked they will certainly use this possibility to hurt one another; and this, perhaps, accounts for four-fifths of the sufferings of men. It is men, not God, who have produced racks, whips, prisons, slavery, guns, bayonets, and bombs; it is by human avarice or human stupidity, not by the churlishness of nature, that we have poverty and overwork. But there remains, none the less, much suffering which cannot thus be traced to ourselves. Even if all suffering were man-made, we should like to know the reason for the enormous permission to torture their fellows which God gives to the worst of men.” C.S. Lewis

Despite the fact that we can explain most pain, we still struggle with an all-powerful God who allows it.



Sin is no small problem.

“We are not merely imperfect creatures who must be improved: we are, as Newman said, rebels who must lay down our arms.” C.S. Lewis

This is an easy mistake to make because we tend to measure right and wrong in relative terms.



Pain Gets Our Attention

“And pain is not only immediately recognizable evil, but evil impossible to ignore. We can rest contentedly in our sins and in our stupidities; and anyone who has watched gluttons shoveling down the most exquisite foods as if they did not know what they were eating, will admit that we can ignore even pleasure. But pain insists upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pain: it is His megaphone to rouse a deaf world. A bad man, happy, is a man without the least inkling that his actions do not ‘answer’, that they are not in accord with the laws of the universe.” C.S. Lewis

Never under-estimate the lengths to which God will go to ensure we have opportunities to turn to Him.



Pain Gets Our Attention

“No doubt Pain as God’s megaphone is a terrible instrument; it may lead to final and un-repentent rebellion. But it gives the only opportunity the bad man can have for amendment. It removes the veil; it plants the flag of truth within the fortress of a rebel soul.” C.S. Lewis

Pain is intended to get our attention and make us better, but it also the potential to make us bitter.



When Life is Disagreeable

“As St Augustine says somewhere, ‘God wants to give us something, but cannot, because our hands are full—there’s nowhere for Him to put it.’ Or as a friend of mine said, ‘We regard God as an airman regards his parachute; it’s there for emergencies but he hopes he’ll never have to use it.’ Now God, who has made us, knows what we are and that our happiness lies in Him. Yet we will not seek it in Him as long as He leaves us any other resort where it can even plausibly be looked for. While what we call ‘our own life’ remains agreeable we will not surrender it to Him. What then can God do in our interests but make ‘our own life’ less agreeable to us, and take away the plausible source of false happiness?” C.S. Lewis

We are never more likely to seek God than when we hurt. An easy life to an unrepentant soul is no gift.



In All Things – God is Good

“Let me implore the reader to try to believe, if only for the moment, that God, who made these deserving people, may really be right when He thinks that their modest prosperity and the happiness of their children are not enough to make them blessed: that all this must fall from them in the end, and that if they have not learned to know Him they will be wretched. And therefore He troubles them, warning them in advance of an insufficiency that one day they will have to discover.” C.S. Lewis

Mark 8:36-37

For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? NKJV



Sad Truth – Great Truth

“If God were proud He would hardly have us on such terms: but He is not proud, He stoops to conquer, He will have us even though we have shown that we prefer everything else to Him, and come to Him because there is ‘nothing better’ now to be had. It is hardly complimentary to God that we should choose Him as an alternative to Hell: yet even this He accepts.” C.S. Lewis

Psalms 57:1

Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy! I look to you for protection. I will hide beneath the shadow of your wings until the danger passes by.



Pain is often necessary.

“Prostitutes are in no danger of finding their present life so satisfactory that they cannot turn to God: the proud, the avaricious, the self-righteous, are in that danger.” C.S. Lewis

If you think about it, those who seem so blessed in this life may be the least blessed among us.



A Compelling Question

“It has sometimes been asked whether God commands certain things because they are right, or whether certain things are right because God commands them. With Hooker, and against Dr. Johnson, I emphatically embrace the first alternative.” C.S. Lewis

Does the law affirm right or create it?



Pain Hurts

“If I knew any way of escape I would crawl through sewers to find it. But what is the good of telling you about my feelings? You know them already: they are the same as yours. I am not arguing that pain is not painful. Pain hurts. That is what the word means. I am only trying to show that the old Christian doctrine of being made ‘perfect through suffering’ is not incredible. To prove it palatable is beyond my design.” C.S. Lewis

It is a somewhat terrifying truth that pain stalks us all through this life and we fight to avoid the very condition that helps us most.



Pain is an ugly friend.

“Then, slowly and reluctantly, bit by bit, I try to bring myself into the frame of mind that I should be in at all times. I remind myself that all these toys were never intended to possess my heart, that my true good is in another world and my only real treasure is Christ. And perhaps, by God’s grace, I succeed, and for a day or two become a creature consciously dependent on God and drawing it’s strength from the right sources. But the moment the threat is withdrawn, my whole nature leaps back to the toys: I am even anxious, God forgive me, to banish from my mind the only thing that supported me under the threat because it is now associated with the misery of those few days.

” C.S. Lewis

**We hurt – God comforts – our thinking is corrected –
then pain retreats – then we retreat from God.**



Poverty is Pain

“Of poverty—the affliction which actually or potentially includes all other afflictions—I would not dare to speak as from myself; and those who reject Christianity will not be moved by Christ’s statement that poverty is blessed. But here a rather remarkable fact comes to my aid. Those who would most scornfully repudiate Christianity as a mere ‘opiate of the people’ have a contempt for the rich, that is, for all mankind except the poor. They regard the poor as the only people worth preserving from ‘liquidation’, and place in them the only hope of the human race. But this is not compatible with a belief that the effects of poverty on those who suffer it are wholly evil; it even implies that they are good. The Marxist thus finds himself in real agreement with the Christian in those two beliefs which Christianity paradoxically demands—that poverty is blessed and yet ought to be removed.” C.S. Lewis

Matthew 5:3

"God blesses those who are poor and realize their need for him"



All Suffering is Good?

“But if suffering is good, ought it not to be pursued rather than avoided? I answer that suffering is not good in itself. What is good in any painful experience is, for the sufferer, his submission to the will of God, and, for the spectators, the compassion aroused and the acts of mercy to which it leads.” C.S. Lewis

Were there no eternal consequences we could argue that all pain is bad.



Pain Gives Perspective

“The Christian doctrine of suffering explains, I believe, a very curious fact about the world we live in. The settled happiness and security which we all desire, God withholds from us by the very nature of the world: but joy, pleasure, and merriment, He has scattered broadcast. We are never safe, but we have plenty of fun, and some ecstasy. Our Father refreshes us on the journey with some pleasant inns, but will not encourage us to mistake them for home.” C.S. Lewis

Many tastes of Heaven in this life, but not so many that we cease to desire it.



A Great Mystery

“The problem is not simply that of a God who consigns some of His creatures to final ruin. That would be the problem if we were Mahometans. Christianity, true, as always, to the complexity of the real, presents us with something knottier and more ambiguous—a God so full of mercy that He becomes man and dies by torture to avert that final ruin from His creatures, and who yet, where that heroic remedy fails, seems unwilling, or even unable, to arrest the ruin by an act of mere power. And here is the real problem: so much mercy, yet still there is Hell.” c.s. Lewis

Romans 11:33

Oh, how great are God's riches and wisdom and knowledge! How impossible it is for us to understand his decisions and his ways!



Questions / Comments

