

A REASON FOR ADVERSITY

TIME CAN BLUNT THE STING OF EMOTIONAL
PAIN. BUT UNDERSTANDING WHERE IT FITS IN
GOD'S WILL CAN PUT IT TO REST

By, Charles R. Chesnutt, Sr.

BIBLEBOOKS.CO

For God so loved the world
that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whosoever believes in Him
should not perish but have everlasting life.

John 3:16

BIBLEBOOKS.CO

“Buy the Truth and sell it not.”
Proverbs 23:23

©2017 by Charles R. Chesnutt, Sr. all rights other than those
expressly relinquished below are reserved:

Relinquishment of Rights

This copy or any successive copy of this copy may be freely download-
ed, translated into any language, copied, printed and/or distributed in
whole or in part, digitally or in print, neither redacted nor altered from
its original meaning, without any fee or further permission from the
publisher. But it may not be sold.

Distributed copies or parts of copies must contain this page. Quotations
need only provide appropriate credit with BIBLEBOOKS.CO as publisher.

Revisions of this work are determined by the date published.

This edition was published on November 12, 2017.

Preface

The author, an attorney and graduate of Dallas Theological Seminary, addresses the problem of pain with the conviction that scripture is inspired by the Holy Spirit and is wholly without error. Accordingly, this book is an uncompromising demand for scriptural consistency and truth – whether it bodes good or ill for how one may prefer to view God. The reason for this approach is not simply to grasp the truth, but to honor the Creator, who, for His own reasons, has made us in the way that He chose and is in no need of apology.



This book is an examination of scripture for the purpose of understanding why God, being both just and good, permits pain and tragedy to occur to those He loves.

The problem of pain is a canker in the faith of many and a stumbling block for many more. But there are excellent reasons why the Creator has created a world that contains both pleasure and pain. The failure to confront the more difficult scriptures directly and see the whole fabric of His creation as a whole obscures the reality of God's true character and leads the Christian to a place where God is re-defined and made into something that He is not.

Ultimately, if God is God, He is responsible for all things including adversity and pain. Ironically, when one confronts this difficult truth with blunt honesty and simply accepts the plain words of scripture, the circumventions that we often use to color our conception of God begin to fade and an unexpected consistency and faith emerges.

As I wrote this book it became evident that the avoidance of adversity is of equal, if not more, importance than the reason for it. I therefore addressed that issue in the last half of the book.

Charles R. Chesnutt

Navigation

The navigation click-points for this book are located at the bottom right of each page. The click entitled RETURN TO PREVIOUS PAGE will take the reader back to the last page viewed. This click-point, however, works only with a recent Adobe Reader or similar program. To enable its use in the Adobe Reader the viewer must be set to display each page individually. To do this, click on the small page icon with four arrows in the top middle of the Adobe screen.

The CONTENTS click-point will take the reader back to the Contents where a click on any page number will take him to that page.

The BIBLEBOOKS.CO click-point will take the reader to the Biblebooks website.

Clicking on a reference in [SMALL BLUE TYPE](#) anywhere will take the reader to page indicated.

It is our hope and prayer that this work, and others published by Biblebooks.co, will be both helpful and edifying to you.

Charles Chesnutt

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter 1		
The Theological Problem of Pain		8
WHY DOES GOD PERMIT ADVERSITY?		
Chapter 2		
God is God Despite the Opinions of Man		9
SOME RELIGIONS RE-DEFINE THE GOD OF SCRIPTURE TO CREATE A GOD WHO IS MORE ADAPTABLE TO UNSCRIPTURAL BELIEFS		
The God of Scripture is Sovereign.	10	
Chapter 3		
A Reason for Adversity		19
MANKIND WITHOUT ADVERSITY IS MANKIND WITHOUT RELEVANCE		
Chapter 4		
Righteousness is Eternal		28
RIGHTEOUSNESS IS FORGED ON THE ANVIL OF ADVERSITY AND IT IS ETERNAL.		
Chapter 5		
Adversity Can Be Avoided by Obedience		37
FOOLS...BECAUSE OF THEIR INIQUITIES, WERE AFFLICTED		

Chapter 6		
Adversity in Relationships		43
NOT ALL RELATIONSHIPS ARE WISE		
Avoiding the Tragedy of the Unscriptural Marriage	46	
Chapter 7		
Marital Adversity Can Be Avoided		52
MUTUAL OBEDIENCE TO SCRIPTURE CREATES AN EXCELLENT MARRIAGE		
Chapter 8		
Peace in the Midst of Adversity		58
HE WHO DOES THESE THINGS WILL NEVER BE SHAKEN		
Chapter 9		
Confronting Adversity		65
ADVERSITIES ARE MADE TO BE CONFRONTED		
Prayer	65	
Chapter 10		
Love and Death		67
GOD GIVES TWO TYPES OF LIFE. ONE IS OUR LIFE AND THE OTHER IS HIS LIFE. ONLY ONE OF THEM ENDS.		
Hell and the Second Death	70	
The Soul is Who We Really Are	70	

We Are God's Vinyard 71
Eternal Life 72
Hope for the Unredeemed 73

Chapter 11
Christ in Pain 75
GOD HAS NOT EXEMPTED HIMSELF FROM PAIN

Chapter 12
Conclusion 78

Chapter 13
For Those Who Question 81
KNOWING GOD.
To the Atheist 85

Chapter 1

The Theological Problem of Pain

WHY DOES GOD PERMIT ADVERSITY?

Perhaps in the end we will find that the problem of pain and adversity lies at the center of all Christian doubt.

Indeed, there is no more challenging argument to the Christian than the argument “If God is a loving God and if He is all powerful, then how could He allow pain and adversity?” This argument is a formidable challenge to our faith, but it is only facade that covers the deeper challenge: “Is there a God at all?”

If the answer to that question is “If there is a God, then He is either not loving or He is not all powerful because He permits pain and adversity to exist and He could stop it.”

The argument continues, “The first baby born without arms is an irrefutable argument that a loving caring God does not exist.” Or, another argument, “Who is this God who could prevent the untimely death of a mother or a father or a child, but does not do so? Or “How can a loving God allow disasters, disease and hunger? Why does He stand by when horrible crimes are committed? Why am I dying?”

How can this loving God allow deformities, idiocy, obesity, dwarfism, and ugliness? How can He who can prevent them allow accidents and life-long losses? How can He permit suicide, divorce, adultery, cancer, blindness, insanity and all manner of other tragedies both physical and emotional? How could a loving God permit slavery and holocausts and children who just go wrong and never come back? If He is a loving God, how can He permit our heart to be ripped apart?

Ironically, it is only after we have the courage to challenge Him with these questions that His presence and power become real—and the true strength of scripture becomes evident. Challenges like these prove Him. We challenge Him only to discover that He invites the challenge and He emerges as a shining Truth out of the cobwebs of avoided issues and circumvented doctrines. When we challenge Him head-on for who He is we see more clearly than ever that He is indeed righteous, loving, just and more magnificent than we will ever know.

So let us take a leap of faith and face the Problem of Pain head-on and see where scripture takes us.



Chapter 2

God is God Despite the Opinions of Man

SOME RELIGIONS RE-DEFINE THE GOD OF
SCRIPTURE TO CREATE A GOD WHO IS MORE
ADAPTABLE TO UNSCRIPTURAL BELIEFS

God has created us the way we are for a *very* good reason, and He has given us no choice in the matter. He has done what He has done but He leaves us free to accept Him or reject Him.

One thing we must not do, however, is to pretend that He is something that He is not. It is foolhardy to ignore scripture in order to accommodate our own distaste for the way that He has fashioned us, because He is who He is despite any opinion to the contrary.

But who is He? The God of scripture is eternal.¹ He existed before man and He created man,² and He will exist for the rest of eternity.³ Therefore, He exists apart from man and is not dependent upon man for any aspect of His existence. God is God notwithstanding what we think of Him.

Whether we accept Him, agree with Him, love Him, reject Him, hate Him, follow Him or try to make Him into our own image, He is who He is. And all of our pretense, fabrications and rejections of scripture will not change Him. So, let us concern ourselves first with the God of the Bible and then, and only then, permit ourselves to depart if we find Him to be anything less than exactly what He says He is: love.⁴

If we do not wish Him to be who He is or if we do not wish Him to do what He does, it does no matter because He simply is. Indeed, His name is "I AM THAT I AM"⁵ which means "The Self-existent One." We cannot change Him, nor can He change Himself. He is immutable (unchangeable).⁶ If we examine Him and find Him not to be to our liking, it is of no moment, because He is still God.

1. Deuteronomy 33:27 "The eternal God is thy refuge ..."

2. Genesis 1:26 "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness..."

3. Psalms 104:31 "The glory of the Lord shall endure forever..."

4. First John 4:8 "...God is love."

5. Exodus 3:2 "And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM ... thus shall thou say unto the children of Israel ..."

6. Malachi 3:6 "For I am the LORD. I change not..."

To construct a different god and worship it is idolatry. There is only one God, and He is a jealous God.⁷ He will not receive the worship of those who worship another god—even if they call him Jehovah.

The God of Scripture is Sovereign.

God of is sovereign over all things.⁸ He is all-powerful⁹ and all-knowing,¹⁰ and as such, He foreknew each of us.¹¹ He knows the number of the hairs on our head¹² and is aware of every sparrow that falls.¹³ He creates man and all things¹⁴ and He executes His will.¹⁵ He heals,¹⁶ guides,¹⁷ directs,¹⁸ answers prayer,¹⁹ manifests himself (makes Himself known) to those who love and obey Him;²⁰ He lives in each

7. Exodus 20:5 “Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image ... thou shalt not bow down thyself to them ... for I, the LORD thy God *am* a jealous God visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* ...” (the First Commandment); Exodus. 34:14; De 4:24, 5:9, 6:15; Jos 24:19; Na 1:2; 1 Corinthians 10:22.

8. Psalms 103:19 “The Lord hath prepared His throne in the heavens; and His kingdom ruleth over all.”

9. Revelation 19:6 “... the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.” Job 42:2; Genesis 18:14; Matthew 19:26. God, however, cannot or will not deny Himself. For instance, He cannot sin.

10. 1 John 3:19 “... For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.” Job 37:16; Psalms 147:5 “...His understanding is infinite.”

11. Romans 9:29 “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of His Son ...”; 1 Peter 1:2 “...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father ...”; see also Acts 2:23 and Romans 11:2.

12. Matthew 10:30 “But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.”

13. Matthew 10:29 “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.”

14. Genesis 1. (Entire chapter)

15. Isaiah 14:24 “The Lord of hosts hath sworn, saying, Surely as I have thought, so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed, so shall it stand...”

16. Deuteronomy 32:39 “I am He and there is no god with me...I heal.”

17. Psalms 32:8 “I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go; I will guide thee with mine eye.”

18. Psalms 23:3 “...He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for His name’s sake.”

19. John 14:13 “And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.” Hebrews 4:16 “Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.”

20. John 14:21 “He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.”

person who obeys Him and who loves Him,²¹ gives wisdom to everyone who asks for it,²² brings righteousness to each one who wants it,²³ protects,²⁴ provides,²⁵ gives true freedom,²⁶ removes sin²⁷ and instills within each person who is willing an immense and profound internal peace, which, once discovered, is more marvelous than anything that this earth has to offer.²⁸

This God who is constantly with us and is all powerful is fully capable of delivering each of us from all pain and tragedy and insulating us from harm and sin, either our own sin or the sin of others.

This God could place us in a world where no baby is born without arms, where no one dies, where no disease afflicts, no crime injures, no accident maims, no war kills, no greed steals and no tear is ever shed. But He did not (However, at a later time He will²⁹). God who created each of us and who knows the hairs on our heads³⁰ is more than capable of healing any disease that we may ever encounter and instantly delivering us from persecution, hatred, crime, injury, debt, loss, lawsuit, disease, pain or death. And He, more than any force in the universe, is able to protect us and our loved ones from anything. But He does not always do so. Why?

21. John 14:23 "If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

22. James 1:5 "If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith..."

23. Romans 5:17 "...they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness ..."; Romans 4:11 "... that righteousness may be imputed unto them..."

24. Psalms 50:15 "And call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee..."

25. Matthew 6:33 "But seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you."

26. John 8:36 "If the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed"; John 8:32 "If you continue in my word, *then* are you my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free."

27. Psalms 107:3 "As far as the east is from the west, *so* far hath He removed our transgressions from us."

28. Philippians 4:7 "And the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

29. Revelation 21:4 "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."

30. Luke 12:7 "But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

Let us not delude ourselves by creating a theology that teaches that God is not responsible for adversity. Because God certainly is responsible for adversity. He is responsible for all things, including every tragedy and every pain and loss that has ever occurred because He is all knowing³¹ and all powerful.³²

God does not directly cause all tragedies, but He certainly permits them.³³ He created forces of nature and fashioned every microbe and virus that is responsible for every disease and He created evil people who kill and injure others. He knows when people will be born with defects and He permits it anyway. Scripture tells us clearly that the God of the Bible created all things.³⁴ He knows in advance of each tragedy that will happen.³⁵ He who created Mother Theresa also created Adolph Hitler and effectively hammered His own son to a cross and left Him to die an absolutely excruciating death. He created every saint, every sinner, every taker and every giver, every disease and every recovery, every pain and every pleasure on this earth. He alone determines when men shall live and when men shall die and the pain that they will suffer in between.

Although God is the Creator of those who commit sin, He is not the author of sin.³⁶ Sin is a free choice made by man to ignore the will of God and to engage in acts that result in spiritual death.³⁷ God neither sins, nor causes sin nor does He tempt anyone to sin.³⁸ God creates the sinner but it is the sinner who independently sins. But God is ultimately responsible for both because He created both the sinner and the sin.

For this same reason, one cannot argue that the omnipotent God is not responsible for adversity because it is somehow part of his “permissive” will rather than His “sovereign” will. This distinction makes no

31. Hebrews 4:13 “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with Whom we have to do.”

32. Revelation 19:6 “...for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.”

33. Job 1:12 “And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold, all that he [Job] hath *is* in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand..”

34. Colossians 1:16 "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him."

35. Hebrews 4:13 “...all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of Him...”

36. Deuteronomy 32:4 “All His ways are right.” Job 34:12 “Surely God will not act wickedly, and the Almighty will not pervert justice.”

37. Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

38. James 1:13 “...God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth He any man; but every man is tempted when he is drawn away of his own lust...”

difference whatever because God is omnipotent³⁹ and omniscient,⁴⁰ all powerful and all knowing⁴¹ and He alone determines what will occur. This means that nothing happens of which He is not aware; nothing happens that He does not permit; and nothing happens that He does not ultimately cause. Exculpating God by saying that a tragedy occurred because of different parts of His will—or because His back was turned—is saying that God is not omnipotent and not in control of all things. This argument is unscriptural and unnecessary. God is ultimately responsible for everything and He has no need to be exculpated from anything.

Many simply do not accept that God is the author of tragedy because they do not wish the God whom they worship to have any part in adversity. But God Himself announces that He directly creates evil:

I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace,
and create evil;⁴² I the Lord do all these things.⁴³

Therefore, when scripture says that we should fear God,⁴⁴ it means exactly that. He did not promise that life would be a bed of rose petals; He promised that it would be a garden of roses and thorns. Jesus warns us to fear God because God not only kills but casts some into hell after He has finished killing:

39. Revelation 19:6 "... the Lord God omnipotent reigneth." Job 42:2; Genesis 18:14; Matthew 19:26.

40. 1 John 3:19 "... For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Job 37:16; Psalms 147:5 "...His understanding is infinite."

41. 1 John 3:20 "For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Matthew 10:29 "

42. The Hebrew word that is translated "evil" in this passage can mean 1) evil as in a malicious, immoral act, or 2) evil as in a disaster (as translated in the NIV) or "harm" (as translated in Jeremiah 39:12 (KJV)) or 3) it can mean a consequence which is the result of an evil act of men, as in, "Woe to them that are at ease in Zion...ye that put far away the evil day...and drink wine in bowls...but they are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." (Amos 6:1,3,6). When Isaiah 45:7 is read with Deuteronomy 32:4, Job 34:12 and James 1:13, it is clear that its meaning cannot be 1, but is instead either 2 or 3. See Harris, L., Archer, G., Waltke, B. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. Chicago: Moody Press. 1980. Print. s.v. 2191 at page 854 vol. 2. See also Keil, C.F., Delitzsch, F. *Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans. 1975. Print. Vol. VII, p. 221 (Isaiah 45:7).

43. Isaiah 45:7; the Hebrew translated "evil" is better rendered "tragedy", as it is in the New American Standard Version.

44. Deuteronomy 6:13 "Thou shalt fear the Lord thy God, and serve Him..."

And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him who, after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him.⁴⁵

So Jesus tells us that God kills and casts into hell. Of course He does! He is God. He alone determines when each of our bodies will die. The term “kill” refers to those who die suddenly or violently, so the verse clearly refers to God killing the body and casting the soul into hell. And, indeed, not only does He kill, but He *destines* some to be disobedient and to stumble:

Behold, I lay in Zion a Chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on Him shall not be confounded. Unto you therefore which believe *He is* precious; but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed...⁴⁶

And God chooses:

Therefore hath he mercy on whom He will *have mercy*, and whom He will He hardeneth. You will say then unto me, Why does He yet find fault? For who has resisted His will? Nay but, O man, who are you to reply against God? Shall the thing formed say to Him that formed *it*, Why have you made me thus?⁴⁷

So God chooses some and does not choose others and ultimately casts some into hell.

At this point we must address a prevalent scriptural error regarding the hell. It is certainly true that hell exists and God does cast souls into hell, but except for Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet who lead

45. Luke 12:4-5 (emphasis supplied).

46. 1 Peter 2:6-8

47. Romans 9:18-20

world into death and destruction, He does not burn anyone alive forever. The doctrine of eternal torment for all unbelievers is a Catholic myth and it is gross theological error and is nowhere in scripture.⁴⁸

The eternal fate of unbelievers is death, not eternal torment. Those who reject Christ will, in the end, die and remain dead for the rest of eternity. They will not be burned alive forever. The Bible contains 50 scriptures that teach death as the ultimate fate of those who reject Christ, the chief of which are Ezekiel 18:4 ("The soul that sins shall die") and Romans 6:23 ("The wages of sin is death"). The Bible specifically teaches that the unredeemed will be cast into the lake of fire and there they will die in the "second death."⁴⁹ Eternal torment for anyone but Satan, the antichrist and the false prophet is nowhere in scripture.

The argument for eternal torment arises from the fact that some scriptures are broad enough to support either eternal death or eternal torment. But there is no scripture that actually teaches eternal torment for unbelievers; *every* single scripture that addresses the eternal fate of the unredeemed either says death or points to it. This includes passages that allude to eternal punishment⁵⁰ because the unredeemed will be punished eternally, to be sure, but that eternal punishment is death, not eternal torment.

The unredeemed souls who rejected Christ will face the consequence of their sins in hell. But in the end, hell and death will be cast into the lake of fire, which will be the second death for both of them.⁵¹ God creates a new heavens and a new earth where there is no more pain and no more sorrow⁵² and no more hell. Thus, many of the lost souls who die will receive exactly what they expect (eternal death). God will not resurrect them for the purpose of burning them alive forever. He does not predestine anyone to that fate.

48. See the author's [FATE OF UNBELIEVERS](http://biblebooks.co) at biblebooks.co

49. Revelation 21:8 "...unbelieving...and all liars...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

50. Matthew 25:46; Second Thessalonians 1:9; Jude 1:7.

51. Revelation 20:14 "... Death and Hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

52. Revelation 21:1 "And he shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying or pain; the first things have passed away..."

It is for this reason that scripture tells of two deaths, not just one. In the first death the body dies;⁵³ and in the second death the soul dies.⁵⁴

Unless the soul is saved through Christ, in the end it will die⁵⁵ because of sin.⁵⁶ All have been thoroughly warned⁵⁷ and given the opportunity to be saved through Christ.⁵⁸

The only escape of eternal death is to appropriate the work of Jesus Christ who paid the wage of sin for us by *dying* for us in our place on the cross.⁵⁹

It is essential for us to understand that the doctrine of eternal torment of the unbeliever is error because when we understand that God is truly sovereign it is essential to understand that He does not predestine anyone to burn in hell forever. Instead, some live and some die. So what else is new?

Some Christian denominations re-define God to become less fearsome, less responsible and not really in control. They create a god who neither interferes nor creates nor does anything unpleasant. In this way they lead their congregations away from the Creator, away from scripture, away from salvation by faith in Christ and into lives that will eventually end in eternal death.

One does not have to look far in scripture to see that God is far from the neutered god described by apostate churches. The God of the Bible is fearsome. Love and acceptance are not His only attributes. The God of scripture is also the eternal judge and in control of all things. He is the ultimate cause of everything, including tragedies.

53. Hebrews 9:27 "And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment..."

54. Revelation 21:8 "... their part [their soul and resurrected body] will be in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death."

55. Ezekiel 18:4 "The soul who sins shall die."

56. Romans 6:23 "The wages of sin is death."

57. See Appendix 1

58. Revelation 22:17 "Come." And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who wishes take the water of life without cost."

59. See *Believe in God* which may be downloaded from biblebooks.co

For instance, He drowned every human on the face of the earth except for one family because of the wickedness of mankind—this obviously included infants.⁶⁰ He predestinated His own people, the Israelites, to be enslaved and mistreated in Egypt for 400 years;⁶¹ He turned the hearts of the Egyptians against them⁶² and strengthened Pharaoh's resolve not to respond to the signs of Moses and his demand to let the Israelites go.⁶³ He then proceeded to visit a series of miraculous tragedies upon the people of Egypt and when Pharaoh would not let the children of Israel go He killed all of the first born of Egypt, including innocent babies (this is the Passover).⁶⁴ In order to protect the Israelites, whom He had predestinated to be slaves in Egypt, He drowned an army of Egyptians who were required to follow the orders of Pharaoh.⁶⁵ He caused the Chaldeans to attack Jerusalem punish Israel for idolatry and He sent all of Israel into captivity.⁶⁶ He killed 50,070 men just because certain members of their tribe looked into the Ark of the Covenant,⁶⁷ and when He was angered He directly killed some of His own people⁶⁸

60. Genesis 6:5 "And God saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually... And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them."

61. Genesis 15:13 "And He said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land *that is* not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years."

62. Psalm 105:24, 25 "He caused His people to be very fruitful, and made them stronger than their adversaries. He turned their heart to hate His people, to deal craftily with His servants..."

63. Exodus 7:3 "And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and multiply my signs and my wonders in the land of Egypt. But Pharaoh shall not harken unto you, that I may lay my hand upon Egypt, and bring forth mine armies, and my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great judgments"

64. Exodus 11:1, 4-5 "And the LORD said unto Moses, Yet will I bring one plague *more* upon Pharaoh, and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go ...About midnight will I go out into the midst of Egypt. And all the first-born in the land of Egypt shall die..."

65. Exodus 14:27 "And the waters returned, and covered the chariots, and the horsemen, *and* all the host of Pharaoh that came into the sea after them; there remained no so much as one of them."

66. Jeremiah 32:26 "Therefore thus saith the LORD; Behold, I will give this city into the hand of the Chaldeans, and unto the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he shall take it."

67. 1 Samuel. 6:19 "He smote the men of Bethshemesh because they had looked into the ark of the LORD..."

68. Numbers 11:1 "And *when* the people complained, it displeased the Lord: and the Lord heard *it*; and His anger was kindled: and the fire of the Lord burnt among them, and consumed *them that were* in the uttermost parts of the camp."

and sent a plague among them.⁶⁹ He destroyed every inhabitant of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them alive, except for the family of Lot.⁷⁰ He sent His own Son to be crucified and die a horrible death to pay for the sins of others.⁷¹ And He states with absolute clarity that in the end of days, when mankind returns to legitimized sin and debauchery as in of the days of Noah (which the world has now accomplished),⁷² the world will suffer unprecedented destruction and pain.⁷³

Considering the character of God as revealed in scripture and considering the litany of tragedies that God has inflicted on man one thing is imminently clear and that is that in the eyes of God, death of the body is not the ultimate tragedy.

Make no mistake about it. The God of scripture is not only love and acceptance.⁷⁴ He is fearsome and in total control. We best see Him as God indeed and obey Him to the very letter. Fear Him.

But, although He is fearsome and wrathful, He is also the cause of every moment of every love, every act of kindness, every self-sacrifice, every help, every touch, every faithful friend and supportive and loving spouse, every caring mother and father, every honest word, every birth, and every beautiful and wonderful thing on this earth.

So, let us simply admit that He is who He is whether we like it or not. But in our admitting let us admit *all* that He is. Let us presume that these scriptures are true, as is all of scripture, and have the courage see where it leads us. Let us look at this God, who is at once the author of tragedy and ecstasy, the giver of comfort and pain, the author of eternal life and eternal death, and let us ask the most difficult of questions:

Why?



69. Numbers 11:33 "...the wrath of the Lord was kindled against the people, and the Lord smote the people with a very great plague."

70. Genesis 19:24 "Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire..." For many, this teaching is beyond the scope of rational belief. That is His intent. He wants us to make a free choice, just like the people of Sodom made a free choice.

71. Romans 5:8 "While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

72. Matthew 24:37 "But as the days of Noah *were*, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be."

73. See Revelation chapters 6 - 13..

74. First John 4:8 "...God is love."

Chapter 3

A Reason for Adversity

MANKIND WITHOUT ADVERSITY IS MANKIND
WITHOUT RELEVANCE

God places us in a world where He is not immediately evident.

He places us in a world of borders, limits that is in the middle of a limitless universe. We struggle and we die in a thankless world. But during the process we discover things like honor, love, charity, goodness, righteousness and wisdom. Gradually we perceive that there is a spiritual side to life, a spiritual plane that is superimposed upon the physical. We live in both of them. But why does God do it this way? What does He accomplish with this obscurity and why the pain?

He has created us the way we are for good reason; and for good reason He has placed fallible men into a world of crumbling virtues, ecstasies and pain. The reason for this and the reason why He permits—and creates—adversity is because He is using it to create eternal value: righteousness.

We are His chosen agents, chosen to express and to create things like honor, fidelity, honesty, kindness, forgiveness, acceptance, integrity and to express on earth what God is: love.¹

The problem is that virtues that express righteousness and love cannot exist in a vacuum. They must have their counterparts. The counterpart of honor is dishonor; the counterpart of fidelity is betrayal; the counterpart of honesty is dishonesty; the counterpart of kindness is cruelty and the counterpart of integrity is deceit. What inherent good is honor if one cannot choose dishonor, what good is kindness if we are not free to be unkind?

Adversity and its fears and losses create the background for the acquisition of righteousness, spiritual strength, patience and love. Like a white ferret invisible on a snowy hill, righteousness is invisible without its counterparts.

Righteousness is not possible without choice and choice is irrelevant without adversity. Mankind without adversity would not be man and man must be free to sin if his choice not to sin is to have any relevance at all. If man is free to give, he must also be free to take. If he is free to love, he must also be free to reject. He must have free will to be real.

1. First John 4:8 "...God is love."

Of all of the miracles that Christ performed, not one of them altered the free will of anyone. Nowhere does scripture make this more evident than in the case of John the Baptist. When the Baptist was imprisoned, Christ was beginning His ministry and performing miracle after miracle. Christ changed water into wine.² He healed the sick³ and gave sight to the blind⁴ and paid the temple tax from coins taken from the mouths of fishes,⁵ but He left John the Baptist in prison to die. Why? Because He would not interfere with the free will of Herod. The Baptist fell victim to a tyrant and the whim of a depraved young girl. The soldiers of Herod came to the Baptist's cell and cut off his head and presented it to the girl on a platter.⁶ Christ did nothing to stop it.

God has a reason for creating a world in moral free-fall where young girls and potentates can place the heads of prophets upon platters. There is a reason why we live in a world where free will is unrestrained and crooked politicians, tyrants, criminals and sin blossom like spring weeds. It is no accident.

The Creator has placed us in a fallen world where the only currency of true value is coins of righteousness and virtue, coins of honesty and honor, truth and wisdom, justice and mercy, fidelity, diligence, reliability, generosity, service, sharing, giving, loving and others. These are the only things that can produce real value. All the rest die with our body.

God has created us to live in a world that is devoid of its own moral compass and He has given us a blank check called free will so that we can invest in good. And when it is over, He will ask us what we did with it.

2. John 2:8 "Jesus told the servants, "Fill the jars with water." So they filled them to the brim. Now draw some out, He said, and take it to the master of the banquet. They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine."

3. Matthew 8:3 "Jesus reached out His hand and touched the man. "I am willing," He said, "be clean." And immediately his leprosy was cleansed..."

4. John 9:6,7 "Jesus...spat on the ground, made some mud, and applied it to the man's eyes. Then He told him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So the man went and washed, and came back seeing."

5. Matthew 17:27 "Go thou to the sea, and cast an hook, and take up the fish that first cometh up; and when thou hast opened his mouth, thou shalt find a piece of money: that take, and give unto them for me and thee."

6. Mark 6:20-28

We are born to sin, and destined to encounter the refiner's fire. It has to be like that because fidelity rises from temptation and generosity is engendered by want. Faith comes from fear and uncertainty. Our Father takes sinners and turns them into gold and creates beauty from ashes: *us*.

...To give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LORD⁷

Behold, I have refined thee...I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.⁸

And I will ... refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The LORD is my God'⁹

Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness: let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the Lord have created it.¹⁰

It will come about in all the land," Declares the LORD, "That two parts in it will be cut off and perish; But the third will be left in it."And I will bring the third part through the fire, Refine them as silver is refined, And test them as gold is tested. They will call on My name, And I will answer them; I will say, 'They are My people,' And they will say, 'The LORD is my God'¹¹

7. Isaiah 61:3

8. Isaiah 45:6-10

9. Zechariah 13:8

10. Isaiah 45:8

11. Zechariah 13:8

God is a creator and His creating is not limited to the creation of all physical life. He also creates beauty, both physical beauty and moral beauty (righteousness). He creates good. He is in the business of transforming bad to good and changing tragedy into ecstasy.

But in us, He has taken a step beyond simple creation and created a living being that can itself create good. And He has imbued with all of the elements necessary to do this. He has given us both free will and a sin nature so that when we choose right it is significant. He gives us real opportunity to choose the right and shun the wrong and thereby create an eternal instance of righteousness—a commodity of immense value. We are the instruments of good, the vessels of His righteousness. *We are* the beauty that He has created.

It is difficult when we experience the refiner's fire when it burns white-hot. But we are told not to question His wisdom:

Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker! *Let* the potsherds *strive* with the potsherds of the earth. Shall the clay say to Him that fashioneth it, what makest thou? Or Thy work, He hath no hands?

Woe unto him that saith unto *his* father, what begettest thou? Or to the woman, what hast thou brought forth?¹²

The concept of righteousness may seem obscure to many, but to God, it is massive. God values righteousness *exceedingly*, and He hates unrighteousness.¹³ Righteousness, or rather the lack of it, was the reason for the fall of man; it is the reason for eternal judgment—eternal life or eternal death—and it is the reason for the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. When He looks upon us, He does not see our body, but our heart. He

12. Isaiah 45:6-10

13. Ezekiel 3:20 “When the righteous turneth away from his righteousness, and committeth iniquity, *and* doeth according to all the abominations that the wicked *man* doeth, shall he live? All his righteousness that he hath done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he hath trespassed, and in his sin that he hath sinned, in them shall he die.”-

sees our intent, our sincerity¹⁴ and He understands that He has created us as imperfect beings.¹⁵ And He searches our heart and deals with us according to what He sees.¹⁶

Anyone who does not recognize how important righteousness is to God does not know God.¹⁷ Righteousness *now, in this life* is overwhelmingly important. The decision to accept the righteousness of Christ results in eternal life,¹⁸ and the decision not to accept the righteousness of Christ results in eternal death.¹⁹ Obedience to God's Word may seem irrelevant in this fallen world, but in reality it is everything.

God *intends* it to be obscured with the temptations of the world.²⁰ Without the difficulty and without the obscurity, there is no issue to wrestle with; there is no choice, and without choice there is no righteousness. Righteousness is making a free choice to hear and to obey His words in the face of adversity, rather than choosing not hear and not to obey and capitulating to sin.²¹

14. First Samuel 16:7 "for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart."

15. First John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness... My little children, I am writing these things to you that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous."

16. Jeremiah 17:10 "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings." See also Isaiah 64:4-6 where God states that He meets with him that works righteousness, but in one sense our righteous acts can be as "filthy rags."

17. First John 3:9 "Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin; for His seed remaineth in him: and he cannot sin, because he is born of God."

18. John 10:28, 29 "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me: and I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of My hand."

19. Revelation 21:7,8 "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the cowardly, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

20. Isaiah 6:9,10 "And He said, Go, and tell this people, hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert and be healed."

21. Matthew 13:15 "For this people's heart is waxed gross, and *their* ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest at any time they should see with *their* eyes, and hear with *their* ears, and should understand with *their* heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. But blessed *are* your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear."

Adversity is the means of creating righteousness because adversity forces us to make difficult choices in the face of temptation and pain, and when those choices are wisely made, they are instances of righteousness. They are points of light in the darkness of an immoral world.

God has created us to create righteousness and to become both righteous and eternal. He has not created us to spend a lifetime churning self-aggrandizement like a mouse running in a golden spinning wheel. We were not created to wander through this world in search of wealth, power, pleasure or stoicism. We were created in His image. We were created to create. We were created to be independent agents of righteousness, creators of good.

We have been gifted with the inestimable gift of being able to create instances of good that *could not exist* but for the man or woman who made them. And, unlike sin which results in spiritual death,²² the righteousness that we create results in life and peace.²³ It is eternal:

As the whirlwind passeth, so is the wicked no *more*:
but the righteous is an everlasting foundation.²⁴

... the righteous [shall go into] life eternal.²⁵

...as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might
grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life
by Jesus Christ our Lord.²⁶

22. Romans 5:12 “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for all have sinned.” Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

23. Romans 8:6 “For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded [oriented toward righteousness] *is* life and peace.”

24. Proverbs 10:25

25. Matthew 25:46

26. Romans 5:21

Within scripture's continually reiterated concept of righteousness and obedience, God weaves numerous and specific shining facets. Among these facets are love (God is love²⁷), honesty,²⁸ integrity,²⁹ fidelity,³⁰ courage,³¹ diligence,³² love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, goodness, faith, humility, temperance [self-control]³³ kindness,³⁴ and others.

As we assimilate these qualities, they become consistent patterns of behavior and we become that person. These patterns of behavior are called virtues. Virtues are expressions of righteousness. These virtues are life³⁵ and they are eternal.³⁶ But they cannot exist without their counterparts.

Righteousness and virtue are by far the most prevalent aspects of all scripture. In the Old Testament, righteousness permeates the scripture from Cain and Able³⁷ to Judges;³⁸ it stretches from the Ten Commandments³⁹ to the prophet Malachi.⁴⁰ Righteousness is the reason for the

27. 1 John 4:8 "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love." The love in this passage is "agápe," which means a love that is wholly unconditional.

28. Romans 12:17 "Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men."

29. Psalms 25:21 "Let integrity and uprightness preserve me; for I wait upon thee." Proverbs 11:3 "The integrity of the upright shall guide them..."

30. Titus 2:2,10 "That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience ... shewing all good fidelity..."

31. Psalms 27:14 "Wait on the LORD: be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart..."; Psalms 31:24 "Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the LORD."

32. 2 Peter 1:5 "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge..."

33. Galatians 5:22 "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering [patience], gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness [humility], temperance [self-control]..."

34. 2 Peter 1:7 "And to godliness [add] brotherly kindness..."

35. Proverbs 12:28 "In the way of righteousness is life, And in its pathway there is no death."

36. Romans 8:10 "And if Christ *be* in you, the body *is* dead because of sin; but the Spirit *is* life because of righteousness."; Romans 8:6 "For to be carnally minded *is* death; but to be spiritually minded *is* life and peace."

37. Jude 1:11 "Woe unto them! for they have gone the way of Cain..."

38. Judges 21:25 "In those days...every man did that which was right in his own eyes."

39. Exodus 20

40. Malachi 2:17, 3:5 "Ye have wearied the LORD with your words. Yet ye say,

Old Testament law. It flows through Psalms like a river of purpose⁴¹ and forms the bedrock of Proverbs.⁴² It is the reason behind all of the prophets and it is the light of their prophecies.⁴³

In the New Testament, Christ was crucified to give the gift of righteousness⁴⁴ to those who were unrighteous in order to make them righteous.⁴⁵ Righteousness is the core of Christ's ministry and teachings; it is the reason for His death on the cross⁴⁶ and one of the goals of the resurrection is for us to be made in the righteous likeness of Christ.⁴⁷

Behind all the lessons, the themes, the drama, the history and all the teachings in all of scripture stands a silent giant: righteousness. And within that giant are honesty, fidelity, love, courage, wisdom, diligence, reliability, constancy, truth, generosity, honor and all other virtues.

It is no wonder that God has placed the apple of His eye (man) into a world where man himself can become the author of this eternal jewel.

Wherein have we wearied *Him*? When ye say, Every one that doeth evil *is* good...I will come near to you to judgment; and I will be a swift witness against the sorcerers, and against the adulterers, and against false swearers, and against those who oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless..."

41. Psalms 1:1 "Blessed is the man who walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord and in His law doth he meditate day and night." Psalms 11:7 "For the righteous LORD loveth righteousness; his countenance doth behold the upright."

42. Proverbs 21:12 "He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness and honor."

43. Isaiah "Drop down, ye heavens, from above, and let the skies pour down righteousness; let the earth open, and let them bring forth salvation, and let righteousness spring up together; I the LORD have created it." Isaiah 32:17 "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."

44. Romans 3:22 "...the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe..."

45. Second Corinthians 5:21 "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." Romans 5:8 "But God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

46. First John 2:2 "And He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

47. Romans 6:5 "For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection."

It is for this reason that the forbidden fruit in the garden of Eden was the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.⁴⁸ For without the knowledge of good and evil, there can be neither good nor evil. But when man ingested this fruit, the knowledge of good and evil became part of an imperfect being who would inevitably use it for both good and ill, for life and for death. But without the fruit, choice is irrelevant, without the fruit man is morally neuter. Without the fruit, man would not be man. God created man exactly the way he is—and permitted him to fall—for a reason.

What gross irony it is that the very world that is lost has transformed the knowledge of good and evil into an apple.

We live in a moral universe where righteousness is everything. In a fallen world, righteousness is light in the darkness. God has given us the opportunity to be lights and, by simple definition, that requires a free choice.



48. Genesis 2:17 “But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

Chapter 4

Righteousness is Eternal

RIGHTEOUSNESS IS FORGED ON THE ANVIL OF
ADVERSITY AND IT IS ETERNAL.

Christ describes Himself as a vine with Christians as the branches. Their stated purpose is to *bear fruit*.

I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman. Every branch in Me that beareth not fruit He taketh away; and every *branch* that beareth fruit, He purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.¹

One of the primary purposes of the post resurrection ministry of Christ—if not *the* primary purpose—is not simply to receive the free gift of salvation, but also to *bear fruit*. And the fruit that we are to bear is the fruit of the Spirit and that fruit is righteousness:

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance...²

We have been chosen for the express purpose of bearing not just fruit, but permanent fruit:

Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and *that* your fruit should remain...³

He is building us, constructing us to be bearers of this fruit. He is constructing us; we are God's building:

For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry; *ye are* God's building.⁴

1. John 15:1,2

2. Galatians 5:22. These are the qualities that we are to pursue.

3. John 15:16.

4. 1 Corinthians 3:9

He who does the will of God will never die:

For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.^{5†}

In addition to the fruits of the Spirit set forth in Galatians 5:22, we are also called to be “transformed” by the renewing of our minds that we may do the will of God.

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.⁶

We are the branches of the vine of God.⁷ God has foreknown us and predestined us to be conformed to (made into) the image of righteousness (Christ).⁸ But He does not call us to an empty obedience with nothing more than a hope for a rewarding afterlife. He calls us to a life of actually knowing God in the here and now.

He who has My commandments and keeps them, he is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will disclose Myself to him.⁹

Knowing God is more than a spiritual relationship To know Christ is to experience eternal life *now*.

And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.^{10†}

5. 1 John 2:16,17 † This is a reference to the second death, not the first.

6. Romans 12:2

7. John 15:5 “I am the vine, ye are the branches: he that abideth in Me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.”

8. Romans 8:29 “For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.”

9. John 14:21

10. John 17:3 † Jesus Christ promises to give us *His* life (John 14:6, “I am...the life”), not an extension of *our* lives, but something entirely different. Our lives will end (Hebrews 9:27 “It is appointed unto men once to die”), but His life will never end because

We were created for many reasons, but one of the most important reasons is to know Christ and in knowing Him to bear the eternal fruits of righteousness.¹¹ In the actual and experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ we receive *everything* that pertains to life and godliness:

His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of Him...¹²

Thus, we have His eternal spiritual life and we have access to everything that pertains to life (eternal life) and godliness. It is with these supernatural tools that we work with Him to construct a edifice of spiritual good, a building of righteousness, God building:

For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, God's building.¹³

But life is not an easy road and it was never intended to be, not for us and certainly not for Christ. But it is a necessary one; and adversity is a principal part of it. Perhaps this concept is best encapsulated in a statement that Jesus makes to Peter, the Apostle:

Simon, Simon behold, Satan had desired *to have* you, that he may sift *you* as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not...¹⁴

Satan desired to sift Peter as wheat and apparently received leave to do so. Jesus was quick to pray for Peter, but what did He pray? Much John the Baptist who was left in prison to be killed, Jesus neither delivered nor prayed for the deliverance of Peter from the hand of Satan.

Instead, Jesus prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Why does He not pray that Peter would be spared? Because Peter's faith was *supposed* to be tried. When we see this, we see God as leaving Peter to be harmed. But when God sees it, He sees it as a necessary evil for Peter, to strengthen him by pruning him so that he may bear spiritual fruit.

it is eternal (John 17:3). Because His life is eternal, not only will it never end, but also, it never began.

11. Romans 5:21 "That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord."

12. Second Peter 1:3. Also see Second Corinthians 3:18 "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, *even* as by the Spirit of the Lord."

13. First Corinthians 3:9

14. Luke 22:31.

Therefore, the issue that Christ addresses in His prayer was not the pain that was coming to Peter, but how Peter would respond to the pain. Would he turn from his faith or would he emerge with a faith made stronger by having withstood the onslaught of Satan? How else would this fisherman-turned-evangelist have obtained the faith and courage necessary to become the pillar of evangelism that brought the opportunity to know God to the entire world?¹⁵

It is edifying to consider that in permitting Satan to sift Peter like wheat, God was addressing something, some shortfall, in Peter that had to be removed. If Peter had known the problem, could he have corrected it by obedience and thereby avoided the resulting pain? Is that possible? Not only is it possible but scripture is filled with admonitions to do exactly that.¹⁶

On a Sunday morning many years ago in small church where the chosen but humble came together to worship, there came a cry from the midst of the congregation. It was the distressed call of an anguished young woman, "Lord teach me so I don't have to learn!" She was impulsive and perhaps uneducated. And, perhaps, she was of little significance in the eyes of the world, but in the heart of the Creator, she was pure gold. She had been taught by the Spirit Himself and she had learned the secret to His peace: surrender.

Much tragedy can be avoided by surrender. But what choice will a man make when faced with inevitable tragedy? Will he remain honest? Will he deny his faith? Will he leave his family? Will he take revenge? Will he refuse to forgive? Will he kill, as Cain did when God rejected his sacrifice?¹⁷ The choices that man makes define him forever—precisely the way Cain has been forever defined. What has been done can never be undone. It may be forgiven,¹⁸ and a sinner may be rehabilitated and made into a new creature,¹⁹ but the opportunity to be an author of righteousness in the face of that particular temptation ends at the moment of choice.

15. Matthew 16:18 "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

16. See Chapter 5

17. Genesis 4:8 "...Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him."

18. 1 John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

19. Second Corinthians 5:17 "Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.."

Remove the requirement to choose by removing adversity from mankind and man is no longer man. Without choice or challenge man becomes a pretender reading scripts upon a stage. He is no more real than an actor speaking courageous pretense—faking courage without fear, receiving honor without price, working without effort or loving without passion. Remove temptation and adversity and real choices disappear. Without adversity we become no more significant than shadows that flicker across a cinema screen. Turn off the projector and they disappear.

Choosing is what righteousness really is; it is choosing the right solely because it is right; and each right choice that we make is a golden brick in God's eternal construction. Each wrong choice is just another board hammered on, a board that will later be burned:

Now if any man build upon this foundation of gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble—Every man's work shall be made manifest; for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath build upon it, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet as by fire.²⁰

Scripture defines choices of good or evil as choices between darkness and light²¹ and scripture defines the damned as those who loved darkness rather than light:

And this is the condemnation, that light [Christ] is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.²²

Note the care with which the above scripture is written. The damned did not evil deeds because they loved darkness; it was the other way around. They loved darkness *because* they committed evil deeds. They loved darkness because they chose to do evil. What we do determines who we are. What we do determines what we love and we define what we love by what we do.

20. 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

21. See the interplay between darkness and light in Ephesians 5.

22. John 3:19

Now consider the concept in a romantic context. The modern man or woman who embraces the promiscuity of this age is defining what he or she *can* love. The more fornication that he or she commits, the deeper the effect becomes until ultimately true love of a righteous (faithful) spouse becomes more and more distant. It is no longer a question of love, but a question of whether one *can* love.

But is fornication actually sin? Of course it is.²³

The love of darkness did not cause their deeds to be evil, the evil deeds caused their love of darkness. They became who they chose to be and what they became was the sum of their choices. Each choice to lie;²⁴ † each choice to steal;²⁵ each choice to gossip;²⁶ † produces another piece of spiritual death. It is gradual and with each instance it is just a little easier to die inside, a little easier to turn away from the light. Justification for sin becomes facilitated as Truth is obscured. As the repeated sin of fornication²⁷ progressively obscures its own darkness, so do all sins become legitimized with their use. As stated cogently by one unfortunate young person, "I crossed the line just once because I knew I could always step right back. But when I turned to step back, I could hardly believe how far away the line was..."

Sin produces spiritual death and we can feel it. It is a void inside.

In the end it is man who produces his own love for darkness. Sinful choices *produce* the love of darkness and the love of darkness results in God's condemnation.²⁸ Jesus Christ is the only solution because the

23. First Corinthians 6:9a "Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate [homosexual sin], nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. of our God..."

24. Revelation 21:8 "...all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." † When, in this verse, the categorizations of sin reach the sin of lying, scripture uses a singular emphasis by referring to *all* liars."

25. Exodus 20:15 "Thou shalt not steal."

26. Luke 6:37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned." † Obedience to this verse and the verse following, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven" is one of the keys to internal peace and spiritual freedom. See the author's *Endless Love*.

27. First Corinthians 6:9 " Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals."

28. Psalm 119:119 "[You reject] all the wicked of the earth *like* dross..."

cross is the only thing that can change the spiritual effect of what we have already done. It is the only thing that can make the spiritually dead come alive with life eternal.

...He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life.”²⁹

And just as we can feel the internal void of spiritual death, we can also feel the peace of spiritual life. It is an actual experience. It is the gift of eternal life; it is the actual knowing of God. It is this and this alone that gives peace that is beyond comprehension. It is this and this alone that turns lives around, makes zealots out of agnostics and saints out of atheists. Theology or change of opinion does not do this. This is not method or philosophy. We are not preaching a change of mind. We are preaching miracle. We are preaching actually knowing Christ and experiencing eternal life in no uncertain terms *right now*:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent.³⁰

Choosing not to turn to Christ is the voluntary choice to love darkness rather than light and it results in God’s final condemnation to eternal death.³¹ Ultimately what we love is determined by our choices. Our choices are eternal³² but they are not irreversible because we can always come to Christ.³³

The final destination of all Christians is heaven, but we will all face the judgment seat of Christ. The judgment seat of Christ for Christians is not a judgment of condemnation because there is no condemnation

29. John 5:24

30. John 17:3

31. Revelation 21:8 “...unbelieving...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second [eternal] death.” The final condemnation of the unbeliever results in eternal death, not eternal torment. See the author’s *Fate of Unbelievers*.

32. Proverbs 10:24 “...the righteous is an everlasting foundation.”

33. First Corinthians 6:9-11 “ Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.”

for Christians (there is no second death for Christians).³⁴ The Judgment Seat of Christ is a judgment in which we each will receive “the things done in [our] body, according to that done, whether it be good or bad.”³⁵ It is dependent upon what we love. It is our choice and we must all render an accounting to God for what we have done on earth.³⁶ Every choice has an eternal effect, and He tells us quite frankly that He lets us live the way we choose and in the end He harvests the fruit that He has sown, our fruit, the fruit of righteousness that we yield during our years on earth.

The world is like a field where both wheat and weeds are growing. Wheat is valuable because it yields nourishment (righteousness). Weeds (weeds) are not valuable because they yield nothing and, when eaten, they take the place of wheat and deprive the body of the nourishment that it needs. In the end the weeds will be gathered and burned, but the wheat shall be gathered into God’s barn:

Let both grow together until the harvest; and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather together first the tares (weeds), and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into My barn.³⁷

At that time the righteous shall shine forth as the sun

Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.³⁸

All of the accountings and the rewards at the judgment seat of Christ will arise from a lifetime lived out in this fabric of good and evil, tragedy and ecstasy, dreams and despair that we call mankind. In this fabric, all men are subject to its inherent adversities, temptations, pleasures, contentments, virtues, accomplishments, pains and death. If these adversities did not exist, neither would their righteous counterparts in which case there would be neither wheat nor weeds.

34. Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."

35. 1 Corinthians 5:10.

36. Romans 14:12 "So then every one of us shall give an account of himself to God."

37. Matthew 13:30

38. Matthew 13:43"

So, what is God doing by creating mankind with adversities? He is doing what He is His nature; He is creating. He is creating us, not only the physical us, but the eternal (spiritual) us. He is creating us to carry the fruits of His Spirit, fruits could not exist without the entire fabric of this life that incorporates threads of adversity, threads of happiness, threads of success, threads of failure, threads of fears, of tragedy, and of peace and faith all of which are carefully woven into the magnificent tapestry of mankind.³⁹ We are the jewels of His creation made in His image. We are His garden. We are the branches in His vineyard.

I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.⁴⁰

The critical relevance of this verse is sometimes lost in its repetition and familiarity. But the verse reclaims its power when we realize that grapes grow only from branches, not from vines. It is true that without the vine the branches die. But without the branches, there are no grapes and we are the branches. *We* are his vineyard. We are His harvest!



39. Galatians 5:22 “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law.”

40. John 15:5

Chapter 5

Adversity Can Be Avoided by Obedience

FOOLS...BECAUSE OF THEIR INIQUITIES, WERE AFFLICTED

PSALM 107:17.

Much of the adversity that we encounter in life is voluntary. Adversity can be avoided by avoiding sin because adversity is the inevitable result of sin.

Besides its natural consequences, all sin causes spiritual death by destroying our relationship with Christ.^{1†} And following the final judgment, sin committed during life results in the second death for the one who rejects Christ.² The second death can be avoided by Christ and Christ alone.

Righteousness is not simply doing what seems right or feels right. Righteousness is what God says is right, and one learns what is right by reading scripture—hence the immense importance of Scripture. Scripture is not a theological word game; it is the means to a transformation into a lifetime of immense peace, peace that is experienced. Scripture is a paradigm of honor and morality that is superimposed on life. When we stay within its construct, we are blessed and, if we are believers, we are blessed with the experiential presence of Jesus Christ.³ When we fail to follow the pattern, we venture into sin and depart from the presence of God.

In scripture we find righteousness and wisdom. Scripture is like a flashlight on a dark path at night. It tells us how to avoid pain beforehand by telling us how to avoid sin.

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet...⁴

The wisdom of God's word has saved many from significant pain:

1. †Sins committed by believers destroy their relationship with Christ because the believers' experiential relationship with Christ in this life is contingent upon righteousness (obedience). One cannot continue to sin and enjoy the presence of the savior. "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." John 14:21

2. See "Appendix" on page 87

3. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose myself [make Myself known] to him."

4. Psalms 119:105

By the word of thy lips, I have kept *me from* the paths of the destroyer.⁵

And again:

The entrance of thy words giveth light.⁶

And again:

He that followeth after righteousness and mercy findeth life, righteousness, and honor.⁷

Failure to appreciate the wisdom of scripture has unfortunate consequences:

The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead.⁸

One does not have to read much scripture to see how adversity can be avoided by obedience. For instance, *much* pain can be avoided by obeying scriptures such as these:

Do not yoke yourself (in a relationship, a marriage or in partnership) with an unbeliever.⁹

Do not steal.¹⁰

Do not covet (do not permit yourself to strongly desire something that belongs to another—like his wife or her husband).¹¹

Don't be a fornicator, a homosexual, a thief or a drunkard.¹²

5. Psalms 17:4

6. Psalm 119:130

7. Proverbs 21:21

8. Proverbs 21:16. Those who are spiritually dead know it.

9. 2 Corinthians 6:14 “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers, for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness.”

10. Exodus 20:15

11. Exodus 20:17

12. 1 Corinthians 6:9,10 “Be not deceived: neither fornicators nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, or extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.” Romans 1:26,27 “God gave them up unto vile affections: for

Don't be a liar.¹³

Husbands love your wives¹⁴

Wives, submit to your husband and his leadership.¹⁵

Don't become a surety (don't cosign a loan or promissory note).¹⁶

Forgive. Always forgive. Always, always forgive, and never hold a grudge.¹⁷

Do not criticize or condemn.¹⁸

Love always. Love never fails.¹⁹

Don't injure with words.²⁰

even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature: And likewise also the men, leaving the natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompense of their error which was meet.”

13. Exodus 20:16 “Thou shalt not bear false witness...” Proverbs 12:22 " Lying lips [are] abomination to the LORD."

14. Ephesians 5:25 “Husbands love your wives, even a Christ also loved the church, and gave Himself for it.”

15. Ephesians 5:22 “Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.”

16. Proverbs 17:18 “A man void of understanding striketh hands, *and* becometh surety in the presence of his friend.”

17. Matthew 18:22 “Then came Peter unto Him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee, Until seven times: but Until seventy times seven.”

18. Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment he judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.”

19. 1 Corinthians 13:7,8 “[Love] beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. [love] never fails.” This scripture teaches that if it fails, it is not really love.

20. James 1:26 “If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion *is* vain.”

Do not gossip. Scripture equates gossip with murder and it makes no distinction between gossip that is true and gossip that is false: all gossip, whether true or false is sin.²¹ Whoever secretly slanders his neighbor, him I will destroy...²²

Do not associate with a gossip.²³

Obedience to scripture produces freedom. That is the reason why people obey scripture. They do not obey it because they are "religious." They obey it because they have discovered what it can do for them. The young husband or wife does not avoid the flirtation of another because he is "religious." He avoids it because he has discovered the wisdom of scripture and he knows that the commandment not to commit adultery is one of them.^{24†}

Avoiding adversity generally consists of the use of the same scriptures that foster good relationships:

Be diligent; work hard.²⁵

Don't be wise in your own eyes.²⁶

A good man obtains favor of the Lord.²⁷ (So, strive to be a good person.)

The way of a fool is right in his own eyes.²⁸ (Therefore look to scripture for what is right and what is wrong.)

21. Romans 1:28-30 "God gave them over to a reprobate mind ... being filled with all unrighteousness ... full of envy, murder ... malignity; whisperers [gossips], backbiters, haters of God ..." Gossip (slander) is one of the worst of all sins. Scripture places it on the same level as murder.

22. Psalm 101:5

23. Proverbs 20:19 (NASV)

24. Exodus 20:14 "You shall not commit adultery." † Adulterate means to pollute. Relationships can be polluted with flirtations almost as much as with physical adultery.

25. Proverbs 6:6 "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise ... a little sleep, a little slumber: so shall thy poverty come ... and thy want as an armed man."

26. Proverbs 26:12 "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? *there* is more hope of a fool than of him."

27. Proverbs 12:2 "A good man obtaineth favor of the Lord, but a man of wicked devices will He condemn."

28. Proverbs 12:15

Avoid the results of sin by not committing it.²⁹

In the way of righteousness is life.³⁰ (Strive for and grow in righteousness.)

A prudent man covers shame.³¹ (Don't speak of your own shame or the shame of others.)

The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways.³² (Be careful of whom you make your companion.)

The simple believe every word [every word that others may tell him] but the prudent man looketh well to his going.³³ (Test everything by scripture.)

The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life.³⁴ (So, go to the fountain and drink.)

The fear of the Lord creates strong confidence.³⁵ (Fear God and because of this fear, yield to Him and experience what happens when you do.)

Scripture teaches us to be just plain smart. For instance, it teaches us to look ahead for the threat to come and avoid it:

29. Proverbs 12:21 KJV reads "There shall no evil happen to the wicked, but the wicked shall be filled with mischief." The word that is translated "evil" refers to "sorrow that is the harvest and product of sin." See C.F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, transl. from the German (Eerdmans Pub. 1975) vol. 9, p. 64

30. Proverbs 12:28 "In the way of righteousness is life and in the pathway thereof, there is no death."

31. Proverbs 12:16 "A fool's wrath is presently known: but a prudent man covereth shame."

32. Proverbs 14:14 "The backslider in heart shall be filled with his own ways: and a good man *shall be satisfied* from himself."

33. Proverbs 14:15 "The simple believe every word, but the prudent *man* looketh well to his going." This proverb applies to scripture as well as life in general; a close look proves that scripture is reliable and that it is all true.

34. Proverbs 14:27 "The fear of the Lord is a fountain of life, to depart from the snares of death."

35. Proverbs 14:26 "The fear of the Lord *is* strong confidence..." Fearing God and (therefore) yielding and obeying scripture creates a history of wise decisions, each one of which instills understanding and confidence in scripture."

A prudent *man* forseeth the evil and hideth himself:
but the simple pass on and are punished.³⁶

It teaches us to protect our good name:

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches,
and loving favor than silver and gold.³⁷

It teaches not to be contrary, mischievous person:

Thorns *and* snares *are* in the way of the froward. He
that doth keep his soul shall be far from them.³⁸

And perhaps most importantly it teaches us to embrace humility:

By humility *and* fear of the Lord *are* riches, honor
and life.³⁹

Humility is the bedrock of practically all virtues. It is the lens that lets one see truth through the cloud of pride. Humility is not the absence of self-respect. It is the door to wisdom.



36. Proverbs 22:3

37. Proverbs 22:1

38. Proverbs 22:5

39. Proverbs 22:4

Chapter 6

Adversity in Relationships

NOT ALL RELATIONSHIPS ARE WISE

Scripture is like a map that illuminates the sometimes murky waters of relationships:

Make no friendship with an angry man [or woman];
and with a furious man thou shalt not go.¹

Avoid the immoral woman [or man].²

Avoid liars.³

Don't reprove a scorner, because he will hate you for it; but reprove a wise man and he will love you.⁴

Avoid the gossip;⁵ don't be a gossip.⁶ Gossip is a sin that God places on a level equal to murder.⁷

He that keeps his mouth keeps his life.⁸

Contention comes by means of pride.⁹ Avoid the proud and self-centered.

1. Proverbs 22:24

2. Proverbs 5:3-6 "For the lips of a strange woman drop as a honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, and sharp as a two edged sword. Her ways are moveable, that thou canst not know them."

3. Proverbs 6:19 "... the Lord doth hate ... a false witness *that* speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren."

4. Proverbs 9:8

5. Proverbs 26:22,23 "Where no wood is, *there* the fire goeth out; so where *there is* no talebearer, the strife ceases." Proverbs 20:19 "...do not associate with a gossip." (NASV)

6. Psalm 101:5 "Whosoever privily slandereth his neighbour him will I cut off.

7. Romans 1:29 "Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness ... murder, debate [contentions], deceit, malignity; wisperers [gossips], backbiters, haters of God..."

8. Proverbs 13:3 "He that keepeth his mouth keepeth his life, but he that openeth wide his lips shall have destruction."

9. Proverbs 12:10 "Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom."

Fools make a mock of sin.¹⁰ Avoid the fool who mocks righteousness and thereby mocks sin.

Shun pride. “Pride goeth ... before a fall.”¹¹

All of these scriptures fit together like the gears of a watch. But they are not written just to be studied; they are written to be lived. And when we live them, their power is expressed. These scriptures are more than just smart. They are the most effective means to avoid adversity in this life. They are the means by which we experience the presence and the power of God.

How do these scriptures open us to the power and presence of God? John 14:21 tells us how to experience His presence through sincerely yielding to Him. We love Him by yielding to Him, by recognizing Him as our God, by obeying Him:

He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them, he it is who loves Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him [I will make Myself known to him].¹²

This verse is simple and powerful. It teaches that God makes Himself known to those who express their love toward Him through obedience. God makes Himself known to those who have His commandments (those who learn what His commandments are) and *keep them* (those who obey His commandments), those who obey Him as a means of expressing their love for God.

We should remember, however, that obedience does not give us salvation, because salvation is a gift¹³ and one cannot earn a gift. Salvation is given to all who wish it, but initially it had to be earned because the penalty for sin is death and someone had to die. It was earned and paid for by Jesus Christ at the cost of His life,¹⁴ and, since He earned it, it is

10. Proverbs 14:9 “Fools make a mock of sin: but among the righteous *there is* favor.”

11. Proverbs 16:18 “Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”

12. John 14:21

13. Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God.”

14. Romans 5:8 “...while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” The gift of salvation is therefore Christ’s to give, not ours to earn. And Christ chooses to give it to whomever wants it: “And whosoever will let him come take the water of life...” Revelation 22:17.

His to do with as He chooses. And chooses to give it away.¹⁵ Because it is His to give, there is nothing that we can do to alter what He does with it. He gives is freely and never takes it back. We can refuse it, but we cannot lose it once we have it.¹⁶

So, salvation is a free gift, but the experience of God's peace and presence is not a gift; it is an opportunity. It is an opportunity to all of those who have trusted in Christ and received the gift of salvation. The experience and the presence of God is acquired by surrender to Him. Surrender, true obedience is the way that we express love back to God and enjoy His presence. His presence is His response to our obedience.

Why is the presence of God not a free gift as well? Why must we obey Him in order to experience His presence? Because each piece of disobedience is sin and sin is the opposite of God. Each sin is a piece of spiritual death¹⁷ but God is spiritual life:¹⁸ God does not dwell in the presence of continued, willful sin.¹⁹ Sin obscures it evil of its own nature, so we often cannot perceive the danger.

God saves sinners, that is true, but if those who are saved continue to sin, they cannot know God because sin always separates man from God, and it does not matter whether the sin comes from a Christian or not:

15. Revelation 22:17 "... And let him that is thirsty come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. ... And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely. ..."

16. Romans 8:38 "For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, 39Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

17. Romans 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life." Ezekiel 18:4 "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth shall die..."

18. John 14:6 "I am the way, the truth and the life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me."

19. John 14:21 "He that hath My commandments, and keepeth them... I will love him and will manifest Myself [make Myself known] to him." In this verse we find the true core of true Christianity: the actual experience of the presence of God. The experience of the presence of God is a spiritual love affair, an experience which, when superimposed upon any life transforms it in to something wonderful. It is this experience that draws men to the well of scripture where every drop is peace. Here, and only here, do we find faith transformed into awareness. Here, in this scripture, is the sum of it all: knowing Him. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent."

...your iniquities have separated you from your God: your sins have hidden His face from you”²⁰

And again:

...You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness, Nor shall evil dwell with you.”²¹

And again:

Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived....²²

And again:

...as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.²³

Much adversity can be avoided by simply avoiding an unwise or unscriptural relationship in the first place. That is especially true for the marital relationship.

Avoiding the Tragedy of the Unscriptural Marriage

The threshold sin that causes pain in marriage is entering into an unscriptural marriage. An unscriptural marriage is a marriage between two people who are unequally yoked spiritually. Why?

This scripture means do not marry anyone who not actually know Jesus Christ and actually experiencing eternal life (a relationship with Christ).²⁴ Why? Because only the one who knows Christ will have the spiritual strength to give what is required to establish a relationship on a spiritual level. Marriage to an unbeliever limits the available intimacy because it renders the very deep and spiritual marital intimacy contemplated by scripture to be impossible.

20. Isaiah 59:2

21. Psalm 5:4

22. First Corinthians 6:9

23. Galatians 5:21

24. John 17:3 “These words spake Jesus...And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom Thou hast sent.”

Of course, this sin is easily committed because the embrace of human love makes it easy to believe that one is seeing the entire picture and that nothing will ever change. The warmth of a rare and fulfilling relationship serves to obscure the underlying realities. It is for this reason that scripture warns us to guard our heart *first*.²⁵

Love without Christ can cool, but lovers who walk with Christ will never cease to love. Human love lives in the presence of righteousness. It is empowered with the presence of Christ and it never dies and need not ever cool. To be specific, warm, actual, passionate human love in a marriage need not ever die. Human love (the Greek word "eros") is one of four loves that are empowered by the presence of Jesus Christ. The presence of Christ is contingent upon obedience to His word (scripture)²⁶ and that obedience, especially for an excellent marriage, begins precisely at Matthew 7:1.²⁷

It is astounding how much difference obedience to this one scripture can make to a marriage.²⁸ This scripture is so powerful that after watching it work it is easy to conclude that those who ignore it are either ignorant of it or simply find that their family is not worth the trouble. This scripture and forgiveness are keys that inevitably work, unless the marriage is plagued with significant sin such as adultery or drunkenness.

Sin can be both covered and resolved by God's presence, but where the mate is either an unbeliever or does not live his or her life in such a way as to invite the actual presence of Christ, the purpose of God is thwarted and the disheartening reality is that God never comes where He is not invited—except in judgment.

Therefore, instead of using the light of passion to discern wisdom and truth, use the lamp of scripture:

25. Proverbs 4:23 "Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life."

26. John 14:21 "He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."

27. Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge so that you will not be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it will be measured to you."

28. See the author's *Endless Love* at biblebooks.co

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?²⁹

Before a marriage, each party presents a pretty face. But after the marriage, perhaps not. It is difficult to predict how one will be treated after the marriage, and how one is treated by a spouse after the surrender occurs is everything.

Let us consider the advantages of yoking one's self with someone who is wholly committed to scripture and surrendered to Christ. A spouse who is surrendered to Christ is someone who:

1. Treats you better than himself or herself.³⁰
2. Treats you in the way that he or she would want to be treated.³¹ Treats you with patience and kindness. Your mate is someone that is not self centered. He or she never embarrasses you (never acts unseemly), is someone who is rarely provoked to anger; someone who thinks no evil of you and *speaks* no evil of you. Your mate bears everything and endures everything that you may do. If you are a wife, your husband is someone who would never strike you but always take care of you, provide for you and protect you.³²
4. Is constructive, intent on building you up and building a family.³³

29. Second Corinthians 6:14

30. Philippians 2:3 "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind [humility] let each esteem other better than themselves."

31. Matthew 7:12 "Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them."

32. 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 "Charity [the word translated as "charity" in the King James version of the Bible is agape, which is unconditional love] suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth ..."

33. Proverbs 14:1 "Every wise woman buildeth her house: but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands."

5. Is someone who will always forgive you, and never hold a grudge.³⁴

6. Is someone who will never criticize you or condemn you even if you deserve it,³⁵ but may, if you wish to hear it, offer you constructive rebuke.³⁶ If you are a wife, your husband loves you as his own body;³⁷ he loves you as Christ loves the church and will sacrifice himself for you. His goal in life is to ensure your happiness and safety,³⁸ and provide for you;³⁹ he will never criticize or condemn you.⁴⁰

8. If you are a husband, your wife will yield to you, recognize your leadership, love you, respect you and never speak ill of you⁴¹ and never criticize or condemn you.⁴²

9. The committed mate has no desire to relate to anyone else inappropriately,⁴³ much less commit adultery. The committed mate will never lie to you⁴⁴ or otherwise deceive you.⁴⁵

10. The committed husband will provide for his wife and his children.⁴⁶

34. Matthew 18:21,22 “Then came Peter to him, and said, Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Till seven times? Jesus saith unto him, I say not unto thee Until seven times; but Until seventy times seven.”

35. Matthew 7:1 “Judge not, that ye be not judged.”

36. Proverbs 9:8 “...rebuke a wise man and he will love thee.”

37. Ephesians 5:28

38. Ephesians 5:25 “Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ loved the church, and gave Himself for it.”

39. 1 Timothy 5:8 “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

40. Matthew 7:1 “Judge [criticize] not...”

41. Ephesians 5:23 “For the husband is head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and He is the savior of the body.”

42. Matthew 7:1 “Judge [criticize] not...”

43. First Corinthians 13:5 Love does not “behave itself unseemly.”

44. Revelation 21:8 “...all liars shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.” Proverbs 19:9 “...he that speaketh lies shall perish.”

45. First Corinthians 6:8 “Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud...”

46. First Timothy 5:8 “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of

It is easy to see how a marriage of equally committed spouses can be exceedingly pleasant.

On the other hand, it is also easy to see that if one spouse disregards these truths because of an incomplete commitment to scripture, the marriage can be exceedingly—and permanently—unpleasant:

1. He or she treats himself or herself as more important than you rather than the other way around;
2. Treats you the way that he feels to be appropriate rather than how he would himself prefer to be treated. Treats you with patience and kindness sometimes. Your mate is self centered. He or she sometimes embarrasses you and can be provoked to anger; he or she remembers wrongs and sometimes speaks evil of you to third parties. Your mate has clear limitations on what he or she will cooperate with you and support you. If you are a wife, your husband is someone who might even strike you; he may not provide for you and protect you. He may even require you to provide for him. If you are a husband, you have a wife who is dissatisfied because she does not have the peace of Jesus Christ. She nags and criticizes you.
4. He or she is not intent on building you up and building a family.
5. He or she is someone who will not really forgive, and who holds a grudge against you.
6. He or she criticizes you or condemns you because it appears to be appropriate. Speaking the truth in love, "tough love" or "constructive criticism" is often condemnation in disguise. If you are a wife, your husband is a man who loves you when he needs to, and when it is expedient; he is not self-sacrificing. His goal in life is to ensure his happiness and equanimity, and be provided for; he may well be critical.

his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel."

8. If you are a husband, your wife will not yield to you or recognize your leadership. But instead she believes that yielding to a husband is somehow demeaning and it makes her less than equal. She feels free to speak of you critically to her friends.

9. He or she has to fight a desire to relate to someone else inappropriately. He or she may deceive you.

10. The husband relies on you, not on himself, to provide for the family.⁴⁷

Much adversity — a *lifetime* of adversity — can be avoided by yielding to Second Corinthians 6:14 and refusing to yoke one's self with an unbeliever.

The husband who loves his wife as Christ loves the church will enable his wife to yield to him, treat him with respect, never criticize and never speak ill of him. And the wife who yields to her husband's authority, treats him with respect and never speaks ill of him, or criticizes him will enable her husband to love her sacrificially and to the death, as Christ loves the Church, a love that is so strong and evident that it is never questioned. Each one inspires the other.



47. First Timothy 5:8 “But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”

Chapter 7

Marital Adversity Can Be Avoided

MUTUAL OBEDIENCE TO SCRIPTURE CREATES
AN EXCELLENT MARRIAGE

There is really only one secret to an excellent marriage and that is love.^{1†}

To be the recipient of the gift of sincere human love is marvelous. To be loved is like listening—transfixed—to a beautiful song, to be carried by its music and lost in its poetry is a rare gift indeed. To hear that song is life-changing. But to be the singer is an experience beyond all measure.

Love is like a diamond engagement ring in a young man's pocket. Its only purpose is to be given away.

But what is this thing called love that becomes the center of life but which we can neither create nor acquire on our own? What is this thing that can be the apex of human experience or the deepest of human pain? What is this elusive and beautiful thing? Scripture tells us what it is, and scripture tells us how to acquire it and how to keep it. If we understand what scripture says about it and yield our will to God, we can acquire it and we can keep it.

Let us first consider what love is.

Biblical Greek has four different words for love. But English and some other languages have only one word for love and they use that one word ("love") to translate all of the different kinds of loves in the Bible. So when we read "love" in an English Bible, it could be referring to any one of the loves. If we are to understand what the Bible is saying about love, we must understand what these four loves are and where the words are used because they can't always be distinguished by the context. Three of the loves can often be distinguished by who it is who is loved. But the fourth love is drastically different from the others.

The first love is the love of friends. This Greek word is φιλία, or "philia." This is the word from which we derive "Philedelpia," The City of Brotherly Love. Philea is the love between friends.

1. † See the work entitled *Endless Love* by the author. This work discusses the scriptural nature of relationships and healing of marital discord and expands upon this chapter.

The second love is the love of family. This Greek word is *στοργή*, or “storgé.” Storgé is the natural love of parents for children and children for parents and siblings and other family members or between people who found themselves together for some reason.²

The third is the love of lovers. This Greek word is *έρως*, or “eros.” Eros is the romantic love of lovers; it is a love that may or may not be expressed by physical intimacy.

These three loves are human loves and they are given to all of us. They are indeed beautiful, but they are limited as we are limited. They are human loves and they originate in us. But the Fourth Love is different.

The Fourth Love

The fourth love different because it is supernatural.

The fourth love is *ἀγάπη*, or “agápe.”³ The distinguishing characteristic of agápe is that it does not require anything in return. It is the purest form of love. Agápe is love that loves the unloveable. It is agápe that brought Jesus to the cross and sacrifice Himself for the sins of the world,⁴ which necessarily included the sins committed by the very persons who crucified Him.⁵ Agape is supernatural love. We know this because God is supernatural and God *is* agápe:

...God is Love [agápe]⁶

It is here, at agápe, that the spiritual reality of the presence of God becomes transformed into human experience, where faith becomes perception and where peace passes all understanding.⁷ It is here, and only here, that God makes Himself known to us when we express our love to Him by obedience.

Christ tells us plainly how we are to relate to God and how we can know Him:

2. Although this word is not used in scripture, it is included in the Greek language used in Biblical times.

3. Agápe is translated “charity” in the King James Version.

4. First John 2:2 "And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

5. Romans 5:6 "But God commendeth His love [agápe] toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

6. First John 4:8

7. Philippians 4:7 " And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

"He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him."⁸

And it results in God making His abode (His home) with us spiritually:

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep my words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.⁹

Agápe is the oxygen of the experiential presence of God and agape is the key to the other three loves. It is a relationship based upon the expression of our love through obedience. We obey; and He makes Himself known to us. We see Him; we love Him more, and He comes closer. It is a magnificent dynamic, a spiral going upward. To know God is to experience eternal life here and now:

This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.¹⁰

Without love and obedience and forgiveness through Jesus Christ, God does not make Himself known. It is for this reason that those who have never trusted in Christ have absolutely no idea of what really happens to committed, obedient believers. They actually believe that Christianity is simply a matter of believing in God or not.

Our eternal state (condemnation or eternal life) turns on what we love because what we love is what He looks at. Love is what He looks at because He *is* love (agape):¹¹

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.¹²

8. John 14:21 (NASV)

9. John 14:23

10. John 17:3 (NASV)

11. First John 4:8 "God is love [agape]."

12. John 3:19 " And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil."

Relationships ultimately turn on agape and agape is expressed by obedience. It is like any relationship: love must be expressed. Serving others in various ways is the primary way that we express love to others. Serving God by obeying Him is the way that we express our love to Him. It is the way that we express our appreciation for what Christ did for us. It is the way that we express true worship, and in doing so acknowledge that He is indeed God. God will always be God, but unless we acknowledge by our sincere actions, by our choices, that He is *our* God, He will respect our choice and He will not be *our* God. He will be as distant from us as we are from Him. Knowing Him is a spiritual love affair.

Obedience without love is called legalism, and legalism does not provide the predicate necessary for experiential presence of God. God is not interested in us doing everything right. He is interested in us loving Him and loving one another and expressing that love by sincere fidelity, honesty, generosity, kindness, service, encouragement—by expressing that love by righteousness, which is obedience to His word.

The message of these scriptures is crystal clear. One agápes God (loves God) by obeying Him. And obedience means to relinquish sin. Unquestioned obedience is an act of faith and without faith, it is impossible to please Him:

But without faith *it is* impossible to please *Him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and *that* He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him.¹³

First Corinthians 13 describes what agápe is:

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not agape, I am become as a sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not agape, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not agape, it profits me nothing.

13. Hebrews 11:6

Agape suffers long, and is kind; agape envies not;
agape vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

Does not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her
own, is not easily provoked, thinks no evil;

Rejoices not in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth;

Bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things,
endures all things.

Agape never fails...^{14†}

Thus, we see that 1) agápe is extremely important because we are nothing without it; 2) agápe is complete acceptance because it bears all things and 3) agape is completely unconditional because it endures all things. Agape is therefore the “love of all loves.”

The fact that *God is this love* speaks volumes toward who God is.¹⁵ God is an unconditional lover, and one does not know God without loving:

He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is
love [agape].¹⁶

This fact has everything to do with marriage because the only thing that can really make a marriage work is love. And we can choose to love by acquiring agápe to light the original fire.

14. First Corinthians 13:1-8 † Each instance of "love" in First Corinthians is agápe, so First Corinthians describes agápe. It is for this reason that the love described in First Corinthians 13 seems so very out of reach. It is God's love and it can therefore be acquired only with the presence of God.

15. God certainly has other characteristics as well. But the scriptures that describe these other characteristics generally describe how God acts; they tell of what He does or what He is like. For instance, God is just and punishes sin but He also forgives. He is patient and at the same time He is fearsome. But none of these scriptures say that He is any of those things. There is no scripture that says that God is kindness, or that God is mercy. He is kind and merciful, to be sure, but there is not scripture that says that God is kindness or mercy. There are scriptures saying that God is just, but they do not say that God is justice. Or, a scripture may state that vengeance belongs to Him, but there is no scripture that says God is vengeance. First John 4:8 is the only scripture that states that God is something. And it is immensely significant that the one word that scripture uses to describe what God is—is love, agápe. It is here, at agápe, where we find the most fundamental reality of who He really is and it is here that we can relate to Him.

16. First John 4:8

Why Agape is Important to Marriage

None of the four loves is limited to themselves. For instance, we may love a cousin with both the love of family and the love of friends and in such a case two loves become one greater love. The love of family is enhanced by the love of a friend and vice versa. Or one's spouse may be a best friend as well as a lover.

The same is true for agápe. It can be generalized as well and it can be expressed either by itself or through any of the other three loves. It is like a stem-cell; it can grow into whatever love it finds itself to be. But agápe, being God, is infinitely powerful. Agápe is like a massive reservoir that becomes phileo if the love is of a friend, storge if the love is of family or eros if the love is the love of lovers. Or, in the case of the Christian marriage, Agápe empowers all four loves, so that the Christian lover can love with all four loves at once. Like the miracle of the water changed into wine, agápe mixed with the other (human) loves transforms them into something far greater. For instance, when agape is united with eros it becomes intoxicating. For many this lovely intoxication begins the instant that the lovers kneel down together and go to Him.

Agápe expressed through the love of lovers creates a bond of immense power and iron fidelity; it is a self-sacrificing love that is supernatural. When both spouses possess it and each one loves with it and is loved by it, it becomes impregnable to any external force.¹⁷ It is at once supernatural and emotional; and vulnerable and powerful, peaceful and magnificent. It is intimacy on both the physical and the spiritual planes at the same time. To love with such power and to be loved in return in a righteous Christian marriage is the capstone of all human experience and second only to knowing Christ.

The secret to an excellent marriage is love that knows no bounds, love that is both endless and inexhaustible. Love like this occurs only when agape is mixed with the other three loves. That mixture occurs with righteousness because it is yielding to scripture that opens the door to the presence of God and His agape.

The reader is again directed to the work entitled *Endless Love* for a deeper study of human love, its loss and its restoration.



17. First Corinthians 13:8 "Charity [agápe] never fails"

Chapter 8

Peace in the Midst of Adversity

HE WHO DOES THESE THINGS WILL
NEVER BE SHAKEN

PSALM 15

Let us consider two “nevers.”

Both of these nevers are stark departures from perceived reality. They stand on the very outer limits of faith. They are the guardians of internal peace in the midst of adversity.

Although they were written a thousand years apart and for different reasons, both of them strike the same point: righteousness is a shield to the pain of adversity.

We find the first “never” in Psalm 15 (NIV) when it teaches that he who yields to God’s call to righteousness will never be shaken:

Lord, who may dwell in your sacred tent?
Who may live on your holy mountain?
He whose walk is blameless,
who does what is righteous,
who speaks the truth from his heart;
and has no slander on his tongue,
who does his neighbor no wrong
and casts no slur on his fellow man,
who despises a vile man
but honors those who fear the LORD,
who keeps his oath
even when it hurts,
who lends his money without usury
and does not accept a bribe against
the innocent.
He who does these things
will never be shaken.

We find the second “never” in Second Peter Chapter 1 where we find perhaps the most astounding scripture in all of the bible:

Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things [righteousness], you will never stumble...¹

Note that each of these scriptures speaks directly to actual, experiential divine participation in our lives. Help in the midst of trials comes from the supernatural peace of God:

And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.²

The supernatural peace of God depends on the supernatural presence of God. And the supernatural presence of God depends on our heart: Do we love Him and do we express that love through surrender to His Word? If we do, we find another scripture that speaks directly to God's interaction with us: He makes Himself known to us.

Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me, he will keep my words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.³

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.⁴

These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.⁵

The presence of God within is what eternal life is:

And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom thou hast sent.⁶

1. Second Peter 1:10

2. Philippians 4:7

3. John 14:23

4. John 14:25-27

5. John 16:33

6. John 17:3

Knowing God is experienced in this life now. This is the real power behind Christianity. Knowing God is eternal life and we experience eternal life through Christ:

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him.⁷

Eternal life is Christ.⁸ Without Christ, there is no eternal life. With the gift of eternal life and the promises that accompany it, we became partakers of the divine nature⁹ and we experience His life now in this life when He is with us.¹⁰ Here we find a profound truth of Christianity ironically expressed in a worldly parable: It is not what you know but Who you know.

The most tangible characteristic of eternal life in this life is an inner peace that the Christian who is fully committed to obedience to scripture receives directly from God when that Christian surrenders his will to God:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.¹¹

On the other hand, the most tangible characteristic of disobedience is emptiness, confusion and lack of internal peace.

But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters case up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.¹²

God does not tell us to do anything that He does not empower us to do. Take courage. You are forging ahead into those trials that God, in his own wisdom, has prepared specifically for you. Being troubled is a

7. First John 4:9

8. John 14:6 "I am...the life"

9. 2 Peter 1: "...by these [promises] you might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust."

10. John 14:23 "Jesus answered and said If a man love Me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."

11. John 14:27

12. Isaiah 57:20

choice (but not a sin), even in the midst of trials. Freedom from fear is a choice, even when we dying. Certainly , it can be very difficult, if not impossible, but it is our direction, our goal.

So what is the alternative when we open our eyes in the morning and face the lion of adversity? The alternative is *faith* in the very jaws of loss and pain. And the greater the trial, the more difficult that faith becomes. And the more difficult the faith becomes, the greater the significance of our choice to have faith becomes and the stronger *we* become.

The fear, the lack of faith, the reaction to the pain, and the emotional upheaval is the trial, not the sin. The sin is what we may do as a result of the trial, but forgiveness awaits us when we sin. If one curses God because of the trial, it is a sin, to be sure, but He knows that He is testing you and He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins¹³ which have been paid for at the cross.¹⁴ Without the cross He would still forgive as He did before Christ,¹⁵ but the penalty (death) would remain and eternal life would never be ours.

When we refuse, as a matter of our own choice, to yield to the destroyer and sin, God forges us into eternal value. It is in this way that we win. We win when we are crushed in the vice of adversity and we win when we are not. God cannot be out-done. In the end, He awaits us in a place where there is neither death¹⁶ nor tears:

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes;
and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow,
nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain:
for the former things are passed away. And He that
sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things
new.¹⁷

13. First John 1:9 "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us."

14. Romans 5: 6,8 " For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly... God commendeth His love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." First Peter 3:18 "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh [the cross], but quickened [made alive] by the Spirit."

15. See Psalm 51

16. Revelation 20:14 "Death and hades [hell] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

17. Revelation 21:4,5

These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.¹⁸

Therefore, faith and obedience are the key to experiencing eternal life and experiencing internal spiritual peace in the midst of tragedy.

The pain of loss and the continuing reality of that pain must be borne and we must endure, but with Christ's help.¹⁹ It is as necessary for us to endure the outrageous happenstance that is part of this life as it was for Christ,²⁰ except He endured much, much more. He became sin for us.²¹

Righteous choices in the face of adversity are like golden bricks built upon a solid foundation of Christ:

But each one should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test

18. John 16:33

19. Luke 22:31,32 "...behold, Satan hat desired that he may sift *you* as wheat: but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not..."

20. Revelation 5:9,10 ""You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God and they will reign on the earth."

21. Second Corinthians 5:21 " For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

the quality of each person's work. If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames.²²

The bricks become a part of us, a new creature in Christ.²³ They are eternal as we are eternal.²⁴ Every brick is eternal because it is an act of righteousness.²⁵ Their value lies in the very fact that they are forged in the fires of adversity. They cost something. Cheap love is worthless. Christ proved that for all of mankind.

So, the adversities that we encounter in this journey are far from meaningless: they define us.

The couple who loses a child and still exercises faith in God has created faith where faith would otherwise have died. The man or woman who experiences the untimely death of a spouse or a sibling can be pressed to the point of ultimate testing and emerge with a faith that is stronger than ever and the internal presence of God that goes with it. The spouse who honors a marital vow and lives out a grim marriage faithfully has honored God and has created fidelity and patience that would not otherwise exist. The man who to his own loss honors his word has created integrity. The woman who bears extreme physical pain and at the same time quietly submits to the will of God will bear the fruits of the Spirit and has inserted a backbone of iron into her faith. The Christian who faces an untimely death with courage and faith creates exactly that: courage and faith where they did not exist before—and takes them both into eternity with him. The disabled child who overcomes, perhaps a Helen Keller or a Joni Erickson Tada, creates cascades of faith, wisdom, inspiration, hope and love to herself and others.

It is certainly true that each of these people may have chosen not to be chosen to be the authors of such good at the cost of such pain. But at the same time, God required no less of His own Son.

What we endure on earth is not endured in vain. We were not created to exist and then to die for no reason. We were not placed here to spin away our precious years in self glorification.

22. First Corinthians 3:10-15

23. 2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore if any may be in Christ he is a new creature...”

24. John 10:28 “And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of My hand.”

25. Romans 5:21 “...as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.”

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.²⁶

God is in the business of bringing beauty from ashes, joy from mourning and forming us into value from pain:

The spirit of the Lord God *is* upon me...to comfort all that mourn...to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they might be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the Lord...²⁷

In order for God to offer to the gift of forgiveness and peace to an immoral humanity He had to pay our death-penalty for sin²⁸ and become sin for us.²⁹ But, like our choices in the face of adversity, the price of the cross had to be actually paid before our peace could be real. The cost in physical pain, in death, and in becoming sin for us was immense, but He did pay it. And because He paid it, we have been reconciled with God.³⁰ But the pains of life will come. Although we can receive His peace in the midst of them, the pain of adversity is still there. And it must be endured. That is the nature of man.



26. Romans 8:28

27. Isaiah 61:1-3

28. Romans 6:23 "For the wages of sin *is* death."

29. 2 Corinthians 5:21 "For He hath made Him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him."

30. Romans 5:10 "...we were reconciled to God by the death of His son."

Chapter 9

Confronting Adversity

ADVERSITIES ARE MADE TO BE CONFRONTED

Hiding from an adversity, or denying it, does not make it go away. God has created adversities as a means of forming us in the same way that He formed David. So how we confront adversities is just as important as how we respond to them.

There are numerous scriptures that address generally how we can avoid adversities, but few that speak to how we should deal with them. There are two scriptural means of dealing with adversities: prayer and wisdom. Let us first consider prayer.

Prayer

God is a Spirit,¹ and He communicates spiritually. The means of this communication is prayer (worship) “in Spirit and Truth.”² Praying “in spirit” refers to praying from the heart, not simply repeated or unintelligible prayers.

To the Christian, this means more than simply being sincere when we pray. Because when we make a heartfelt commitment to Christ and are obedient to scripture, God, Who is spirit, comes to us and dwells inside of us.³ So, when we pray, we are not addressing God who is silent or distant; we are addressing God who is within us. We are addressing God who resides inside of us. We are not praying outward; we are praying inward.

Further, this presence of God inside of us is not theoretical, it is experienced; it is “knowing,” actually knowing God,⁴ not just believing in God. Simply believing that God exists is of no consequence whatever.⁵ Nothing turns on whether we acknowledge God’s existence; everything turns on whether we have trusted Christ and whether we actually know

1. John 4:24 “God is a spirit: and they that worship Him must worship *Him* in spirit and in truth.”

2. Id.

3. John 14:23 “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.” See [FOR THOSE WHO QUESTION](#)

4. John 17:3 “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God... See [EXPERIENCING PEACE IN THE MIDST OF ADVERSITY](#)

5. James 2:19 “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”

Him, because knowing God is what eternal life *is*.⁶ So, when we pray we are communicating spiritually with God who is within us spiritually. This communication, when deep and sincere, is to experience the actual presence of God. It is not theoretical; it is experiential.

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.⁷

Paul teaches us to

Be careful [anxious] for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.⁸

The personal histories of the prayer warriors of the past and present all paint a similar picture. It is as if they see their Christian lives like an expanding globe filled with good. It grows larger and more beautiful daily as they yield to God's will, but the good remains encased in the globe. And as they descend into deeper and deeper prayer, the globe finally breaks. And good, like massive rivers of light, spills over the dams of adversity and fills their entire valley.



6. John 17:3 "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God...

7. Romans 8:16

8. Philippians 4:6,7

Chapter 10

Love and Death

GOD GIVES TWO TYPES OF LIFE. ONE IS OUR
LIFE AND THE OTHER IS HIS LIFE. ONLY ONE OF
THEM ENDS.

Where is God when we are dying? Where is He when the young die?

Who is this God who both kills¹ and loves?² How can these two be reconciled?

Here is one explanation with two parts:

The first part of the explanation is obvious. We are all mortal and we will all die. It is just a matter of time and only God can determine when that time will be. Some lives are long; some are short. That's just part of life.

The second part of the explanation is more difficult to embrace. The second part of the explanation is that death is not the ultimate tragedy. Death is not the ultimate tragedy because, in addition to the fleeting hours of our mortal life, we, as Christians, have been given eternal life which is the ultimate gift of God who loves us.³

But eternal life is given to the soul, not to the body. We know this because all bodies will die whether they are saved or not:

...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.⁴

Although bodies will die, all souls will not die:

Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death...⁵

1. Luke 12:5 "Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into hell."

2. John 8:16 "God is love." John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

3. 1 John 2:25 "And this is the promise that He hath promised us, *even* eternal life."

4. Hebrews 9:27

5. James 5:20

...everyone who lives and believes in Me [Jesus Christ] will never die.⁶

In Ezekiel the Creator speaks directly through the prophet and says:

Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth shall die.⁷

In this passage, God makes clear that the soul is not the same thing as the body.

Instead, He draws a clear delineation between the body and the soul. This clear line between the two is reiterated throughout scripture: There is a soul and there is a body and who we are is the soul, not the body. We are souls walking around in bodies.

The most comprehensive delineation of the soul as opposed to the body (as well as the fact that who we really are is the soul) is found in the parable of Lazarus.⁸ Lazarus was a beggar who was scorned by a rich man daily. The rich man never gave to Lazarus, even though he could have. Eventually both Lazarus and the rich man died and Lazarus went to the bosom of Abraham but the rich man went to Hades, which is hell, the abode of the dead.⁹ Following their death we find that they converse about their life and speak of their respective circumstances.

Thus, the respective souls of these men exist after death and are conversing intelligently and are reaping the results of the choices they made on earth. The bodies are dead and gone. They are buried somewhere in Israel. But their souls survived the death of their bodies and their souls are still alive.

When Jesus gives the parable of Lazarus, He is speaking of the souls as being the very persons whose bodies have died. Who they were was not their bodies. Who they were, their thoughts, their desires, their loves and all of the non-physical aspects of them was who they were and all of who they were is embodied in their souls.

6. John 11:26

7. Ezekiel 18:4

8. Luke 16:19-31

9. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, Bauer, Arndt and Gingrich (University of Chicago Press), 2d Ed. 1958, p. 563, s.v. ᾅδης “the underworld, the place of the dead.” This word should be distinguished from “hell.” See id. s.v. γέεννα “Valley of the sons of Hinnom...the place of punishment...”

The fact that the dead are not simply the dead physical bodies can be seen by the scriptures that teach of the resurrection of the bodies of the just (the first resurrection)¹⁰ and resurrection of the unjust (the second resurrection).¹¹ Everyone will be resurrected and reunited with their bodies. But one group will be resurrected for eternal life and the other for eternal death following the final judgment.¹²

Paul differentiates between the body and the soul in Romans 7 when he speaks of the “inward man” and the “flesh.” He laments the influence of the flesh (sin) on the inward man (the soul). Paul clarifies that the person that he really is the inward man, but sometimes the inward man serves the law of his members (sin):

For I delight in the law of God after the inward man: but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.¹³

He wishes to be delivered from the effect of this “body of death” and, indeed, he has found the answer in Jesus Christ:

O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God; but with the flesh the law of sin.¹⁴

The effect of death is to deprive the body of life, not to deprive the soul of life. So there are two deaths. The first death is the death of the body and the second death is the death of the soul.

10. Revelation 20:4-6 “... I *saw* the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God...But the rest of the dead lived no again until the thousand years were finished. This *is* the first resurrection. Blessed and holy *is* he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power...”

11. John 5:29 “And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.”

12. Scriptures teaches that the final state of the unredeemed is eternal death (the second death), not eternal torment. Eternal torment is reserved for Satan, the anti-christ and the false prophet. See [A SCRIPTURAL DISCUSSION OF HELL](#).

13. Romans 7:22, 23

14. Romans 7:24, 25

By coming to Christ we can avoid the second death but not the first. That is why Jesus Christ is so important. Salvation is when we turn to Christ and trust in Him for the forgiveness of all sin. If we do that then He gives us eternal life. If we (our soul) has eternal life it cannot have a second death.

Hell and the Second Death

The second death is exactly what scripture says it is: it is death. It is death, not eternal torment. God does not burn unbelievers in hell for eternity; there is no such thing as eternal torment for unbelievers. It is simply not in scripture. Anyone who questions this should try opening a concordance to the word "torment" and "eternal" or similar words. They are used together in only one scripture and that is to describe the eternal fate of Satan.¹⁵ There is no scripture that defines the eternal fate of the unredeemed as eternal torment. All scriptures that refer to the eternal fate of the unredeemed refer to it as "death" in one of its forms, such as "perish" as in John 3:16 or simple "death" as in Romans 6:23. There is no eternal torment for the unredeemed. In the end, following the final judgment, they die; their eternal punishment is eternal death.¹⁶

However, that is not to say that those who have rejected Christ will not encounter any consequence for sin except for death. There is indeed a hell and the unredeemed soul will be held there until it dies in the lake of fire. One cannot live the life of a criminal or a Hitler and escape divine justice with a bullet. No. The soul that sins will die but not before it confronts the consequences of its acts in hell and faces its Creator in judgment.

The Soul is Who We Really Are

We are a soul united with a mortal body. We are souls that are expressing themselves through bodies. To put it in colloquial language, our bodies are our "avatar," our means of expression, our interface with the material world. When we die in the first death, it is our body that dies, not us. We, the real we, continues to live.¹⁷

15. Revelation 20:10 "And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever."

16. Revelation 21:8 "...[the] unbelieving...shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death." Ezekiel 18:4 "Behold, all souls are mine...the soul that sinneth shall die..." Scripture does not teach that the soul that sins shall be tormented eternally. See the author's *Fate of Unbelievers*.

17. John 5:24 "Verily, verily, I say unto you. He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, that everlasting life, and shall not come into condemna-

We are not sparks of life that begin with a Darwinian accident and end in dust. We are souls created by a Creator and we will live for eternity if we drink from the well of eternal life offered by Christ.¹⁸

Whosoever drinketh of this water that I shall give him shall never thirst: but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life.¹⁹

It is most comforting and enlightening to contemplate the difference between the body and the soul. The concept is etched into scripture and when we permit scripture to alter our perspective, we find that it is no longer necessary to mysticize the concept of eternal life, or to lament the tragedy of an untimely death, or indeed, to fear our own death.

We Are God's Vinyard

God has placed us in a world that is a moral free-for-all and He has done it for a reason. It is no accident that we are forced to make difficult choices and endure pain. There is a reason for it, and that reason is that in this way alone can He create eternal value. We are the branches that bear the grapes of righteousness in His vinyard.

I am the vine and you are the branches; he who abides [stays] in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.²⁰

We become what we freely choose. And we cannot freely choose unless both options confront us: both good and bad. We live in a world of moral light and moral darkness. Ultimately morality is the center of it all and we must choose:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil...he that doeth truth cometh to the light...²¹

tion; bu is passed from death unto life.”

18. John 4:14 " But whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst; but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life."

19. John 4:14

20. John 15:5

21. John 3:19,21

Eternal Life

The soul is dead because of sin unless Christ makes it alive by paying the penalty for sin:

And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened [made alive] together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses...²²

And you *hath He quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins...²³

The soul that sinneth, it shall die.²⁴

And how do we know that our soul has become alive? When a dead soul becomes alive—and no longer intends to embrace death by committing immoral acts—it experiences the presence of the Creator:

He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me: and he that loveth Me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him.²⁵

Eternal life is therefore not simply an extension of mortal life. It is an experience. It is spiritual life and it is an entirely different life from our physical life. That is the reason why the experience is called being "born again."²⁶ It is spiritual life that we receive before the body dies and spiritual life is intended to be experienced.

Mortal life has a beginning and it has an end. Eternal life does not. Eternal life, being eternal, has neither beginning nor end. Eternal life has a point of commencement for us because we receive it at one point in time, but what we receive is eternal life, life that never began: we receive Christ's life.²⁷ Eternal life in Christ is therefore not simply an extension of mortal life; it is something entirely different.

22. Colossians 2:13

23. Ephesians 2:1

24. Ezekiel 18:20

25. John 14:21

26. John 4:6,7

27. John 14:6 "I am...life..."

Eternal life is a supernatural life that is superimposed on mortal life and lived and experienced in this life and thereafter. Eternal life is knowing God.²⁸ We experience this life until we mar it with immorality and sin. It is a marvelous life that must be experienced to be comprehended:

“In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.”²⁹

One day the mortal life of the Christian will end. But as frightening as it may be, it is not the ultimate adversity. It is the ultimate release.

For the Christian, the day of his death will be like the lady who returned to her home on a cold day. She is tired, and rather than hanging up her old coat, she walks into warmth of her home, drops her arms to her side and lets the coat slip to the floor behind her. But the real person, the real she, walks on. That is death for the Christian. The body slips away, but the person, the real person continues on. That is what Christ meant when He said, "I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish."³⁰ He did not mean that our bodies would never die. He meant that our souls will never die. Our stay here is temporary. It always has been. We knew that going in.

Hope for the Unredeemed

What of the man, the son or the daughter who dies apparently without accepting Christ and without receiving eternal life?

We know first that God is in control³¹ so no matter what the deceased had done or said before his demise, he or she may have been saved. God is not limited by the uninformed choices of man. Salvation that occurs moments before death is no more limited than the boundaries of God's omnipotence. God is limited by neither time nor circumstance. He is not limited by the roller-coaster of youth, the depth of a depression, the death of love or the bullet of an assailant. And He

28. John 17:3 "And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent."

29. John 3:5,6 "...Except a man be born of water [physical birth] and of the Spirit [spiritual birth] he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit."

30. John 10:28 (NASV)

31. Ephesians 1:4,5 "According as He hath chosen us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be hold and without blame before Him in love; Having predestined us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will."

will not permit one pebble on the coast of His eternity to be misplaced by the thoughtless designs of anyone. All good, all evil and all else are under His just control. There is always hope for salvation.

A man or a woman, however, who does die without Christ does not face an eternity in the flames of hell. After the body dies, the soul faces a stay in hell, which may or may not be horrendous, depending upon the sins committed during life. Each person will be judged by a just God based upon what he did in life.³² But in the end his soul will die.³³

Many evangelical churches teach that those who do not turn to Christ during this lifetime will be sentenced to be tormented for eternity. There is no scripture that makes this statement. On the contrary, scripture repeatedly states that the inescapable result of sin is death, not eternal torment.³⁴

If you are the parent, the spouse or friend of someone who rejected Christ to his dying breath, you still do not know that he was not saved. But even if he was not, you may rest assured that although he will be judged for his sins, he will be rightly judged and he will not be burned in hell forever.



32. Revelation 20:13 "...and they were judged every man according to their works."

33. See the author's *Fate of Unbelievers*, which examines all of the scriptures that relate to the doctrinal error called "eternal torment."

34. There are 48 such scriptures all of which are quoted in the author's *Fate of Unbelievers*.

Chapter 11

Christ in Pain

GOD HAS NOT EXEMPTED HIMSELF FROM PAIN

Although scripture makes it clear that God is the ultimate cause of all things, including pain, it is likewise clear that God did not spare Himself from either physical or spiritual pain.¹

God's justice is inevitable and sin results in death. For mankind, it is either the death of Christ or our own death. Our choice.

Perhaps one of the most profoundly illuminating scriptures relating to the issue of pain in this life is found in Revelation 5. This passage is an analogy, a story, that teaches the depth of the effect of the cross. It seems that the time had come in heaven to open the book containing the decrees of God, because the end of mankind was fast approaching. But not just anyone could open the book. They needed someone who had the credentials to open it. So, heaven was searched in an effort to locate someone who had the credentials and could break the seal so the book could be read. There was only one person who had the credentials to break the seal and that person was Jesus Christ.

It is certainly not surprising that Christ had the credentials to open the scrolls. But what is very surprising is *why* He had the credentials to open them. This scripture says that Christ had the credentials to open the scrolls *because He was slain*.

Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain and hast redeemed us ...²

This passage does not give any other reason for Christ's qualification. It does not mention the fact that Christ had the requisite credentials because He is the Son of God,³ or because He is divine⁴ and the second person of the Trinity, or because He is the light of the world,⁵

1. Scripture teaches that there is one God who exists in three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Christ is the Son and is therefore divine, the second person of the Trinity and is therefore God. See John 8:58 ("Before Abraham was, I AM.")

2. Revelation 5:9.

3. John 1:34 "And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God."

4. John 8:15 "Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am."

5. John 8:12 "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

or because He is God incarnate,⁶ or even because all things had been made through Him.⁷ He was and is all of those things, but none of these things are mentioned as the reason why He was worthy to open the scroll. Scripture gives only one reason why He is worthy to break the seal and open the book and that reason is because he was slain.

The point is that He had to actually *do it*.

He had to suffer. He had to actually die the death. God the Father did not simply decree by divine fiat that the sins of the world were forgiven. Instead, He required Christ had to become sin for us⁸ and to die the death Himself to satisfy divine justice and exculpate man from the inevitable end: eternal death.

So, pain is universal and inevitable. God does not exempt Himself from it. And we who are made in His image are required to suffer as well. When we do, let us remember that God did not exempt Himself from pain, excruciating pain.

The crucifixion is an overwhelming statement of How God sees both sin and righteousness. Sin is death; righteousness is life. At the cross Christ died as the result of the sins of others (us) and was later resurrected to eternal life because of His own righteousness and divinity. Therefore, the cross is the ultimate statement of the truth that the wages of sin is death⁹ and that the fruit of righteousness in Christ is eternal life.¹⁰

All who have placed their trust in Christ for the forgiveness of their sins have appropriated Christ's voluntary¹¹ sacrifice for the payment of their sins. They are in Christ and they will never die because they have

6. John 8:58 "Jesus sayeth unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Before Abraham was, I am. Then they took up stones to cast at him..."

7. John 1:3 "All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made."

8. 2 Corinthians. 5:21 "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who know no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him."

9. Romans. 6:23 "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

10. John 3:15, 4:36, 6:54, 17:2,17:3; Acts 13:48; 1 Timothy. 6:12, 3:7; 1 John 1:2, 2:25, 5:11.

11. Matthew 26:53 "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently send twelve legions of angels. But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled...?"

eternal life.¹² This gift of eternal life is free for the taking¹³ for whoever wants it.¹⁴ It is free, because only Christ could earn it and only Christ did earn it,¹⁵ and can therefore do with it as He chooses. And He chooses to give it to whoever will take it.¹⁶ Once given, the gift can never be lost because no man, no matter what he does, has either the authority or the power to alter what God has already done.¹⁷†

In order to give us this gift, God did not exempt Himself from pain. He had a cross to bear, and we, who are made in His image have ours to bear as well.



12. John 6:40 “And this is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on Him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise Him up at the last day.”; Romans 6:23 “the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

13. Ephesians 2:8 “...it is the gift of God.”

14. Revelation 22:17 “And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.”

15. Revelation 5:9. “...for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood...”

16. Revelation. 22:17 “...And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

17. Romans 8:38, 39 “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”; John 6:39 “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent Me, that of all which He hath given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” † Other scriptures, such as Hebrews 6:4-8, teach that if anyone has tasted the heavenly gift and voluntarily turned away, it is impossible for us to renew him again to repentance. Evangelism is useless for him. However, the person himself can always repent (First John 1:9). But repentance for Christian is unrelated to salvation; it is instead related to knowing God and experiencing God's presence and peace (John 14:21,23). The more the Christian sins, the more he departs from the presence of Christ and the he will "bear thorns and briers" rather than the fruits of righteousness. This person is a back-slider and eventually he will lose all semblance of Christianity and become useless to God's overall purpose which is for us to become branches attached to the vine of Christ and bear the fruits of righteousness. The reference to the burning in Hebrews 6:8 when the back-slider is "nigh unto cursing" does not refer to hell, but instead to the standard procedure in vineyards where dead branches are snapped off and burned.

Chapter 12

Conclusion

We do not live an accidental life that is defined by the span between a birth and a death. We are here for a purpose. We have been created by our Creator. We are not accidents of evolution in a universe of night. We are here for a reason. We have been made by the Creator for the purpose of bearing the fruits of righteousness; we are branches in the vineyard of God yielding fruits of righteousness. We are making honor, truth, kindness, wisdom, faith, love...we are expressing Jesus Christ, we are vessels of the divine nature.

We are creating eternal value.

But if what we create is to be significant, righteousness has to be a choice. It is a choice to do right in the face of trials and temptations. It is a choice to do right in the midst of pain, the choice to do right when all the world is telling us to do the opposite. Ultimately it is the choice to do right for one reason and one reason alone: because God has told us to. These choices define us. These choices are who we are. God creates us. But our choices define us. It is ultimately our choice to be conformed to the image of Christ or to be conformed to the image of the world.

He places us in an environment of adversities where He does not impose His will on us. He gives us an even playing field. He creates a world where righteous choices mean something because wrong ones can be easier, a world where right choices can be difficult. He places us in a world where we make a lifetime of choices each of which is morally right or morally wrong or morally neutral, and we live with the consequences. We live with who we are.

He places us in an environment where He does not impose Himself on us because He has created us to love and if we are to love we must have the freedom not to love. He has created us to love because He is love.¹ He has created us to express love, acceptance without judgment. When we express this love we are expressing Him because He is love. We are the branches in His vineyard; we are the ones whom He has chosen to yield the grapes of His righteousness, to feed His hungry children, to give water to his chosen, to carry the divine nature in imperfect vessels, to be light and salt in a dead world, to live in Him and to speak His Truth. And it is never too late.

1. First John 4:8 "...God is love."

In the end, when each of us must face the prospect of an eternity of endless death or endless life, we look back over our years and see that all of our life has fashioned us. What we did with all of the good and all of the bad, with all of the ecstasies and all of the pain, it has made us into who we are.

God created us in His image and that creation did not end when we were born. It had just begun.



Chapter 13

For Those Who Question

KNOWING GOD.

Why believe anything the Bible says? Is it not just a book of Jewish myths?

Indeed, how can anyone really believe in God? Don't we all live a life without really knowing whether God is there or not? God is invisible, intangible and silent. How can anyone believe that He exists?

These are valid questions and they deserve answers.

There are, of course, volumes written both for and against the validity and the truth of scripture. But most people do not read them before they come to believe that the Bible is true. There are many more volumes written about the existence or the non-existence of God, but practically no one bothers to read them before making a decision for Christ. How can anyone make a rational decision about God?

The answer is quite simple. They *try it*. Books don't help. Being religious does not help. Pretending to believe does not help. Only God can show you that He is real. And if He doesn't, you will simply never know. It is as simple and as terrible as that.

He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.¹

But if God is God, then He is perfectly capable of making Himself known in no uncertain terms to anyone and everyone — and known in such a way that it is clear that the knowledge of Him is actual and not simply an intellectual conclusion or a psychological “crutch” constructed by a needy mind.

So, why does He not make Himself actually known? The answer is that He *does* make Himself known. That is the reason that there are so many committed Christians.

But it is by invitation only. *He* issues the invitation, and *we* must accept it. If we don't accept the invitation, we can't go to the party.

1. First John 5:12

The invitation is issued to all.² *So you are invited.* You may choose to accept the invitation or you may decline it. Your choice — it is always your choice.

What must you do to accept the invitation? First the acceptance of the invitation must be sincere, because if God is God, He is going to know your heart. You must, in good faith, intend to accept the forgiveness offered by Jesus Christ. You must mean what you say to Him (there are no magic words here). And all the faith that is necessary is the faith to trust in Jesus Christ sincerely for the forgiveness of all sin, even though you are really not sure He is even there.

And ye shall seek me, and find *me*, when ye shall search for me with all your heart.³

Note that this scripture does not say to trust in Him because you are certain, or because you just believe, or because someone told you to trust. It says to be sincere; trust "with all your heart."

One does not know God and then trust in Christ. One trusts in Christ *in order to* know God. Knowing God comes as a *result* of trusting, not vice versa. You don't look for and find God like finding a lost car-key. You don't find God. God finds you. So, don't expect to know God or really anything about Him until you come to Christ. You can't know Him until He discloses Himself to you.

Don't fall for the lie that tells you that this act of faith is "intellectually impossible" or that it is somehow a "violation of who you really are" or that it is simply "unreasonable." If you sincerely trust in Christ for the forgiveness of all sin and that trust is foolishness, then you have lost nothing. But if you fail to trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of all sin and it is not foolishness then you have lost everything.

When Christ was sacrificed on the cross, He paid for all of our sins (past, present and future). He was later resurrected demonstrating that His sacrifice was effective and that the penalty for sin had been paid.⁴

2. John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

3. Jeremiah 29:13

4. This is called the "gospel," or "good news."

We become forgiven and sinless in God's eyes when we appropriate the work of Christ on the Cross by our decision to rely upon what He did there for us. That is absolutely all we have to do to be cleansed from sin. There is no penance to pay (He paid it all), no hail-Mary's, no priest, no preacher, no confessor. Just you and Him:

Believe [trust] on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.⁵

And we must all be cleansed from sin in order to become someone to whom God will disclose Himself. That cleansing occurs when we come to Christ.

So, to accept the invitation all you have to do is to honestly trust in Jesus Christ. You don't have to know that it is true in order to try it. One can know that God is real only after God discloses Himself.⁶

Knowing Him is the gift of eternal life:

And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.⁷

So, after you have trusted in Christ (salvation), when does He disclose Himself to you?

He discloses Himself to you when you yield your will to His and obey His word.

He that hath my commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him.⁸

If a man love Me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him and We will come unto him, and make our abode with him.⁹

5. Acts 16:31. The words "believe on" mean to "trust in."

6. John 14:21 "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself [show myself] to him."

7. John 17:3

8. John 14:21

9. John 14:23

God's gift of eternal life comes when you trust in Christ. This is the gift of salvation and it is an unconditional free gift, free for the asking. But knowing God — having Him disclose Himself to you — is conditional. It is conditioned on how much you have yielded to Him, or how you intend to live your life conforming to His Word. If you surrender your will to Christ, He will disclose Himself to you. When He discloses Himself to you, you will love Him and discover that all that you never believed was true really is true.

If you do not obey His word, He will not make Himself known to you. Why? Because God does not dwell with those who are willfully and intentionally committing sin.

This presence of God is not theoretical, it is actual and it is experienced. This the reason why so many people tell of their salvation and remain Christians all of their lives. This is “knowing” God,¹⁰ not just believing in God. Simply believing that God exists is of no consequence whatever.¹¹ Everything turns on whether we have actually trusted Christ and whether we actually know Him; nothing turns on your opinion as to whether God exists or not.

So, the “formula” here is to trust and obey. It is not necessary to prove yourself or perfect yourself before God discloses Himself to you. What is important is to place your faith and trust in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins and sincerely surrender to His will. After you do that, He will disclose Himself to you and empower you to turn from sin. He will show you and you will understand. He will show Himself to you just as He has shown all the others who did the same thing over the past two millennia.

Christians are not Christians because they liked a particular set of rules or chose particular brand of theology. They are not Christians because they like the idea of a sacrificial Saviour or because they just like the way the Bible set everything up. Most of them never read the Bible and had no idea of what it says. They are Christians because they decided to trust in Christ, discovered the presence of God and found it to be wonderful. In short, they are Christians because they tried something and it proved to be true.

10. John 17:3 “And this is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God...”

11. James 2:19 “Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble.”

To the Atheist

To the avowed atheist, let me say that you may be far closer to the Truth than you realize because you are uncompromising and you are honest. You refuse to engage with an imaginary theological construct for the purpose of creating some type of artificial mental repose (theological liberalism). My hat is off to you. You demand experiential reality.

But if what I am saying is true, then that same uncompromising demand for truth should take you to the point where you try it. We all live a life of borders and the border for the atheist is constructed of reason and observation. But if you are to be certain of it you must have the objectivity to not only walk right up to it, but also to take a step beyond it. You can never truly see it if you don't look at it from both sides.

This is my challenge. You claim to be rational but in fact your decision not to try Christ is irrational. It is irrational not to make a decision to place your trust in Christ's forgiveness and to surrender to His will *if He will disclose Himself to you*. It is irrational not to try—unless you reject Him ab initio.

The argument that the Bible is a collection of myths and no fool would ever be persuaded by it is irrelevant because no one can rationally accept the Bible as true without first discovering the reality of Christ because the Bible is spiritual and without knowing God first, the Bible is foolishness. It says so itself.¹² And that tired old argument that simply trying is somehow a breach of your personal honor is, well, irrational because you lose nothing by trying and prove me wrong at the same time.

Quite frankly, if you do have the courage to walk beyond the limit of your own vision just to see if there is anything there, you will be in for quite a surprise. It certainly surprised me.



12. First Corinthians 1:18 " For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."

Timeline of Warning

FIFTEEN CENTURIES OF SCRIPTURE WARNINGS THAT SIN CAUSES DEATH

Genesis 2:17

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die.

1400 BC

Psalm 33:18,19

Behold, the eye of the Lord is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy; to deliver their soul from death...

967 BC

Ezekiel 18:4

“Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth shall die...

593 BC

Ezekiel 33:11

“As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from you evil ways; for why will ye die?”

593 BC

John 8:51, 52

Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.

30 AD

James 5:20

Let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death...

45 AD

Romans 1:32

Who, knowing the righteous judgment of God that those who practice such things are deserving of death...

55 AD

Romans 6:16

...sin leading to death...

55 AD

Romans 6:21

What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? For the end of those things *is* death.

55 AD

Romans 6:23, 24

For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life.

55 AD

Second Timothy 1:10

But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality

55 AD

Romans 6:16

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, His servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?

55 AD

2 Peter 3:9

The Lord is ... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

68 AD

Hebrews 2:9

But we see Jesus...that He, by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

80 AD

Revelation 2:11

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death.

90 AD

Revelation 20:14,15

Revelation 21:8

And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire ... [the] unbelieving ... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

90 AD

‡

Where does Christ teach that He saves us from eternal torment? Nowhere. Where does Christ speak of eternal torment? Nowhere. Where does any scripture use the words eternal torment to describe the fate of anyone except Satan? Nowhere. Where does scripture teach that Jesus Christ saves us from anything other than death? Nowhere. Where does scripture teach that the wages of sin is death and that Christ saves us from the wages of sin? Everywhere.

