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EDITORIAL

What Does the Bible Teach?

“For the ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them”

There have always been two kinds of people on earth. Those who fear God and do what he says, and those who say there is no God and do what they think is the best for them. The Bible says, “Fool has said in his heart that there is no God.” (Psalm 14:1). There are those who believe the Bible to be the word of God and follow in everything what it says; but there are others who reject the Bible to be the word of God. Again, the Bible says, “There is a way that seems right to man, but in the end of it there is destruction.” (Proverbs 14:12). It is too wonderful to know that God has spoken and has told man from where has he come, and what is his purpose on earth, and where he is going. The Bible reveals the mind of God to man. It is true that the Bible is the most published and most read book in the world. But it is also true that there are very few who actually follow what it says. In the long ago when God had brought Israel out of the land of bondage to bless them; it was the same situation with the people, when the prophet Hosea had said to them: “Who is wise? Let him understand these things. Who is prudent? Let him know them. For the ways of the Lord are right; the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.” (Hosea 14:9).

Although man through the centuries has invented many ways to save himself from sin; to work his way into heaven, and to

worship God, as he himself sees them right. But the only right and sure way is the way of the Lord. What do men do when they want to know the right and exact weight or measurement of a particular thing? The only right way is followed to go to the weighing machine or scale or a measuring tape. That is the only right thing to do to avoid any and all disputes and disagreement. Why can't the same be done in matters pertaining to spiritual or religious? Why should we not go to the authority; to the written revelation of God, the Bible, instead of going to man and his written books and creeds?

In the myriad of churches of different origins and names; diverse doctrines and ways of worship, man has forgotten to go to the source of the authority of God, to the book of God, the Bible, to know what is the sure and the right way of God. The Bible clearly teaches that God is not the God of confusion, but of peace. (1 Corinthians 11:33). Why there exist chaos and confusion then? Why are people confused between Protestants and Catholics, who is right? The answer cannot be found in the wisdom and theological books of men. God speaks today through the Bible alone. The Bible is God's book of authority. Only the way of the Lord is right, as the prophet says, and the righteous walk in them, but transgressors stumble in them.

Christ Is Man's Only Saviour

J.C. CHOATE

You might immediately ask, "But why does man need a saviour?" Many, of course, reject the idea of God, or that Christ is the Son of God, and the saviour of mankind. At the same time, you can see for yourself where such people are, the kind of lives they are living, and the mess that they are making in the world. Jeremiah, the prophet of God in old times, was right when he said, 'O Lord, I know that the way of man is not in himself : it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." (Jeremiah, chapter 10, and verse 23). But man needs a saviour because he is lost, and he is lost because of his sins. The thought of being lost may be compared to one who has lost his way in his travels, because he has gotten on the wrong road, or of a child being separated from

his parents. Sin is what causes one to become lost, or to be separated from God, since it is sin that comes between man and God.

Man did not enter the world with sin, but he became a sinner when he reached the age of knowing right from wrong, and then he disobeyed God's law. The Apostle John said, "Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law : for sin is the transgression of the law." (1 John 3:4). Then Christ said, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin." (John 8:34). The apostle Paul tells us that the consequences of sin is death. We read, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 6:23).

That means then that since man is a sinner, that he is lost, that he cannot save himself, therefore, he needs a saviour. But who could that saviour be? Not another man, because he also needs to be saved. Not even a godly man, because he cannot be good enough or do enough good works that would make it possible for him to save anyone. So that brings us back to God and his Son, Jesus. God, the Father, saw that man was in sin, lost and without hope. He saw that it was impossible for man to save himself, or for the law, or any other system to save him. Therefore, he decided to sacrifice his own Son that man might have a saviour. He further chose to send his son into this world to be born of woman. Mary was chosen to be the mother, and the angel said of her, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: and he shall save his people from their sins." (Matthew, chapter 1, and verse 21).

Christ was born, lived a sinless life, and was crucified upon a cruel cross for the sins of the world. John wrote, "And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin." (1 John 4:5). Peter said, "For even hereunto where ye called because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth : Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously: Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, and we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed." (1 Peter 2:21-24).

The Apostle Paul declared that "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." (1 Corinthians 15:3). Again, he said of Christ, "Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father." (Galatians 1:4).

My friends, think about it. There man was lost, with no hope, unable to save himself, in his sins, an enemy of God, but God through his grace and mercy was willing to send his only begotten Son to die on a cruel cross, and Christ was willing to do that, that man might be saved. That includes us too. What a great price was paid that we might be saved! What a great love was manifested on our behalf! Christ himself said, "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." (John 3:16). Again, he said, "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you." (John 15:12-14).

But even though God gave his Son to be our saviour, and Christ was willing to give his life that we, and all people might be saved, that does not mean that all will be saved. First of all, we must believe in him. Jesus said, "I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins : for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins." (John 8:24). Then based on that belief, if we will obey him. then he will save us from our sins. He said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments." (John 14:15). Can you imagine one wanting the Lord to save him, but refusing to believe in him or to obey his commands? Surely not.

Christ commanded the apostles to take the gospel to all the world, and those who would believe and be baptized would be saved, but those who refused to believe would be lost. (Mark 16:15, 16). Peter and the apostles preached the gospel to a group of people in Jerusalem, and on convincing them that Christ was the Son of God, then they wanted to know what they should do. "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." (Acts 2:38). Then we read in Acts 2:47 that the Lord added the saved to his church.

Christ is the saviour then of all who will believe in him and obey him. The Hebrew writer said, "Though he were a Son, yet

learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him." (Hebrews 5:8,9). But what about all of the unbelievers, those who choose to remain in their sin? Unless they turn to God before they die then they will be eternally lost. Isn't there some other way that they can be saved? No, since Christ is man's only saviour, and therefore man's only hope.

What about you? Do you believe in God? Do you believe that Jesus Christ died for your sins? Have you obeyed him? If not, will you? I pray that you will.

God's Faith In Mankind

CLEM THURMAN

When man sinned in Eden, the plan of God to save man began to unfold: *"According to his eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 3:11). And man, even with all his shortcomings, was part of the working of that plan. We read much in the Bible about the need for faith: *"Without faith it is impossible to please him ... Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins. . . Being justified by faith we have peace with God"* (Heb. 11:6; Jno. 8:24; Rom. 5:1). Faith gives us access to the grace of God (Rom. 5:2) and is the means by which the gospel empowers us to receive the salvation of Christ (Rom. 1:16).

Man sinned, and sinned, and sinned. *"There is none righteous, no, not one. . . All have sinned and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom. 3:10,23). Yet God saw something in man worth saving, and sent Christ to die for us, *"That whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (Jno. 3:16). We speak often of our need for faith in God. But what of God's faith in man? Is that faith misplaced? Or does man (at least some people) properly respond to the confidence God places in him?

GOD'S FAITH IN MAN IN FORMER TIMES

When man became so wicked that *"every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Gen. 6:5), God determined to destroy man from the face of the earth. But, to

preserve and accomplish His purpose in man, all of mankind could not be destroyed. So one man was chosen: Noah, a righteous man (Gen. 6:8-9). He was told to build an ark, and: *"By faith, Noah ... prepared an ark"* (Heb. 11:7). Later, God determined to separate a people of His own, to make of them a sanctified people through whom the "seed" (Gen. 3:15) of promise would come. He chose Abraham to be the father of that people: *"For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord"* (Gen. 18:19). When the time came to deliver that people from Egyptian bondage, God chose Moses to deliver them. With the guidance and strength of God, Moses did it (Ex. 14:13; etc.). God had faith in Noah, Abraham and Moses — that they would do His will. That faith was not misplaced.

There have always been battles to be fought between the forces of good and evil. But God uses mankind to do His fighting. The Midianites oppressed God's people, and God promised to deliver them. But, instead of acting directly, God used Gideon to overcome them and free Israel (Judg. 6 & 7). Even Midian recognized that God was with Gideon: *"This is nothing else save the sword of Gideon the son of Joash, a man of Israel: for into his hand hath God delivered Midian"* (Judg. 7:14). When Israel's hearts failed at the sight of Goliath, God chose a young man named David to slay Goliath and rout the army of the Philistines (1 Sam. 17). The prophets of Baal seemingly had things their own way, until God gave His charge to Elijah and that godly man rose to meet the challenge. The prophets of Baal were overcome and God's faith in Elijah was vindicated.

GOD OFFERS SALVATION ONLY THROUGH CHRIST

Even though, as the prophet foretold, *"He was despised and rejected of man"* (Isa. 53:3), Jesus became our sacrifice for sin when *"the Lord laid on Him the iniquity of us all"* (Isa. 53:6). He willingly went to the cross and laid down his life: *"I lay down my life... No one taketh it away from me, but I lay it down of myself. . . Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends"* (Jno. 10:17-18; 15:13). The apostle revealed to us later the reason for that death, *"That he by the grace of God should taste of death for every man"* (Heb. 2:9). Jesus died on the cross, that we might be *"justified by his blood"* (Rom. 5:9), and

"reconciled to God through the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). This was according to "the eternal purpose of God which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11).

God doesn't offer a choice to man as to ways he might be saved. Christ said, *"I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (Jno. 14:6).* The apostles taught this clearly, also: *"In none other is there salvation: for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, wherein we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).* Christ is not one of many ways, He is *"the way."* But what if one will not accept Jesus? The Lord replies, *"Except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (Jno. 8:24).* We often hear that it is dangerous to put all your eggs in one basket, but that is what God has done! He has placed His faith in man that man will accept, the one plan God has to save man, through Jesus Christ.

GOD GIVES HIS WORK INTO OUR HANDS

God has always cared for the poor. Under the old law, He decreed that Israel should make provision for the poor (Ex. 23:11; etc.). While Jesus was on earth, *"He went about doing good" (Acts 10:38)* to those that were afflicted. His exhortation to the disciples was to *"remember the poor" (Gal. 2:10).* The apostles gave us an example (Acts 4:32-37; 6:1-6), but they also left clear teachings for us: *"Visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction. . . Do good unto all men. . . Help the weak" (Jas. 1:27; Gal. 6:10; Acts 20:35).* But God will not directly feed the hungry, visit the sick or in other ways minister to the needy. He gives us that work to do for Him, and He has faith in us that we will do it.

Jesus died to save a world that was lost in sin. He stated thus His purpose on earth: *"The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Lk. 19:10).* But then He gave this charge to His followers, *"Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that disbelieveth shall be condemned" (Mk. 16:15-16).* Who is going to tell the lost about the Savior? He has faith in us that we will! He has decreed that *"through the church"* the manifold wisdom of God is to be made known to the world (Eph. 3:10). God wants to save sinners (1 Tim. 2:3-4). Christ died to save sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). Now it is up to us to go and tell them of the salvation which Christ offers to them.

The early followers of Jesus felt very keenly the God-given responsibility to tell the lost about Christ and His salvation. In Jerusalem, *"Daily, in the temple and in every house, they ceased not to teach and to preach Jesus as the Christ"* (Acts 5:42). When persecution arose, the disciples had to leave the city: *"They therefore that were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word"* (Acts 8:4). The result of such dedication is recorded later when Paul wrote that the gospel of Christ had been preached *"to every creature under heaven"* (Col. 1:23). We need to feel just as keenly today the responsibility to tell the lost about the Savior.

The only hands God uses to serve the needs of those about us are our hands. Our feet are the feet He uses to carry the message of salvation. Our tongues are His instruments to tell the lost about Christ. It is great that you have faith in God. But, remember, God also has faith in you. Don't let Him down.

To Judge, or Not to Judge

BYRON NICHOLS

The words of Jesus in Matthew 7:1 are often quoted fervently today. They read, *"Judge not, that you be not judged."* If there are any words from Scripture that would qualify as "politically correct" today, then surely these are those words. This is an age in which it is advocated that men are to "live and let live", opting to ignore, excuse, or condone any and all behavior, regardless of its violation of God's law.

The following observations are not offered in an attempt to justify any kind of judging by anyone that is in opposition to what the Bible teaches. This is not an effort to endorse unjust criticism or engage in condemnation, but it is an exercise in studying the biblical concept of judging on the part of Christians.

Many assert that Jesus is prohibiting the judging involved in calling attention to the sins of others, yet these same people are condemning what they see in others. In other words, they feel totally qualified and justified in judging those whom they believe to be guilty of judging others. One is made to wonder how and why judging is considered by these people to be admirable when they do the judging, while at the same time they declare with

vehemence that the same judging is wrong for others. How can it be right for them if it is wrong for all others? I believe that the answer is that it cannot be right, and the basis for that response is found in the inspired words of Paul in Romans 2:1, where he says, *"Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge do the same things "* (emphasis added).

As is typically the case in Bible study, it is important to consider the context of this declaration from Jesus, *"Judge not, that you be not judged."* Reading Matthew 7:2-5 sheds some very important light on His words in verse 1. In those following verses the Lord made it clear that His grave concern was not about the action of judging itself, but about the fallacy of a judgment being done by one who is hypocritically judging, trying to divert attention from his own sins by turning the spotlight on the sins of another.

In verse 1 Jesus has just said that it is wrong to judge others, yet in verse 6 He calls for action on the part of His followers which **requires** judging! Here He says, *"Do not give what is holy to the dogs; nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."* The Lord here creates some questions for us: (1) Just what is "holy"? (2) Who are the "dogs"? (3) What are the "pearls"? (4) Who are the "swine"? In order for us to comply with the Lord's commands in this verse, we must have clarification of these terms which He used in an obviously symbolic way. For us to answer these four questions by identifying to whom or what Jesus was referring, we have no choice but to engage in judging. To do less would be to ignore this divine order. Whoa! Is Jesus vacillating back and forth like a weed in the wind by saying "don't judge", and then almost immediately turning right around and contradicting what He had just said? Not at all!

Of course the words of Christ do not stand or fall on the confirmation or endorsement of anyone else, but Paul echoed the teaching of the Lord when he affirmed that the Jews were not in a position to be hypocritically judging the Gentiles, being equally guilty of having violated God's law—read carefully Romans 2:21-23.

In John 7:24, Jesus again said, *"Do not judge"*, but it is imperative that we note the words that followed. His total statement

was, ***“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment”*** (emphasis added). Friends, this is the key to the whole matter of any judging done by us as human beings—**judge righteously**, not maliciously, not hypocritically.

Jesus and those writers of the New Testament (who were inspired by the Holy Spirit) have made it non-negotiable that Christians engage in righteous judging every day of our lives. Let me offer just a few of the multitude of possible illustrations of this truth as found in our New Testament:

1. In Romans 16:17, Paul urged Christians to note (or mark) those in the church who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to what they have been taught. It is impossible to do this without comparing the Scriptures with contrary teachings, and ultimately arriving at a judgment on the matter.

2. Paul, in 1 Timothy 6:20 and 2 Timothy 2:23, said to ***“avoid profane and vain babblings”***, as well as ***“foolish and ignorant disputes”***. To be faithful in doing this we must be able to judge what is profane, vain, foolish, and ignorant.

3. 1 Corinthians 15:33 exhorts us to not keep company with ***“evil”*** people, who will corrupt our good behavior. To be obedient in this we must be able to determine, or judge, who or what is evil and who or what is not. Surely that must be done on the basis of what is taught in the Bible, but it still requires some judging on our part.

4. Paul makes it abundantly clear in 1 Corinthians 6:5 that the church is to have men who can handle necessary judging of matters of conflict between fellow Christians.

5. In 2 John 9-11, the apostle John calls upon the church to reject any who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ. Making a determination that someone is not abiding in the doctrine of Christ is the same thing as making a judgment.

6. Another very apparent teaching that is in conflict with much of today's thinking regarding judging is found in 1 John 4:1: ***“Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. Determining whether a “spirit” is of God, or whether one is a “false prophet” necessitates judging based on the Word of God.***

7. We have a command from the apostle Paul, ***“... in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition***

which he received from us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6), once again making it quite clear that Jesus never intended His words in Matthew 7:1 to be interpreted as a prohibition of all kinds of judging on the part of men.

These few are representative of the great many examples of righteous judging that the New Testament calls upon Christians to make.

It is essential that we understand that there are indeed judgments that we absolutely have no authority to make. Included among these are judgments that are rendered with an un-Christian attitude. Also included are those judgments which belong only to God and Christ. We have no authority whatsoever to thrust ourselves into areas of judgment which are solely matters for the Godhead. It is not that difficult to determine from the Scriptures which matters of judgment belong to the Father and the Son, as opposed to those for which we are responsible.

Let us not succumb to peer pressure that would have us to refrain from making those kinds of judgments for which we will one day be held accountable.

Evolution and the Bible

BOB SPURLIN

We cannot successfully deny the fact that belief in God and the theory of evolution are involved in a life and death struggle for existence. The Christian is laboring under a false assumption who thinks that the theory of evolution is no threat to faith. This writer has even heard Christians declare their belief that the theory of evolution and faith in God are totally compatible (Hebrews 11:3). What a foolish and uninformed conclusion to reach!

Some among us think they can reconcile the Bible account of creation and the theory of evolution through belief in "theistic evolution": the idea that most of the statements in Genesis 1 and 2 are figurative (which means that they are actually saying nothing specific), and that even though *God* did the initial "creating", the *method* He used for developing His universe was a natural evolutionary process.

But the Christian cannot reach such conclusions through a

rational process based on faith. The Bible makes three claims about the nature of creation which can never be harmonized with the evolutionist's creed.

First, the Bible claims a perfect, full-grown creation from the beginning. The Genesis description shows that God created the first living things completely mature and in full possession of the power of reproduction. There was no "development" toward perfection or from one stage to another.

Six times in the first chapter of Genesis (1:4; 10,12,18,21, and 25), the record says that God evaluated His handiwork as "good". The Biblical account of the world's origin does not suggest upheaval, disorder or "struggle for survival," as the evolutionists claim. All things were operating in perfect harmony and order from the moment of creation! Whereas the theory of evolution demands that we view things as going from simple to complex, from a disordered arrangement to a more orderly one, the Bible says the process is working in exact reverse: things were perfect in their original state, only to be subjected to degeneration and decay by the introduction of sin.

Second, the Bible claims a complete creation in six days.

The six days of man's work-week are comparable to the creation-week of Genesis one: The Bible says: *"For in six days the Lord made the heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day"* (Exodus 20:11). The *"works were finished from the foundation of the world"* (Hebrews 4:3). An evolutionist, and even some among us, are suggesting that the "day" during the creative work of God was millions and even billions of years in length. The word translated "day" in the Old Testament, "Yom", always referred to a literal day of twenty-four hours when modified by such words as "first," "second," "third," etc. Surely, we can see that the language of the Bible does not permit the possibility of a gradually-developing universe.

Third, the results of creation were produced in a non-evolutionary manner. Each living unit of creation reproduces *"after its kind"* (Genesis 1:11-25). It has never happened that two lower life-forms mated to give birth to a higher life-form. For example, a male and female cat cannot reproduce a cow or horse, because such a theory does not follow the creative process of reproducing "after its kind". Those who embrace the theory of evolution believe a process that is contradictory to the Bible and

to all known science.

Evolutionists assert the premise that it requires millions of years for a living thing to change from a lower to a higher life-form. Yet, their scenarios of just **how these graduations took place, from one life form to another**, are described in words such as “perhaps”, “it is believed”, “possibly”, etc. Close analysis shows that they are nothing more than modern-day fairy tales, developed by people whose first intent is to disprove the existence of God and His part in creation. The theory of evolution is just that—an unproved and unprovable *theory* — and nothing more!

Christ Loved us and Gave Himself for us to Enable Us to Live by Faith in Him.

T.R. DOHLING

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Galatians 2:20).

This verse sounds paradoxical. “I have been crucified,” but “I now live.” But we might say, “That’s not paradoxical, it is just sequential. First I died with Christ; then I was raised with him and now live.” True. But what about these even more paradoxical words: “It is no longer I who live,” yet “I now live”? Do I live or don’t I?

Paradoxes are not contradictions. They just sound that way. What Paul means is that there was an “I” who died, and there is a different “I” who lives. That is what it means to become a Christian. An old self dies. A new self is “created” or “raised.” “If any one is in Christ, he is a new *creation*” (2 Corinthians 5:17). “When we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ... and *raised us up with him*” (Ephesians 2:5-6).

The aim of the death of Christ was to take our “old self” with him into the grave and put an end to it. “We know that our *old self* was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing” (Romans 6:6). If we trust Christ, we are united

to him, and God counts our old self as dying with Christ. The purpose was the raising of a new self.

So who is the new self? What is different about these two selves? Am I still me? The verse at the beginning describes the new self in two ways: One way is almost unimaginable; the other is plain. First, it says that the new self is Christ living in me: "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." I take this to mean that the new self is defined by Christ's presence and help at all times. He is always imparting life to me. He is always strengthening us for what He calls us to do. That's why the Bible says, "I can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (Philippians 4:13). "I also labour, striving according to His working which works in me mightily" (Colossians 1:29). So ultimately the new self says, "I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished by me, through word and deed..." (Romans 15:18). The truth is plain: *Christ Himself* works in and through us when we let Him. That's the first way Galatians 2:20 speaks of the new self: a Christ-inhabited, Christ-sustained, Christ-strengthened me. That's what Christ died to accomplish. That's what a Christian is. The other way it speaks of the new self is this: It lives by trusting Christ moment by moment. *"The life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."*

Without this second description of the new self, we might wonder what our part is in experiencing Christ's daily help. Now we have the answer: **faith**. From the divine side, Christ is living in us and enabling us to live the way He teaches us to live. It is His work. But from our side, it is experienced by trusting Him moment by moment to be with us and to help us. The proof that He will be with us and will help us do this is the fact that He suffered and died on our behalf to make it happen.

Atheists and the Problem of Evil

KIPPY MYERS

Without question, the argument against God's existence that seems to have affected people the most deeply, is the one commonly referred to as The Problem of Evil and Suffering. Here

is one way that an atheist might state the problem: If God is all loving and all good, then he would not want us to suffer. If God is all powerful, then he would not allow us to suffer. But we do suffer. Therefore, the atheist concludes that there is no God (as the Bible describes him). This is the atheist's argument in a nutshell. I would like to make two brief points by way of response to this argument.

THIS WORLD'S PURPOSE

1. The atheist seems to assume that if God existed, then the purpose of human life would be happiness and health or something very much like that. But how does anyone come up with this idea? What if that is not the purpose of this universe? If the atheist is wrong about this, then his argument has no power.

For example, let's say that you come to my house and you see a bowl of artificial fruit. You approach this plastic fruit, pick up an apple and try to take a bite out of it. "Yeow! This is horrible fruit," you complain. I try to tell you not to eat it, for it is not intended to be eaten. It is only supposed to look pretty. You try a banana this time. "Why can't I peel this banana? This is lousy fruit you have here. It doesn't even smell like fruit!" I repeat myself. This fruit is not supposed to be eaten or even smelled. It is only here to look good and I think that it accomplishes its task quite well. So, here we two stand, looking at the same fruit.

Each of us thinks that it has a different purpose. In keeping with the purpose that each of us has in mind, the fruit is a success to me, and a failure to you.

The same is true with the purpose of the universe. I think that it is doing what God created it to do. The atheist thinks that it is a failure.

But that is an assumption on his part which we must separate from him.

2. Can a finite human being stand in judgment of an infinite God? For the sake of argument, I want to put this hypothetically for the atheist.

What if there were an infinitely wise being? Would any human really be in a position to question the way the infinite being does things? By the way, several of the speeches in the Book of Job deal with this question, (e.g., Job 9:1-3.)

In other words, if God really exists, and if he really has infinite (unlimited) knowledge, then he will obviously do some things with

which we will disagree. Children have been known to disagree with their parents about matters like going to bed early on school nights. Teenagers might disagree with their parents about having to do their homework before watching television. But the reason that these younger ones disagree with their parents is precisely because they lack the sufficient information, foresight, and wisdom that the parents have. What makes the situation even worse is when the child not only does not know better than the parent, but they THINK they do. That can really start the sparks to flying! Of course, we would consider one a poor parent who gave in to a child's demands, simply because the child claimed to know better than the parent.

Thus, if God exists, then he knows what he is doing and no • one on this planet is qualified to stand in judgment of him. They might think that they are, but people who lack the information, foresight, and wisdom for such decisions are exactly the ones who might think that they have it. Left to my own lights, I cannot grasp all of the details necessary to compose and run a universe. An atheist should admit that recognizing my ignorance, I am at least open to the possibility that an infinite God might exist and thus I am aware that by nature I am too limited to critique the way in which God might be running the universe." But like the child previously mentioned, some atheists think that they know more than they do, and that puts them at a disadvantage.

A GOOD QUESTION

With this in mind, a good question for an atheist making the argument from the problem of evil would be, "Could it possibly be the case that you are wrong in your views of what God should do or how things should be run?" Or, you could put the same question in different ways. Would an omniscient (all knowing) Being have to agree with you on everything? Could an infinite Being disagree with you and be right? Or, the one I have used on occasion, "If you and an all knowing Being disagreed on something, who would be, right?" The best an atheist could logically say at this point is that with his present assumptions he disagrees with the way things are, but he would have to admit that if he had infinite knowledge, he might have to change his mind about it.

I think that this way of approaching the problem of evil/

suffering is worth consideration. It doesn't make suffering any easier. It doesn't even prove that God exists. It merely calls attention to the fact that we cannot absolutely prove that God doesn't exist based on the existence of evil or suffering because of the position that we are in compared to the position that God is in (even if hypothetically for the atheist, as I have tried to state it here). No one can prove, for example, that God does not have a plan in light of which suffering will make perfect sense to us one day, when we have more information about it.

As Frank Hashey has said, "Compared to God, I live in a shoebox, seeing some or even most of the inside of that box, but totally ignorant of what is outside and how this box fits into that world outside." We Christians believe 1 Corinthians 2:15-16, which says that unless the Lord tells us what he wants us to know, "Who knows the mind of the Lord?" We also believe that God has given us some clues about why we are here. (Ecclesiastes 12:13; Matthew 7:13-14; Acts 17:27.) Does the unbeliever presume to know what God's thoughts would be?

I have made only two points in response to the atheist's argument from the problem of evil. We could also talk about the atheist's problem of defining evil, the role of free moral agency, the nature of a physical world run by physical laws, the underlying assumptions of the atheist's argument, and other crucial issues that arise from this argument against God. But (1) the purpose of the universe, and (2) the problem of being dogmatic about a topic for which you have insufficient information, are significant considerations.

Busy Here And There

T. PIERCE BROWN

In 1 Kings 20:13-43 there is an interesting story of Ben-hadad whom the Lord had marked for destruction. King Ahab, who cared nothing about God's will, word, work or way, called him "brother," made a covenant with him and let him go. God's prophet came to him with this story, a sort of parable, similar in purpose to the one Nathan told King David. "And as the king passed by, he cried unto the king, and he said, Thy servant went out into the midst of

the battle; and, behold a man turned aside, and brought a man unto me, and said, Keep this man: if by any means he is missing, then shall thy life be for his life, or else thou shalt pay a talent of silver. And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall thy judgment be: thyself hath decided it. And he hasted and took the headband away from his eyes; and the king of Israel discerned that he was of the prophets. And he said unto him, Thus saith Jehovah, Because thou hast let go out of thy hand the man whom I had delivered to destruction, therefore thy life shall go for his life, and thy people for his people. And the king of Israel went to his house heavy and displeased, and came to Samaria." (1 Kings 20:39-43.)

The difference in the response of Ahab and David is significant. Ahab went to his house sullen and vexed. David confessed, repented and was forgiven.

The thought that kept striking me with sledgehammer force was, "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." Is there any lesson there that applies to me? I am so busy with thousands of students doing correspondence Bible courses. I am so busy speaking and writing to encourage evangelism, both personal and impersonal, at home and abroad. I am so busy writing articles for brotherhood publications and books. I am so busy attending meetings, visiting sick and needy. All of these are worthwhile activities, and I am glad that God has allowed me to be a co-worker with Him in these activities. But I have neighbors who live next door to whom I have not presented the gospel. I asked myself, "If on the judgment day the Lord should remind me that here were daily opportunities confronting me for helping to save the lost next door, would my reply be that I was busy here and there and they were gone?"

I confess that even after 50 years of preaching the gospel, I do not know how to allocate the time of which God made me a steward. How much time to spend in studying God's word, how much to spend in writing about what I have learned, how much to spend sharing the good news with my neighbors, or how much to just quietly sit and meditate on God's grace and goodness. I do not know.

But I do know that the thought of being busy here and there and finding one gone for whom God left me the opportunity and responsibility to help touches my heart. I am not suggesting that

we will be lost simply because we did not always know how to keep our priorities straight. But I am suggesting that we may have contributed to someone else staying lost because we were busy with some things when we should have been busy with others.

Have you decided which excuse you will use for not doing the primary job for which God will hold you responsible, that of fishing for men? Will it be, "I am too timid. I just cannot speak to my friends or neighbors about Jesus?" Will you have some reason for being able to talk about everything else under the sun but this? If your excuse is, "I was busy here and there" will you also have some answers about how important were the things about which you were busy? Jesus said, "Come ye after me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matthew 4:19.) He did not say, "If you do not get too busy here and there."

I am glad that I do not know what God is going to do about those of us who have failed in this respect. I have no doubt that God in His gracious love forgives every Christian who truly repents and asks forgiveness. But there are some things of which we need to be aware.

1. True repentance involves the kind of Godly sorrow that leads one to determine not to disobey God's will. Is a person penitent who knows that he is not properly about his Father's business and persists in deliberately failing to try to do better?

2. Although we may not miss heaven just because we failed to get our priorities straight, someone may. The consequences of our failure will be eternal. There are untold millions who are dying untold, because most of us are busy here and there and they are gone. Note an important point. I am not the cause of some other person being lost. He is lost because of his own sin. But the principle of Ezekiel 33:7-9 still applies. "So thou, son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die, and thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way; that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood will I require at thy hand. Nevertheless, if thou warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, and he turn not away; he shall die in his iniquity, but thou hast delivered thy soul."

We have lost many opportunities that are presented at certain times of our lives. As young people we have opportunities to

develop habits that will glorify God. But we may be busy here and there and they are gone. Young parents have the opportunity to take their precious child on a knee and tell him the stories of Jesus and others in the Bible that would change his life. Some are busy here and there and they are gone.

The principle of which we speak applies to property, position or power. It applies to talents, time or thoughts. You may find yourself saying, "I once had money I could have used for the glory of God and the good of man, but I was busy here and there and it is gone." "I once had position or power to have influenced some change in government, society or church activity that would have been good, but the opportunity is gone." "I once had great abilities, active mind, or noble resolves, but I was busy here and there and now have 'old timer's disease' and they are gone."

The farmer who does not plan and plow and plant when spring comes may wish and weep and wail when winter comes, but to no avail. Shakespeare was right when he said, "There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries."

Being busy here and there is not enough. We must be busy about the important things — things that count for eternity. We must be busy at the right moments. Unless our primary aim in life is to glorify God and let Jesus have the first place in our plans, we may find ourselves in the same condition as the man in this parable. What are you busy doing?

Faith And Love

C.E. MANNON

For many years—over a half century—I have been pleased to earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3) that comes from hearing the word of God (Romans 10:17) and the faith by which I am to walk. (2 Corinthians 5:7.) Others around me have done the same. From reflections of events over the years and a more concentrated focus on the holy scriptures in recent years, I am much impressed with the ever present urgency to relate the agape love of God to this faith.

For apart from this love, enjoined by command (Matthew 22:37-39) and exemplified by Christ (John 15:13) few will know or care for the faith to which we are called. (John 13:34-35.)

Apart from this love, our faith to "remove mountains" or bestow benevolence will profit us nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:2-3.)

Apart from this noblest form of love, our faith can succumb to intellectual ritualism or ceremonial approaches with a foreboding future. Without this motivation to identify and temper our opinions as distinct from our faith, we make ourselves more vulnerable to becoming exceedingly judgmental and parties to strife, schisms and unnecessary divisions.

Therefore, we plead for an earnest look at some of the numerous references enjoining love with faith.

"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision but faith which worketh by love." (Galatians 5:6.)

"Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers..." (Ephesians 1:15-16.)

"That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God." (Ephesians 3:17-19.)

"Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 6:23.)

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints, for the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel." (Colossians 1:3-5.)

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers; remembering without ceasing your work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father; knowing brethren beloved, your election of God." (1 Thessalonians 1:2-4.)

"But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and love, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you." (1 Thessalonians 3:6.)

"We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the love of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth." (2 Thessalonians 1:3.)

"Now the end of the commandment is love out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned; and the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 1:5,14.)

"Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou has heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." (2 Timothy 1:13.)

"All that are with me salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen." (Titus 3:15.)

"Hearing of thy love and faith which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all the saints; that the fellowship of thy faith may become effectual, in the knowledge of every good thing which is in you, unto Christ." (Philemon 5,6.)

Our continuing to combine the intellectual (faith) with the emotional (love) is sure to prompt a togetherness with promise.

Jesus Is Lord

JOHNNY RAMSEY

"Were the highest heavens my pulpit, multitude of angels my audience and eternity my time, Jesus Christ would always be my text," wrote an older preacher to a young evangelist. In Phil. 2:9-11 we learn why: *"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things on earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."* The term "Lord" actually means "Master," as Peter preached on Pentecost, *"God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ"* (Acts 2:36). Whether the teeming millions of earth realize it or not, our loving Savior is truly *"the Master of heaven and earth and seas,"* as we sometimes sing (Mk. 4:41).

Truly, Christ has all authority, *"both in heaven and on earth"* (Matt. 28:18). In Col. 1:18, Paul writes of Jesus, *"He is the head*

of the body, the church, who is the beginning, firstborn from the dead, that in all things he might have the preeminence." On the mount of transfiguration the voice of the Father boomed forth the majestic strain, *"This is my beloved Son in whom I am well-pleased. Hear ye him!"* (Matt. 17:5). Powerfully, Col. 2:9-10 informs us that *"Christ is the fulness of the Godhead bodily"* and that we *"are complete in him."* Jehovah now speaks *"through his Son, who is the brightness of his glory"* (Heb. 1:1-3). Saul of Tarsus learned of the marvelous power and sublime authority of the Man of Galilee on the lonely Damascus road many years ago. The natural, loving response of his heart is recorded in Acts 9:6, *"Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?"* Then in Acts 22:16 the Lord gives His answer, *"Arise, and be baptized and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord."*

In Eph. 1:19-23 and 5:22-32, we are fascinated by the awesome scope of the sovereign authority of the Redeemer. Jesus is not only the Lord of my life, He is also the head of the church which is His spiritual body. God is glorified *"in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end"* (Eph. 3:20-21). Faithful members of the church of Christ never forget this relationship. We are caused to rejoice as we bow in loving submission to the King of our lives (Rev. 17:14). Friend, if you have never allowed Jesus to be your Lord, you are missing the grandest relationship this earth affords. Please read Gal. 3:27 and 2 Cor. 5:17, *"For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ... Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature."* Living in harmony with those passages will cause us to exclaim, in the presence of Jesus, the beautiful words of Jno. 20:28, *"My Lord and my God!"*

On the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), when the church of the Lord was established, sinners were told: *"God hath made that same Jesus. .. both Lord and Christ."* The Anointed One is also our Master! That very day 3,000 people paid homage to the Lordship of Jesus. Acts 2:41 and 2:47 also tell us, *"Those who gladly received his word were baptized, and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls. .. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."* Will we own and crown Jesus as our Lord this very day? Remember, Christ must be Lord of all or He will not be Lord at all. May we, therefore, commit our all to His blessed care.

Have You Thought About Your Soul?

Have you ever stopped to wonder
What this life is all about?
Why you're here and where you're going,
When your lease on time runs out?
Maybe you've been far too busy
Trying hard to reach your goal;
Would you let me ask you kindly,
Have you thought about your soul?

You may reach the highest portals,
And your dreams may all come true;
Wealth and fame may be your portion,
And success may shine on you,
All your friends may sing your praises,
Not a care on you may roll;
What about the great tomorrow -
Have you thought about your soul?

Don't forget your days are numbered,
Though you may be ridin' high,
But like all of us poor mortals,
Someday you'll just up and die.
Your success and fame and glory
Won't be worth the bell they toll;
Let me ask you just one question,
Have you thought about your soul?

If you've never thought it over,
Spend a little time today,
There is nothing more important,
That will ever come your way
Than the joy of sins forgiven,
And to know you've been made whole,
In the name of Christ the Savior
Have you thought about your soul?

—Author unknown to the editor