

WHY DID THIS HAVE
TO HAPPEN TO ME?

A man has just been shipwrecked. All on board the ship have perished in the terrible disaster. Clinging on to a small plank he finds himself drifting toward a small island - the place that will be his home for some time. In the course of the next few days all of the salvageable materials and provision washed ashore have been carefully stored in a small hut which the shipwrecked man has constructed.

He is proud of his accomplishments, for he is not a carpenter, much less a contractor, but he provides a thatched roof on his new home. It protected him from the sun in fair weather and the rain in bad weather.

One day, after returning from a little fishing on the other side of the island, the man saw smoke. He ponders a moment the significance. Soon his casual stroll quickens into a fast walk and the fast walk into a run. With each step his heart likewise accelerates. Soon he has topped the little hill which had obstructed his view. There he sees to his utter dismay his hut going up in flames. Before his eyes, all of his provisions, his belongings, and his work were going up in smoke. He falls to the ground, kicking the white sand with his feet, and cries: "Why did this have to happen to me? Why? Why?"

Why did this have to happen to me? Me, of all people. Do you remember the last time you asked that question? Let me refresh your memory. Do you recall the last time you had a flat tire? Remember asking, "Why in the world did this have to happen to me?" I recall my last time. I was pushing it close for a speaking engagement. I experienced a flat tire. Had my window been down - and had the first

passing motorist had theirs down - and were they able to hear me, they would have heard the question: WHY? Well, when I got to the service station later that day, the answer was obvious. I had run over a very large nail.

As a housewife, do you remember asking the question after looking at some burnt biscuits? Did you not utter the famous question "why?" Again, the answer - there was a reason. Perhaps you did not have your mind on your business, or you forgot to set the automatic thermostat, or the timer.

We have at times all uttered this question, and the unusual thing about the question is that we often direct and address it to God. All too often I have heard God being blamed for a failure, a temptation, a catastrophe, or the like. The fact is, God had nothing to do with it at all. Still, God is blamed for so many of the catastrophes that occur in life. He is blamed for the evil in the world; He is blamed for the failure of any project, be it in the home or plant. From the explosion in the mine in the eastern United States, to the sinking of a ship in the Atlantic, the crashing of an airplane in Europe, or the resulting end of a temptation in Hometown, U.S.A., God is blamed. God is NOT the author of evil, or that which is bad, etc. This belongs to the realm of Satan. This is very beautifully expressed in the words of James:

"Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for 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, and enticed. Then when lust has conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin when it is finished bringeth forth death."⁴

Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God. Let no man say that God causes evil. When a disaster occurs, or in a tragic hour, there are those who ask why did it happen - rightly so - but it is not God's fault.

Several years ago following a severe hurricane, the television camera was focused on a man who had his home completely destroyed just hours before. He was seen and heard over television to ask: "What sin have I committed?" With a sweeping gesture over the countryside, the broken trees, the destroyed homes, etc., he asked, "What sin have we committed that God would send this?"

Few people, very few people, have an intelligent and scriptural attitude toward natural, personal disasters, sufferings, and tragic occurrences.

Of all the problems of the Old Testament, that of the suffering of the righteous is the most severe. If God takes care of his own, which He does, why do they suffer without apparent reason? God is not the author of disasters nor of personal calamities which cause sufferings!

ALL BAD THINGS ARE
NOT PUNISHMENTS FROM GOD
AS SOME SUPPOSE

Misfortune can come to any person. Do not be guilty of saying, "That one got what he deserved, because I know such and such about him." This, of course, is playing the part of God and is judging.

Jesus, on one occasion, commented on a natural disaster. It was a local disaster, but I am sure it created national concern. Remember the tower that fell in Jerusalem and killed 18 persons? Jesus commented on this disaster by saying, "On those 18 upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and slew, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you, No!"² This is a clear statement, an unusually clear statement, that all calamities and all disasters are not punishments, as many believe. Words from the Son of God support this view.

I think of many great noble men of the Bible, yet they experienced suffering. They suffered, yet they were called of God. I think immediately of Moses, a man whom God chose, a man who was doing "the Will of God", but who had troubles and who suffered. It was not because God did not like him, for God had chosen him. Misfortunes come upon all - all classes - all races - all creed holders.

God does not operate a penal institution. God does not give one a corresponding penalty for a particular sin. (Of course, sin brings its judgment and "the wages of sin is death"³ and "whatsoever a man soweth that he shall also reap."⁴)

There is a cause and effect principle operating in the world today as yesterday and as will be the case tomorrow. I had my flat tire because I ran over a nail. Mistakes occur because someone makes an error, etc. etc.

Yet, Job's three friends Bildad, Eliphaz and Zophar were men

who lived in a day in which people believed that suffering and sin went together. It was the theology of the day that suffering and sin were walking hand in hand, as if it were. It was the custom to relate the two - that every bit of suffering was due primarily to a particular sin. It was the conviction that God punished each act of sin with a corresponding penalty; that suffering was therefore a necessary evidence of personal guilt.

But, the experience that Job encountered (see section III of this paper for details) proved differently. The results of Job's life and the experiences which he endured changed their phraseology quite a bit. His encounters proved that a new view of suffering should include these points: (1) That the innocent do suffer in this life as do the wicked; (2) That suffering may be used as a means of showing the faith of a Christian; and (3) That suffering can extend the influence of a Christian and strengthen his faith.

Job's faith was not insurance he took out in case trouble came; it rather was that which sustained him when he would have been utterly defeated without it. The book of Job to some shows a "dualism", so to speak, concerning a righteous God. Bear in mind that nothing happens in the world today without the Lord's approval, or, a better word would be "permission". The sin that enters our life, the disease and the disaster that comes our way fall into a realm "under the hand of God." God does not cause your suffering. God does, however, permit your suffering so that as a result of your suffering you can become a better person and can thus extend the influence of Christianity.

Satan is the author of evil and perhaps Paul had this in mind when he wrote: (regarding temptations that come our way)

"The one who thinks he is standing up better be careful that he does not fall. Every temptation that comes your way is the kind that normally comes to people. For God keeps His promise, and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond your power to resist; but all the time you are tempted He will give you the strength to endure it and so provide you with a way out."⁵

He is saying that amid all the sufferings and temptations amid all the things you will encounter, when your faith is at low ebb, when you are at the end of your rope and you have even tied a prayer knot, still about to slip off, remember..."there is no temptation taken you but such is as common to man."

One has stated those words, because of sin in the world, "This makes it evident that in some sense God has consciously permitted sin to come into the world. This He made possible when He gave free will to both angels and men. Somehow, in His infinite wisdom, He found it better to create beings who could sin rather than machines that could not. We will some day realize that only the present sufferings could make possible our future joys." Aptly put!

BOTH THE GOOD
AND THE BAD SUFFER

The rains that we experience from time to time in our community fall on both the good and the bad; they fall on all. So it is that the good suffer because of the sin of the Evil One. This is too frequently seen in the result of an automobile accident. Due to the neglect of one, many suffer. In fact, many give their lives. It is seen also in air crashes of our day. Often times, because of the neglect of a pilot, many passengers pay with their lives - or because of the mixed up mind, one may plant a bomb on board.

From the Genesis account we have the story of the beginning of sin; because of their sin we have sin today. Because there is sin, often-times the good suffer with and/or for the bad.

Because we belong to the human race we must share its burden of sin. (To carry it a point farther; to belong to the Church implies that one must bear its burden, but that is another slant.) You and I belong to the human race. The human race groans today because of the sin of Adam and Eve and our forefathers. We share its burden daily.

"...your heavenly Father, who makes his sun rise on good and bad alike, and sends the rain on the honest and the dishonest."⁶

Sunshine and rain, used in this scripture, are chosen because they denote the chief providential blessings. (Acts 14:17)

Perhaps off a tangent, but as God loves all, so we are to love all - even our enemies. God's blessings fall upon them as well as His/our enemies.

From the Talmud: "A thousand thousand, and myriads are bound to praise thy name for every drop of rain thou sendest down upon us, because thou renderest good to the wicked. But the love of God to his enemies is not the same as to his friends, the one being a love of

compassion and benevolence, the other a love of complacency; He bestows benefits upon the wicked, He delights in the good. And in like manner we are not bidden to take admiring delight in our enemies, but to cherish no revengeful and malignant feeling towards them, and to do anything we can for their welfare - that is, of course, when it would not aid in the accomplishment of their evil designs against us."⁷

ALL BAD THINGS
ARE NOT BAD THINGS

How true is this statement: Not all bad things are bad things. Do you recall the illustration of my opening pages - of the shipwrecked man coming over the top of the little hill only to find his hut going up in flames? He cried, "Why did this have to happen to me?" Well, the next day when he was rescued and the captain of the vessel came to him, he heard these astonishing, almost unbelievable words: "If we had not seen your fire signal we would have sailed on by the deserted island. Sir, you are a most fortunate man that we saw YOUR signal. If we hadn't seen your fire signal...." Does this not say to your heart that not all things are bad things, so termed by us. You will, I am sure, have to agree.

The things that occur, and we utter how bad they are, may not be so bad after all. My point is, we see only today and a part of tomorrow.⁸ God in His infinite power, His wisdom and understanding, and His sight, sees not as we do (for which we are to be thankful) for He sees it ALL. God sees the entire picture and because He sees the entire picture, He judges situations differently. Certainly He judges situations differently than would we. It is true - we see through a dark glass at times.⁹

The loss of a child at the age of three or four may seem horrible for us. If we could only instill to those with whom the child shared the brief life that things are not as they appear. Things are not as bad as we think, if we could see the total picture of the outcome of that little life - developed into adulthood. Too, life even at its longest duration is still a brief speck in time. There are so many problems we could engage upon at this point, but perhaps it would be best to just stop and not only say, but believe Paul as he penned,

"For we know that all things work out for good, to them that love the Lord."¹⁰

The omnipotent God has the affairs of the world in His hand. He makes the sun shine; however, if we had the sunshine at all time, do you know what kind of surroundings we would have? We would have a desert. That is why one was moved to say, "Through my tears, I have my rainbow."

It is indeed wonderful that God does see differently. There was a minister who was trying to comfort a woman who had passed through many trials. He was failing in his efforts to cheer her when he picked up some embroidery upon which she had been working. He said, "What a confusion of color threads. Why waste time on a thing like this?" The lady turned the embroidery over and said, "Now look at it. You were seeing it from the wrong side."

"That is exactly right", said the minister. "You are looking at your trials from the wrong side. Turn them over and look at them through the eyes of God - God's side."

The Lord is working out a design. He is working out a pattern for every life. We must attempt, at least, to look at things from His point of view and TRUST His workmanship.

SUFFERING'S BLESSINGS

Sometimes we need to be reminded of the blessings that come to us as a result of suffering. Sometimes it is the fire of affliction that draws the songs of praise of people.

The following incident is related by Mrs. Charles Spurgeon who was a great sufferer for more than a quarter of a century. "At the close of a dark and gloomy day, I lay resting on my couch as the deeper night drew on; and though all was bright within my cozy room, some of the eternal darkness seemed to have entered into my soul and obscured my spiritual vision. In sorrow of heart I asked, "Why does my Lord deal with his child? Why does He permit lingering weakness to hinder the sweet service I long to render to his poor servants." For awhile silence reigned in the little room, broken only by the crackling of the oak log burning in the fireplace. "Suddenly I heard a sweet soft sound, a little clear musical note like the tender trill of a robin beneath my window. What can it be? Surely no bird is singing out there at this time of the year and night."

My friend exclaimed, "It comes from the log on the fire." The fire was letting loose the imprisoned music from the old oak's inmost heart. Perchance he had garnered up this song in the days when all was well with him, when birds twittered merrily on his branches, and the soft sunlight flecked his tender leaves with gold. Ah, thought I, when the fire of affliction draws song of praise from us then indeed we are purified and our God is glorified. As I mused the fire burned and my soul found sweet comfort in the parable so strangely set forth before me." Singing in the fire; yes, God helping us, if that is the only way to get harmony out of us, then let the fire be heated "seven times seven".

Notice some blessings, if you will:

1. There is created a freshness, a spring of gratitude which flows forth from the stream of "Thank you, Lord".
2. Suffering sometimes gets folks to church that have been out a long, long time. Some have become pillars in the church.
3. Suffering, at times, deepens the well of sympathy and compassion for others. The eyes of many are opened to the needs of others around them.
4. The faith of an individual becomes greater. By being on one's back, for example, one is, out of necessity, forced to look UP. In this new position a new perspective can be gained - one can see clearly manifestations of God.
5. Suffering sets the stage for the drama of experience - the experience of one with God. The suffering which brings an individual to say "I know in whom I have believed." God is still running the universe. He is ALL God, sinless God and I am thankful, sinful person."

The desire to have such an experience should be uppermost in our lives. You see, there are suffering's blessings.

To conclude this preface, transfer yourself, in your mind, to a large forest. An oak attracts your attention. There is a small vine clinging to it. During the most fierce storm the vine clings to the oak. Even though the oak may be uprooted the vine winding around the oak remains in position.

Picture, if you will, the vine growing on one side of the giant tree only. Continue the picture with a tremendous wind storm approaching and it is approaching on the side of the oak on which the

little vine is growing. No matter how hard the winds blow and the rain beats upon that little vine, that vine is protected BECAUSE it is pressed by the forces of nature against the giant tree.

Picture, if you will, the vine growing on the other side of the tree. No matter how hard the wind blows and the rains descend the vine is still protected BECAUSE the oak protects it...it shelters it and is to the vine security also.

In some of the violent storms of our living, the Eternal God somewhat intervenes and thus shelters our being; while in other storms, the Eternal God in all His infinite wisdom allows us to be exposed or subjected to these events, so that we might be "pressed" more closely to Him. God is love and although we cannot understand His acts of providence, we must trust His acts and all other acts to Him.

SECTION I. References

1. James 1:13-15 (King James Version)
2. Luke 13:4 (King James Version)
3. Romans 6:23
4. Galatians 6:7
5. I Corinthians 10:13 (Today's English Version)
6. Matthew 5:45 (New English Bible)
7. American Commentary, Matthew Volume, page 122
8. I Corinthians 13:9
9. I Corinthians 13:12
10. Romans 8:28 (King James Version)