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WHY?

Why does God permit troubles, trials, and tribulations in this world? Why do even Christians suffer? Why, when we accept Christ, doesn't the Lord immediately take us out of this world of problems? Why are we left here?

We may blame all the trouble on *sin*. But where did sin come from? We can blame sin on the *Devil*, but where did he come from? Did a *good* God create a *bad* Devil? Did God know Adam and Even would yield to temptation—or was the fall of man a *surprise* to God?

In our attempt to understand these things, we must recognize that it was God's plan for each of us to have a right to CHOOSE. We were not created as mechanical robots—as though all of our actions were programmed by remote control—with some Higher Being at the controls! God desired a people who would serve Him—not because He *forced* them to—but because they *chose* to do so.

Adam had a choice. We have a choice. Some accept; some reject. The Scriptures say, "I have set before you life and death...CHOOSE life" (Deut. 30:19). "CHOOSE this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15).

Once we understand the God-given right to CHOOSE, it is evident there had to be at least TWO different things between which we would make our choice. If there had never been evil in this world, we would have never known wrong; and, consequently, we could not CHOOSE the right. Or, if only evil had been allowed on this earth, we would have known nothing different than this. In order for us to CHOOSE, *both* good AND evil had to *co-exist* on this planet.

In preaching I have sometimes illustrated it this way: I might hold up *one* book, possibly a hymnal, and say: "I will give you either book you want; take your choice." Of course this raises the obvious question: "What do you mean 'take my choice'? You only have ONE book in your hand!" Obviously, if only one thing is offered, there is no choice. BUT, if I hold up TWO different things, possibly a hymnal and a Bible, there would be a choice.

So it is in this life: in order for us to choose, TWO different systems—known by such expressions as good and evil, light and darkness, filth and purity, right and wrong, truth and error—are very active throughout the world. Daily, these two systems

function in millions of ways. For this to happen, it was NECESSARY that each system have a LEADER. Our Lord is the leader of that which is good, of course. And for the system of evil to have a leader, it was necessary that an *opposite* of God, the Devil, also play a role.

SO, did a *good* God create a *bad* Devil? Some explain it this way: God did not create the Devil; rather he created a beautiful angel who later, on his own, *became* the Devil. But if God created a powerful being, *knowing* he would become the Devil—and God *is* omniscient, all-knowing—this is not radically different than a more direct creation. But that is a subject in itself.

How *ever* it came about—and no human can explain all the details—we are clearly told that all things were created by God. HE is the Creator! "ALL THINGS...visible *and* invisible...were created by Him, and for Him...and by Him ALL THINGS consist" (Col. 1:16,17; John 1:3).

God has said: "I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity; I, the LORD, do ALL THESE THINGS" (Isa. 45:7).

We can see a purpose for the system of evil, *and* its leader—such being necessary so that mankind can make a choice. But after we have made our choice, after we have received Christ, WHY doesn't the Lord immediately take us out of this world? We recall the prayer of Jesus: "I do not pray that you should take them out of the world..." (John 17:15). Why are we left here to go through troubles and trials?

One reason is that we learn true character by EXPERIENCE and by making COMPARISONS—comparisons made by observing the two opposing systems. Good becomes obvious when compared to bad; bad becomes obvious when compared to good.

If we think about it, we could not know Jesus as our SAVIOR if we had not become sinners. Becoming a sinner was not difficult, "for *all* have sinned" (Rom. 3:23). But—good news!—Christ died for sinners (Rom. 5:6; 1 Cor. 15:3).

We could not be SAVED if we had not been LOST!

We could not be HEALED if we were not SICK!

We could not obtain VICTORY if we did not face DEFEAT!

We could not have an ANSWER if we never had a NEED!

Without VALLEYS there would be no MOUNTAINTOP!

We are thankful for the DAWN because we have known the NIGHT!

Life is filled with comparisons!

We appreciate a good house especially when we compare it with a house we had that was not so good. We appreciate a good car especially when we compare it with a car we had that was not so good. Bitter cold weather makes us thankful for the warm sunshine. It takes a dark night to reveal the splendor of the stars. Weeds and worthless ground make us especially aware of beautiful flowers.

It takes war to enjoy peace; failure to enjoy success; poverty to enjoy prosperity; poor crops to rejoice over an abundant harvest; hunger to enjoy food; tiredness to appreciate rest.

We are *in* the world, not *of* the world, but the world serves as a school in which we learn valuable lessons—lessons of appreciation and experience—by the comparisons we make.

It takes the crushing of beautiful flowers to bring forth fragrance. Likewise, on occasions, the Lord must crush his saints to make them more tender and kind. Even as steel becomes strong because of the hammer and white heat, so trials we suffer *and overcome* make us stronger.

Several places the Scriptures speak of those who “overcome” (Rom. 12:21; 1 John 2:13; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 26). How could we “overcome” unless there were things to overcome?

If we are not corrected by the Lord, then we are not really his sons (Heb. 12:6-11). We are even told that Jesus was made “perfect through sufferings” (Heb. 2:10). “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” (Heb. 5:8,9). Yet we think it *strange* that we should experience trials as Christians! Peter wrote that we should not regard such as a “strange thing,” but rather as an occasion to rejoice (1 Peter 4:12).

The often-quoted verse, Romans 8:28, comes to mind: “ALL THINGS work together for good to them who love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” In a number of places where the Scriptures use the term “all things,” it is quite clear from *context* that the meaning is “all [these] things” (Phil. 4:13; 1 Cor. 9:22, 10:23, 1 John 2:27). So is it here: the context mentions “the sufferings of this present time,” “infirmities,” “tribulation,” “distress,” and “famine,” but “in ALL THESE THINGS we are *more than conquerors* through Him who loved us”! (Rom. 8:18-37).

In some situations, it may seem we have been attacked by Satan. But he can go no further than God allows. In the end God gets the glory, Satan is defeated, and we attain a greater spiritual depth.

The story of Job is a classic illustration. Because of Satan’s activity (Job 2:1-7), Job lost his cattle, children, health, and wealth. Everything looked like hopeless defeat for him. But, looking behind the scenes, we see that God permitted it all—for a purpose. When Job could no longer lean on riches, family, or friends, he had to trust *fully* in the Lord. In a time like

this—when there is no other way to turn—our approach to God becomes positive and determined. Answers come that would otherwise be unknown.

During Job’s trial he received revelations about the resurrection: “For I KNOW that my Redeemer lives, and he shall stand at last upon the earth. And after my skin is destroyed, this I KNOW, that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold and not another” (Job 19:25-27).

Job received a greater faith and determination than he had ever known before. He came to a place where he could say: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him.... When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold” (Job 13:15).

A song from years ago, *Job’s God is True*, comes to mind:

*I can feel the hand of Satan
As the tempter presses me sore;
He has been before the Father
Asking leave to tempt me more.
Though God slay me, yet I’ll trust him
I will then come forth as gold;
For I know my Redeemer liveth
For I feel him in my soul.*

When these things were accomplished—trials never last forever!—God “blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42:12-15). His property was restored and children were born to him. His daughters were the most beautiful women in all the land. One he named Jemima. When her sister had a child, she became “Aunt Jemima”!

There was a purpose for the trial of Job. It worked together for good—even though it appeared at the beginning that Satan had things going *his* way!

It sounds very strange to say, but Satan even played a part in the *success* of Paul’s ministry! Paul, having told of his heavenly encounter with the Lord—having heard inexpressible truths too awesome to even talk about—would write:

“And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, *a messenger of Satan* to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure” (2 Cor. 12:1-7).

In other words, had Paul become exalted, arrogant, and proud, God could not have used him effectively. So a messenger of *Satan* became instrumental in keeping him humble, and used of God.

Concerning Hymenaeus and Alexander, who shipwrecked their faith and became blasphemers, Paul said: “I have delivered them unto *Satan*...” For what purpose? To get even with them? No. “I have delivered them unto Satan, that they may learn *not to blaspheme*” (1 Tim. 1:19,20). We don’t know the details, but whatever happened to them, learning not to blaspheme was a good thing, even though Satan played a part!

There is also the case of a man “judged” by the apostle and who was delivered by him “*unto Satan* for the destruction

of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:3-5). For some, lessons must be learned the hard way, but the final result is what counts, as in the case of this man.

Remember how Joseph was despised by his brothers and sold into Egyptian slavery? He became a servant for Potiphar, a captain under Pharaoh. Potiphar's wife tried to lead the young man into sin. Failing in her plans, she accused *him* of evil. This led to his imprisonment. It looked as though things were going from bad to worse for Joseph. Could all of this work together for good?

One day Joseph was called upon to explain two of the king's dreams. God revealed the meaning: there would be seven years of plenty, followed by seven years of famine. It ended up that Joseph was made a ruler over the land of Egypt! There was a *purpose* for him being in Egypt.

Later his brothers and father came to Egypt. What a great family reunion it was! Food and every necessary thing was provided for this family in abundance. In the end, all the defeats of Joseph's life actually resulted in a great victories! Each trial proved to be only another steppingstone to greater usefulness.

What evil power caused Joseph's brothers to sell him into slavery? What caused them to lie to their father? What power led Potiphar's wife to try to lead the young man into sin? What caused her to lie about him and have him cast into prison? We might quickly identify all of these things as the work of Satan. We might blame individuals. Yet, above and beyond it all, it was what God allowed—for a *purpose*.

Notice what Joseph told his brothers: "Be not grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for GOD sent me before you to preserve life...to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you who sent me here, but GOD" (Gen. 45:5-8).

James Russell Lowell (1819-1891) wrote:

*Truth forever on the scaffold,
wrong forever on the throne,
Yet that scaffold sways the future,
and, behind the dim unknown,
Standeth GOD within the shadow,
keeping watch above his own.*

Another biblical example of how misfortune actually worked for good, is seen in the case of Paul and Silas (Acts 16:16-34). Being wrongly accused, publically stripped and humiliated, beaten with stripes in the town square, and thrown into a dungeon-like prison, the future looked dim. Who inspired their imprisonment? It must have been the work of Satan—or was it? If so, God permitted it.

In jail they would meet a jailer who, after seeing a manifestation of God's power, would cry out for salvation. By natural reasoning, we might suppose a rough and mean jailer would be the least likely person to accept Christ. But, being converted, we can understand that his testimony would carry special

weight. And this is exactly what happened. The jailer was converted and also his family, all becoming part of the church that was established there.

In order to reach the jailer, Paul and Silas needed to be in jail. In order for the jailer to see the miracle of them being loosed, they first had to be bound. At first, it looked like Satan had gained a victory. But God, who knows the end from the beginning, is always a step ahead. In the end, Satan was put down, God was glorified, and all these things worked together for good.

Jesus said: "ALL power is given me in heaven and in earth" (Matt. 28:18). If Jesus has all power—then the only power with which Satan can operate is power God allows him to use. Since God is ALL-mighty, he either *does* or *allows* every single thing that has been done, is done, or will be done! HE is supreme. No wonder we read repeatedly in the Bible that "ALL THINGS are of God" (2 Cor. 5:18).

If we can only accept this grand truth, we will have discovered the cure for worry and fear! We can understand how all things work together for good. This is why the Bible can say: "In EVERY THING give thanks" (1 Thess. 5:18). "The steps of a good man *are* ordered by the Lord" (Psalms 37:23). WE are part of a GREAT plan. Why, then, should we worry? Why should we fear?

But what about world events? During our Lord's trial, Pilate said: "Do you not know that I have power to crucify you, and I have power to release you?" But Jesus replied: "You could have no power at all against me, except it were given you from *above*" (John 19:10,11).

Uninspired religionists plotted the crucifixion of Jesus. He was considered an outcast from his family, a traitor to his country, and a heretic by his religion. He who came to bring LIFE was now condemned to DEATH! Finally he was crucified and died. Satan could have said: "At last I have won a great victory; Jesus is dead!" But what seemed to be Satan's greatest victory—the death of the Son of God—was actually the very thing which forever *defeated* Satan and sin! Through his death, burial, and resurrection, we can have life and that more abundantly. All of this did indeed work together for good!

Some have pictured Satan as sneaking into the garden of Eden when God's back was turned—as though God who sees all things could not see this! And then—some would have us believe—when God walked into the garden, he was horrified! Surprised! Shocked! His creation had fallen into sin! But the fall in Eden was no surprise to God. How could that be? God knows the end from the beginning (Acts 15:18). God *knew* there would be a fall, he *knew* that sin would enter in.

There can be no doubt about this, because our salvation is the result of "his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ BEFORE the world began" (2 Tim. 1:9). We are redeemed with the "precious blood of Christ...who verily was foreordained BEFORE the foundation of the world" (1 Peter 1:19,20). Why would God plan redemption through Christ, unless he also knew there would be a fall and, consequently, a need for redemption?

God desired a people who would do his will by CHOICE. In order for man to CHOOSE, there had to be TWO different systems between which he would make his choice. Each of these systems had to have a leader. God is the leader of good, but there needed to be an opposite of God, as it were, and thus a purpose for Satan's existence.

Nevertheless, God remains in control, so that "ALL THINGS work together for good," according to "the purpose of Him who works ALL THINGS according to the counsel of His will" (Rom. 8:28; Eph. 1:11).

It is an *awesome* plan—howbeit mysterious. As the poet William Cowper (1774) expressed it:

*God moves in a mysterious way,
his wonders to perform;
He plants his footsteps in the sea,
and rides upon the storm.*

Paul the apostle, filled with inspiration, cried out:

*"O the depth of the riches
both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!
How unsearchable are his judgments,
and his ways past finding out!"* (Rom. 11:33).

SO!—have we been able to solve all problems or answer all the "Why" questions? Quite honestly, we have not. But what is written here—though we may only "know in part" (1 Cor. 13:9)—*can* provide a degree of guidance in our journey along the shining path of life, a journey "that shines more and more unto the perfect Day" (Proverbs 4:18). —RW



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