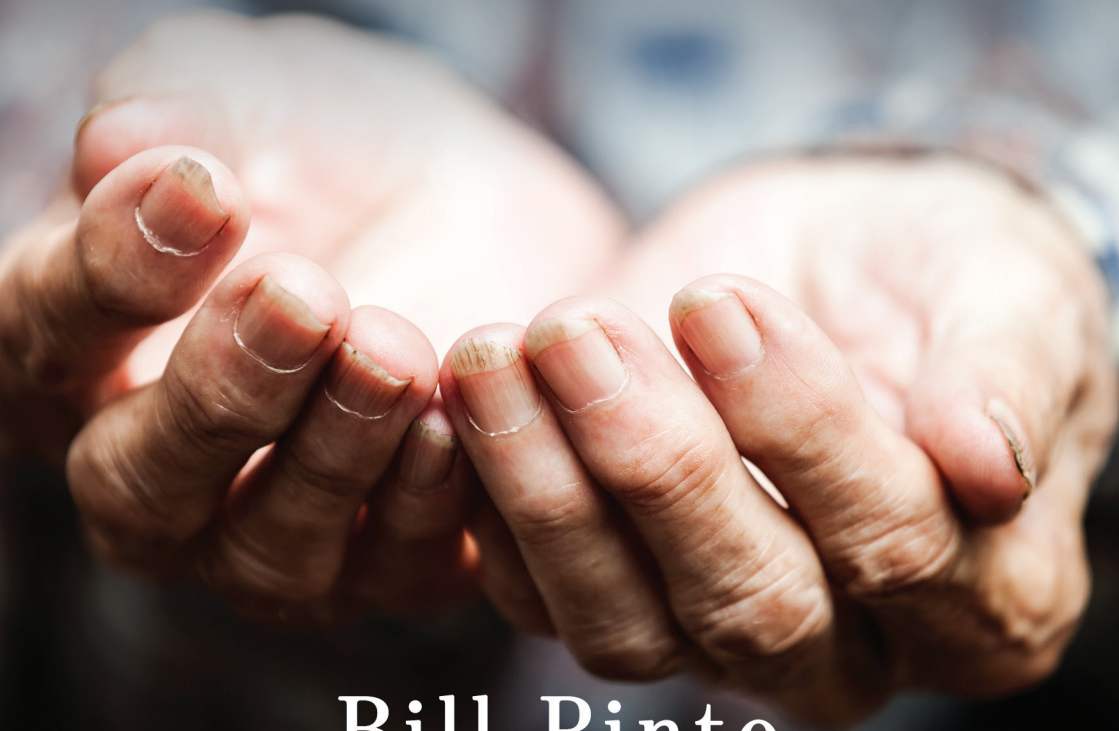


# Why Does God Permit Suffering?



Bill Pinto



*Why would a loving God allow sin to exist?  
Why is there pain and suffering?  
Why doesn't God intervene?*

In times of grief, emotional turmoil, and physical trial, it's questions like these that arise the most. In fact, the question of why a loving God would permit pain and suffering is one of the main objections to Christianity. For instance, it was this question which most perplexed my mother, who was particularly distressed with the plight of suffering children. Indeed, this question has caused many people to doubt God's Word and abandon their faith as a Christian to become a skeptic and unbeliever.

Before embarking upon a study like this, there are a few vital principles to bear in mind. To begin with, one needs to evaluate the case honestly, without bias or preconceived ideas. For example, let's suppose that you make a negative judgement of someone based upon a misrepresentation. Obviously your judgment is going to be faulty since it's based upon false grounds. It's your responsibility to know the facts so that you can make an honest judgment. In the same way, it's important to approach this study openly and without preconceived ideas. Furthermore, since it is God's character that's in question, one has to go to God's Word to find the answers.

You may recall the name of Charles Templeton. Templeton was a famous evangelist around the time of Billy Graham. Like Graham, Templeton was immensely popular and attracted vast crowds as a young preacher. However, Templeton ended up abandoning the Christian faith and even wrote a book criticising the Bible. The main reason for his apostasy was the question we're addressing today. Additionally, Templeton believed that God would consign more than half the people that ever lived to an eternally burning hell. Naturally, this belief led him to develop an immense distaste for God and Christianity. Yet this belief is a misrepresentation of the facts. An eternally-burning hell is not what the Bible teaches. On the contrary, it is a false teaching invented by Satan to denigrate God's character. This teaching has most likely made more people infidels than any

other false doctrine. In spite of this, the truth about hell isn't difficult to uncover when you study it carefully. Yet despite being a Christian evangelist who taught the Bible, Templeton failed to search out the truth. As a result, he found himself similarly confounded by the question of why a loving God would permit pain and suffering.

Of course, there is nothing wrong with asking this question. God wants us to gain a clearer conception of His character. However, many ask this question not out of a desire to know the answer. Rather, their questioning stems from a place of defiance and retaliation against the Bible and Christianity. In fact, this objection is often raised by the same people who reject God because of the hypocrisy, corruption, and violence taking place within the church. Yet even these obviously unjust facts are no reason to cast judgement upon God and His Word. We need to ask questions honestly, and search for answers with a pure desire to know the truth. This means reasoning from cause to effect. Bearing this principle in mind, one will see that the answers are not so difficult to find.

Consider the following scenario. A man finishes work and on his way home, stops at a bar to have some drinks. He has a few too many drinks but still chooses to drive the rest of the way home. Part way through his journey, he loses control and kills an innocent family. What was the cause of that family's death? And what was the cause of the suffering and grief experienced by their loved ones? The tragedy and accompanying sorrow were all caused by the one man's choice to act irresponsibly.

Some might argue that since God is all-powerful, He could have prevented the accident from taking place. They say this as though God never intervenes at all. The truth is that God is working every moment to protect, sustain, and save life. He never sleeps nor slumbers. For every story you hear of someone who tragically loses a loved one, you can hear a story of someone who - were it not for God and His providence - would not be alive. The Bible is full of promises of His watch-care and providence, and the involvement of His angels who protect and sustain us each day.

However, let's say that every time something tragic were about to hap-

pen due to a person's irresponsibility, God intervened. What would be the result? It would simply encourage evil behaviour to continue, for none would be aware of the consequences at stake.

In the secular world, we are exposed to graphic illustrations of the harmful effects of smoking and drink-driving. We are shown images and case studies of people suffering in hospital. This is to impress vividly upon us the consequences of indulging wrong habits and making wrong decisions.

As I mentioned, God often does intervene. Yet He also has to allow us to reap the consequences of our actions with the hope that we will learn from them. This is an important principle to understand. For instance, on the same night that the drunk-driver in our illustration killed an innocent family, thousands of other people left work and drove home responsibly. In many cases, we have a choice in the matter. We can choose to be responsible in our actions and habits, or we can choose to be irresponsible. The latter will bring consequences, and God wants us to learn from them. So before asking why God allowed something to happen, consider what caused that suffering in the first place. This is what it means to reason objectively from cause to effect.

Ultimately, the reason why all these things happen is due to sin. Sin is the cause of all suffering, injustice, cruelty, and violence in this world. When God created the earth and mankind, it was perfect. Nature and the animal kingdom lived in perfect harmony with their maker. And man was the crowning act of God's creation, for we were created in the image and likeness of God. There was no sin and there was no suffering. Then man chose to disobey God. As a result, the earth was cursed. Man's nature became corrupted, and suffering and death entered into the lot of all life on earth. This suffering has only continued to increase. It's a deception to believe that the world is improving. Not only does observation and reason tell us that's not true, but the Bible also says otherwise. Before Christ's return, the Bible warns us that the world will wax more and more evil (2 Timothy 3). And as sin increases, suffering and death will also increase.

Tracing back history to the book of Genesis, we find that the first instance

of human death took place when Cain (Adam's first son), became jealous of Abel, his younger brother. Cain harboured evil thoughts toward Abel and slew him. This event marked the first murder of the human race. From that first death we've witnessed world wars, holocausts, and grave terrorist acts that have never ceased to continue. There is little regard for human life. All this is because of sin. What is sin? The only definition of sin given in the entire Bible is this:

1 John 3:4 Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

Sin is the transgression of the law. What is the law? In James 2:8-11 we read:

James 2:8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

2:9 But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convicted of the law as transgressors.

2:10 For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all.

2:11 For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

The law is the ten commandments, as highlighted by the examples James provides in verse 11. It's incorrect to say that you're not a sinner simply because you don't murder. James reveals that by breaking even one commandment, you're guilty of all. Hence, the law condemns you as a sinner. And it is sin - the breaking of the ten commandments - which brings suffering.

At this point, one might consider natural disasters, and ask what they have to do with man's actions. As mentioned earlier, there were no storms, floods, wildfires, or earthquakes when God created the world. So whether it be directly or indirectly, all suffering goes back to man's rebellion against God; man's transgression of His law. And each one of us has a part

to play. For when God created the world, it was perfect. It didn't even rain upon the earth before there was sin. Notice from the book of Genesis how wonderfully the earth was designed.

Genesis 2:5 And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the LORD God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was not a man to till the ground.

2:6 But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

This passage reveals the beauty of the garden of Eden, and how perfectly nature cooperated with man. While man was to tend to the garden, there were no thorns or rocky ground to necessitate hard labour. The work was a pleasure, and did not induce the 'sweating of the brow'. Additionally, a lovely mist came up each morning to water the earth. Once Adam sinned, the earth was cursed. Continual and unremitting sin then led to the flood, which changed the atmospheric conditions of the earth, and has caused natural disasters to take place ever since. Notice from the passage below how immense and drastic the flood was.

Genesis 7:11 In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.

It was not only rain from heaven which formed the flood, but huge subterranean oceans which were broken up and came forth from underneath. This changed the earth's crust and it is for this reason that there are fault lines in the ground, which of course play a major role in the earthquakes and tsunamis we observe today. Consider the following headlines in which secular scientists recognise the link between heavy rainfall and earthquakes.

“Heavy Rainfall Can Cause Huge Earthquakes”  
*National Geographic*

“Why heavy rain can trigger earthquakes”

*The Times UK*

“Why the Haiti earthquake may not have been a natural disaster”

*Independent UK*

Consider also the following excerpt from an article written by three professors of geophysics titled: ‘*California’s Rain May Shed Light On New Questions About What Causes Earthquakes*’.

“...injecting water into boreholes—either for waste disposal or to drive residual oil out of depleted reservoirs—is particularly likely to trigger earthquakes...”

...Today, earthquakes caused by humans occur on a much greater scale. Events over the last century have shown mining is just one of many industrial activities that can induce earthquakes large enough to cause significant damage and death. Filling of water reservoirs behind dams, extraction of oil and gas, and geothermal energy production are just a few of the modern industrial activities shown to induce earthquakes.”

“...Nowadays, earthquakes induced by large industrial projects no longer meet with surprise or even denial. On the contrary, when an event occurs, the tendency may be to look for an industrial project to blame. In 2008, an earthquake in the magnitude 8 range struck Ngawa Prefecture, China, killing about 90,000 people, devastating over 100 towns, and collapsing houses, roads and bridges. Attention quickly turned to the nearby Zipingpu Dam, whose reservoir had been filled just a few months previously...”<sup>1</sup>

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1 Gillian Foulger, Jon Gluyas and Miles Wilson, “California’s Rain May Shed Light On New Questions About What Causes Earthquakes,” *The Conversation*, February 24, 2017. <https://theconversation.com/californias-rain-may-shed-light-on-new-questions-about-what-causes-earthquakes-73571>.



People often call natural disasters ‘acts of God,’ but in reality, more and more disasters are occurring due to human activity. Ironically, rather than being acts of God, all disasters are the result of man’s rebellion against God. For as we saw, it was the flood which caused these conditions in the first place. And what caused the flood?

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.

6:6 And it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart.

The wickedness of man at the time of Noah was so abundant that for the sake of future generations, God had to destroy them. It must be said however, that God extended the antediluvians 120 years of mercy to repent from their sins and seek refuge inside the ark. Yet out of love for humanity, man’s rebellion had to be stopped. Judgement had to be met in order to preserve mankind.

Ultimately, all the evil in this world, all the pain and injustice, is the result of man’s rebellion against God. Now that we know the cause of suffering, we can more easily understand why God permits suffering to continue. You see, for God to put an end to suffering - and He will - He has to put an end to sin. This means putting an end to sinners, which means that the great majority of the world are going to be lost.

Now, many might argue that they aren’t bad people. I’ve known a lot of people who as far as social standards go, are indeed good people. Yet as we saw in James, even though one is not stealing or committing adultery, that doesn’t mean they’re not transgressing God’s law. Notice who else thought himself to be blameless according to the law. The following Scripture is from the apostle Paul, speaking about his past as Saul of Tarsus.

Philippians 3:6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

Saul thought that he was blameless, and yet he was persecuting and killing innocent Christians. The commandments are much deeper and far-reaching than we think. Jesus taught that even if one does not kill or commit adultery, by simply harbouring anger or looking upon a woman with lust, they are guilty of sin. These feelings of lust and anger stem from one's thoughts. Therefore, the commandments judge one's very thoughts, and not just physical acts.

The tenth commandment - thou shalt not covet - is really the root of all sin, and it takes place in the mind. For instance, a man commits adultery because he covets after another woman. A man steals because he covets something which does not belong to him. Lucifer coveted God's throne, and it was this sin which caused the war in heaven and led to the situation we're in today. Thus, the injunction 'thou shalt not covet' runs through all ten of the commandments. This includes the first commandment, which instructs us not to have any other gods except for the true God, who we are to love with all our heart, soul and mind. When we covet other things more than God, we are guilty of sin. Other evil traits such as envy and jealousy are the result of coveting. Realistically, coveting is a tendency which every person has to battle against to a greater or lesser degree. Only through the power of Christ can this propensity be overcome. In fact, jealousy and coveting were the direct cause of Jesus' death. The Jewish leaders were envious of Christ. They were envious of His popularity with the people, the power of His teachings, and the miracles He performed. Notice what the Bible has to say about Pontius Pilate when the Jewish leaders delivered up Christ to be crucified.

Matthew 27:18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.

Mark 15:10 For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.

The only innocent man who ever lived was crucified because of envy. As the following verse reveals, it was envy which also led to the martyrdom of Paul.

Acts 13:45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.

We need to recognise that our wrong actions - our sins - cause suffering. Furthermore, suffering is not confined to this world alone. We're fallen human beings, yet when we watch the news and witness the tragedies that take place, we suffer. It hurts us to see the effects of natural disasters, witness poverty, or hear of the innocent being abused. How much more do you think God suffers? We're fallen human beings, but God is holy. And the more holy and perfect you are, the more sensitive you are to evil. Those who become deeply accustomed to crime, and whose consciences are almost completely silenced, are far less sensitive to tragedy. Yet our perfect and holy God is witnessing every injustice that takes place. He sees every child that cries out for pain and hunger. He beholds these scenes every moment of each day. How do you think He feels? Do you think God wants to permit this suffering to continue? God is not only watching the events of this world; He is pained by them. Notice what James says about the poor and oppressed who call out to God:

James 5:4 Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth: and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

5:5 Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

5:6 Ye have condemned and killed the just; and he doth not resist you.

God takes notice of every act of injustice and cruelty. One day soon He will put an end to it. In the gospel of Matthew, we find Jesus defending His Father's justice, just as we ought to do. With a child on his lap, He declared:

Matthew 18:10 Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones;

for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.

Jesus taught that every child has an angel in heaven who reports their welfare back to the Father. I guarantee that none of us would be alive today if it were not for the guardianship of angels. I can testify personally, that even before I knew God, it was a miracle that I was kept alive. I thank God for His providence, and the guardianship of His angels that my life was sustained and I was able to make the decision to follow Him.

In spite of this, some ask why God permits suffering as though it doesn't matter to God, when it matters far more to Him than it ever could to us. Ironically, it's most often the skeptics, atheists, and unbelievers that ask this question, yet they themselves live in rebellion against God's law. They themselves cause suffering, while at the same time they question God as to why He allows it to continue. They covet. They lust. And they bear false witness. They are quick to point out the corruption, poverty, and vice in the world but they don't see anything wrong in their own lives. They want God to do something about the world's problems, but they don't want God to do anything about their problems. And at the same time, they are part of the world's problems. Yet they cast the blame upon God for not doing anything about it.

Two of the most infamous men who ever lived are Francois Voltaire and Thomas Paine. Their writings were inspired by Satan to destroy Christianity, the Bible, and the knowledge of God. These men were deists. They believed in a god who set this world in motion and then left it alone to rule itself. Deism is the opposite of Calvinism, yet both are fallacious extremes. Even though John Calvin was a Christian, he taught some of the most grievous errors. Calvin taught that God controls every aspect of life on earth. He claimed that God has predetermined everything, including whether one is saved or not. On the other hand, Voltaire believed that God has absolutely no input in the affairs of this world. Thus he argued that God is to blame for all the suffering that occurs since He created the earth to begin with.

Both theologies are false. The truth is that man has a free will. Governments can choose to pass laws which God regards as blasphemy. People can choose to disobey God and act unjustly. And in spite of man's wrong choices, God still works constantly to protect and save life. Read the 34th and 139th Psalms for wonderful descriptions of God's watch-care and providence. The reason we're still alive today is because God is controlling the events of this world. One day soon, God will command the angels to let loose the four winds of strife, and the world will be plunged into a time of conflict more horrendous than anything that has ever been witnessed. For now, God is holding back those winds.

The following quote from Voltaire highlights his endeavour to destroy Christianity.

“I am weary of hearing people repeat that twelve men established the Christian religion. I will prove that one man may suffice to overthrow it.”<sup>2</sup>

In 1776, Voltaire claimed: “One hundred years from today the Bible will be a forgotten book.” Voltaire died two years later. In 2019 - 243 years after this statement was made - the Bible is the most read, most published, and most sold book in the world, with an estimated five billion copies being sold and distributed. Mortal man should tremble at the thought of making boasts such as this before the Creator of the universe.

Voltaire's writings were one of the main influences behind the French Revolution. He and the French people couldn't accept how a loving God could permit suffering, misery, and injustice. The people were aware of disgraceful corruption in the monarchy and in the Catholic Church. They saw priests living luxuriously while citizens were starving. It was right for them to question these organisations, yet God was not the one to blame. The French people however did blame God, and as a result they rejected Him entirely. In fact, they raised up a new god which they called the goddess of reason. They erected a statue of this goddess - a prostitute - to

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2 William Patrick Palmer, *A Compendious Ecclesiastical History*, (London: James Burns, 1840), 239-240.

signify that man's reason was greater than God's. This concept extends right through Voltaire's and Paine's writings.

What was their reward? In giving up the God of the Bible, France received what is known as the reign of terror. The reign of terror spanned ten years and marked one of the worst periods of this world's history. The corruption, cruelty, violence, and immorality continued, and was a hundred fold worse. People lost their property and their lives for no reason at all. It was a period of complete and total anarchy. What was supposed to be years of enlightenment had transformed into years of turmoil and war.

You see, when God and His law are denounced, evil is the inevitable result. Nothing good can come from abandoning God's law. God declared this very thing through the prophet Hosea.

Hosea 4:1 ...the Lord hath a controversy with the inhabitants of the land, because there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land.

4:2 By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.

4:6 My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge:...seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God...

When the knowledge of God is rejected, as it was during the French Revolution, all that results is "swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood." The French Revolution was a demonstration of the results of rejecting God and His law. In this historical event, the warning of Hosea was made manifest.

Furthermore, to understand these issues correctly, one has to view them in light of something called the great controversy. The great controversy began in heaven when Satan convinced a third of heaven's angels to rebel against God's government. This resulted in the banishment of Satan and his followers from heaven. Once Satan caused Adam to sin, this controversy entered the human family, and has continued upon earth to

this very day. Even now, supernatural forces are vying for your life. God works providentially, by prompting you, and speaking to your conscience, whereas Satan fills the mind with terrible temptations, hoping to lead you and your children into dreadful wickedness. Every moment this war is waging. Yet neither God nor Satan can force the will. Notice how Paul describes this battle in his letter to the Ephesians.

Ephesians 6:11 Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

6:12 For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

The Bible - the sword of the Spirit - is the main weaponry needed to stand against the wiles of the devil. The very thing which Voltaire and Paine claimed would be a forgotten book is man's greatest defence and protection. The reason why the Bible is indispensable is because your enemy is not another individual who has done something wrong by you. You are not fighting against flesh and blood but "against spiritual wickedness in high places". And you need the sword of the Spirit to fight this spiritual battle.

Who was it that inspired Voltaire's writings? Who was behind the French Revolution and the reign of terror? It was Satan. By contrast, who was behind the Protestant Reformation and the translation of the Bible into the common tongue? It was God. This is the great controversy in action. Satan knows that if he can cause people to lose confidence in God's Word, they're helpless and bound to do evil. Men and women will then come under Satan's control. The reign of terror is proof of this fact. Moreover, Satan knows full well the power of the Bible because He's been witnessing it for six thousand years. He's seen that when people trust and obey God's Word, lives are transformed which he has no control over. So Satan works tirelessly to destroy faith in the Bible.

When Voltaire died, Satan employed another man to continue that work. That man's name was Thomas Paine. The statements which follow are tak-

en from Paine's book, *The Age of Reason*.

“It is from the Bible that man has learned cruelty, rapine, and murder; for the belief of a cruel God makes a cruel man.”<sup>3</sup>

“People in general know not what wickedness there is in this pretended word of God... it is a book of lies, wickedness, and blasphemy.”<sup>4</sup>

Reading these quotes as a Christian fills me with horror. Yet this book has inspired millions of people. Of course, we know who was behind it. And it was because Voltaire and Paine didn't understand how a loving God could permit pain and suffering that they wrote this way. With that said, these men also wrote some good things, which is part of the reason why they continue to have such an influence. They championed the human right to freedom of speech and liberty of conscience. And they used these rights well in directing criticism towards the corrupt monarchy and organised religion of the time. Ultimately however, these men used their reasoning and writings to attack the Bible and the God of the Bible, leading men to become infidels and unbelievers. Ironically, when you cause someone to lose confidence in the Bible - because you're protesting against the evils of society - you're simply contributing to the evils in society. For the only thing that can keep a person from doing wrong is God. It is the Spirit of God which inspires and empowers one to refuse what is wrong and do that which is right. When you cause someone to lose faith in the Bible because of your concern for the oppression and suffering taking place in the world, you're simply adding to that oppression and suffering. This is how much Satan has people deceived.

You see, when a man starts obeying the Bible and living according to its precepts, he ceases to sin. He stops acting selfishly and being jealous of others. He becomes a loving father and a faithful husband. He cares for

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3 Thomas Paine, *The Age Of Reason: Being An Investigation Of True And Fabulous Theology*, (New York, London: G.P. Putnam's sons, 1896), 198.

4 Ibid, 103.



society and becomes a blessing in his workplace and community. In spite of this, men such as Voltaire and Paine would have you lose faith in the Scriptures. And their reasoning is still making infidels today, hundreds of years after their death.

Charles Templeton, as mentioned earlier, was a Christian evangelist who abandoned his faith. The news excerpt below reveals the book he was reading at the time of his demise.

“In 1946, the National Association of Evangelicals listed Templeton as the “best used of God” superseding even Billy Graham. However, Chuck was having major doubts as to the validity of the Bible and those doubts increased as he read infamous works of famous skeptics. He wrote in *Charles Templeton: An Anecdotal Memoir*, “I picked up Thomas Paine’s *The Age of Reason*. In a few hours, nearly everything I knew or believed about the Christian religion was challenged and in large part demolished.” In the next ten days, he read Francois Voltaire’s *The Bible Explained at Last...* Chuck was now doubting his beliefs and believing his doubts!”<sup>5</sup>

Still today, these books are causing people to lose faith in God. Even in the grave, one can be a savour of life unto life or of death unto death. 2 Corinthians 2:16. These men championed their freedom of expression, when in reality, they were not free at all. They were slaves to a common master. The apostle Paul declared:

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?

The great controversy is not only being waged between holy and wicked beings. It’s being waged in your mind. That’s where the battle is fought. Who will you obey when your conscience speaks to you? Think back to

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5 Don Boys, “Pathetic Preacher Dies in Unbelief!,” *CST News*, Aug 8, 2005. <http://www.cstnews.com/bm/other-hot-topics-for-informed-christians-cstnews/pathetic-preacher-dies-in-unbelief.shtml>.

when you were a child and try to recall the guilt you'd feel when you did something wrong. Where did that come from? It was the voice of God striving with you while Satan tempted you to sin. The fact is, that you either obey Satan, and are his servant unto death, or you obey God, and are His servant unto righteousness, where the end thereof is eternal life.

Voltaire and Paine were proud of their freedom of expression, yet they were servants of Satan, leading people to sin and ultimately to hell. They are certainly going to reap what they've sown. Peter says something very similar when speaking about the corrupt religious leaders of his day.

2 Peter 2:19 While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption: for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

These men who Peter speaks about were corrupt, and yet they thought they could preach liberty to others. They were in bondage to their own selfish natures and Satan controlled them and used them as he would. Remember Jesus' warning to Peter: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat: But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not." Luke 22:31-32.

Friends, you cannot separate suffering from sin. Sin is the cause of suffering, and when Jesus comes He will put an end to sin. He will put an end to sinners and there will be no more suffering. Yet if Jesus returned today, thousands would be lost who might have been saved had Christ held back till tomorrow or next week. Men wonder why God permits suffering and yet it is in His great mercy that God allows life to continue because He wants to save your soul. He wants to give you eternal life. God gave the antediluvian world 120 years to repent from their sins and seek refuge inside the ark. However, after that time, the flood came. God is merciful and long-suffering, but He won't hold back forever. Notice what God says in the book of Ezekiel when the children of Israel were going astray.

Ezekiel 18:32 For I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth, saith the Lord GOD: wherefore turn yourselves, and live ye.

Ezekiel 33:11 Say unto them, 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 your evil ways; for why will ye die, O house of Israel?

I love this passage because it highlights God's personality as our Father. It shows God pleading with us as we would plead with our children when we see them pursuing a wrong course. God has no pleasure in the suffering or death of the wicked. He strives with mankind daily; imploring them to turn from their evil ways that they might be saved. For your sake He allows the earth to continue a little longer. He preserves your life with the hope that you will hear His appeal, and He might save you for eternity.

Jesus taught that when the Comforter is come, "he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment:" John 16:8. This promise is realised every time you feel guilty for doing something wrong, as well as every time you have a noble thought, a loving impulse, or a pure motive. When one thinks about heaven and eternal life, it is not by chance. That impulse comes from the One who "lighteth every man that cometh into the world". John 1:9. It is God impressing your heart and speaking to your conscience. If you don't resist that voice, God will continue drawing you, and He'll change your life for now and for eternity.

It's true that God wants to end suffering, but He also wants to save you. And so He never sleeps nor slumbers. Heaven is striving with every man. In Titus 2:11 we are promised: "For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men." Some ask about those who have never heard the gospel. They wonder how God judges those in remote regions who have never even heard of the Bible. The truth is that even in the most remote places and amongst the most heathen people, there is still a knowledge of right and wrong. Their own conscience tells them that it's wrong to murder, lie, and commit adultery. Where did that knowledge come from? It came from the grace of God which has appeared to all men. And what does that grace teach? The next verse reveals that the grace of God "teach[es] us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should

live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;” Titus 2:12.

This grace appears to every human being until they totally resist God’s Spirit and refuse to hear His voice any longer. However, if people did listen to that voice speaking to their conscience, and did not resist it, their lives would be speedily transformed. In John 1:12 we read: “But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name”. As you receive Christ into our life, you also receive divine power to overcome sin.

Ultimately, there are two paths a person can take. They can respond to God’s drawing and grasp that blessed assurance of eternal life, or they can become more and more hardened by resisting His Spirit, and pursue the path leading to sin and death. For as we saw earlier, “to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are”. Romans 6:16. There are powers striving for your soul. By being mindful of this, you can make better decisions. By choosing to obey God, not only will you cease to cause direct suffering to others, but you will also help to hasten the Lord’s coming so that He can put an end to suffering for good. By contrast, if you ignore God’s voice, you will simply continue to add to the sin and suffering in this world. For example, a man might enjoy a happy family life and yet be drawn into gambling. If that gambling habit gets the better of him, he may ruin himself as well as his family. Situations like this happen all the time.

Here is another illustration which reveals where suffering comes from, and how it has nothing at all to do with God. Imagine a city with all its usual features; a police station, a courthouse, aged-care facilities, and prisons. Let’s imagine that from tomorrow onwards, every citizen in that city decides not to sin. The adulterer decides that he isn’t going to commit adultery anymore. The thief decides that he isn’t going to steal anymore. The children decide to be respectful to their parents. Every single commandment is kept. What happens to that city? Overnight, the violence, corruption, disrespect, and hatred vanishes. Overnight, there is no longer a need for the police force, the courthouse, the aged-care facilities, or the prisons. There are no criminals to arrest. There is no one to take before a

judge. And people are taking care of their elderly parents. Without any interference from God, the main causes of suffering all disappear. Although this will never take effect in reality, this illustration shows how the majority of suffering ceases when men start obeying God rather than disobeying Him. Aside from reaping the consequences of past sins, and the inevitable decay of health with age, this is what happens when men start listening to God's voice, and live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world.

Friends, you have the power to make these decisions. Sin is always a choice. It is never inevitable. It's true that you need divine help, but you have the ability to say no. Many think that they have unbeatable habits which they cannot give up. However, consider the following illustration of a man who appears to be enslaved to a particular sin. Imagine that this man has an electrical device strapped to him and whenever he chooses to indulge that sin, he is shocked with hundreds of volts of electricity. How many more times do you think he would fall prey to that habit? I dare say not once! The person would be converted instantly. That's the power of the human will. Stories of prisoners of war, and those lost in remote locations highlight the lengths mankind will go to in order to survive. The human will is extremely powerful. And when you place it in God's hands, you can overcome every wrong habit and your life can be transformed.

In the illustration of the city, there was harmony and peace when men ceased from sin. That's what heaven will be like. What I most look forward to in heaven is not the streets of gold or the tremendous glories and wonders. It is not those things which Jesus says: "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." What I most look forward to is the knowledge that you can have a conversation with someone like Moses or Paul, and yet they won't look down on you as one unworthy of their company. There will be no intimidation or feelings of superiority. You will sit with Jesus, the Creator of the universe, and feel completely comfortable in His presence. Instead of boundaries, there will be perfect love and respect for one another. That's what God desired for this world, and what society could be like if people changed their ways and gave heed to God's voice. Revelation 22:14 describes the kind of people that are go-

ing to be in heaven.

Revelation 22:14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

It was sin that took away man's right to the tree of life. When men stop sinning and choose to obey God, they regain this right. Admission into the heavenly city will only be granted to those that keep God's commandments. Then, God's ideal for the human family will be fulfilled, and His obedient and selfless children will enjoy indescribable bliss and peace for eternity. However, in order for that to happen, God has to allow suffering on earth to continue for a period of time. You see, every person who enters the heavenly gates was once a sinner. Every person played their part in causing suffering to others. Yet in God's mercy and long-suffering, He kept them alive. Then one day they responded to that grace that bringeth salvation, and God won them to eternal life.

With the exception of Jesus, the wisest man that ever lived was King Solomon. The Bible says that God granted him wisdom that no man, before or after him, would ever possess. Solomon wrote hundreds of proverbs in addition to the book of Ecclesiastes. When Solomon was an old preacher, he looked over his life experience and all the wisdom which God gave him, and he summed up the purpose of life in this one verse:

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.

12:14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil. (NIV)

This is the most precious and valuable wisdom that a person can obtain. Anything outside of this counsel - all the world's philosophies - is foolishness and vanity. Friends, God is no respecter of persons. Regardless of whether you're rich or poor, famous or unknown, God sees only two categories: the saved and the lost. God sees those who keep His com-

mandments, and those who do not. And God is not ignorant as to what is happening here on earth. He is going to bring every deed into judgement, and justice will soon be met out.

There is certainly much wisdom in this passage. This one verse contains the answer to all of humanity's problems. If we would keep God's commandments, there would be no more sin and as a result, no more injustice, corruption, violence or unfaithfulness. By default, all the suffering which these sins bring would immediately cease.

Of course, nobody likes to suffer. Nevertheless, suffering is part of man's lot in this life. This world is fallen, our natures are fallen, and suffering is a component of life on earth. And suffering doesn't discriminate. You can be wealthy and prosperous and yet in one moment, a phone call announcing the death of a loved one can shatter it all.

There's another reason why God permits trials and hardships. Jesus promised: "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." John 16:33. The reality is that you are going to suffer in this world, whether it be for the sake of the gospel or due to the consequences of your sins. Would it not be far better to suffer for Christ's sake and cherish the hope of a blessed eternity to come? Those who reject God and continue in sin are still going to suffer in this world, but they will also suffer the punishment of eternal death. When Peter and the apostles were unjustly arrested and beaten, the Bible says that "they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name." Acts 5:41. Moreover, sufferings and hardships can actually be beneficial to us. Notice the wisdom of God in cursing the ground for man's sake after Adam sinned.

Genesis 3:17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;  
3:18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;

3:19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

God declared that after the fall, man's life would include sorrow, hardship and toil. All these things were for "thy sake", or in other words, for thy good. Ultimately, God informs Adam that he will have to work hard and endure trials, and then one day he will die. After Adam sinned, man's nature became sinful and selfish. Can you imagine what would happen if everything around him remained perfect, just as it was before he had sinned? The only thing that stops man from doing half the evil things he wants to do is an awareness of the consequences. Sinful man living in a perfect environment would simply perpetuate evil because there would be no consequences. Yet when one has to toil the ground, and deal with thorns and thistles, they're reminded of the disobedience which led to that state, and the promise of a perfect, new life to come. It's for this reason that trials and tribulations can be for our good.

Have you ever noticed that it's much harder to share the gospel with the wealthy than with the poor or middle-class? Those who are sick, outcast, or downtrodden are often far more willing to listen. In their hardships and hopeless circumstances, God is able to reach them with the hope that this life is not forever, and something far better awaits. For those who are troubled, it is their very circumstance that makes this hope of the gospel a reality to them. They have a need, and that need brings hope. Hope beyond the prison, beyond the hospital bed, and beyond the burdens of this life. It is because of hardships and sorrows that men are drawn to hear the good news of salvation and eternal life.

Man is also endowed with virtues such as trust, patience and contentment. When a person has trust, it helps them not to fret or be anxious and concerned. When a person has patience, it prevents them from getting angry and helps them to remain calm. And contentment is the most beautiful quality of all. I believe that being content is the secret of a true Christian. When you're content, you'll never covet something else or someone else. You'll never be envious or jealous. You'll have peace and happiness



regardless of your situation. And God has given us a perfect example of this to follow. For no man ever lived who had more perfect trust, or was more patient than Jesus. At the same time, no man ever lived who went through more hardships, trials or sufferings than Jesus. Our Saviour was surrounded by enemies. He had no permanent home to lay his head, and He was forsaken by His disciples in the hour of His greatest need. Yet throughout all this, Jesus was content. The apostle Paul understood this principle, and applied it in his own life. He declared:

Philippians 4:11 Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.

4:12 I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

It was through trials that Paul learnt to be content. Why do we question God's wisdom? Why don't we trust Him a little more? He's our Creator. In fact, it's these trying experiences which enable us to develop trust.

After the stock market crash of the great depression, many of the most powerful, rich men saw their wealth disappear and as a result, committed suicide. These men had trusted in their riches. When that was gone, they were left with nothing. By contrast, the poor and oppressed were better able to endure that experience. They were accustomed to hardships and they had developed a lot more trust.

Many think that wealth can supply their needs, while others imagine that money would solve their problems. I've been to third world countries, and I've seen people living in grass huts with beds made from banana leaves. A storm might ruin their entire village but they will come together to rebuild it. These people wash in rivers. They cook over an open fire. And they're happy. Their children are happy. I've also seen a godly man from one of these very villages become totally and completely destroyed and corrupted by money. He became unfaithful, abusive, and even violent. He abandoned his children. I have never seen a more dramatic change in

a person. Money is not the answer. Rather, it can often create a lot more problems. Contentment on the other hand does provide a solution, and it is gained through hardships and trials. It leads one to trust in God because there's no one else to trust in.

When Paul was brought before Nero in trial, he said: "all men forsook me". Yet he also said: "notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me". 2 Timothy 4:16-17. Hardships and sufferings allow God to build and refine our characters. The next time a trial comes to you, remember that you can rise above it. Claim the promise: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." Philippians 4:13. The book of Habakkuk contains another precious description of faith in times of trial.

Habakkuk 3:17 Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labour of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be cut off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls:

3:18 Yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will joy in the God of my salvation.

3:19 The LORD God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places. To the chief singer on my stringed instruments.

When Habakkuk's entire livelihood vanished before his eyes, he said: "yet I will rejoice in the Lord". This is both the secret and the blessing of the Christian faith. Everyone goes through hardships, but when a Christian does, he has hope in the Lord. Whereas for the unbeliever, all he sees is the tragic circumstance before him. He has nothing to hope for and no one to trust in. Many drown in despair and even take their own lives. However, the Christian is able to look past the trial before him. He knows that what he's enduring is temporal and that there's a better life to come where there will be no more sin or suffering. He knows that the day is coming when "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". Revelation 21:4.

When we remain focused on these promises, and keep our eyes fixed on eternity, our difficulties and trials fade quickly away. The following verse is undoubtedly the greatest text in all the Bible with regards to why God permits suffering. The apostle Paul suffered immense persecution. He was stoned to the point that his opposers were convinced that he was dead. He was beaten and shipwrecked multiple times, and yet he speaks of all these things as being a “light affliction”. In his second letter to the Corinthian church, we read:

2 Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

4:18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Paul maintained the perspective that his life on earth was but for a moment. And he understood that tribulations “worketh for us” eternal glory, just as Adam’s difficulties were to be for “thy sake”. Rather than focusing on the things that are seen - the trials and tribulations before him - Paul chose to focus on the things which are not seen - the promises of God and the hope of eternal life. If you remember these passages, and pray when you’re struggling, your trials will also become light afflictions to you. This can even be the case when one loses a loved one, and is naturally overcome with pain and sadness. For if they know that their child or parent was right with God, then they also know they will see them again. And they will strive even harder to make sure that they’re right with God because they want to spend an eternity in heaven with that person. So regardless of what the affliction is, we can be sure that it “worketh for us”. For “we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.” Romans 8:28.

Let us therefore remember that suffering does not come from God. And God is working every moment to protect us from suffering, and preserve our lives. Yet at the same time, suffering is the result of sin and rebellion, and it is for our own good that we face the consequences of our wrong ac-

tions. We need to learn from these consequences and keep from sinning. For one day God will put an end to suffering. And when He does, He will have to put an end to sin and sinners as well. Then, at last, there will be no more pain, suffering, injustice, or death.

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Why would a loving God allow sin to exist?

Why is there pain and suffering?

Why doesn't God intervene?

