

“ WHAT KIND OF GOD IS IT THAT.....? ”

We don't need to live in this world very long to realise that it contains an awful lot of suffering - suffering that clouds the vision of many to the existence of God.

Most of us have seen some of the work of David Attenborough the naturalist, who has travelled the world filming God's magnificent creation. Some of the things he films are quite outstanding, helping us to recognise the wonderful creativity of our Maker, and yet I have never heard him even mention God. Evolution yes, many, many times – but God – no. Apparently he recently explained why: He does marvel at the things he films but in the process he sees many things he doesn't care to film – things that blight his recognition of a Great Creator – such as children whose eyesight is being destroyed by parasitic worms which enter the body through polluted water. Also, of course, he cannot avoid seeing the evil effects of war, famine, corruption and terrorism and they are enough to place doubt about God in many minds. The whole world it seems, “groans and labours with pain until now,” Romans 8:22 , awaiting the return of Christ.

Actually, we don't need to look further than our own nation to see the suffering of children, innocent little ones abused and even tortured to death by their own parents. Our own lives indeed, often contain tragedy and suffering – some apparently quite accidental – some hereditary and some we brought upon ourselves – any of which can blight lives.

So, reasons humanity, if there is a God, why does He allow such evil and suffering ? If the very number of hairs on our head are all known to God ,as the Bible says, how can He permit such suffering ? We find the answer in-

2 Corinthians 4:4 “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.” This world is not now ruled by God ! This world is governed by men, with all their failings, weaknesses and depravity but it is actually ruled by Satan. Yes, the planet belongs to God, but it is presently under the sway of the deceiver, Revelation 12:9 “And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” He is the one who has inspired the political systems, the governments, the religions, the societies we live in. That is why God tells us not to be deeply involved in the world and its ways !

1 John 2:15 “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.”

From the very beginning our first parents chose to reject God's laws. So Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden. Later the whole of mankind, except Noah's company were drowned in the Flood. Only one man's family continued to follow God's way. Abraham, and later his children, the patriarchs, walked in the light of God's Law, Genesis 26:5 “Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

However, when God delivered Abraham's descendants from Egypt, even before Sinai they were resisting His Law, Exodus 16:28 “And the LORD said unto Moses, How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?” When His voice boomed out the Ten Commandments they shrank from His presence in fear, Exodus 20:18-26 “And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw *it*, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God *was*.”

Later they went on to choose a human leader rather than God, 1 Samuel 8:6-7: “But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD. And the LORD said

unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them.”

Man, it seems, likes to do “that which is right in his own eyes” Judges 21:25. Freedom to do your own thing is what men seek, no matter what God’s word says. These are the “human rights” men desire, but their rights don’t always bring happiness, Hosea 4:6 “My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children.”

Human suffering then, is permitted by God in order that we learn that choosing the wrong way hurts. The choice to keep it or reject it remains ours, Deuteronomy 30:14,19 “ But the word *is* very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.”

Nor can we long delay the choice without risking salvation, Hebrews 2:3 “How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him.”

Even choosing right does not guarantee freedom from suffering ! Romans 8:16-17 “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together.” If Christ Himself suffered for us, can we expect to escape it altogether ? Or to be free from the danger of time and chance ? Ecclesiastes 9:11, “I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race *is* not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favour to men of skill; but time and chance happeneth to them all.” What this is saying is that God deliberately placed us in a world where we are endangered. All of us will encounter pain and loss at some time during our lives, but what really counts is not the suffering, but how we respond to it. Like Job we have lessons to learn, and most of us, it seems, can only learn them the hard way.

Behind all our experiences though, including suffering, is a purpose. God gave us His law to show us how to avoid sin. His word explains that our refusal to walk in righteousness brings only death. Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

He doesn’t need to punish us for sin. It’s consequences in our lives are automatic – guilty conscience, bad character, broken relationships, ill health, shattered minds, fear, corruption and ruined lives, but most people carry on quite unaware that these are the results of breaking God’s Law.

Not one of us is without sin. That’s why Jesus came saying in Mark 1:15 “And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.”

The bible shows that it is not enough to ‘live a good life’ as many “Christians” do. What they think is “good” often bears no reference to the Law of God, and separates them from God, without any connection at all !

To repent means to cry out to God for forgiveness of your sins – through the sacrifice in which Jesus Christ gave His life and poured out His blood to grant undeserved forgiveness for our iniquities. It means turning life around and endeavoring to live by the word of God, all we read in the bible !

Only then will the connection to God be created. Only then can you expect His intervention in your life, Matthew 7:21-23 “ Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

What separates us from God ?

Isaiah 59:1-2; “ Behold, the LORD’S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear.”

There is only one exception to this rule Acts 2:39 “For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, *even* as many as the Lord our God shall call.” The children of God’s people enjoy a special and privileged relationship with their Father in Heaven until He, in His good time, calls them to repent. John 6:44 “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day.” But **when** we are called to turn from our sin, when we recognise it’s evil results in our lives, God shows us that we need a vital, missing dimension in our lives, Acts 2:38 “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.**” The Holy Spirit alone can unite us with our Creator !

Most “Christians” are not so linked. When they suffer, they wonder why their prayers are unanswered.

Without repentance, baptism and the Holy Spirit we remain a partially incomplete creation, lacking the begetting by God that sets us on the road to God’s Family. Romans 8:29 “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the **firstborn among many brethren.**” Faith and confidence wither when tragedy strikes because that vital link, God’s Holy Spirit is not there.

Even in Christ’s day people were puzzled by “innocent” suffering, Luke 13:1-5 “There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, **except ye repent**, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, **except ye repent**, ye shall all likewise perish.” Most people, even then, chose to leave God entirely out of their lives and take their chances without any intervention from God when tragedy strikes. God was not in any way involved with these events, for it says “except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish,” showing they were unrepentant.

However, none of us is immune from time and chance, or from the results of the sins of our fathers or others, or the depredations of bad habits, or bad diet or environment. When we suffer though, it does mean that as God’s children, none of our sufferings are pointless. If we had never suffered such consequences how could we hope to empathize with and help those we will serve in God’s Kingdom ?

And, when we do suffer we have the advantage of God’s help - Ecclesiastes 8:12-13 “Though a sinner do evil an hundred times, and his *days* be prolonged, yet surely I know that it shall be well with them that fear God, which fear before him: But it shall not be well with the wicked, neither shall he prolong *his* days, *which are* as a shadow; because he feareth not before God.” He is most merciful -

Isaiah 55:6-7 “Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”

Only those who have diligently studied His word ever find His innumerable specific promises to those who fear Him, for with God on our side who can fail ? 1 Kings 8:56 “Blessed *be* the LORD, that hath given rest unto his people Israel, according to all that he promised: there hath not failed one word of all his good promise, which he promised by the hand of Moses his servant.”

It is in our times of trial that we learn patience and closeness to God. Paul found that , and God is no respecter of persons ! Philippians 4:13 “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.”

God has promised that He will never let us, spirit begotten children , be lost in despair : 1 Corinthians 10:13 “There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God *is* faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear *it.*”

So, as we have seen, life and suffering are inseparable. God the Father suffered even the cruel death of His Son. Jesus suffered scourging for our Divine healing. God has called each one of us through His word to become perfect, Ephesians 4:13 “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ:”

In conclusion, with the help of the missing dimension, God's Holy Spirit, we are called to develop true Godly character **and if this requires suffering** God will bring us through, as it says in Romans 8 verses 18-22 (Moffat) "Present suffering, I hold, is a mere nothing compared to the glory that we are to have revealed. Even the creation waits with eager longing for the sons of God to be revealed. For creation was not rendered futile by it's own choice, but by the will of Him who thus made it subject, the hope being that creation as well as man would one day be freed from it's thralldom to decay and gain the glorious freedom of the children of God."

