

Glad Tidings

Of The Kingdom Of God



Featured **Articles**

The Grace of God (p. 3)

How and Why I Came to Christ (p. 9)

Suffering and the God of Love (p. 13)

A monthly magazine written and published by the Christadelphians (brothers and sisters in Christ) and available throughout the world.

Its objectives are to encourage the study of the Bible as God's inspired message to humankind; to call attention to the divine offer of forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ; and to warn people that soon Christ will return to earth as judge and ruler of God's worldwide Kingdom.

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Publisher
The Glad Tidings Publishing Association
A registered charity—Number 248352

The Grace of God

WHEN NEWS CAME that his army had been defeated at the Battle of Malplaquet, the French King Louis XIV exclaimed "Has God forgotten all I have done for him?" He had done much to advance the Catholic cause, and therefore he reasoned that God should not be so ungrateful as to allow his army to be defeated.



King Louis XIV

It's difficult for you and me to put ourselves in the position of an absolute monarch. When you have the power of life and death over your subjects, you get used to having what you want. That kind of power breeds a special kind of arrogance. But just maybe we can recognise King Louis' attitude in some of the ways we behave.

Have you ever thought, "Why is this happening to me?" or "Why is God letting this happen to me?" or "I don't deserve this." These are not uncommon thoughts—even for followers of Christ. When life goes wrong it can be very hard.

Look at it another way. Have you ever thought, "I'm a decent kind of person. I'm a lot better than some. I don't see why God shouldn't be pleased with me"?

These are two aspects of the same attitude. Do you recognise it in the way you think? If so, you need to sit up and read this carefully—because these kinds of thoughts betray a massive gulf between the way you're thinking, and the way of God.

Saved By Grace

The Apostle Paul said this: '*By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God*' (Ephesians 2:8). This is a profound statement that's worth pondering. "Grace" is defined in a Bible dictionary as 'undeserved favour'. The grace of God is a fundamental theme in the Bible. God is the Creator, the Giver of life and everything, the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ who died to save us from our sins: '*God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*' (John 3:16). He owes us nothing, and we owe Him everything. When we look at it like that, does our self-satisfaction take on a different hue?

Jesus told a story:

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one

a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.' But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:9–14).



The Gift of Salvation

The Pharisees were the religious rulers of the day. People looked up to them, and they were generally very pleased with themselves. Tax collectors were as unpopular in those days as they've ever been—this man would have been working for the Romans and so doubly resented by the Jews. The contrast between these two was simply this: one believed that he was a good man and deserved God's favour; the other knew his need of God's mercy.

There was another occasion when we see the two categories of people together.

Jesus was invited to dine by a tax collector.

And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, "Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?" And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Mark 2:15–17).

Coming to terms with God and His ways means putting our lives into perspective—accepting what we are when we come before Him. In another of Paul's letters he puts it like this: 'All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus' (Romans 3:23–24).

So it's worth asking yourself the question—do you believe you're a good person, and God ought to be pleased with you? Or do you recognise yourself as a sinner? If you accept your need for God's grace, He will extend it to you. If you don't, He won't.

Questions? Comments?
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Law and Grace

THE LAW OF MOSES was a law which the people of Israel were commanded to keep from the time it was given by God (around the 15th Century BC) until Christ's work of salvation had been completed (in the 1st Century AD). Getting to grips with the place of the Law in God's purpose can be challenging: on the one hand the Law is 'holy' (Romans 7:12), but on the other hand its observance was described by the Apostle Peter as '*a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear*' (Acts 15:10). Peter's comment on the Law was made whilst debating one of the most pivotal questions of the New Testament era: how can we be saved from death and live for ever? Are we saved, as some of its adherents claimed, by observance of the Law of Moses? or are we '*saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus*' (Acts 15:11)?

An Old Testament Example

The inability of the Law of Moses to save, and our utter dependence upon the grace of God, is a theme which is discussed extensively in the New Testament. But it is also found frequently in the Old Testament. An infamous incident in the life of King David powerfully illustrates that he, like all of us, could only be saved by grace.

In the spring of the year, the time when kings go out to battle, David sent Joab, and his servants with him, and all Israel. And they ravaged the Ammonites and besieged

Rabbah. But David remained at Jerusalem (2 Samuel 11:1).

It was David's custom to lead his army personally (see 2 Samuel 18:2), but for whatever reason this year he stayed home.

'It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house...' (2 Samuel 11:2). David was known to meditate upon God whilst on his bed (see Psalm 63:6), but it's unlikely that's what he was doing. It seems he was just taking it easy. And as the English proverb quips, 'the devil finds work for idle hands to do'.



'He saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. And David sent and enquired about the woman. And one said, "Is not this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite?" So David sent messengers and took her, and she came to him, and he lay with her' (vs. 2-4). David had seen a beautiful woman bathing, which would

have been a potent temptation for many a man, even one with the spiritual qualities which David exhibited throughout his life. The woman was married, which would no doubt have been enough to deter David's advances at other points in his life but not on this occasion; King David committed adultery with Bathsheba, the wife of Uriah the Hittite. This desperately sad account demonstrates that even great characters like David were not immune to temptation.



Like us, David needed a Saviour who *'in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin'* (Hebrews 4:15).

The Law of Moses said, *'If a man commits adultery with the wife of his neighbour, both the adulterer and the adulteress shall surely be put to death'* (Leviticus 20:10). According to the Law, David (and Bathsheba) should have been put to death. This is very powerful in the context of the debate about whether the Law can save from death and bring about eternal life. The Law couldn't save David—in stark contrast, it could only condemn him to death! This helps to explain why it is described as *'the ministry of death'* and *'the ministry of condemnation'* (2 Corinthians 3:7 and 9).

As a result of their adultery, Bathsheba became pregnant. It was impossible for David and Bathsheba to keep quiet about what they had done, because Bathsheba's husband Uriah was off fighting the Ammonites, so the baby couldn't possibly have been his. Two options presented themselves to David at this point:

- 1) confess to Uriah (who was one of David's 'mighty men', see 2 Samuel 23:39) what he had done; or
- 2) take steps to make sure Uriah never found out what he had done.

David chose the second option. He tried to make Uriah go home to his wife (2 Samuel 11:6–13), so it would appear that the baby was Uriah's, and David's shameful secret would be safe. Honourably, Uriah refused to go home to his wife while his comrades were on the battlefield. In David's mind, it seems, there was only one option left.

David sent Uriah back to the front of the battle with a letter for his commander: *'Set Uriah in the forefront of the hardest fighting, and then draw back from him, that he may be struck down, and die'* (v. 15).

Guilt and Fear

As an aside, where did David get such a desperately wicked idea? It appears that he learnt it from his predecessor the godless King Saul, who wanted David to die in battle with the Philistines (see 1 Samuel 18:17).

Having acted like Saul, David was afraid that God would treat him as He treated Saul. For example, He took His holy spirit from Saul (1 Samuel 16:14), which explains

why David pleaded, *'Take not your Holy Spirit from me'* (Psalm 51:11).

If Uriah died in battle, David thought that would solve his problem, as he heartlessly remarked when the mission was accomplished: *'The sword devours now one and now another'* (2 Samuel 11:25). However, this is not how God saw this awful sequence of events:

'Why have you despised the word of the LORD, to do what is evil in his sight? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and have taken his wife to be your wife and have killed him with the sword of the Ammonites' (2 Samuel 12:9). In God's eyes, David had essentially killed Uriah. According to the Law of Moses, how should David have been punished? *'If a man wilfully attacks another to kill him by cunning, you shall take him from my altar, that he may die'* (Exodus 21:14). The fact that David was not put to death reveals that the punishments prescribed in the Law were not always enforced.

Saved by Grace

David was an outstanding character, a man who *'did what was right in the eyes of the LORD and did not turn aside from anything that he commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite'* (1 Kings 15:5). However, according to the Law, David deserved to be put to death... twice! Obedience to the Law could not save David, and if it could not save a man such as him then what chance does anyone else have? David was completely and inescapably dependent upon God's grace.

This beautiful theme comes out so movingly in Psalm 51, which as the title

tells us, was written *'after he had gone in to Bathsheba'*:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! (Psalm 51:1-2).



Forgiveness and salvation were possible for David, but only due to those perfect characteristics of God: steadfast love and abundant mercy.

What lesson can we take from David's experience of Law and grace? We cannot be forgiven and live for ever—we cannot be saved—by obedience to religious laws, whether it be the Law of Moses or any law which we might devise. Like David, we too are wholly and undeniably dependent upon the grace of God. This is all captured in the inspired words of the Apostle Paul to the believers of his day: *'By grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God'* (Ephesians 2:8).

Stephen Blake

Hebrews

THIS LETTER to Hebrew believers demonstrates that Jesus Christ is God's final and perfect representative, better and greater than all who preceded him. He is greater than ...

- the angels—1:4–14
- Abraham—7:4
- Moses—3:3–6
- Aaron (High Priest)—4:14, 15; 8:1–4
- Joshua—4:8
- all the prophets—1:1–2.

The writer shows that Christ is of a higher order than the Jewish priests, who were descended from Aaron of the tribe of Levi. Jesus was of the royal tribe of Judah, *'and in connection with that tribe Moses said nothing about priests'* (7:14). But Jesus' priesthood was greater than that of Aaron (5:6; 6:20; 7:1–21): chapters 5–7 show how Christ is *'a priest for ever according to the order of Melchizedek'*, who was the king-priest of Salem (later Jerusalem, Genesis 14:18–20).

The letter shows how the Law of Moses pointed forward to Christ. Chapter 9 tells how he was prefigured in the tabernacle and its contents (Exodus 25–27), and in the calendar of feasts and sacrifices which Israel had to follow. And what was true for the tabernacle, the temporary shrine in the wilderness, was also true for the temple in Jerusalem and its rituals—which was still in existence at the time of writing and which the Hebrews were reluctant to turn

away from. Animal sacrifices (chapters 9 & 10) pointed forward to a better sacrifice: Christ's sacrifice did away with the need for those sacrifices, and did away also with the need for the temple and the priesthood.

The Way of Faith

Chapter 11 shows that salvation is by faith in God's promises, centred in Jesus Christ. Jesus, though he was God's Son, *'in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin'* (4:15, see 2:17–18). He is a mediator (8:6; 9:15; 12:24) for those who come in faith to ask God's forgiveness. In Jesus there is *'a new and living way'* (10:20);



through him we may *'draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith'* (10:22).

Norman Owen

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Some interesting links with other parts of the Bible:

- ◆ Hebrews 2:14—see Romans 5:21; 6:23.
- ◆ Hebrews 9:22—see Leviticus 17:11; Matthew 26:28.
- ◆ Hebrews 13:13—see Exodus 29:14; 33:7; Numbers 19:2–3.

How and Why I Came to Christ

IT IS DIFFICULT to appreciate that it was just over 63 years ago, when I sat in a bath of warm water in an old upper room and confessed my belief in the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I was brought up in Middlesbrough in northern England in the 1950s. My mother sent me to St Paul's Church School: she thought that was good for me.



*Tees Newport Bridge,
Middlesbrough*

At school we were made to attend the Church of England services each morning. It has to be said that most of us were not interested in religion.

Each morning we had Bible teaching, then in the afternoon science, which included teaching on the evolution of life (which was more interesting for most of us). The Bible held no real appeal for me.

But I am sure that somewhere inside, I wanted to find out about God. That is why once, after a special church parade with the Air Cadets, I stayed behind at the church. But nobody showed any interest in me, in particular the young people, so I left. (In my subsequent years as a church member I have not forgotten that lesson.)

I did pray a little as I wondered what life was about—something like "If you are there who are you?"

In 1957 my family moved to Luton. My first job was enjoyable. However one of



Luton Town Hall

my colleagues was a churchgoer and he castigated me as a heathen because I did not attend church. But he never invited me to go with him. Another lesson learnt.

I was called up for National Service, and hoped to join the Royal Air Force to follow my passion for aircraft. But because of a foot injury sustained on the football field I was rejected.

A New Challenge

I obtained a job as an engineer fitter working on tabulator machines. There were four of us working together: I was an agnostic (I neither disbelieved nor believed in God); there was an atheist, and two churchgoers, one of whom was Vernon, a Christadelphian who had recently been transferred to the factory. (Looking back, I believe God was at work here.) The two churchgoers were very vocal about their

faiths, and at first I wasn't happy about it. Between us we had many arguments about the origin of life. The churchmen gave me booklets on the subject, and other Bible subjects. Although I felt that I was being 'Bible bashed' I had to admit I was being persuaded. Prayer was now in my life—something like "What am I to do?"

One day I shocked Vernon by asking him the subject of the public talk at the Christadelphian meeting that Sunday. He actually lived in Watford and belonged to his local meeting, but he said he'd take me along to the meeting in Luton. So we met at the Luton hall—I remember it didn't look like an appealing place from the outside. The subject of that Sunday's talk was "*The Judgement Seat of Christ*". I did not understand much, but I was struck by one phrase: '*They shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks.*' It's from the beginning of Isaiah 2, and those verses stayed with me.

Coming Round

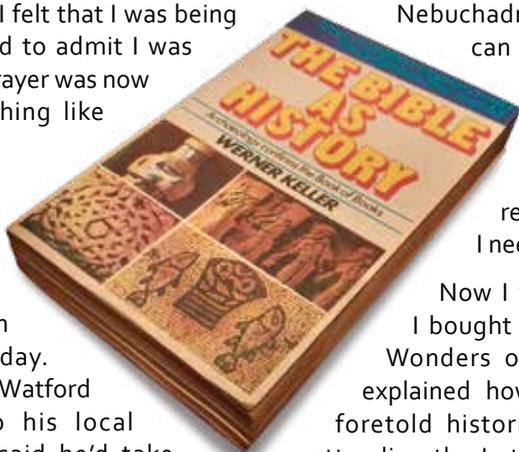
The verbal battles continued at work. Vernon gave me a Bible—a pronouncing edition, which helped me get to grips with the difficult names. My resistance to religion was being eroded.

Six months after the first visit I went again to the Luton Christadelphians. The subject was "*God Rules in the Kingdoms*

of Men". On the wall was a huge painting of Nebuchadnezzar's dream from Daniel 2. The dream was a prophecy about world history which was future to Nebuchadnezzar, but which we can look back on and see how it came true. I enjoyed this talk. The Bible started to open up, and I realised there was much I needed to learn.

Now I was into heavy stuff! I bought a book entitled "*The Wonders of Prophecy*",¹ which explained how the Bible accurately foretold historical events. I began attending the Luton evening meetings fairly regularly. I was invited to people's homes to talk about the Bible, and I finally acquiesced. I remember Bert, one of the kindest men I have ever met. During our chats I showed my interest in archaeology, and he loaned me "*The Bible as History*",² a fascinating book that explains how many unearthed artefacts and people and cities are referred to in the Bible. When I read the phrase, "*Nothing has been found that has proved the Bible to be wrong*", I was off to the British Museum to see for myself. I was impressed.

History, archaeology and prophecy started to fit together. Now I believed the stories of the Old Testament. I read the Bible intently. The Kingdom of God was shining out from its pages, wonderful visions of the future which I had never heard of before. And so many verses referring to the return



¹ John Urquhart; ² Werner Keller

of Jesus Christ and the wonders of his coming Kingdom. I felt I was emerging from ignorance to a whole new world of Bible knowledge.

My Conversion

When Bert said I was ready for baptism I had a great struggle to make that vital step. Then I was rushed into hospital, and I was reminded of my mortality—had I left it too late? During my convalescence I read “God’s Way”,³ which answered many of my questions. I felt converted, and asked for baptism again.

I now came to fully understand that this man Jesus Christ sacrificed his life for me and for all who will believe. So on the 10th January 1959, after a great struggle within, I was baptised in obedience to the Lord’s command (Acts 2:38) by full immersion in water.

On the following Sunday morning I stood in front of my new brothers and sisters and received ‘the right hand of fellowship’—a way of welcoming me into my new family. That day for the first time I shared the bread and wine in obedience to my Lord’s command (1 Corinthians 11:23–26), in symbolism of his sacrifice.

After two false starts, Jesus accepted me as I am. My life was now completely changed. I had a new goal, a purpose, a secure future, and a huge family. It has not always been easy. But I have the confidence to share the wonderful Gospel message with any who will listen.

³ John Carter; ⁴ New King James version

I thank God every day for His calling, His mercy, His grace and the love of the Lord Jesus my saviour and friend, and pray for his return to fulfil those precious promises in the Bible. This verse encourages me to wait patiently for his return, and continue to give my whole life to him:

‘Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming’ (Matthew 25:13).⁴

Tom Ingham



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The Temple Tax

THE BOOK OF EXODUS describes the construction of the Tabernacle, the focus of Israel's worship of God.

The Tabernacle was largely made of materials that were offered freely by the people (Exodus 25:2). But also, it was partly built by means of a tax. There was to be a census: *'Each one who is numbered in the census shall give this: half a shekel according to the shekel of the sanctuary... half a shekel as an offering to the LORD. Everyone who is numbered in the census, from twenty years old and upwards, shall give the LORD's offering. The rich shall not give more, and the poor shall not give less, than the half shekel, when you give the LORD's offering to make atonement for your lives'* (Exodus 30:13–15). We learn later that this census money was silver coins, which were melted down and used to make components of the Tabernacle (Exodus 38:25–28).

This was the 'atonement offering'. 'Atonement' means reconciliation. It taught the people that despite their waywardness, God wanted to be reconciled to them. Generally taxes in Israel were 'tithes'—people paid in proportion to what they had—but this offering was the same for everyone, rich and poor. Everyone's life is of equal value to God.

The half shekel became established as an annual tax for the upkeep of the priests and the Temple. It was for payment of this tax

that Jesus told Peter to go and catch a fish, in whose mouth he'd find a shekel coin with which he'd pay the tax for the two of them (Matthew 17:24–27).

The coin Peter found in the fish's mouth would have been minted in nearby Tyre. It was typically Tyrean half-shekels that were used for the temple tax, because the Romans did not permit the Jews to produce their own coinage. The Jews particularly resented this rule, because the Tyrian coins bore images of their gods.

In the ruins of a public building that was demolished in the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD archaeologists found an extraordinary silver coin. On one side it has the image of a goblet, similar to the ones used in the Temple service at the time, and the words 'half shekel'; on the other side a depiction of a branch with three pomegranates and the words 'Holy Jerusalem'. The script on the coin is ancient Hebrew. It seems that during the Jewish revolt the Jews expressed their defiance of Rome by minting their own coins for the temple tax.

However, the true meaning of the 'atonement offering' is not the stamp on the silver—it's the fact that God Himself has paid the ultimate price. *'We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation'* (Romans 5:11).

Doug Potts

Suffering and the God of Love



THERE IS NO DOUBT at all that the problem of suffering is one of the greatest problems a Christian has to face. It has probably caused more people to lose faith, and prevented more people from finding faith, than almost any other problem. It is the argument most often used by atheists when they want to try and prove that there is not a God. Their argument is usually something like this:

Christians believe in a loving, all-powerful God. But such a God would want to stop all the suffering in the world. He has not stopped the suffering, therefore either:

- a He is all-powerful but not loving, or*
- b He is loving but not all-powerful, or*
- c He does not exist.*

On the surface this seems a very strong argument, and we must never belittle the problem of suffering. All of us are touched by it at various points in our lives. No true follower of Christ can see or hear about a child born deformed, or people starving, or an entire town destroyed by an invading

army, and not be touched by the distress of the victims. And when the suffering is our own it becomes even harder to accept.

But when we analyse the atheist's question, we see that it is neither accurate nor fair. It assumes four things which are not necessarily true:

1. that God is in some way responsible for suffering,
2. that suffering is necessarily bad,
3. that if God allows suffering when He has power to stop it, He is therefore lacking love, and
4. that because God has not so far stopped suffering, He therefore never will.

What I want us to do is to look at each of these points in turn, and I hope that then we will have a more complete picture which will help us to understand suffering, and accept it. What we should not expect though is to fully understand everything. Do not expect every problem to be fully solved—to do that we would need to fully understand the mind of God.

1. Is God Responsible for Suffering?

If we think about it carefully, we find that there are basically four kinds of suffering in the world:

a Suffering caused deliberately by humans

In this category are included war, robbery and murder. If a person (or a nation) sets out to deliberately kill, maim, rob or cheat, then a great deal of suffering will be caused. Is it then fair to blame God and ask why He does not stop it?

b Suffering caused unintentionally by humans

In this category we have the likes of famine and starvation. The fact is that there is enough food produced in the world to feed everyone adequately. The problem is, who gets it? Some have more than enough, while others starve. (At this point we may all start thinking of other people we know who have too much. Poor countries blame rich countries, poor people blame rich people. We can all think of someone better off than ourselves, and it's easy to point the finger and say "Why don't they give up some of their wealth?" But that really is no use, because the fact is there are also people who are poorer than us, so we need to point our finger at ourselves and ask whether we are prepared to give up some of what we have.) So whose fault is this suffering? God provides and we refuse to share—we can hardly turn round and say "Why does God allow such suffering?"

c Suffering caused by human foolishness

If, for example, someone crashes their car while driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs, who is to blame? (Incidentally, much suffering could be avoided by following the wise guidance that is to be found in God's instruction book, the Bible.)

d Suffering that appears to be out of our control

It is the case that some suffering in the world—probably a small percentage—is not our fault. For example, children are born with deforming conditions which have no identifiable cause. It is this kind of suffering which is most difficult to understand.

We must go back to the beginning and ask the question, "What is the overall cause of suffering anyway?" And as with every important question of life God gives us the answer in the Bible.

We read in Genesis 1:31 that when the works of creation were finished, 'God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good'. So clearly the world cannot have been full of suffering at that point. In Genesis 2:17 God gave the first man Adam a clear warning: '*Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*' Adam and Eve decided not to believe God, but instead to believe the serpent's lie: '*You will not surely die*' (3:4). As a result of this disobedience God brought the curse upon humanity: '*By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return*' (3:19).



That is the cause of suffering. Suffering is a symptom of our mortality. It is not the disease, it is the effect of the disease. We suffer because we are mortal dying creatures. We are dying creatures because of sin: *'The wages of sin is death'* (Romans 6:23). And we all sin. Therefore ultimately the present state of creation is a result of human wrongdoing.

2. Is Suffering Necessarily Bad?

Initially this seems like a foolish question, after all no one likes to suffer. It is unpleasant, but that does not mean it is bad. It is possible for something to be unpleasant and yet useful at the same time. Remember that particularly nasty medicine you probably had at some time? It was unpleasant—but it did you good.



There are people who are born without the ability to feel pain. This is actually a grievous disability. They don't notice when they burn or hit themselves, and it often leads to serious bodily damage. Pain is beneficial. It is a built-in warning signal to tell us that something is wrong. It's not pleasant, but it is a good thing.

Someone once asked Jesus about the troubling case of some innocent people who had been killed. *'There were some*

present at that very time who told him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered in this way? No, I tell you; but unless you repent, you will all likewise perish' (Luke 13:1–3). When you suffer, or see other people suffering, it's not important to wonder whether the suffering is deserved or not. Instead, let it remind you of your frailty and mortality. Just as pain is a danger signal to remind us to seek some remedy, so suffering is a danger signal that we are dying creatures—and we need to seek a remedy!

The Apostle Paul knew what it is to suffer. In 2 Corinthians 11 he recounts a list of the things he suffered during his preaching work. He continues in chapter 12 to describe a particular infirmity he had. (There are various suggestions, but we don't know for sure what this infirmity was.) Surprisingly, this handicap is called a gift from God—it was *given* to Paul to prevent him becoming conceited (v. 7). But he wanted to be rid of it. *'Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"* (12:8–9). Paul realised that he was suffering for his own good, and so he learned to accept it.

3. Does God Allow Suffering Because He Does Not Love Us?

We have already seen that we cannot blame God for causing suffering, it is our fault whether we like it or not. But if God

has the power to stop it and does not, it might be argued that He must take some of the blame. Suppose you were an expert swimmer, and you saw someone fall into a river and drown and did not try to help them. Even though you were not responsible for them falling into the river, would you not bear some responsibility for their death? Is God like that? Is He standing back and watching us all drown when He has the power to save us?

Once again the atheist's argument is not justified. Allowing (or even sometimes causing) suffering does not mean that there is a lack of love. For example, if you see someone stepping into the road in front of a bus, and you dive to save them and they fall over and hurt their shoulder—you have hurt them, but saved their life.

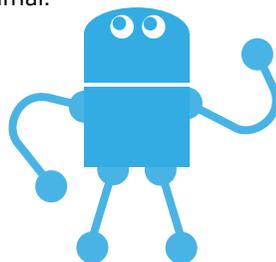
In a sense our suffering is like that, on a much larger scale. When Adam and Eve first turned away from God in spite of a clear warning, God would have been quite justified in wiping them out. Instead He made them mortal, suffering, dying creatures. He did this out of love, as an incentive to make them turn back to Him.

4. Will God Ever End Suffering?

This is the whole point that is so often missed. The assumption is made that God is to blame for suffering (which, as we have seen, He is not); that all suffering is bad (which is wrong); that if God allows suffering He therefore does not love us (when it in fact proves that He does love us)—and the conclusion is that He is doing nothing about the situation. Nothing could be further from the truth. Ask yourself the question, if God wanted to remove

suffering how could He do it? The answer is by removing sin, since that is the cause of suffering. It is no good a doctor treating a symptom—they must treat the disease, and suffering is just a symptom of sin and death. So how could God remove sin? There are two ways in which He could do it.

- a) By making it impossible for us to sin. Sounds reasonable, but think a little more—the only way that could be done is by taking away our free will! How would you like to be a robot? Programmed by God just like a computer! No thank you! I want my free will. Take it away and I am no longer a human being, I am less than an animal.



Neither is it what God wants. He wants love, from a willing heart, not an automatic response from a thing that has no choice. He wants us to respond to His Love willingly—and for that there must be free will! So this option is no good. What is the alternative?

- b) By setting up a plan which would reveal to humankind how to find the way out of the death-trap into which we put ourselves. By showing us how to live, and by providing a way of salvation for those who choose to take it.

That is what God is doing. That is exactly what Jesus meant when he said '*unless*

you repent, you will all likewise perish' (Luke 13:3).

Right at the beginning when God first pronounced the death sentence because of sin, He also promised a way of escape. The Bible is a revelation of that plan, and the culmination of the plan is Jesus Christ, His Son:

God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him (John 3:16–17).

Yes, amazingly God not only loves us, He was willing to suffer Himself because of His love, when He allowed His Son to suffer and die on the cross—so that our suffering might end!

If you doubt the love of God, just read this: *'God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved' (Ephesians 2:4–5).* Despite our weaknesses, in spite of our continual disobedience, in spite of our many sins God loves us. Christ died for sinners like you and me, because God loves us and does not want us to perish. The whole of the Bible is a wonderful unfolding of God's

love, extending to us the opportunity to find eternal life. Of course it takes time, because God is not prepared to use the one thing that might speed up the process—force! He wants us as children, not as pets.

If you want to see the future, read Isaiah chapters 35 and 42. A world of peace, safety, plenty and righteousness. Paul knew what suffering is, as we've seen. But he knew the reason, and he knew the love of God. He concluded: *'I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us' (Romans 8:18).*

Of course suffering is difficult to bear. But never let anyone persuade you that it is God's fault. And never let anyone tell you that God does not care. We need to understand the true cause of suffering and to turn to God in humility so that He might cure us. Then our suffering is put in the right perspective, and we can look beyond this present evil time to the wonderful promise which God has prepared for those who love Him.

He will not force us to believe in Him or accept Him—but when we really see His love and know His plan in Jesus Christ, the only sensible course is to accept His offer of salvation with gratitude.

Chris Furniss



WC

Why was Jesus circumcised at eight days old in accordance with Jewish law (Luke 2:21)? Christians don't need to be circumcised: 'For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love' (Galatians 5:6).

Ed

IN THE OLD TESTAMENT, before the birth of Christ, there are strict rules about how God's people were to come to Him. Men needed to be circumcised (Genesis 17:10), and Israel needed to keep the Law of Moses (which is described in detail in the books of Exodus through to Deuteronomy).

Christians don't need to be circumcised, or to keep the Law of Moses. This is largely what the letter to the Galatians is about. There were some in the Galatian churches who were trying to suggest that Christians need to be circumcised and keep the Law, and Paul is strenuously demonstrating that they don't.

Chapter 3 is the culmination of the argument. Paul presents the logic in v. 13: *'Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"'*.

The Law contains a clause that says someone who is hanged on a tree

is cursed (Deuteronomy 21:22–23). This was probably one reason why Jesus' enemies wanted him crucified—so they could say that he was cursed. But Jesus was sinless, and the Law cursed an innocent man. It's as though this clause had been deliberately written into the Law, so that at the appropriate time the Law could be removed.

During his life Jesus kept the Law of Moses impeccably—although not always in the way that his enemies thought was proper. For example the Gospels record many occasions on which he healed people on the Sabbath. The religious rulers objected on the grounds that he was working, which was forbidden. But he pointed out to them that he was actually fulfilling the principle of the Sabbath law: *'for the Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath' (Matthew 12:8)*.

Jesus was a Law-abiding Jew and therefore it was necessary that he was circumcised. But at his death the Law became obsolete, and the call of the Gospel was opened to everyone, Jews and Gentiles. As Paul continues, *'so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith' (Galatians 3:14)*.

Law and Grace

THIS LIST OF WORDS (with one word used twice) can be rearranged into the Bible verse **John 1:17**. The verse contrasts law and grace. All 13 words are in the wordsearch.

(The quotation is from the ESV; other versions might be slightly different.)

AND LAW
CAME MOSES
CHRIST THE
FOR THROUGH
GIVEN TRUTH
GRACE TRUTH
JESUS WAS

E H T W S W R J N
C N H F A Y Y L P
T H H T W L N L G
T H R O U G H N G
V M A I S R E M R
F N O U S V T E A
D Z S S I T F M C
F E V G E O F A E
J Y R B R S T C Z

Anna Hart

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