



## Human Suffering

HOMER HAILEY

Man opens his eyes to his surroundings, experiences, and inheritances and is made to shudder at the vast amount of suffering on every hand. In nature he sees devastation and destruction on a continuous rampage, which led John Stuart Mill to say, "Nearly all the things for which men are hanged or imprisoned are Nature's every day performances." While nature is the great benefactor of man, it indiscriminately inflicts inestimable suffering upon all mankind.

Nature, however, is only one of the sources of human suffering. Parallel with her contributions to the sufferings of men, man himself contributes the greater share to the afflictions of man. On every hand man is seen to suffer at the hands of man. Some endure a greater share than others, but all are "joint heirs" of this great inheritance of the human family. The problem of suffering is therefore not the problem of the scientist or of the great thinker, but it is the problem of the common man—of all men.

The problem of suffering cannot be shrugged off. The problem may be stated as follows: How could a God who is good in the absolute and allwise have created a world in which He would have known that suffering should have such a large place? If good in the absolute, how can He bear to look upon suffering and allow it to continue to be the heritage of all men, the good and the bad? Further, if He is all-powerful, why does not His absolute goodness move Him to remove suffering, or at least protect the innocent from its ravages? Such questions led Mill to argue that if God were powerful and good, He would prevent suffering. Since suffering is found on every hand, God cannot be both. The question has likewise

perplexed the minds of men and women in our day who have heard neither of John Stuart Mill or of his or another's philosophy. How is one to harmonize or reconcile what he finds in nature and man with what he believes about God?

Should one take the position that God is good and all-wise and all-powerful, but that suffering is the consequence of sin, then arises the question or problem of the suffering of the innocent. Why do the innocent suffer? Further, if God is interested in the development of men and women into the very best of which they are capable, why allow events to transpire that remove the influence so needed for the development of that "best?" the removal of influences which will throw innocent individuals upon the world, where, without that influence, they become bad?

In a word, the question seems to be, How can we reconcile the place and enormity of suffering in a world ruled by a good, wise, and omnipotent God, with the goodness, compassion and tenderness of that God? There is an answer that satisfies the heart of faith. The answer must come later. Just here let the problem be emphasized further by a consideration of the suffering and its sources. The sources appear to be two-fold: Nature and man.

### The Harsh Features of Nature

The picture of sufferings which result from nature's conduct can be painted in dark and terrible colors: a tornado sweeps away homes, leaving many persons with broken bones, mutilated bodies, and bereaved of loved ones. The hail completely destroys crops, causing food and

clothing shortages. In another part of the world earthquakes devastate cities, and volcanos destroy villages and thousands of acres of productive land. Other sections are swept by blizzards, leaving children caught on the road home from school to freeze to death, or become the victims of severe bodily ailments. In another part of the world hurricanes leave ruin and desolation in their wake. General sufferings result from these, leaving few unaffected.

From the forces of nature one turns to the animal kingdom, there to view suffering inflicted by the larger animals upon the smaller, life existing upon life. As one man wrote, in what appears to be an exaggerated vein, "Everywhere in the realm of Nature we find teeth and talons whetted for slaughter, hooks and suckers molded for torture. Everywhere we see a reign of terror—sickness, hunger, battle, and death" (Romanes, quoted by James Gordon Gilkey, *The Certainty of God*, p. 25).

In the realm of human affairs, as affected by natural laws, one sees the young man or woman taken by death when most needed by the family or the country or church. The baby is stricken by a fearful disease; the medical profession is baffled, and the babe must linger in suffering, possibly to be deformed for life, causing mental anguish to the parents. This leaves them baffled as they cry, "Why?" And so continues the picture, page after page.

As a rule, however, when men begin to depict the sufferings caused by nature, they are prone to exaggerate and go to extremes. Romanes, quoted above, is an example. Apparently he failed to see but one side of the picture, and severely exaggerated that. While it is true that many animals live upon the life of other animals, it is easy to exaggerate the suffering involved therein, and to overlook completely the good and beautiful side of nature and to consider her beneficences. In considering the suffering inflicted by tornadoes, earthquakes, volcanos, and the like, it must be admitted that the occasions are rare. When lamenting the cold, the heat, the drouth, the pestilence, by which suffering is inflicted, it must be remembered that while these occur

periodically, nature at the same time provides the things necessary for man's protection from most all of them. Also, most of these, in the process of occurrence, are bringing blessings to another section, or even providing blessings to follow in the section in which they occur. This may raise the question, "Why could not the blessing have come without the suffering?"

Our problem is that of justifying such suffering inflicted by nature with Divine control by an affectionate Father-God. The Christian believes there is perfect harmony, although admitting the limitation of his understanding of many things. The Christian "walks by faith, not by sight;" therefore seeks to understand certain evidences that thus lead him to walk, admitting his lack of understanding in other things involved.

The first fact to be considered is that we live in a world of law and order. In the physical world one finds regularity the most obvious feature. "Without such regularity, life as we know it would be impossible," says one writer. This must be recognized. Part of the answer to our question will be found in the truth that many of the ills suffered by man at the hand of nature spring from the working of nature's beneficent regularity as much as do those of her "gifts" in which we most rejoice. All the things mentioned above from which man suffers, belong to nature's regularity.

The second fact to be recognized is that back of the creation of nature and man, God had a divine and eternal purpose. When the natural world is considered, it is to be seen that there is within it that which gratifies and supplies every physical desire, need and appetite of man. Nature bears on its every particle, from atom to universe, the mark of an intelligent designer. When man is considered, he is found to possess the intelligence capable of discovering the things good for him and the things bad. His task becomes, therefore, that of solving the mysteries of nature, bringing these under his own power and into his service. This is as God commanded him in the beginning when He said, "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it" (Gen. 1:28).

In His eternal purpose God created man capable of development in intellect and under-

standing, learning by experience as he grapples with what he finds about him. In this way he learns what is good and what is not good; where he should live and where he should not live; the kind of houses he should build for protection from the elements and the kind he should not build. Development is realized, not by having everything in life easy and sweet, but by coming up against the rough and the challenging. If the first proposition be accepted—that back of every volcano, earthquake, flood, frost, and storm there is the working of nature for the good of man in another place—then this follows: that intelligently providing against these calamities by the intelligence given him, man grows, develops and progresses toward that goal set for him in the great eternal purpose of God.

God's hand is in the universe, guiding and directing it for the good of man by its blessings, and for the development and good of man in its adversities. All of these point to the goal of an ultimate purpose of God, which for the moment, we may not see nor fully understand. For God to avert the disaster in the regular working of nature would be for Him to destroy that regularity and law in nature by which man comes to understand its profound secrets, and to cope with its problems, which are for his good.

### The Harsher Features of Man

When the sum total of the sufferings of man are added up, it will appear that by far the greater bulk is that for which man himself is responsible. Not only does he inflict suffering of a physical kind upon others of his race, but likewise upon his own person he brings suffering and afflictions willfully, through ignorance, or through carelessness. To these physical sufferings inflicted upon others, man adds an untold quantity of spiritual and mental sufferings.

The world of suffering inflicted by men upon man has been graphically described by one, as he described his dream, saying, "And in my dream I stood with an angel on one of the balconies of heaven. And the angel allowed me to lean over and listen. But I could not bear to hear. Sounds of pain came up to me: the cries of widows, children

in agony, strong men wounded and mutilated, the burden of the bereaved, the lonely, the bewildered, the frightened. Men crushed women beneath their feet, and starved little children, and hunted their brothers into poverty and unemployment and disease. Even women hurt one another with cruel deeds and malicious words. There were pains of body and mind and soul, which no one on earth could understand and no one could cure. The world seemed full of sorrow and pain, and the sound of it all came up to heaven until my soul was sick" (L. D. Weatherhead, *Why Do Men Suffer?* p. 11).

If one allows himself to dream with this writer, he is rudely awakened out of his dream to the brutal reality of the picture as he picks up the average daily newspaper. Until recently he was confronted with the slaughter of thousands of men upon the battle-fields of the world, with the accompanying cries of the suffering wounded, and the thought of the sadness of the mothers, wives and children bereaved by such slaughter. Today he reads of the hungry, cold and homeless thousands in Asia and other sections affected by such carnage. In his own country are murders, divorces, deceptions, and terrors of life brought on by human depravity. Before our very eyes, within our own experience we see the harsh features of history and the brutality of man, running amuck, unbridled and unchecked.

To what must this vast amount of unnecessary suffering be attributed? There can be but one answer: the misuse of the freedom given man by God who created him. When God created man, He created a moral being, free to make, and capable of making choices, whom He placed in a world governed by immutable laws. Suffering inflicted by man upon his fellow-beings is the result of the violation of those laws, spiritual and physical. Why did God create man capable of inflicting such suffering? He could not have created him otherwise and have created man. A creature without will would have been only another creature of the lower animals, or an automaton, which would not have been a man. Suffering incurred by the actions and conduct of another is the result of abuse of that divinely endowed

freedom. This moral evil or misconduct of man is called by God "sin."

Back of all suffering there must be sought secondary and other causes, inextricably interwoven, a network of nature and history in which the life of each must be lived. These must be reconciled with the character of God in His goodness and power by recognizing His purpose in nature and the freedom given man. In abusing this gift of freedom man inflicts suffering upon himself and upon others. In struggling with nature, man exercises himself, learns the ways of life, and thus develops according to the eternal purpose of God.

### The Use to be Made of Suffering

All of this may or may not have answered satisfactorily the question of "Why?" It may simply have posed another question, "Why should God have so made the world? or have made it at all? Could it not have been made differently?" At this point we ask only one concession: that the universe is a cosmos, not a chaos. If this be granted, then that argues for a designer and law-giver back of the designed cosmos. With this acknowledged, then one must conclude that back of the whole creation there is purpose. God made man for a purpose, whatever that ultimate purpose beyond our present view may be. In the immediate present we see the purpose of developing character and personality. This personality and character could not have been developed without tests, corrections and suffering that would result from the exercise of will. This is not an assumption, it is the conclusion based on the observation of history, the periods of the past and the present, together with the revelation God has made to man in His divine book. Great personalities grow out of environments, come up through trials of many kinds. In His infinite wisdom and with infinite power to execute that wisdom, God provided the kind of environment that would produce the greatest personality from the creature, man.

The purpose of suffering in such a world of development may be summed up as follows:

1. Suffering may be punitive. But even punitive

suffering may have as its ultimate end the correction of the individual or of groups. When one perishes in the suffering that follows his act, it may not serve to correct him, but it may serve to correct others about him. It serves its purpose.

2. Suffering may be corrective. The suffering of discipline is calculated to correct the individual, revealing mistakes, instructing and developing in wisdom and understanding.

3. It may be a means of testing. The piety of Job was tested by his suffering. He proved that his devotion to God was apart from any selfish motive.

4. Suffering may be vicarious. It may be suffering for the sins of others. This type of suffering reached its climax in Jesus Christ, the vicarious sufferer for the whole world. The suffering of His disciples today will likewise be vicarious if the end He sought is ultimately to be achieved.

5. Suffering may be inexplicable. Oftentimes it is beyond our understanding. There is suffering before which one must bow and say, "I do not know why; I cannot understand." In such cases one can but say, "Though I do not know why; still I believe."

These five causes may be summarized under one head: suffering is consequential — the consequence of law in operation or of law violated. Not violated by the individual necessarily, but by man in the sumtotal of his experience.

### THE PROBLEM OF SUFFERING

The problem of human suffering in one of its most baffling aspects is set forth in the book of Job. The opening scene of the book presents to the reader a man described as "perfect and upright; and one that feared God, and turned away from evil" (1:1)—a good man. Not only a good man morally, but he was a man deeply interested in the spiritual welfare of his children; a man who "rose up early in the morning and offered burnt-offerings according to the number of them all" (1:5). Nor was his goodness and piety spasmodic; it is said of him, "Thus did Job continually." His goodness was habitual.

## THE PHILOSOPHY OF THE FRIENDS

From the plans of one enjoying all of the blessings and pleasures of such an honorable estate, the hero of the book suddenly found himself bereft of all his children, his possessions and his health. In the stead of such prosperity he found himself afflicted with the loathsome and dread disease, apparently, of black leprosy, forced to sit in the ashes of the city dump; separated from friends and loved ones, suffering excruciating bodily pains. And, added to all this, there was the mental anguish of having no explanation for it, which pain likewise must be endured.

The condition of this good man suddenly plunged to such an awful depth of suffering and humiliation for no cause, so far as he could see, raises the challenging question which must have some solution: "Why do the righteous suffer, while on every hand the wicked are seen to prosper?" "Why does God allow such, since He is wise and good?"

Back of the discussion of the problem between Job and his three friends, however, there is another question, one raised by the Adversary, which in reality develops into two questions. Satan had raised the question before Jehovah, "Doth Job fear God for nought?" (1:9). That is, does a man serve God except for the pay he gets for the service? In the mind of God such a question would raise this perplexity, "If man serves God for the pay in it, can God trust man to serve Him for the love of righteousness?" While in the mind of Job, in the midst of such inexplicable suffering, there would be the added question, "Can man trust God—can he continue to believe in His goodness, benevolence, and power under such conditions?"

Other questions arise from time to time throughout the discussion, which shall be considered in their place; but these three appear to be the most prominent: 1. Why do the righteous suffer? 2. Can God trust man to serve Him simply for righteousness sake? 3. Can man trust God, when his suffering is unexpressable in its intensity, and unexplicable as to its cause. Soon after the arrival of his friends, who came to comfort him, Job lamented his condition before them, which opened the way for the discussion of the problem of suffering.

Eliphaz, apparently the eldest and most sedate of the group, opened the discussion. In his first speech he presented his philosophy of suffering, which was the wisdom of the ancients. His position can be summed up in a word: It is the wicked who suffer; they suffer because of their sin. However, the suffering is intended to be disciplinary. If men will return to God, doing again the thing that is right, their prosperity shall return unto them. In the form of a syllogism, the position of Eliphaz would be:

1. Suffering is the result of sin.
2. Although apparently you, Job, have been a good man, yet you suffer.
3. Therefore, since you suffer, you have sinned.

Eliphaz is saying likewise, which is the inescapable consequence of his doctrine, that God controls the world by the principle of good for good, and bad for bad. Job is receiving bad, therefore he has been bad.

In his second speech Eliphaz becomes more intense in his accusation of Job. The wisdom of Eliphaz is not his, but the fathers' — it cannot be wrong. In this speech his accusation is more direct; he has nothing to say about Job's having been a good man. The premise of this speech is the same as the former, only more intense:

1. Only the wicked are cut off speedily.
2. You, Job, have been cut off speedily.
3. Therefore, you are a wicked man.

In the third speech of Eliphaz there is no change in his position. There is only a stronger accusation of Job, charging him with great wickedness, and appealing to him to confess his sin and return to God. There is much truth in what he says, but his premise and application are wrong. His premise is that all suffering is the result of sin. His application is that Job suffers because of sin, therefore Job is a sinner.

Bildad assumes the same position as that of his elder associate. In his first speech he accuses Job's children of sinning, while he simply iterates and reiterates the charges of his predecessor; incriminates and reincriminates Job as a sinner. In his second speech he does no more than depict

the awful lot of sinners. His premise and conclusion are the same as of Eliphaz:

1. The lot of sinners is terrible.
2. Your lot, Job, is terrible.
3. Therefore you must be a sinner.

Zophar is the most direct, harsh and blunt of all the friends. He charges that Job's suffering is not even so great as it should be—"Know therefore that God exacteth of thee less than thine iniquity deserveth" (11:6 b). Not only has Job committed the former sin which brought the calamity upon him, but according to Zophar, he has added to it by denying that he had sinned. Wherefore he has charged God with letting him suffer when he has not sinned.

The only change in the position of the friends is the concession made by Zophar. In his final speech he modifies his position to allow that if the wicked should prosper, it shall be for a short time only. "Knowest thou not," says he, "that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless but for a moment?" (20:5). This name modification would have to be made for the good man who is blessed. It too, would be but for a short time.

The position of the friends throughout, in the words of a former teacher of the writer's, is that "piety pays, perversity punishes." To this position they tenaciously cling from beginning to end, even when they are put to silence, convinced they cannot meet Job's challenge made from the first respecting his own integrity.

### THE CONTENTION AND PERPLEXITY OF Job

From the beginning of the discussion, and throughout to the end, three points stand out most prominently:

1. Job always affirms his integrity: "I am innocent.
2. He is undergoing terrible suffering—suffering beyond all description.
3. He continues to go back to God as the cause.

Toward his suffering Job is perplexed. He has been a good man; no man can accuse him of wrong-doing, so why should his suffering be so

intense? He blames God with being unmerciful to him, of being unjustly hard on him (chapter 6). He then charges that there is no moral standard in the universe, that God makes no distinction between right and wrong (9:22-24). All power belongs to God, but it appears as if God uses it to further the cause of the bad as well as the good (chap. 12). In this Job accuses God unjustly, and without knowing some of the things he later came to realize he did not know.

A change in Job's attitude toward God is seen as the discussion progresses, beginning in chapter 13. He there charges the friends with seeking to shield God with falsehood, while Job affirms "That a godless man shall not come before him" (13:15). However, this changed attitude toward God on Job's part only raises more questions in his mind:

1. "How many (what) are mine iniquities and sins?" (13:23).

2. "Wherefore hidest thou thy face, and holdest me for thine enemy?" (v. 24).

3. "Wilt thou harass a driven leaf? And wilt thou pursue the dry stuffle?" (v. 25).

This attitude of friendliness toward God continues to develop. He appeals to God to witness for him (16:18-17:2), while continuing to lament his condition. This friendliness reaches its highest degree of development when Job turns to Him, confident that He will vindicate him (19:23-29). The contention of Job here adds a fourth phase:

1. Job is innocent.
2. Job is suffering.
3. God is back of the suffering.
4. But God will vindicate him in his suffering.

As Job progresses with his argument, he proclaims God's greatness, declaring that He is so great and majestic that one cannot get to Him; He is beyond the plane of being reached with the suffering of man. His ways are baffling, one cannot get to Him; while at the same time good people suffer, and the wicked prosper. Job almost turns the philosophy of the friends around, "the righteous suffer, while the wicked prosper." But, in the end, God will vindicate him in his righteousness and innocence. The contention of Job may now be stated as follows:

1. I am righteous.

2. God is all-mighty, powerful, wise.

3. Therefore, there must be some other solution than that of the friends. They are unquestionably wrong.

Throughout the discussion one can see in Job's attitude toward his friends only disgust and disdain. He charges them with lying, and their theology and position as rubbish. They are no friends! Only once does he make any gesture of friendliness toward them (chap. 19), only then to turn from them to his appeal to God.

As the cycles of speeches draw to a close, Job describes his glory of former days, his suffering of the present, and reaffirms his integrity before God and man. With the speeches made, the issue is squarely up: the friends' claim as to the cause of suffering is wrong. Job has been good, so whatever the answer to the problem of suffering, the friends do not have it. The righteous suffer, the wicked prosper, therefore the suffering of the righteous is not because of sin in their life.

The debate has been won by Job, so far as the position of the friends is concerned. The two questions growing out of Satan's query to God have been answered: 1. Man will and does serve God for the pure joy of that service, for righteousness sake; therefore God can trust man so to do. Job's steadfast holding on to God has proved this point. 2. Man can trust God, for God does not afflict just to hurt man. This question, however, is not so clearly and completely answered at the end of the cycle of speeches as it should be, for Job has said some hard things about God which need to be corrected. The distorted view of God must be changed, the conception of God is not high enough.

### THE WISDOM OF YOUTH

The friends have failed, yet somehow their cause must be vindicated, and Job must be corrected. Youth, in the person of Elihu, has sat silently by, but can stand it no longer. This young man now asks permission to say a few words. He would vindicate God and in a measure uphold the contention of the older men at the same time. He appears young, egotistical, and to "know it all." Job's ideas of God have not been correct, but Elihu

throws little new light on the subject. He fails to answer the friends.

The speeches of Elihu pave the way for Jehovah to speak, that He might settle the matter. Elihu charged Job with folly and points out wherein he had charged God foolishly. Although "full of words," and doing fine with his speech, he adds little to the settlement of the problem.

### The Final Word—Jehovah

Jehovah speaks. His speeches become an examination of Job, testing the wisdom and knowledge of the suffering patriarch. At times the sufferer has spoken as if he knew all behind the problem of suffering, yet admittedly ignorant as evidenced by his search for the answer. He now confesses his ignorance in the presence of the majestic wisdom of God. In all of God's works there is manifestations of wisdom and purpose. Job had been boastful in his suffering. He had lacked humility and a sense of dependence on God. God speaks that simple faith in Him might be restored: that man should trust when he cannot see because of the very evidence of purpose on the face of the universe.

In the book, what problems are solved:

1. The philosophical position of the traditionalists is refuted: all suffering cannot be traced to sin in the individual sufferer.

2. God can trust man to serve Him for righteousness' sake, and not for the pay that might be involved.

3. Man can trust God when he cannot see; for though he cannot tell why he suffers, he may know that God cares; He may be in there suffering with him. God does not arbitrarily inflict suffering, nor is God disinterested in the suffering of the righteous.

4. There are some lessons that can be learned only by experience. No matter how often we may be told a thing, some things we can learn only in the school of affliction. After his experience in the crucible of suffering, and after God had spoken to him, Job could then say, "I had heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee: Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."

Although the book does not answer the "Why" of suffering altogether; it does answer the greater problem of suffering: "What use shall I make of suffering?" Job is the answer. Out of the furnace of affliction he came forth a better man, possessing a deeper faith in God, a humility and trust he did not know before, nor could he have learned it in any other school than that of suffering. Suffering is in the world; this fact is evident on every hand. The solution of the "why" would be worth little if reached. The big thing, the important thing, is to learn how to use it for the development of a deeper and more abiding trust in God, assured of the great truth that God cares, that He is mindful of every moment of that suffering, and that through it He can make it work to His glory and to the glory and development of the trusting soul that suffers.

## SUFFERING

After Jesus had spent a busy day teaching a great multitude, he dismissed them and then sent the disciples across the sea in a boat. Withdrawing Himself, He went away into the mountain to pray. In the midst of the sea, as the night wore on, the boat became distressed by the waves, "for the wind was contrary" (Matt. 14:24). But in the midst of the troubled waters and its storm tossed waves Jesus came to them, "walking on the sea." How like the experiences of the Christian upon the equally turbulent sea of life was this experience of the disciples upon the tempestuous sea of Galilee! Contrary waves, over which the Christian seems to have so little control, and which threaten his life; but in the midst of which comes the Saviour to quiet and to soothe, to be near and to stand by, to comfort and to sustain.

### God and Suffering

How often when the waves are contrary and calamity strikes, and suffering or death invades the sacred realm of a home, does one hear the plaintive cry, "Why did this happen to me? What

have I done to cause God to send this tragedy into our home?" One is amazed at the times he hears God blamed with the suffering or calamity that comes into the experiences of men. Such charges are unjust to God and to His holy nature. Man would make a brute of God, a cruel monster who strikes the little children with dread disease, leaving their bodies helpless or their minds deranged, or the mature man or woman with afflictions and sufferings, excruciating in their intensity. The claims of many in trying to explain suffering only make God contradict Himself.

"It is the Lord's will," say some. No, it is not the Lord's will, it is the devil's will. Imagine God sending sickness, disease, blindness, deafness, and other afflictions, and then have Jesus come and undo the very thing God had done. Jesus healed the sick, restored soundness to the deformed, caused the deaf to hear and the dumb to sing the praises of God. Did He do this in opposition to the very thing God had sent upon men, and that according to His will? A thousand times, NO! Upon being questioned for having healed a woman on the Sabbath, one who had possessed a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years, so bowed together that she could in no wise lift herself up, Jesus made His defense saying, "And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan had bound, lo these eighteen years, to have been loosed from this bond on the day of the sabbath?" (Luke 13:16). Her binding was according to Satan's will; the loosing was of God.

To the apostle Paul there was given a "thorn in the flesh." What it was no one knows, nor has the means of knowing. The apostle never said. To have told us what it was would only have gratified our curiosity, but would have been of no use whatever. And so, instead of telling us what it was, he has told us from whence it came and how God gave him the power to use and to bear it. "There was given to me a thorn in the flesh," wrote the apostle, "a messenger of Satan to buffet me, that I should not be exalted overmuch." The thorn in the flesh was from Satan, "a messenger from Satan." It was not from God. But there was something else which was from God, and it is this that God gives to all: "Concerning this thing I

besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he hath said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my power is made perfect in weakness" (2 Cor. 12:7-9). God does not send the thorn, Satan sends that. And God may not remove it, even though we so implore Him; but He sends the grace with which to bear it.

### God's Inexorable Law

An inexorable, unchangeable, immutable law of God—one that cannot but be—is, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." All of God's laws are good; they are founded on the very character of God Himself, for they emanate from Him. Conditions that exist, sufferings that must be endured, death that comes to all, are the result of man's being out of order with the law or laws of God. Somewhere, by someone, law has been violated, and that sowing must demand its reaping.

God does not change the natural order or law because a saint must suffer in consequence of violation of the law. He cannot change it, for it is good; it is best for man as God made him. In a moral world, governed by laws of an infinite wisdom, both the law and its consequences are best for man. We speak of the law as having been "broken." This is a mistake; the law is not broken, but man breaks himself against the law. The law remains. "For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life" (Gal. 6:7, 8).

Suffering, therefore, is not punishment from God for sins done; it is the inevitable consequence that comes from violated law. The law may be unknown to the violator; he may be in utter ignorance and darkness as to what he or others have done, but the consequence is the same. When God provided the means of human redemption in Christ, He provided redemption from the guilt of sin; not from the natural consequences of sin. The consequence must be eradicated by the removal of the cause: violation of natural law or laws, which result in physical suffering; the violation of spiritual or moral laws, which result in mental or spiritual suffering.

### Chastisement

But, someone asks, what about the chastening of Hebrews 12? Is not that punishment? I reply with another question, Is it? Is there anything in the New Testament to indicate that God punishes man for sin or sins in this world, in this life? Man suffers as a Christian, suffers for well-doing; but this is not punishment, nor is it the question under discussion in this article. Also, God sends, and has sent in times past, His judgments upon nations and men, but is the sending of these judgments now, under the New Covenant, punishment of the individual for sins? Nothing is found in the New Testament so to indicate. I believe He uses nations and then judges their wickednesses now in time, but this has nothing to do with individual suffering as punishment for an individual's sins.

Consider now the passage in the Hebrew letter, "My son, regard not lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art reprov'd of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth" (Heb. 12:5, 6). Is there anything in the passage to indicate punishment? Nothing, but taken in the light of the context, rather the contrary.

First, let us define the word "chasten." paideuo, the verb from which the word comes, has the original meaning "to train children; to cause one to learn; to chastise" (Thayer). Also, paideia, "the whole training and education of children; whatever in adults also cultivates the soul, esp. by correcting mistakes and curbing the passions; hence, instruction which aims at the increase of virtue; chastisement, chastening" (Thayer). The English word chastise is defined as "to inflict punishment upon for the purpose of moral improvement; now, esp., to inflict corporal punishment upon; also to restrain, refine, or purify." It is from the root word "chaste," meaning "pure, undefiled."

Vincent says of the word, as used in Ephesians 6:4, and translated "nurture," "The term here covers all the agencies which contribute to moral and spiritual training" (Vincent, Word Studies, Vol III, p. 404). The same word is used of the word of God by Paul to Timothy when he wrote, "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable

for instruction (discipline or chastisement) which is in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:15). Traditionally, and in the English, the word has come to be looked upon as involving punishment. But the question is, Did the Holy Spirit so use the word in the New Testament?

Returning to the passage in Hebrews, and considering the context, the apostle introduced the quotation from the Old Testament, quoted above, by saying, "For consider him that hath endured such gainsaying of sinners against himself, that ye wax not weary, fainting in your souls. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin: and ye have forgotten the exhortation..." Clearly, the writer is thinking of spiritual chastening or purifying, and not physical punishment. They were suffering, yes; but it was suffering for Christ, by which suffering the soul was being purified, chastened; but not in punishment. This is our point. The writer follows the quotation by making a contrast between the punishment inflicted upon children in their training, and chastening of the children of "the Father of spirits." Ours is in order "that we may become partakers of his holiness."

Nor can it be proved that Paul's use of "chastened" to the Corinthians indicated punishment (I Cor. 11:32). And when he used the word with reference to himself it was of that which became his lot as a Christian, and not of punishment (2 Cor. 6:9). In the words of another, "Chastisement is the purifying of man's spirit. Discipline is the education of man's spirit." I believe this to be the correct use of the words as they are used with reference to God's chastening and disciplining His children. Jesus said, "As many as I love, I reprove and chasten" (Rev. 3:19). Did He mean that He punished them, or did He mean that He uses consequences and the working of His providence to make chaste, that is, to purify, to refine?

### Thy Will Be Done

Probably no doctrine of the Bible is more misused than that in the expression, "Thy will be done." In the garden of Gethsemane, as Jesus fell on His face before the Father, He prayed, "My

Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass away from me: nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt." Finding the disciples asleep, he reproved them for their inability to watch and pray with Him for one hour, then "Again a second time he went away, and prayed, saying, My Father, if this cannot pass away, except I drink it **thy will be done**" (Matt. 26:39-42). This was not a doctrine of despair; it was not a fatalistic resignation to the principle of "Come what may." It was and is a doctrine of cheer, of faith, of glory. It is the prayer of one whose disposition is to have God's will done in and through him. Jesus taught the disciples to pray, "Thy will be done, as in heaven, so on earth" (Matt. 6:10). When, from the heart, one seeks that the will of God be done, he is not resigning himself to a cold, hard fate, but is praying that in himself the will of an infinitely good Father shall be done on earth as it is done in heaven.

Tragedy strikes and death invades the family circle. In a frantic effort to offer consolation and to find some explanation as the cause, the bereaved one cries, "It was the Lord's will!" Or a well-intentioned and well-meaning, but badly misinformed friend says, "You loved it too much, God took it from you." Or perchance, "It was too precious, God wanted it with Himself." Surely one so speaking does not know of what he speaks. Most of our suffering comes from our carelessness, hatefulness, lustfulness, extravagance, and ignorance. None of it comes directly from God. How wicked to blame God with our follies. Ignorance of God's laws inevitably brings its own consequences.

Occasionally one is called into a home where the mother sits by the lifeless form of her beloved child, only recently snatched from her loving presence by the insatiable sickle of death. Heart-broken, between the grief-stricken sobs that rise and fall like the billows of the unrestrainable sea, she strives, in the plaintive cry, "The will of the Lord be done," to find an explanation for what has happened. Without being fully conscious of it, what has she done? She has blamed the Lord with the disease that so recently smote the darling of her heart, or with the accident in which a

drunken wretch crashed into the frail body of her beloved, robbing it of life's precious breath. Is God to blame? Is one being fair to Him who gave life, and who sustains its every waking moment, when fatalistically he resigns himself to the unholy doctrine that God sent either of these, or one of a thousand other messengers of death that leaves hapless mothers to nourish a broken heart by such tragedies? As said above, so let it be said again, **NO! NO!** a thousand times, **NO!** This is not the God of the Bible.

Someone is ready to respond, "But what about Job? When he had suffered the loss of his property and of his children, he said, 'Jehovah gave, and Jehovah hath taken away: blessed be the name of Jehovah' (Job 1:21). Does not this teach that God takes our loved ones, or sends the disaster?" The Hebrew word (laqach) translated "taketh" or "hath taken" is also translated in many other places in the Old Testament by "receiveth." It means "to take" or "receive." Hence, "The Lord gave, the Lord hath taken or received." Certainly when the natural order of life is broken and the loved one has been taken away, one can bless God for having received that one. But granting that Job was confessing that God had "taken" his children and his property, this does not necessarily mean that God had sent the calamities, for the context shows that it was Satan who was responsible for the ills which had befallen the patriarch. Of these things Job did not know; he had much to learn. And in the end he confessed his ignorance of God and of His ways, and that he had spoken things which he did not understand. I do not believe the passage in Job can be used to sustain the doctrine that God wilfully inflicts suffering upon us either by accidents or diseases, or by natural calamities which rob us of those whom we love, or cause sleepless hours of pain and misery.

"Thy will be done" is a prayer that in our lives God's will shall be carried out as it was in Jesus, His Son. It is not an inspired expression by which to blame God with our woes and ills, too often the result of ignorance and sin, and always the consequence of law violated somewhere by someone.

## Suffering in the N. T.

One must ever distinguish between suffering on behalf of Christ and for His cause, and the suffering that comes from natural causes. The former i.e., suffering on behalf of Christ, is brought about by men in rebellion to God's spiritual laws. In these the apostle rejoiced, and declared their value in working steadfastness, approvedness, hope, etc. (Rom. 5:3-5). These tribulations on Christ's behalf were made instruments of glory to the sufferer. Of the latter, i.e., the suffering that comes from natural causes, these are the result of the violation of God's natural laws. The individual himself may not have violated the law, but the law has been violated and now comes the consequence. But even these may be turned to the good of the sufferer and to the glory of God.

To the Corinthians Paul wrote, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and **God of all comfort**; who comforteth us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1:3, 4). Without doubt Paul was here speaking of the afflictions suffered for Christ; however, he praises God as "the God of all our affliction." Therefore, even through the bodily afflictions of disease and accident, one can be brought to find in God the source of all comfort, and through this to be drawn closer to Him.

James said, "Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye fall into manifold temptations (trials); knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience" (James 1:2, 3). The temptations or trials here under consideration by James were tests of faith. Faith is tested in many ways, as James continues to point out, among them being that of suffering: "Is any among you suffering? let him pray" (5:13). Here again one finds use for suffering; through it he is brought to acknowledge his dependence on God and to recognize in His divine provisions through nature and in Christ the remedy for all his ills, whether physical or spiritual.

Yes, suffering is the result of some one's being out of harmony with God's laws, the violation of

them. But in His infinite wisdom God has seen fit to sanctify suffering to the end of purifying and humbling His saints, and as means of leading us frail human beings to a more complete dependence on Him from whom all blessings flow. END

---

ar  
an  
Je  
on  
m:  
—  
EC