



Ordeal

Jerry D. Ousley

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By Jerry D. Ousley

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Forward

I *have* always admired Job. Other than Jesus Christ, he probably suffered as much as any individual recorded in the scriptures and stood the test. Who of us could endure losing great wealth in a single day to include the lives of our children and stand firm in his faith? When called on by his God to stand the test even though he had his doubts fueled by what he had been taught Job passed the test with flying colors.

It makes me to wonder if we, who claim the Christian heritage here in the States, could really stand up to such a test ourselves. I hope so. It isn't easy or flippant to suffer for God. Christians around the world pay a heavy price for their faith even today. As persecution increases all around us, these brave men and women have endured hardship, pain, suffering, starvation and neglect all because they have fallen in love with Jesus Christ and only wish to share their good fortune with others.

The world will never understand the Good News of Jesus Christ because it is motivated by a dark and evil power and held close in the tight clutches of its evil prince of darkness. For now, he is the prince of this age. He will run his rein of terror until the God of Heaven decides it is enough. I believe that decision is coming soon and very soon. We may have to endure some suffering ourselves. But if and when we do, may we have the strength, courage and power of Job to withstand anything that this evil prince of darkness may throw our way. With the help and strength of our Lord Jesus Christ we too will be able to stand the test of our own ordeal.

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Dedication

I lovingly dedicate this work to my children; our son Jeremy, and our daughter Megan. I love them very, very much and wish them great happiness and peace of mind despite the ordeals of life. At the first publishing of this book Megan is getting ready to make me a grandparent for the first time. I look forward to this new and wonderful experience with all my heart and know that she will raise our grandchild up to know the God who gets us through each and every day of life whether it is filled with joy or brings whatever else. Both of my young adult children are inspirations and love Jesus. Jeremy will stand the test and so will Megan along with their spouses and that gives me great comfort knowing that they hold tightly to the hand of the only One able to pull them through.

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Chapter 1
The Trial of Loss
Job 1:1-22

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“There was a man in the land of Uz, whose name was Job; and that man was blameless and upright, and one who feared God and shunned evil”

Job 1:1

It was a very prosperous time. The economy was booming and many were getting rich seemingly overnight. It was the “roaring twenties” and to many it was the best of times. People were living like it would never end and I suppose they thought that was the case. With millions in the bank, even a setback wouldn’t affect them or so they thought.

Then, towards the end of the decade it happened. The Great Depression struck a crippling blow to everyone in the nation. Only those who had nothing to begin with were unaffected and even then, it was harder because food, which had been plentiful was now outrageously priced. Jobs were nowhere to be found. Many boarded up their homes and headed west in search of a better life. What had been very prosperous times had become worse than worse.

Today we are insured (or so we think) and we believe that the stock market will not crash again, but we are human and nothing we touch can ever be perfect. Our money is in banks that are federally backed and this can be secure to an extent, but what if the Great Depression returned? How could a government, itself bankrupt, insure us?

What if a personal “great depression” hit? What would our reaction be if we suddenly lost our job and we were facing the loss of everything we have? I hope it never happens to you but if it does there are ways to be prepared that go far beyond savings, insurance, stocks and bonds. It is a spiritual preparation.

It happened to Job. His story is one that bears telling in depth and it begins with prosperity. Job was a very rich man. Job “feared God and shunned evil.” What this statement means in a nutshell is that Job had a great respect for God and very consciously stayed away from everything he knew or believed to be evil.

His wealth extended to every area marking a successful life during his day. He had large herds of livestock, including seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yokes of oxen (remember that

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a yoke is two), five hundred female donkeys, and a very large household (which means he also had a large number of servants). These things alone, even by today's standards, were indicators that someone was well off. He also had ten children including seven sons, and three daughters. His wealth was a consequence of his respect and obedience to the God of Heaven.

Like any concerned parent Job worried about his kids. His sons would take turns having celebrations in their individual homes (that tells us that all of his children were grown) and they would invite their sisters to come. While this made for great family time, Job worried that they might do something sacrilegious while partying and so he would pray for them, then get up early the next morning and offer a burnt offering to God on their behalf just in case.

God loved Job. Because of his obedience to Him, God had put what the Bible calls, "a hedge" around Job. It was like an unseen wall that kept the devil away from him.

Wouldn't it be nice if life were really like that? We come to God; we serve Him with all our being and live our lives according to the word of God. It stands to reason that we should live a blessed and happy life, doesn't it? But all too often real life isn't like that. Instead, it seems that living for Christ is often followed by a life of pain and persecution. It can be filled with trials and labors. Job soon found this out.

The Bible tells us that a day came when "the sons of God" presented themselves before the Lord. This is said in reference to the angelic body. Satan, who is a fallen angel, was also allowed to make an appearance at this holy gathering. God asked him, "Where do you come from?" Satan's answer, "From going back and forth on the Earth," reveals his true nature for the Bible tells us in 1 Peter 5:8 that he goes about, "as a roaring lion looking for prey to devour." That's his purpose. He is like a hunting lion waiting for a weak deer to pounce on and devour.

We must realize however, that those who have not accepted Christ as their personal Savior are already under the rule of the devil. Most wouldn't acknowledge or entertain that thought for even a second but the fact remains that unless we have become a servant of the Master of Heaven that we are lost and under the influence of this world and its current ruler.

These are not the people the devil is looking for. He is looking for believers dedicated to Christ to tempt them to sin against God. He doesn't want them to have victory in their lives and so he is constantly looking to bring evil upon them. This comes in many forms ranging from personal temptations to attacks against entire congregational bodies.

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Of course, we bring some things on ourselves. However, the “angel of light” directly or indirectly influences every form of evil that happens to mankind.

God asked Satan, “Have you considered my servant, Job? There’s not another person on the face of the Earth like him. He is blameless from sin, he lives uprightly, he respects Me and stays away from evil.”

Satan answered God something like this, “Of course he does. He doesn’t do all this for nothing You know! You have fenced him in with a hedge that I can’t break through. It surrounds him, his household and everything that he has. You have made him rich with many possessions and great land possessions. But if You extend Your hand against him, he will curse You to Your face in a minute!”

You better believe that Satan does that with each and every believer who is trying with all he or she is worth to live a life pleasing to God. I’m not in any way referring that our Christian experience is based on works. Those of you who have followed our writing over the years know that we emphatically teach that our salvation is entirely based on the grace of Jesus Christ. But after we come to Christ, we want to do things that will bring others into the Kingdom and this comes by living a good witness and extending acts of love to all who stand in need.

The devil is the accuser of the brethren (Revelation 12:10). He is constantly bringing things up to God about us. “Hey, God, look what Your special servant is doing now!” Only the grace of Christ can withstand his constant accusations. He is the “tattletale” of tattle tellers and he questions the motive of everything we do.

Notice that Satan even tried to put his “smooth moves” even on God. His accusations against Job were attempts to trap the God who created him, in His own words. If he will try to tempt God, how could we ever believe that we are exempt from his entangling words?

The God who owns the cattle of a thousand hills looked right through the ploys of this fallen angel and knowing the very heart of Job He did not hesitate to allow the devil to take away the things Job had. After all, it would be a very simple task for God to replace “things.” So, God told Satan, “Look, all that Job has is in your power but you are not allowed to touch him personally.” Satan wasted no time. He immediately left the presence of God and went right to work on Job.

A FATAL DAY

In one fatal day the devil destroyed all that Job had. A messenger came to Job telling him, “The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing in a field beside them when the Sabeans (desert raiders) stole

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them all and killed all the servants that were working with them. I am the only one who escaped with his life!”

Before Job even had a chance to soak in the tragic news just given him another servant came running to him saying, “Fire has fallen from the sky and all your sheep along with the servants watching them, have been consumed. I’m the only survivor!”

Yet another runner was coming up while he was speaking, “The Chaldeans divided into three groups and raided the camels, stole them all and killed the servants watching them. I have escaped alone to bring you this news!”

All that represented his wealth was suddenly gone. But the devil wasn’t finished yet. Another servant came running to Job saying, “Your sons and daughters were celebrating in the home of your oldest son and out of nowhere a great wind came across the wilderness and flattened the house. It fell on them killing them all. I escaped with my life to bring you these tidings.”

What could Job say? In a single moment his wealth and his children were all taken from him. How could anyone face the news of such tragedy?

THE DEVIL DELIGHTS IN YOUR DESTRUCTION

The devil wants to destroy your life, especially if you have made a commitment to God. If you are serving the Lord with all of your heart then yes, you are a target of evil. Many strong believers in Christ whose hearts were in the right place and only wanted to serve their Lord and Master, have been struck with one blow after another. It seems like it will never stop and only God in Heaven can find the answer to the insurmountable problems.

Do you feel like Job must have felt? Have you been struck with one blow after another? Does it seem like the whole world is crashing in on you? You are not alone. But there is a reason God allows these things to happen. There is purpose to all the chaos.

First know that you have not sinned against God and He is not punishing you because you have done wrong. If you are a born-again believer in Christ then you can rest assured that God doesn’t punish His children like this. He will let down His hedge for a season but not just so the devil can “have some fun.” There is an ultimate goal behind it and believe it or not it is for your benefit.

Job had some lessons to learn. He had done everything right and he felt things were perfect in his life by the standards of belief during his

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days. So why was he being punished by God? We will see some of those things as this story progresses.

TURNING THE TIDES

When most people would have been singing the blues Job did a remarkable thing. The Bible tells us that Job observed the rites of grief by shaving his head and tearing his robe. Yes, he was distraught by his loss that day. But what he did next spoke of a mighty faith in God. The Bible says that he worshipped. True worship can only be tested in the face of trials, even fierce ones. When it seemed there was absolutely no reason to worship, Job did just that. Don't we worship when we are happy? Isn't it more practical to worship the God of the universe when everything is going right? It may seem that way. But when one can worship, even in face of evil, loss, persecution and hardship, then that person can know that the real love of God abides in his heart.

When Paul and Silas had been beaten and locked in stocks in a dungeon just because they followed the leading of God in their ministry, even when worship seemed most unlikely, they sang praises at the midnight hour. They didn't do it to gain a miracle from God but only because of their trust in their Lord. When they worshipped, God brought them deliverance.

We must be prepared to worship God even when things go bad. And they will. There will be hard times as well as joyous. We worship God, not for what we may gain but simply because we have realized our purpose in God's ultimate plan and that is to bring Him praise and honor. Deliverance may not always come in the way we might think. It didn't for Job. But I assure you that it will come.

Job thought about it and knew that when God brought him into this world it was with nothing, not even a stitch of clothing. He also knew that when his life was over, he could take nothing of his possessions into the after-life with him. Naked he was born and naked he would die. But in the midst of this realization, he had the fortitude to bless the name of the Lord.

If only we could come to this same knowledge. We talk about it and sing about it. But do we really know it? Is our love for God so much a part of our lives that we are really willing to give it all up if necessary and maintain our praise and worship of God?

In all that had taken place the Bible says that Job sinned not. The devil thought for sure that if all the blessings of God were stripped away from Job, he would turn his back on God and curse Him. God knew differently. But this trial God allowed to come upon Job was for much more than to prove something to the devil. Once again God used the

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epitome of evil to serve His purpose. God knew that even though Job loved Him very much there were some things in his heart that must be brought to light. And so, He allowed this and more to come upon His servant so he would come out the better for it.

And we will too. When we are truly in love with our Savior and when we are so dedicated to Him that even death itself will not separate us from our faith in Him, it is then that God may allow some bad things to happen in our lives and it may seem like He has completely forsaken us. But in the end, we will be a better Christian and the testing of our faith will show us just how much our love for the Lord will stand the test of time.

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Chapter 2
The Trial of Pain
Job 2:1-13

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“So they sat down with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that [his] grief was very great.”

Job 2:13

I thought I had it made. That's really an interesting statement when you think about it. What does it mean "to have it made?" When I hear that statement the first thing I think about is, "Everything is going according to plan, to my desire, and I have no want." I may have thought that, but the situation would soon change. I was 19 years old and in my first year of Bible College. I had worked all summer long and had saved enough money to pay for most of that first year and had some pocket change to boot. I had found a part time job in a local nursing home and it seemed everything was coming up roses.

But extra unexpected expenses began to cause my bundle to dwindle a bit and it wasn't long before I was scraping for pennies to get by. I tightened my belt but everything still seemed like it was going as planned and that's when it happened. I awoke one morning with a sharp pain in my extremities. Upon examination I found a large, swollen red spot on the back of my upper leg that resembled a giant pimple. A couple of days later another one popped up and I was walking mighty lightly. They were boils and let me tell you that except for the fact of where they were located there was nothing funny about it! They hurt!

Over the course of the next few months there wasn't a day went by that I didn't suffer with boils, sometimes three or four at a time. When they finally went away, I was very grateful to God and my attitude was adjusted. I no longer thought I "had it made" and I was just thankful that the pain and discomfort of those things was over and I was able to get around normally.

That experience has always made me partial to good ole' Job. I can't imagine completely what he felt, but I think I know in a small way. Remember that in the last chapter, God allowed the devil to take away everything that Job possessed, including his children. Even though he had been a rich man, he now found himself a broke pauper. He lost everything. But in all of his loss the Bible tells us that he did not sin against the Lord. Satan wasn't satisfied.

THE DEVIL BEFORE GOD

The Bible begins chapter two with the record of another day when the angelic host (called the sons of God) presented themselves before the Lord, and Satan showed up again. God asked him the same questions as before, "Where are you coming from?" Satan gave God the same answer as before, "From roaming back and forth on the Earth."

The language of the Bible almost makes it sound like God couldn't help but "rub it in" on Satan. Both of them knew very well what had been allowed to happen to Job. God asked the question anyway saying, "*Have you considered my servant, Job, that there is none like him on the Earth, a blameless and upright man, one who fears God and shuns evil? And still he holds fast to his integrity although you incited Me against him to destroy him without cause*" (Job 2:3).

This made the devil's blood boil. He had first told God that if He allowed him to take away all Job possessed that he would turn against God. It didn't happen. So now the devil answered God by saying, "*Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will surely curse You to Your face!*" (Job 2:4-5).

We must know that our adversary, the devil, is out to get us. We must always be wary of his devices because he has studied each of us. He knows what we fear, what we dread, and what we are tempted with. Be sure that these are the areas in which he will attack. He's not going to tempt us with those things we are not afraid of. He's not going to throw things in our paths to tempt us that we have no concern about. Nope! Rather, if we have a problem with lust, he's going to throw an email at us about sex to tempt us to just click on that page, or if a person has had problems with stealing, he's going to put us in a position where we can take something and no one else would ever know about it. He's going to hit below the belt where he knows we are already wounded. That's why we must always be on guard against him. We are at war with the devil and he picks his battles well.

But God also knows our weaknesses. He promised through the words of Paul that He won't allow us to be tempted above what we are able to bear (1 Corinthians 10:13). God will allow the devil to throw things at us that we need to overcome. It's not some kind of torture test but one that will bring strength to us. It's kind of like getting a vaccination. Many of our vaccines contain a small portion of the germs or virus that would bring us harm, but when injected into our system in small quantities it causes our bodies to battle the disease enough to build up immunities against it. In this way when the actual virus or germ attacks us our bodies are ready to do battle against it and win.

JOB'S PHYSICAL ATTACK

God does that for us spiritually. He will allow us to be attacked in areas He knows we can overcome. When we have accomplished that victory then we are ready for the full attack and we can win! He gives us timely, spiritual vaccinations. This is what God was about to do with His servant, Job. God told Satan, "*Behold, he is in your hand, but spare his life*" (Job 2:6).

The devil quickly went to his work. What he did was worse than any sickness that he could have brought upon Job. Remember, he could attack Job's body but he could do nothing to him that might cause him to die. So, he hit Job with boils. Not one or two mind you, but one morning Job woke up and every move he made hurt – bad! He was covered from head to foot with these loathsome, painful boils. The Bible says from the sole of his foot (imagine trying to walk on one of those things) to the crown of his head (try combing your hair with boils)! Job took a piece of broken pottery to scratch and scrape his body with, left the house and sat in a pile of ashes. In Old Testament days people sat in ashes while they fasted to show their humbleness and self-sacrifice when seeking God. What Job was doing was looking to God for answers!

SITTING IN THE ASH HEAP

We don't sit in ashes anymore. Most of us rarely fast. But we need to seek the face of God! Most of us comfort-oriented Americans think we've got problems when we get a paper cut. Any little old thing can happen and we're questioning God for letting it happen to us. Let me share a little secret with you - God lets things happen to us not to punish us (remember we are saved by grace so it isn't to whip us back in line with morality) but to teach us. Sometimes it is the only way He can get our attention long enough to focus on Him. To the believer in Christ, everything that happens to us from our jobs, to sickness, to blessing is for our own benefit. God wants to make us strong! Does that mean that when we get sick, we shouldn't seek God for healing? No, it does not. What it does mean is that while we're experiencing whatever God has allowed the devil to put on us, we need to be seeking Him for what He wants to teach us.

It was then that his wife, who only said what she said because she couldn't bare to see him in pain and suffering like he was, spoke up, "Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!" She didn't want him out of the way and it wasn't so she could collect on any inheritance that he might leave behind. Remember he had already lost everything!

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She couldn't bear to see him like he was and she thought she was doing him a favor.

Even with lessons to learn, Job spoke up saying, "You speak as one of the foolish women speaks. Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?" For not having a Bible to read Job displayed a lot of wisdom in his words. He had learned one thing during his lifetime and that was to worship God no matter what was thrown across his path. That's a lesson we all need to learn. It's easy to worship God when everything is going our way but we need to realize that our worship should not be based on good things. We must worship God no matter what.

In all of this, Job did not sin with his lips. He didn't speak negatively about his God. That doesn't mean that some things weren't rolling around in his head as we will see in coming chapters. But he didn't say those things. He didn't make them materialize.

THE "FRIENDS" OF JOB

In the last few verses of this short chapter, we see Job's three friends coming to pay him a visit. It's good to have friends that are concerned about you and they must have been or they wouldn't have come. When they saw him in his humbled, poor and miserable condition they were speechless. They were used to seeing Job in clean clothing, bathed and smelling nice. They remembered him in his rich household with servants scurrying about to see to their every need. Now their rich friend was in poverty, sitting in a pile of ashes, disfigured by the scarring sores all over his body. He was a mess and they had no words to give him for seven days. They had their own thoughts as we will see. But for the moment they were just with him.

I feel like that brought some comfort to Job at first. It helps to have someone close to you in your time of need even if they can't do anything about it. We need to remember that. A lot of times when we go to visit a sick friend or fellow Christian, we think we have to be prepared to say the right things to bring encouragement and if we can't think of anything to say we feel awkward and out of place. We need to learn that sometimes we just need to be there. Sometimes silence says a lot.

Today, if you are experiencing any kind of difficulty in your life, whether it is sickness, disease, poverty, or trouble, know that God has not left you. It might feel like He is a million miles away and has forsaken you. But He is right there beside you. Hold tightly to your salvation and don't be afraid to worship Him. He will pull you through.

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Chapter 3
The Trial of Regret
Job 3:1-26

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*“For the thing I greatly feared has come upon me,
And what I dreaded has happened to me.”
Job 3:25*

As they walked the dense woods very little conversation took place between these three friends as they made their way through the thick undergrowth, but you could tell by their wide, dancing eyes and occasional grins through sweat drenched faces that they were enjoying this. It was the challenge of the journey that made their adventure worthwhile.

They hacked through vines and weeds laboriously cutting a path when one of the men spoke, "We need to be watching for vipers. This is just the environment they love to hide in." It was a repulsive thought to the man leading the three. Although he loved what they were doing right at that moment he dared not speak his heart. He had the appearance of a man who feared nothing but in the secret depths of his heart there was one thing that struck him with terror more than anything else – snakes! He didn't like them and they didn't like him, in that they shared mutual ground. He had made up his mind eons ago that if the slithering reptiles would leave him alone that he would also leave them alone. He had crossed a few during his time and he had either been fortunate enough to evade confrontation with them or he had fought and won. But it was an adventure he'd rather not have.

As these thoughts passed through his mind a clearing broke in front of them. In the middle of that clearing was an old foundation, small, about eight feet square. It looked as if a building of some sort had once been erected over it for rotting planks lay scattered on the ground. Except for these few old boards whatever the structure had been used for it had long since been abandoned. He stepped into the clearing then walked right in the middle of that old foundation. He stopped there to look around and see just what they might have stumbled into.

His friends halted and stood motionless in their tracks. They had not entered the foundation as of yet and they weren't about to. The other friend exclaimed, "Don't move! Keep your feet still and slowly take a look around you." As he did, he now realized that he was in a

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desperate situation for lying in coils in every corner of the old foundation were rattlesnakes. He hadn't seen them when he first stepped in and fortunately for him, he hadn't gone any farther. There were so many that he lost count and in places you couldn't tell where one started and another ended.

What was he going to do now? How could he ever get out of this? He softly addressed the other two men, almost laughing to hide his fear, "It's a good thing I have on my heavy long pants and thick knee-high boots!" Feeling almost relieved he looked down at his feet only to see that he was now dressed in shorts and was barefooted.

Terrified I awoke from the nightmare. My heavy breathing made my chest feel like it was about to explode as I lay in the damp sheets, motionless - petrified in the bed. Sweat trickled down my brow as I realized it was only a dream – but it felt all too real. What I feared the most had crept out in sleeping thoughts one more time.

Job chapter three concludes with him saying this exact same thing, "*The thing I greatly feared has come upon me, and what I dreaded has happened to me*" (verse 25). Fear has destroyed more lives than any other emotion experienced. In panic we make decisions that destroy and kill us. Being afraid is a horrible experience.

Apparently for an undetermined span of years Job had feared losing his wealth and health. This is the assumption to be made from his statement. He had secretly dreaded the day when he would be deprived of his life of luxury. He had been in terror of losing his children. This is reflected in the very first chapter where we are told that when they would have their gatherings and parties, afterwards Job would go to his altar to sacrifice and pray for his sons and daughters, just in case they had cursed God in a moment of frivolity. And the Bible indicates by Job's statement that he had often thought about how terrible it would be to lose his health and not be able to work or enjoy life.

It happened just as he had feared. It was no longer a dread, for it was now his daily life. In a single day he lost all his wealth and children. Then a short time afterwards he found himself covered from head to toe with painful boils. He couldn't sit in comfort and each movement produced even sharper pain as his body weight pressed on yet another boil.

He had sat in ashes for seven days now in the company of his friends who had come to see if there was anything they could do to comfort him. They had sat in horrified silence. He was unrecognizable and words couldn't adequately express sympathy. Job's fears and nightmares had become reality. If only he could awake from this awful plight! But he wasn't asleep. In fact, I'd say he probably hadn't had a full night's sleep since the calamity had befallen him.

WHY WAS I EVER BORN?

For twenty-four verses Job cursed the day he was born. Why couldn't he have died at birth instead of coming to this present place? Why hadn't he been still born? Had he not lived he would already have been in the place he believed souls go at death - A place where no pain existed - A place where wealth didn't matter. He questioned why life was given to one in so much misery. He welcomed death at this point but he found himself in a great paradox. He believed that God would punish those who died in wickedness so he couldn't do as his wife had counseled in chapter two; he couldn't curse God hoping to end his life for then he would have condemned his eternal soul to the place of the wicked. Yet he longed for death to come upon him but each day the sun rose again and he spent the day scratching in pain. It seemed that was all he had to look forward to and his life would end with him looking like a puffy freak.

This world has seen many miserable souls during its ages. People who have been born into poverty would work if they could only find a job. But then they haven't had the good fortune of education and so they find themselves unqualified for anything except the most demeaning forms of labor. There are countries in this world where people are willing to work in unbearable conditions for twelve to fifteen hours each day only earning pennies in order to provide a pitiful supply of sustenance. They live in nothing more than falling shacks yet that is better than facing the elements without shelter. There are homeless people walking the streets of our largest cities in America who were once very successful business men or women but due to some misfortune, have lost it all and seem doomed to just wander each day scouring for what they can find to eat or sell. They may even long for death but it does not favor them.

Others have had promising careers with great talent only to find themselves trapped by a terrible disease that will not allow them to hold steady employment and so they are dependant on what the government can provide for them. If only things could have been different. If only this had not happened!

The haunting fears hidden deep within us when coupled with disaster have driven men and women to "end it all." Even if those fears and disappointments seem silly to others, because they are unique and deeply imbedded in the heart, they become extremely devastating to the person who sees suicide as the only way out. Even to get to the point where a person feels this is the only option to be freed from their plight, requires a lack of belief that God can meet our needs. It requires the loss of all hope. All of these things are anti-God and represent a great lack of faith. Does this mean that the individual was eternally doomed? Only God can answer that question. We are not appointed as judge to determine the eternal home of another person. We can judge based on the Word of God that something is a sin but we don't have the right to

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decide the eternal fate of another. Only God can make that decision. To judge whether one is not a candidate for Heaven voids the work of grace provided by Jesus Christ.

OUR WORST FEARS

Job was desperate but not to the point that he contemplated suicide. Yet he had wished to die or that he had never been born. The key to this chapter is in that verse stating that his worst fears had become reality.

Somehow the devil knows our worst fears. It has been argued whether the devil can know our thoughts or not. The Bible doesn't directly address this issue. But it certainly does seem that he attacks in the areas in which we are most vulnerable. Fear is a destroyer and Satan will use our worst fears to try to rob us of our very souls.

God knows this about our fears. It is important enough that the words "fear not" are found twenty-seven times in the New Testament. The Bible tells us in 2 Timothy 1:7 that God hasn't given us the spirit of fear. It is not in our natural makeup to have this imbedded within us. If it does not come from God then it must be a manifestation of the devil. He sees us as we grow and knows what we have been taught then he uses those learned fears against us to make us lose touch with God.

We have heard it said that the best way to overcome our fears is to meet them head on. Many times, when it seems that God has forsaken us during our fears it is because He knows that we must face them head on in order to overcome them. You see God wasn't just "showing Job off" by allowing Satan to take away everything he had. God wasn't using Job like a puppet in a game to prove something to the devil. Instead, He was using the devil to force Job to face his deepest fears.

Job didn't see it. Most of us don't when faced with our fears for in those times it seems that God is just being unfair. We can't see into the future to know that a year from now what we had feared will no longer hold us in its clutches. All we can see is the here and now and it seems that life is kicking us in the stomach. But as we overcome those things one by one, we are emerging a strong Christian to become a useful vessel in the great plan and purpose of the Almighty.

We may wish for death in the painful present moment of our trial, but as we hold firm in the knowledge that God will see us through all the way to victory, we can know that we will become a stronger servant of the Living God. Our fears will begin to disappear one by one as God gives us the power to cope and then to overcome each of them. God's ways may not seem to be the best at the time but when viewed in retrospect we will wonder, "Why was I ever afraid of that?"

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Chapter 4
The Trial of Confusion
Job 4:1-7:21

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*“Have I sinned? What have I done to You, O watcher of men? Why have You set me
as Your target, so that I am a burden to myself?”*

Job 7:20

“Now wait a minute! You’ve got me thoroughly confused!”

Have you ever said that? Confusion occurs when we don’t have a good understanding of the problem, situation, or words of others. Confusion has been the cause of problems between people since Adam and Eve were driven from Eden. Lack of understanding leading to confusion has caused divorce, mental conditions, and even suicide.

These next few chapters from the Book of Job describe misconceptions held by Christians yet today, as well as give answers to some still pending questions. God was about to reveal some amazing things to His servant Job, but in the process of receiving these revelations Job was thoroughly confused as we will see.

Job had just finished his speech about how he couldn’t understand why God had allowed him to suffer and so he concluded with statements indicating that he wished he hadn’t been born than to live life like he now was living. Before we get down on the man and attack him for having a “pity party” we should think about this for a moment. Aren’t we just like him? We rejoice and worship God as long as things are going our way but when the least little thing happens, we get all upset and question God. If this sounds familiar, I’d say all of us who have been a Christian for any length of time have experienced these same emotions in one way or another. Oh, we might not have lost everything we had, we may not have seen all our children dead in a single day, and we may not be covered from head to foot with boils, but we’ve all had our time. I think Job was holding up pretty well considering the circumstances.

HIS FRIENDS SPEAK UP

As soon as Job had finished speaking his heart it was time for his friend, Eliphaz, to give his opinion. Remember the men now sitting with Job were his friends and had come to “comfort” him. But what they had to

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say was spoken from what they had been taught to believe, not from experience. We need to guard against this habit. It is easy to say what we believe to be true but quite another thing to speak from experience.

He started his discourse by saying that he couldn't hold it in any longer. He had heard the words of Job and he just couldn't wait another minute to answer Job's searching questions. He just knew that he had the answer for his "pal." One thing that I have learned over the years is that people in need and suffering loss aren't necessarily looking for the pat, quick, popular answer to their questions. More often than not they are looking for a true friend who is willing to sympathetically listen to what they have to say. Most people think of counseling as always having the right answer. However most people already know the answers to their questions and just need a good listening ear to allow them to think out loud. We can guide them with questions down the obvious path but they must arrive there themselves.

Eliphaz reminded Job and the others seated with them how that Job had been quick over the years to help those less fortunate than himself. In their times of calamity Job had encouraged and upheld them.

He credited Job with helping many, encouraging them and lifting them up. Job had not forgotten about the widows and orphans. He had done his part in taking care of them. Eliphaz then told him, "But now misfortune has come upon you and you have grown weary very quickly." What an accusation! What a friendship this was! Here Job was suffering to the point that he really felt like death was better than life and his friend tells him that he's being a "wimp!" But it gets worse . . .

Eliphaz continued with the thought by saying, "Who ever perished being innocent? When were the upright ever cut off? He then concluded this thought by saying, "Those who practice iniquity are destroyed by God." What kind of insinuation was this? He went as far as to say that a spirit had appeared to him showing him this doctrine. It may have been a spirit but I'm not so sure it was a spirit from God. God will allow bad things to happen to us but not as punishment because we've done something we don't realize we have done.

Many voices are floating around us today. We need to know that we don't see everything that is going on with the natural eye. Not only are we hearing what man thinks and what we think but also suggestions from the devil are ever being thrown in our ears. All of these things are fighting for our attention and keeps our minds from hearing what God is really saying.

Then, in Chapter five Eliphaz concludes what he thinks to be very rational thinking by reminding Job that the crafty are brought low but the poor are lifted up. Wow! That sounds just like a statement from many Christian groups in our day! We downplay those whom God has entrusted with wealth and make poverty to be something holy. We must remember

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that wealth becomes a very great temptation but poverty has its own set of temptations one of which is a “poor but proud” attitude. Selfishly justifying pride is wrong in any form whether in wealth or in poverty.

It is true that being crafty to the point that we are deceptive in getting our way and the things we want is sin. It is another form of telling a lie. It is wrong. But to lift up poverty as a value is also twisted and wrong.

The Gospel is for all whether rich or poor. It appeals to the poor because it offers hope. But after we have received that hope then we are not to lift ourselves up in the same pride that those with wealth are tempted with. It's the same sin.

The second thing Eliphaz emphasized was a suggestion that Job should take joy in the correction of God. Let's be careful here. The Apostles took joy in the fact that they were persecuted for the name of Christ. Paul told us to be content in whatever state we found ourselves. But what Eliphaz was suggesting is the same thing I've heard others suggest even today. They say that we should rejoice in our suffering but they don't emphasis the worship of God in our misfortunes but that we should be thankful for the actual misfortune. Let's get this straight. Yes, we should be thankful in the correction of God, but not thankful for the trial itself. I'm not glad when I'm sick. I'm not going to say, “Thanks, God, for the actual bad things that are happening.” But I am going to say, “Thank you, Lord for bringing me through that trial and teaching me the lesson that came with it.” See the difference? We aren't thankful for the bad thing that has happened but we are thankful for what God has taught us about faith, patience, endurance, and the new knowledge we have received. We are thankful in that we can still worship God even when things go wrong.

JOB'S TURN

Job spoke up again. In Chapters six and seven Job's response went something like this: “My words have been rash because this hurts. Oh, that God would grant my request (to die). I have been falsely accused! Tell me what I have done wrong and I'll admit it if it is true. I have done nothing wrong; my righteousness still stands. Why is God doing this to me? What have I done?”

Job spoke some truths, but also asked some questions based on his own understanding and misguided teaching over the years. I suppose that if I have a pet peeve about Christianity it's in the fact that we all have some degree of erroneous teaching imbedded in us. As believers in Christ, we must be willing to change what we have believed when God shows us a truth from His Word that we have been wrong about. That's

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one of the key points as to why God allowed this calamity to be brought upon Job.

Job had every right to be wondering what was going on. He had every right to wish that it would all be over even if that ending resulted in his death. But when it came to believing that God was punishing him for something he had done wrong but had no idea what it was, well, that's a misguided conception about God. He doesn't do that. If He punishes us for wrong-doing we will know why.

I've said this before and will probably say it again in this book, but it is a point that is worth saying again and again until we understand and receive it into our hearts and that is: God will allow things to happen to us to get our attention. He knows what we have inside of us and knows what needs to be weeded out for Christian growth to take place. Sometimes He has to put us flat on our backs to get our attention. Sometimes we have to be slapped in the face and told to "shut-up!" in order for us to stop jabbering and listen to what God is trying to tell us. Does that sound hard? Is it too harsh? Maybe so but we know that it is true. God is love but we sometimes think love is all about being gentle and soft spoken. But sometimes love cares about what is happening to others and gets loud and angry. Sometimes our God shows His love to us by telling us what is wrong and what we've got to do to correct the situation. That's tough love but is also true love.

God was moving Job into position to receive great teaching from Him. It was just going to take some time. And so, He does with us. It isn't necessarily punishment but it is life giving lessons that we will be able to look back on and say, "Thanks, Lord, for teaching me that lesson. Thank You God for getting my attention long enough for me to see this deep truth You have had for me all along." It is worth it. It is too our benefit and we will be thankful for it in the end.

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Chapter 5
The Trial of Ignorance
Job 8:1 – 10:22

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*“If it is a matter of strength, indeed He is strong;
And if of justice, who will appoint my day in court?”
Job 9:19*

It is a terrible feeling not to know. To be found in a situation where you don't know what is going on, what has been said, or what has been done, and try to make sense of it all, leaves you feeling exposed and helpless. Imagine taking on a new job during the middle of a project, being expected to pick up where the previous person had left off and not only continue but to bring it to an end. It is nearly impossible. It requires time to learn what is going on, what has already been done and what is left to do.

Perhaps that's why so many seem to fail at being a Christian. They feel Godly sorrow, repent, and come into the kingdom but they are unlearned about what exactly is taking place and what is expected. They are treated as if they should know right from the start and they are overwhelmed. It seems wiser to bail out than to take on the great task of self-education, especially when one has no idea of where to begin.

Job felt overwhelmed. He had no idea why only a few days before he had been a respected, upright citizen, very successful and looked to for answers. Now he sat in a pile of ashes covered with painful boils after losing everything that had once represented his wealth. He no longer knew the answers but was now full of questions himself. It was hard to understand.

The first of his comforters had spoken suggesting that maybe he had done something wrong and God was punishing him. He could think of nothing he had done or said that would have caused this degree of punishment from the God of Heaven – the God he had faithfully served.

His second friend, Bildad, began to speak. He seemed a little less patient than Eliphaz had been. Job had just finished saying how he couldn't understand what happened, that he had done no wrong, and how he wished he could just die. Bildad said these things, "How long will you talk like that? If you will just repent and look to God He will wake up for you and bless you again. Our life on Earth is short. The hope of the

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hypocrite is like trusting in unsure things, like leaning on a spider's web. God won't cast away the blameless nor will He uphold evildoers. Turn to God and He will make everything right filling your mouth with laughter and your lips with rejoicing."

It sounded good. But something just wasn't right. It nagged at Job because if he could lay his finger on what he may have done to anger God he would gladly repent of it. What did he have to gain in being silent about something he may have done wrong, especially if it meant being healed of all those boils and getting his life back? The words that Bildad had spoken were words he probably would have said to someone else in this same plight. He knew that. He had been educated in the same system as his friends and knew the accepted answers. But that knowledge just didn't make sense now. He was confused because he didn't know what God wanted from him.

MY DAY IN GOD'S COURT

Job said, "I know these things are true but . . . how can a man be righteous before God? He has control of the universe for He made it. Who has hardened himself against Him and prospered? If He takes away who can say, 'What are You doing?' Who can stop Him? How can I choose words to reason with God? Who will appoint my day in court?"

We find ourselves in similar situations. We may not be covered with painful sores from head to foot and we probably aren't literally sitting in a pile of ashes but we may feel like it. Perhaps you've been taught that, as a believer in Christ, everything will always "come up roses." Maybe you came into the Christian faith under the deception that says, "from the moment you come to the Lord things will always be good." But now you find yourself in a great plight. Maybe you have lost all your possessions in a flaming house. Or you have suffered the loss of a loved one that tears the heart right out of your chest. Your child, whom you have raised to obey Christian standards and beliefs has committed a crime and is now behind bars and it eats at your gut like a cancer. "What did I do wrong?" Or maybe the doctor has just told you that you have a terminal illness and your days on earth are numbered. "God, what have I done to get this treatment from You?"

The truth is, you probably haven't done anything wrong. And if you have, and confessed it to God the blood of Christ has covered it. We can't do any more about it than that. So why?

I know of a family that suffered like this. It seemed like it was one blow after another. In fact, in those days I even said myself, "They must have some terrible sin going on in their lives to deserve this treatment from God." But I was wrong. I was thinking like Job's friends. For years these individuals experienced loss, poverty, and hardship. But one day

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things began to change for them, not so much in the situations as in their attitudes. They began to experience God like never before.

The husband had worked around sawmills most of his life and for several years he had owned a mill himself. Then the doctors told him that he was allergic to the wood. How could he provide for his family now? It was all he knew!

God knew more than he did. He turned to God and began to get closer to Him than he had ever been before. That man became a pastor. I would have never believed it. If I had been the one doing the calling, he would have been one of my last choices. But God knows. God has a plan. God allowed these things to happen to mold this family and move them into the great work He had planned for them all along.

KNOWING GOD'S MIND

We may have no idea what is on God's mind. We can't begin to fathom the depths God will go to show us His will and we can't understand the training He puts us through to prepare us for that mission.

We tend to think of ignorance as a bad thing. It can be detrimental. It is not, however, a sin unless we choose to remain there. Ignorance simply means we don't know. Job didn't know. Neither did my friend. It was a trial that was as much torture as being tied to a post and whipped. But it will bring us to the place where we can find the answers to our questions. The lessons learned from experience are not easily forgotten. Yes, it would be better to learn them in a book or from hearing of another's experiences, but most of us learn best from hands on training. God gives us the Bible to teach us but He also knows that most of us learn from application.

Bildad had said that if Job would just repent it would "wake God up" and He would restore him. We know from the Bible that God never sleeps. But the idea he was conveying was that God was turning a deaf ear to Job's cries because He was waiting for him to repent. This teaching told them that God would not listen to them in their disobedience until they had made things right with Him. How uncanny that this very teaching still influences Christians today even though we have the Bible which clearly tells us that we are no longer under the Law but under the Grace of God through Jesus Christ. If we have truly sinned God does want us to repent. But this doesn't keep Him from hearing our cries in our helplessness.

Job's friend had also indicated that Job was "leaning on a spider's web." How weak that would be! Of course, it would break under the weight of a man immediately letting him fall. But under grace we are not leaning on a frail thing like a spider's web or our own ability for that

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matter. That too will eventually let us fall. No. Those who trust in Christ are leaning on none other than the “Rock of Ages!”

Another painful realization was emerging in Job’s thinking. He said, “God must destroy the blameless with the wicked for I am blameless!” Bildad had indicated that God always blesses those obedient to Him while He is obligated to punish the wicked. But Job knew that he had done nothing wrong. So why was he being punished? What was the purpose of this ordeal? “If He’s not doing this to me then who else could it be?” Job had no idea what had happened in Heaven. He didn’t know that he had been the object of discussion between God and the devil. He had no knowledge that God had allowed Satan to inflict him in order to use it as a tool to hone Job’s character into brilliance.

God still does that. The devil becomes God’s tool to ultimately bring blessing to our lives. It may not seem like it now. Really it seems like God has completely forsaken us. But even if we now feel like life is over and that the world has come to an end, it is really just beginning. In truth the temporary victory that it seems the devil is winning in your life will turn into major victory in the war over the soul. If only we could look past our current turmoil and see over our plight right to the surrender of the enemy of our very being.

Job wasn’t done yet. He still was confused and still had no idea about what was going on. But he was not going to blame God and even though he wished he’d never been born, still he didn’t blame God. We’ve got a lot to learn from this man.

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Chapter 6
The Trial of Accusation
Job 11:1 – 14:22

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*“Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him.
Even so, I will defend my own ways before Him.”
Job 13:15*

My school project was to build a fort replica from the late 1700's and early 1800's. With the vision in my head and the help of my dad and brother the model began to take shape. We had gathered the branches needed to build the outer walls; Dad was cutting them to the proper length on the saw and my brother and I were cutting the tops of the sticks with pocket knives so as to make them look as if they had been chopped down with an ax. This was going to be a grand fort!

My brother and I were thoroughly enjoying be let loose with pocket knives and we gloried in making the shavings fly, with piles beginning to accumulate on the concrete basement floor. We raced to see who could get the most done while we argued over who had the sharpest knife. I never did find out which one was the sharpest but we shortly found out that mine was sharp enough. I hit a hard spot in the "miniature log" I was working on. I pushed on it with all my young might, finally overcoming the obstacle but with casualties. When the knife cut through the hard spot it slipped off the stick right into my brother's finger. It cut deep. I will never forget how sorry I was that I had wounded my brother like that. Yes, it was an accident, but still I was responsible. Deep cuts take time to heal.

Accusations, whether true or false, but especially when they are false, hurt and there is nothing that cuts so deep and heals as slowly as a false accusation from a friend. Friends can be brutal. Don't get me wrong we need friends who will be honest with us, who really care and genuinely want to give us positive criticisms that will make us better people in the long run. It is a true-blue friend who will talk plainly to us about such subjects. That kind of friend doesn't want to see us damage ourselves or our reputations. It always hurts some, but when we know that they are sincere and have our best interest in mind, then the hurt isn't so bad. However, a friend who cuts us deeply – well that's another issue isn't it?

WHAT KIND OF FRIEND IS THAT?

Those who call themselves friends but only want to “put us down” and are constantly telling us how stupid we are, aren’t really friends. These individuals are only out to make themselves look good at our expense. It seems Job had friends like that. The Bible doesn’t say this but reading between the lines I imagine that they had just been sitting back waiting for an opportunity to gain the upper hand against Job. He seemed too perfect. They needed something to gossip about and someone to flaunt their own spiritual knowledge to. In Job’s weakened and seemingly downfallen position they let him have it.

Job’s friends, Eliphaz and Bildad, had already made insinuations that he had committed some great wrong and was being punished by God. That was hard enough. Now it was time for his third friend, Zophar to speak. He didn’t insinuate anything. In fact, he spoke quite plainly. He said, “Should all these words be answered? You are all talk, will that be justified? Do you think your empty words will cause other men to hold their peace? When you speak words in mockery do you think no one will rebuke you?” Wow! What gall! He was trying to shoot Job down point blank.

When a person has been crippled and put flat on his back, you’d think that a little understanding would be in order, right? Not for Job. He was in intense battle over this teaching that when things go bad it’s because one has committed sin against God. That’s what he was being accused of.

Job’s problem with this teaching was that he knew it wasn’t true. He wasn’t saying that he was perfect but he was defending his position. His buddies just wanted him to admit to his wrong so that God could do His work according to the “Gospel of Ur.” They knew they were right – it had to be so because it was what the ancients had taught them. Job had believed this too. But now he was confused because he knew that he hadn’t done anything like he was being accused of. In fact, Zophar went as far as to say in so many words that, “God is letting you off light considering what you are guilty of.” That was easy for him to say because he wasn’t sitting in a pile of ashes using a broken pot to scrape the painful boils covering him from head to foot. He hadn’t lost everything he had including his children, in a single day. And he was getting off light?

He stood accused by Zophar who said, “An empty-headed man will be wise when a donkey colt is born as a man.” - The words of a friend. Zophar told Job, as his other “friends” had told him, that if he would only repent and confess his sin he would be justified before God, but if not, then his only hope was death. I’m not so sure that Zophar didn’t add this because Job had wished to die.

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I've got one question about all of these accusations they were throwing at Job; they all wanted him to confess so badly, so what were they going to do with that if he did confess something? Run home so they could tell the latest dirt on Job? It makes you wonder. We love to tell dirt on others, don't we? Many today are unwilling to confess their sin and wrong-doing because they know what will be done with it. They know this, most likely, because they know what they'd do with it. James tells us (James 5:16) to confess our faults to each other and pray for each other. But most of us are very insecure about doing that. It's a trust thing. We must grow in Christ to the point that we are willing to not only confess our faults but also be willing to keep other's confessions private, praying for each other instead of gossiping about each other.

Job was devastated by the words of his friends. He stood accused and not knowingly guilty. We are all guilty to some degree. We have failures and sins that we'd really like to conquer and if we persevere, we will eventually. But when our Christian friends accuse us telling us that if we don't get things right, we are doomed for hell, we then stand destroyed.

TAKING A STAND

He spoke some more in his defense in the next three chapters. You can read it for yourself for we have covered many of the things he said here. But there are a couple of things that stand out which bear addressing. Yes, Job had some things in his own life that needed "weeding out" and God was taking care of that. But he was nowhere near as guilty as what his friends were accusing him of.

One thing Job said in Chapter thirteen has become words of encouragement for all Christians. Job said, "*Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him*" (13:15). He had stated his faith in God. He didn't understand why this was happening to him and yes, he wished for death – it would be the easiest way out (or so it seemed at the time), but he said profoundly that his dedication to God was such that even if God killed him, he would still cling to his Master.

That's a faith that many don't understand today. We want things to be better - of course! It would be much easier if these trials God allowed to come upon us would just go away. But in the middle of those trials, we need to plant our feet firmly in what we know about our God. Even though we may not understand and we may disagree with what's happening in our lives - we may even feel like God has let us down - in the midst of those moments we must cry out in our faith, "Even if He allows me to die in this sickness, this financial crisis, this dangerous condition, I will never turn my back on Him! I will trust Him to the very end!"

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We can stand secure against our accusers with these words. We can be confident in knowing that our God, through the grace of Jesus Christ, will indeed remain with us to the very end. If His ministry for us is completed here on earth then we can confidently know that we can go to Heaven with Him. Though He kills me I will yet put my trust in Him.

WHERE IS HOPE – REALLY?

Job also realized another truth in Chapter fourteen. In the first part of that chapter, he related that man's life is a matter of days and full of trouble. I can identify with that, can't you? I think so. Life comes and goes. As children it seems like we'll live forever but the closer we get to the end of our lives it seems the days go quicker. The clock never stops. Its next week before we get through today. So, what real hope do we have?

Job goes on to talk about the hope of a tree. We cut down a tree in our yard some years back. The stump still stands. But I want to tell you I thought I'd never get that tree to die! Every week when doing the mowing, I'd have to take the weed eater and trim off all the new sprouts coming out of that stump. It seemed indestructible. Our human existence isn't like that. We don't sprout up from the grave after we're gone. This life is one time around and it's done.

Job also realized another truth. He didn't have a lot to say about it and he probably didn't know much because there wasn't much theology to draw from in his day, but he knew this: He knew that there was more to life than this. We don't come back to this earth to live another existence as someone else or as an animal or another life form like reincarnation teaches. But we do go on. This soul that God created will never cease to exist. Job knew this for he said in verse fourteen, "*All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes.*" Did you hear it? He knew that there was more. He knew that in the face of the horrible accusation that was being flung at him, even if he did die, there was life beyond this life. He also knew that he would be changed.

I believe in healing. I have been healed by God. I know of many others who have experienced the Divine touch in their bodies and have testified of healing. But I also have many flaws in this body that God has not healed. However, the Bible teaches a future, ultimate healing. When we are changed – When we leave this life and begin to really live in the spiritual kingdom, we will know complete and total healing. Our new bodies will be perfect because they will be given us – No - Transformed by the very God of Heaven.

It's worth waiting for. All our life we will wait, in the midst of hard service and possible turmoil we will have victory because we know a change is coming. And it's worth the wait!

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These are tools to do battle with accusation. We know that we can trust God, even in the face of death, and we know that what's coming next is worth waiting for!

ONE MORE THING

There's one final thing that needs to be said before we conclude this chapter. If there are any reading this that have never made a decision for Christ, have never asked Him for forgiveness of sin and to come into his or her life, then you do stand guilty of all accusations. We must be saved by the blood shed by Jesus Christ on Calvary. We must be covered and hidden in His grace to stand guilt free before God. If you have never made such a decision then you need to drop everything you're doing and make that decision right now.

It is the most important decision you'll ever make in this life. It is more important than the person you are going to marry, more important than the expensive car you want to drive, more important than buying a house, and more important than the career you choose for your life. It is this important because it affects your existence after this life. Those who choose Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior choose everlasting life. Those who choose to remain without Christ in their lives choose everlasting death. I'd say that's a pretty important choice to make, wouldn't you?

Make that choice for Christ today, right now, this very moment. Pray to Him; tell Him you are sorry that you are guilty of the accusation of sin; ask Him to forgive you and apply His grace to you, and He will.

Then you will stand before God being proclaimed "not guilty" because all those accusations that you were guilty of have been done away with by the blood of Christ. He has taken up residence within you by way of the Holy Spirit and when you are accused before God, and God takes a look at you, He doesn't see the black, ugly sin that has plagued you from the beginning but He sees His Own Son standing in your place. That does away with all accusation.

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Chapter 7
The Trial of Consequence
Job 15:1 – 17:16

Jerry D. Ousley

*“My spirit is broken, my days are extinguished, the grave is ready for me.”
Job 17:1*

The young woman's face was streaked where she had not been able to wash her face for several days and tears had freely flowed. What was she to do now? Months before she had been in her home, comfortable with all the provisions a teenage girl needed to pamper herself into a creature of beauty. How she longed to submerge herself in a tub filled with warm water and soap bubbles almost running over the edge. Her parents were not rich but they had the means to provide all the comforts needed.

Her last date turned out to be one of giving in to temptation. She and her boyfriend had indulged in intercourse yielding to the pleasure they had both longed for. What was the harm? All her friends had bragged about it at school. Who would find out? Both of them had attended the same congregation and had been active in their youth group. They knew it was wrong but reasoned, "How could something so fascinating and pleasurable be wrong?" Afterwards they both felt terrible about what they had done and repented to God together.

But then in a few weeks, though she knew God had forgiven her, fear took the place of the pleasure she had experienced when she realized that she had missed her period. She slipped into a drug store across town where she would not be seen by anyone who knew her and bought a pregnancy test praying that it would be negative. But it wasn't. She was going to have a baby.

Her boyfriend understood, but he had big plans. He was college-bound that year following graduation and he couldn't give up his plans in order to be a father now! How disappointed his parents would be if this came to the surface.

She had no choice but to confront her own parents. They would find out soon enough anyway. They listened to her story through her tears as she wept over the details. To her disappointment there had been no, "It's

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going to be alright honey's" spoken. Her mother began to weep uncontrollably and quickly got up and left the room. Her father looked sternly at her. He began to tell her of all the wrong she had done. He quoted scripture showing her the error of her ways. The longer he talked the more intense he got until she could take no more and she also left the room heaving with sobs.

She felt she had no choice and so that night she packed a small suitcase and left home. She checked herself into an institution for unwed mothers until the baby came. Then she left with no idea of her destination. After a few days hunger overcame her. She was dirty, tired, confused, and lonely. She turned to the only place she felt would give her comfort. But to her utter amazement, congregation after congregation turned her away. Of course, there were some that slipped her a few bucks for which she was grateful, but this was merely a conscience-easer. It was no fix. It seemed no one cared and there was no place left to go. What would she do now?

This fictional story is all too real in our current day. It highlights the judgmental attitude of many. Thank God for congregations who are willing to follow the commands of Christ and care for those who have yielded to sin and now find themselves in a plight from which there seems no escape.

We know the commands. We quote the scriptures reciting the "Thou shalt nots." But when others have given in to sin, whether it be an unwed pregnancy as in the example above, drug abuse, alcohol abuse, or whatever the case may be, once the sin has been committed and consequences have overtaken, where do we draw the line that divides morality from recovery, and judgment from compassion?

Yes, they do need the word of God. They do need restoration in the Kingdom but first it's time for the greatest command of all according to our own Savior, Jesus Christ: To love.

DOESN'T IT MAKE GOOD MORAL SENSE?

Eliphaz began to speak again. This time he asked Job in so many words, "What makes you think you know more than any of us? There are those amongst us who are older than your father. Do you know more than God knows?" He then proceeded to give Job the facts. Let's be honest, some of the things Eliphaz said made moral sense. Doesn't it seem reasonable that God would not allow good things to come to those who do wickedly?

The problem with this reasoning was that even though it was true there was no compassion whatsoever in his words. He spoke these things

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to Job matter-of-factly without any feeling at all. There was no regard for what Job was going through or how he felt.

We know that Job was not guilty of the things his friends were accusing him of. He was guilty of wrong doctrine not looking past tradition and some other feelings. But had he been guilty of something it still would not have called for the treatment he received.

Christians, by and large, still have not understood the power and love to be found in the grace of God and in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We are all guilty. We all deserved the worst punishment for being less than perfect. It sounds mean and cruel, doesn't it? What if God told us why we deserved to die? What if God said, "Look at all I would have given you. But because you decided to be disobedient to Me and committed sin against Me, instead you are getting nothing but death. That's what you deserve because of your disobedience." This is what we deserve.

WE DON'T GET WHAT WE DESERVE

Instead, God became man in Jesus Christ. He lived the perfect life we were meant to live. He didn't accuse us and point out our disobedience. No, He laid down His perfect nature and allowed Himself to be sacrificed in the cruelest way possible on a Roman cross – executed like a common criminal. Then He arose from death on the third day, the first to conquer death, paving the way for us to do the same in Him. He made it possible to regain life like God wanted us to have in the first place. The only stipulation put on this free gift was that we become willing to admit our sin confessing our guilt and unworthiness. Upon doing this He granted us the privilege of living guilt-free of sin because of the covering He provided. That's grace! Unmerited favor. We don't deserve it but we get it anyway.

Look at what He did for the woman at the well. She had gone from one husband to another, now living with a guy. She deserved the sermon on morality. She deserved to be told how that marriage was to be for life to one mate. She deserved to be preached at. But she didn't get what she deserved. Instead, Jesus revealed Himself to her as the Messiah, the One who would come and make everything right.

What about the woman taken in adultery? Surely, she deserved to be scolded about how she had flaunted the commandment about not committing adultery. She had broken a direct commandment, one of the "big ten." She deserved the stones that were about to be hurled at her. But she didn't get what she deserved. Instead, Jesus suggested that her accusers examine their own lives. When they did, they slipped away one by one. She stood alone except for Jesus who told her to "go and sin no more." She was forgiven.

Remember Zacchaeus? You know, the short guy, tax collector, hated by everyone in town? He had cheated most of them in one way or another and had gotten rich by his tactics. But the day Jesus came to town he suddenly felt his true height. He had to see Jesus and so he humbled himself by climbing the tree so he could better see. Then Jesus called him and before the end of the day he had made reconciliation by making the promise of restitution to those he had cheated. Jesus forgave him, but He could have told Zacchaeus a mouthful. Zacchaeus didn't get what he deserved.

What of us? What do we deserve? Are we any better than these two women, Zacchaeus, or a host of others that could be named? We deserve the third degree from God but instead He sent His Son to die in our place. No, we don't get what we deserve either. We stand justified before God because of grace.

THE ACCUSER

Our archenemy, the devil, accuses us each and every day. You better believe that if he'd do this to Job, he'll also do it to us. And he does. Perhaps God has allowed some of the things that happen to us that we don't understand or can't explain because of the same reasons He allowed them to come upon Job. I don't know. But I do know this – because of His grace we don't get what we really deserve.

With this in mind we should think twice, no, three times before we do it to someone else. How easy it is to criticize others when they have fallen into sin. We can quote the scripture and point the finger. We can remind them that they must repent or else. We can pass judgment on people before we even realize we have done it. And, if it were left up to us, we'd not fool around with their disobedience but we'd send them straight to hell.

Yet when the shoe is on the other foot, so to speak, we can come up with all kinds of excuses justifying why we did perhaps the same thing. We expect understanding. We fly to the mercy of God and do everything in our power to convince others that we should be "let off the hook." We want grace and mercy but we don't want to extend the same to others. That's hard but it's the truth.

GRACE TO ALL

Grace extends to every individual on the face of this planet regardless of skin color, social status, or even religion or the lack thereof. God has given the same grace to each of us. Of course, we must realize

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this and accept the freely given gift of God and when we do our lives change but the change occurs inside – in the soul of man, not by putting on different clothes and watching our mouths. I agree that when the change occurs within it is reflected on the outside but we all too often preach grace then in the same breath condemn and pass sentence because another individual doesn't become perfect overnight. That isn't grace! That's trying to force someone into seeing things our way – That's religion – trying to appease God for favor. We can never appease God for favor because we always fall short.

Grace says, "I don't condone what you have done but I forgive you for it. Go from this day forward and just don't do it again." You know what's really good about grace? If we succumb to that same temptation again and ask God to forgive us again, He'll say once more, "Go from this day forward, I forgive you, just don't do it again."

NO COMPASSION

Job's accusers showed no compassion. It was only black or white. He was in this plight, in their opinion, because he had committed sin and he had to ask God for forgiveness. To them it was cut and dry and they showed no mercy in it. "Do what we say or you'll die in your sin. Confess your wrong to God or He will kill you!" That was their attitude and frankly the attitude of many even today.

Job would have gladly repented if he just knew what to repent of - he said so. In the same breath he was begging to die he was also begging for an audience with God to find out what he had done wrong. I see many Christians who seem to be in the same boat today. They have been gossiped about, chewed up, and spit out by evil influence upon the very brothers and sisters in Christ who should have been the most understanding; the ones who should have been there sharing their brother's burden.

If Job's friends had really wanted to help Job instead of criticizing him, they should have changed into sackcloth themselves and sat down in the pile of ashes with him. And so today. We want to counsel, and Godly counsel can be used to help others. We want to tell them what they've done wrong. We want to point the finger and say, "See, I told you so." But we need more Christians who are willing to sit in the ashes of compassion with their fellow believers. Instead of getting mad and finding another congregation, or just simply starting their own fellowship, we need believers who are willing to get down in the dirt and grime of human existence and solve problems together. That is compassion; that is true Christian brotherhood; that is what loving our brother is all about.

POINTING FINGERS

This world wants to point fingers. This world wants to find out who's responsible rather than just jump in and fix the problem. "It has to be somebody's fault and it sure isn't mine!" We have allowed the world back into the Church I'm afraid. We've tried to incorporate the tactics of big business into our congregations to see them grow in numbers and increase financially. We have pastors who make more money than several people in their congregations all put together. And that's none of my business until true Christian compassion for a brother or a sister becomes less important than those things.

We've got to get the world out of God's Church (I'm not talking about a building made with human hands but the spiritual kingdom of God). We've got to find where we laid compassion down, go back to it and take it up again. If we really want to see souls saved during these last days of human history, we've got to get back to our first love and make a full circle return to grace. We've got to put that pointing finger down and embrace our brother or sister who has fallen. That's how we can help them back up again! We extend our hand to them in love and understanding and sharing of their burden. We've got to make it as much our fault as it is theirs. Then we can see souls saved. I tell you if the Church of today would really get this down into their hearts we wouldn't have to have big appeal to get newcomers into our fellowship but we'd have to be figuring out how we're going to take care of all these people!

The world needs God. Whether others realize it or not that's Who they're looking for. But the picture most of the Church world paints of Him causes misrecognition and so they pass on by. If we'd just get back to His instructions instead of misrecognition they'd be saying, "Oh, there He is!"

The world has to see true love between Christian brothers and sisters. The lost of this world are tired of seeing superfluous love extended to one's face while they're holding a spiritual knife to their back. The world sees that every day. When they see it in the Church then it is just more of what they've already got. No, they need to see true Christian compassion. They need to see the love of Jesus Christ reflected from the heart and face of believers. They need to see real examples of preferring one's brother over self. They don't need the facts, just the story of compassion. They need to see genuine people with genuine faith and genuine love for others. That's what Jesus wants and that's what the world needs. Can we do it?

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Chapter 8
The Trial of Pitilessness
Job 18:1 – 19:29

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*“Have pity on me, have pity on me, O you my friends,
For the hand of God has struck me!”
Job 19:21*

Brad felt the hot anger welling up inside of him. It was mostly from frustration. The war had left him without legs, even so, he had learned to manage his wheel chair quite well. But he was helpless and without control in this situation.

The government had finally equipped his vehicle so he could drive again. This allowed him to have some feeling of independence. He could go pretty much wherever he wanted to and with the wheelchair-lift he could even get in and out of the vehicle on his own.

This particular day he had a longing deep within to visit the beach. He had loved the beach. Before the war he would go and just sit on the sandy shore for hours starring at the broad ocean stretched before him. It was magnificent to watch the waves roll in, see gulls flying overhead with their mournful cry and just be absorbed in the setting. It was like he was a character in some beautiful painting.

But those moments had long passed. It had taken a lot of time for him to get back into the right frame of mind after the loss of his legs. This day he was going back to the beach to once again become a part of that scene.

Disappointment had led to anger when he arrived only to discover that his favorite beach had been remodeled. The sand and the gulls were still there. But a wall had been built, I suppose to limit how far the tide could bring the water in. A set of concrete stairs had been constructed to descend to the beach. It was only twelve steps but it might as well have been thousands.

As he sat there choking back tears a man came up to him. "Sir," he said, "I'd be glad to help you down these steps if you'd like." It was kind of the man to offer his help but suddenly all the anger and resentment he had felt since the accident burst forth from his lips as he angrily yelled, "Forget it, man! I don't want your pity!"

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“I-I-I’m sorry!” the man said as he walked away, insulted and confused by Brad’s harsh words. The man didn’t understand. How could he?

The truth was that deep inside, Brad did want the man’s pity. He felt sorry for himself and in reality, needed someone to share that sorrow. But He had been taught like so many Americans, that pity is something undesirable – Something that is only extended to someone inferior. And so, he rejected the kindness of the man.

Most of us are like that. We don’t want to display weakness in front of others and we have made true pity an evil thing. The truth is there are times we do pity ourselves and wish we had someone to share in that. I realize there are abusers of pity. There are those who have learned to accept pity as a way to get what they want and that is wrong.

Real pity however, can be a good thing. Pity is probably the wrong word. What we are really talking about is compassion. Job needed compassion right now. His friends had started out really wanting to help him in the only way they had been taught (by stating what they had learned and believed all their lives). As we have said several times in this book, Job had been taught the very same things. The indication from the words of his friends was that Job had said these very words to others believing that he was doing good and upholding the truth.

Now Job was on the receiving end and he was learning things that he had never known. He knew that he hadn’t done anything worthy of such brutal punishment and torture. He had loved God, had worshipped Him daily, prayed for his children and was known as a charitable man. So why had this thing come upon him? We know because we have read the story. But while it was unfolding Job didn’t have a clue.

Job felt sorry for himself. Wouldn’t any of us? Stop and think about that for a minute . . . if we had lost everything we owned, had lost all our children in a moments time, and then days later been stricken with terrible sores from head to foot, wouldn’t we feel just a little sorry for ourselves? I say “yes.”

NO MORE PITY

Job’s friends were beginning to get angry at him now. They had heard his words of self-pity long enough. The teaching of their day showed plainly that Job had to be guilty of some horrible sin and so the formula required him to admit it, asking God to forgive him, and move on. Why wouldn’t Job just submit? Why did he have to be so difficult about this thing?

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What Job needed was some compassion. Added to all his other trials was a lack of compassion by his own friends. Bildad just plainly spoke, "Do you think we're stupid? We all know the teaching. I've heard you speak it many times yourself. If you don't make this right you, Job, are going to be destroyed, your memory being one of a man who has done evil. Is this how you want your life to end?"

Of course, Job didn't want these things. Of course, he wanted what every man on the face of this earth wants and that's to be remembered in love by at least one other person. This was horrific! Why was he being punished so? What had he done? Why couldn't his friends understand that?

Job needed some pity right now. He needed his friends to say, "We don't understand what's going on. It baffles our teaching. But, Job, we know you and have seen your heart. We don't know the answers but we are here with you. We will go through this with you."

And so, it is with us all. Our teaching tells us to shun away from such pity but deep in our hearts we really want and need that from at least someone. All too often we don't take the time, before we pass judgment, to try to understand why someone has become a "mean old grouch." I can't believe that there is anyone on the face of the earth who starts out in life planning to be a "mean old grouch." We all need love and understanding. We all have a place inside of us that requires acceptance from others. But one trial leads to another. We find ourselves being misunderstood, shunned, and pointed at. After time hardness develops over that spot in our hearts and instead of being hurt by such reaction, we become angry. "I don't want your pity!"

We must learn, in the case of others, to think for a moment when someone we have tried to help turns on us like that. We have a reaction of anger just like Job's friends. We get defensive and ask, even if within ourselves, "What did I do buddy?" As Christians we need to learn to suppress that emotion. What we don't see going on in the spiritual background is the devil playing us like pawns in a chess game. He doesn't want us to have compassion on others because that is our greatest tool in this war of the souls. When we stand together, sharing each others' load when the going gets tough, we become a spiritually undefeatable foe, especially when we are believers in Christ. Love, first to Christ, then to our fellow man is a weapon that destroys our enemy every time.

But if he can get us to be angry to the point that we give up on another, if he can drive that wedge of judgment between us (and quite often he does) then he defeats that love-weapon. It is rendered useless and he can have a heyday with both parties.

COMPASSION TO HAVE AND TO GIVE

The truth is we do want each other's pity but our prideful teaching tells us that we don't. We don't want others to feel sorry for us looking down on us (that form of pity too is a weapon of the enemy) but we do want and need each other's compassion.

We have looked at this from the giving end. What about the receiving end? When we find ourselves struck down, like Brad in the story, in reality we feel lonely. We may be in a large crowd. Perhaps we are part of a family and it looks like there's no way we could ever be lonely. But we can be alone in a crowd or in a group. Things that are going on in our life can so fill our minds making us feel different, left out, and all alone. We need someone to understand, someone we can have confidence in and share those feelings that are going on inside of us. Jesus knew this. That's just one of the reasons He gave the greatest commandments, to love the Lord God with all our heart, soul, and mind, and then to love our brother as ourselves. He said to hang all the laws and commandments on these. Why did He say that? Because when we are first operating in love toward God and then our fellow man all the other commandments, all the "do's and do not's" just sort of hang neatly from this great "coat rack" of love. When we act and react in love, even when we do mess up, and even when we do make the wrong decisions, God and our brothers are there not to accuse and abuse but to stand with us through the trial. That is a great strength. This is unbeatable.

Even if we find ourselves in a "pitiless" situation where no one understands and cares we can still reach out to God. I admire Job. He had to stand alone in his ordeal. Job cried out, "How long will you guys accuse me? How long will you stand against me? God has allowed this to happen to me and I don't know why. I feel like God has made an enemy out of me and has allowed all my enemies to surround me. Even my brothers are far from me and my friends have become like strangers. My own family has turned against me and I am offensive to them. I wish my words were written in a book (they are now) or inscribed on a rock so that they would forever be seen!" Job was letting those feelings out. He was crying out for help, and help was shortly on its way.

We cry out for help. That cry comes in many different ways. Our job as Christians is to learn to recognize that cry so we can help instead of condemn.

TIMELESS WORDS

Job then spoke some words that are timeless. He made a confession that came from the center of his heart – his very being. They were words of faith, not blind faith, or confessions we have been taught

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like formulas that are supposed to get to the heart of God. No, Job spoke these things from his inner being and they became like swords against the enemy of his soul. Job said, *"I know my Redeemer lives and that He will stand in the last days on this Earth. I know that after my flesh has been destroyed and passed on that I shall see God. I long for Him."* That was powerful. It let Job know that even in this hopeless situation there was hope. Physically it looked like there was no way out. He was doomed for destruction. If something didn't happen soon, he was going to die.

But he stood strong. In the midst of the pain of those boils, the lack of compassion from his friends, the losses he had suffered, and the emptiness of his own heart, he stretched his neck toward the sky and proclaimed, "I know He is there and I trust Him. I know that He has compassion on me. I know that I can depend on Him even though I don't understand now."

I believe in Christians having victory. But victory is not always displayed by everything working out right. The sign of victory is not that we are financially secure or completely healthy. Victory is not found in a multitude of friends, popularity in the community or any of the signs the world teaches as marks of success. Victory doesn't come even after we have defeated the enemy. Victory is found in the midst of crisis. Victory comes when our heart's attitude has been changed and we can look around us at all the bad things that are happening and going on. The enemy's bombs and mortars are exploding all around us. Perhaps we have been sorely wounded in the battle. In these times victory comes when we can stretch our neck looking up toward the sky and proclaim, "I know my Redeemer lives! I know that regardless the outcome here in the end I will win in Him. Take my health, take my wealth, and take my friends and family if you can! In Jesus Christ I still win!"

We want to define success by all the good things. I tell you success comes in the heat of battle. It comes in the middle of persecution. It comes in these things because of our genuine faith in our Redeemer regardless of circumstances.

Whether we ever get the pity or compassion we need and desire, we can still have victory in Jesus Christ for He and He alone is our true and lasting victory over this world, sin, and the flesh! His compassion extends way beyond what any mortal man can feel. In the end He is always our victory in any situation!

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Chapter 9
The Trial of Comparison
Job 20:1 – 21:34

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*“Listen carefully to my speech,
And let this be your consolation.
Bear with me that I may speak,
And after I have spoken, keep mocking.”
Job 21:2-3*

*I*t baffles the mind. Why does it seem that God's people must endure struggles? Most Christians that I know are not wealthy people. I am familiar with some wealthy people who, though they have good morals, some are even regular church attendees, yet they are not dedicated to God. They are more interested in making money and boosting the economy of their congregation than they are in the conversion of souls. Why must those who have a strong desire to see people come to the Lord and see Christians grow in Christ be largely financially distraught? It is a puzzling question. I have wondered these things many times.

"Lord," I pray, "if You'd just let me win the lottery just think of all the good we could accomplish." Have you ever wondered that? Have you ever questioned God about things like this? Perhaps I'm by myself in this (but I don't think so).

"They'll get theirs in the end!" Have you heard people make statements like this? It is true that the wicked will be judged for their evil and their negligence of God. That's a given. It is certain. Why then does it seem like they continue to prosper when those of us who would love to have financial freedom and feel we would have no problem using our wealth for God seem to plod along in our poverty?

These are questions that can only be fully answered by God Himself. If they plague us then they are being used by the devil to further tempt us. They are intended to drive us away from God or at least feel hard at Him. As believers in Christ, we must be aware of the tactics of our enemy or he will drive us mad with wondering and questioning.

QUESTIONING GOD

Let me say that God doesn't punish us for questioning. He really understands. But He does possess the foreknowledge of all our lives and

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He knows that there are times wealth will in turn hurt us more than help us. "I don't see it," I hear. To be honest there are times I don't see it either. Yet God knows what is best for our individual training as we fill the ranks of His army.

We must learn that He holds the answer to all our questions but at times He chooses to remain silent and let our questions go unanswered. It doesn't seem like it but it really is for our own good. We learn to trust God in that and as we do, we will become stronger as we go along.

Job had questions. His "comforters" were quick to remind him how that, even though it may seem that the wicked prosper, their end will be fatal. Their insinuation was that Job was amongst their ranks. It made sense, didn't it? I mean Job had been one of the most prosperous men among them and now look at him! He had lost it all and sat in ashes with his health failing fast. He had to be a wicked man in saints clothing (according to their doctrine).

Job was quick to bring defense. He reminded them how that the wicked just went on as if nothing was happening. They continued to prosper without giving God a second thought. Yes, they would get it in the end but not in the way that his friends believed. He told them that their answers were wrong because they were talking from the doctrine they had been taught. The problem with the doctrine was that life doesn't necessarily follow the rules. And that's the key to understanding this subject. There are no rules.

UNDERSTANDING PROSPERITY AND SUCCESS

To really understand and get the right perspective we have to look at a couple of words, namely "prosperity" and "success." "Prosperous" means to have success. We have changed the meaning of this word to indicate financial wealth. When we think of prosperity, we automatically see dollar signs. Success means that we have achieved something desired, or something that we have planned. So, looking at the definitions, if we have achieved a goal then we are prosperous and successful. That refers to money and finances only if this was our goal. If our goal is to win souls and we have won them then we have been successful. If this is true then we can be prosperous and successful without depending on the obvious definitions we have made these words to be.

If our goals and plans in life were simply to raise a family, providing the best we can for our children and to give a warm and happy home to them and our spouse, when we come to the end of life, if we have accomplished that goal then we have lived a successful, prosperous life. We may not have thousands of dollars to leave as an inheritance but the

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legacy of the memories we have provided along with the love given is an inheritance that money can never replace.

If having monetary wealth is our only goal then we set ourselves up in a delicate situation. A stock market plummet, a wrong business decision, or any number of things can leave one who only has money, in the despair of failure in a day's time. It will leave the individual with the feeling of failure because the goal was in vain. But to have a child, now grown to adulthood, to come to you and thank you for the training, the love, and the happy, though possibly meager home, brings reward that money cannot buy.

We need to restore prosperity and success to their original definitions. When we do, we can begin to get the right perspective on life. The devil has tempted us to long for wealth telling us that this is the way to success, comfort, and a life of ease. But few that are wealthy really experience what they have longed for. It becomes a trap because money is so easily spent and so hard to come by. So, we must continue making more and more of it so our supply will not run out.

Job brought up the point that those without God seemed to have what they wanted. So why should they call upon God? Why should they give up their life of ease? They had seen the troubles of those who live for God and they don't need that!

It's true. Regardless what is the situation of our life, if we live for God there will be some problems. So why live for Him? The answer is simply because He will be there for us. Tragedy knows no bounds that we may set between Christians and non-Christians. Many Christians have come to a terrible end. But there is a difference.

Without God we must somehow find our way through tragedy. Without God the bad things that come to us must be dealt with on our own. But with God we have hope that if we'll depend on Him, He will pull us through tragedy and hardship.

Besides, it's not all bad! To experience the presence of God is a wonderful thing! Sure, bad things happen to us but many good things happen as well! How wonderful to be able to put some sense to life's puzzlements. How great it is to know that we can trust God and that He brings blessings to us even when bad things take place.

In most cases when an individual leaves this life we don't remember just the bad things about them. We have a tendency to hang on to the good things about them. We talk about the good things and very seldom mention the bad ones. It is the same with the Lord. Bad situations are going to arise but the good outweighs the bad!

Job was struggling with these same "success" definitions. He had possessed great wealth had enjoyed being prominent and well-known. He

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had felt the pride of being noted as one who helps the less fortunate. And now he was on the other side of the fence. All the things he had once believed seemed to be crashing down all around him.

FINDING THE KEY

He found the key to make sense of it all. It was in God. He alone held the answers to all the questions. Job knew that. He hadn't heard all the answers yet but he knew that God had them. He also knew that if he held on long enough, he'd find the answers himself. And we will too.

To find the answers we have to first ask the questions. But we can't stop at asking questions. We have to wait for the answers. Sometimes the answer is simply to be patient. There are some questions God just refuses to answer on this side of life. He knows that we can't really comprehend them now and that is grace. If we know that the answer to a question will really hurt an individual more than help them, we will withhold it not because we don't want them to know but because it is pointless to make matters worse. Have you ever been there? Job was on the brink of finding some answers that he totally didn't expect. They wouldn't necessarily be direct answers to his questions but they would teach him that God had the situation well under control.

God has our situation under control too. It may not seem like it but He does. He will make sense of it all. If we are feeling like a failure maybe we need to look at our goals again. If we are distraught because it seems our goals will never be realized perhaps it's time to do some redefining in our lives. After the questions have been asked, it's time to sit quietly in the presence of God and let Him speak to our hearts. If He doesn't directly answer our questions, He will give us direction and that will bring peace to the situation.

Where the temptation comes in is when we compare what we see with the answers we get from God. Job was confused because what he witnessed with his eyes didn't match what he had been taught in his head. When we begin to compare, we get discouraged and that is the enemy of our souls trying desperately to draw us away from the peace of mind God wants to give us.

It is human nature to want to compare. Peter did. In the last chapter of John Jesus was telling Peter some things about his life that made him feel very uncomfortable. Jesus plainly told him that there would come a time when he would be a prisoner for his faith. Peter didn't like it. He looked over at John who had gotten the reputation of being "the one Jesus loved." I don't believe Jesus loved John more than He did Peter. John was just more affectionate than Peter was. I have never read where Peter ever laid his head on Jesus' chest. John was just a very affectionate person. So, Peter asked Jesus, "Lord, what about him?"

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The answer Jesus gave Peter was basically, "That's none of your business, Peter. If I should allow him to live to a ripe old age what is that to you? It won't affect your own life." In a nutshell that's what Jesus told him. It may sound harsh and hard but what Jesus was really telling him was that he needed to live his own life for Christ and not to be comparing himself with others. We can all be successful and we can all be great individuals for God if we stick to His plan for our lives and not always be trying to copy what another is doing. The only pattern that really works is the pattern of Jesus Himself. Why is that? That answer is simple: He's the only One who lived a perfect life.

The trial of comparison comes when we allow ourselves to question God about why others always seem to be getting it right when we are always getting it wrong. It's okay to admire someone's faith. It's even okay to want to accomplish the same things another Christian seems to be accomplishing. But we must define those desires by God's plan for us. When we find it then we don't have to worry whether we've done it right or not. If we are following Him, then it's right!

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Chapter 10
The Trial of Fear
Job 22:1 – 24:25

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*“Look, I go forward, but He is not there,
And backward, but I cannot perceive Him;
When He works on the left hand, I cannot behold Him;
When He turns to the right hand, I cannot see Him.
But He knows the way that I take;
When He has tested me, I shall come forth as gold.”
Job 23:8-10*

*P*ete stood at the order of the judge, although he almost didn't make it all the way up because of a strange weakness and wobbliness in his legs. He didn't completely understand why; he had always been a strong man. His head swam in dizziness as he came completely erect to his full height.

Some months before he had been a free man doing basically whatever he wanted. He had never realized just how much freedom he really had. He never appreciated the fact that he could come and go as he pleased. If he got up and felt like not going to work, he could choose to do that.

But for the last few months he had been in jail. His excursions around the place were limited to where and when his keepers would allow him to go. He ate only when it was mealtime and other than sitting in his cell, he could go nowhere else without express permission and before a watchful eye.

Yes, there was television but after a few days of staring at a "tube in a box" boredom sat in and he curiously found himself wishing for the opposite of what he had wished for all his life. Before he had dreamed of the day when he wouldn't have to interrupt peaceful sleep to rise early and get ready for work. He knew that if he ever reached retirement, he would just love it but it wasn't what he had thought it would be. Now he longed to get back to the life he had once dreaded.

Pete knew in his heart that he had done nothing wrong. He had not committed the crime for which he was accused. But because a witness thought he looked like the man who had killed that shop owner and he had no one who could prove otherwise, he was taking the rap.

Maybe a death sentence wouldn't be so bad if he had to face years of what he had experienced for the last several months. It was no life;

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only existence. If he could not live free then death would be mercifully appealing.

Still this feeling inside that he couldn't explain ripped through him like a knife cutting paper into shreds. What was it? Then he realized that for the first time in his life he was terrified. Though death seemed like the more humane solution if he could not be dismissed, the thought of ceasing to exist made him afraid. What was it like to die? What torture it was to want to live and want to die at the same time!

Job's friend, Eliphaz, sat before him and now began a barrage of accusations of which Job was not guilty. He had answered most of these before. But up until now they had only been insinuations. Listen to his words and imagine that you were sitting in Job's place, "Is not your wickedness great and your sin endless? You have taken securities from others for no reason! You have taken what little clothing the naked had, you have not given refreshment to weary travelers. You have not given food to those who are hungry. You have sent widows away empty-handed and what little strength the orphans had you have crushed. This is why you are now afraid and in deep trouble! You are in the depths of darkness and you can't see! You are drowning in a deep sea!"

"You feel like you know more than God does! You think you are hidden from His sight by thick clouds. Why don't you just repent, Job? Say the words and you will be forgiven and restored. Even though you are guilty of these things He will deliver you if you'll just see it our way!"

How would we stand before such accusation? Most of us would lash out in our defense and if we had the strength, we'd be ready to put on the boxing gloves for a round or two with this guy!

STANDING IN FEAR

But Job went a completely different direction. As we already said he had addressed these things before with his accusers. Now instead of defending himself he fell at the feet of a merciful God. He wished that he could stand directly before God and state his case. If he only had the chance, he could bring his argument before Him and he would be delivered from "His Judge."

But God was nowhere to be found. Whatever direction he turned Job couldn't find him. Job knew that when his test was over, he would come through like gold refined in the fire because he knew he was innocent of what his friends had accused him of.

Still, he stood in great fear. He was afraid of God. He recognized the great power of the Almighty and knew that he could never hold up against Him. Job stated again using many examples of how those

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considered to be wicked continued shamelessly in the sight of God. They didn't care how they treated people and didn't care how others perceived it. He knew that they would be punished one day for their crime; there was no question about that.

What plagued him the most was the fact that it seemed the righteous received no special treatment. They too suffered and he was living proof of it. What was the answer? When would an explanation finally come? This scared him the most because it seemed there was no answer in sight.

This may have been the greatest trial of Job. Fear is a plague that tears down everything that we seem to stand for. His fear had been deeply imbedded inside of him. He may have thought it was gone because he probably hadn't felt it in many years. Now it was back.

It is one thing to be afraid of what man can do. Sure, there are those who could "pick us up and break us in two." Physical fear can be overcome when we realize the power of God within us. When we have discovered that the Holy Spirit gives us strength to withstand any physical condition we can come to the point where anything that can be done to our bodies doesn't frighten us as much because we know that even if we are killed our souls will go on forever. Job wasn't a novice. Although he was in great pain and had suffered terrible loss these physical things didn't even stack up against the terror going on inside of him.

And that is the worst fear – the kind that plagues us within. That fear of separation from God is like a plague that ravishes our lives. Once we have experienced the Comforter, then to feel like He has left, well, that's scary stuff! We know the Scriptural passages and we have quoted them to others many times. We know how to pray for we have taken hold the horns of the altar of Heaven and have seen God Almighty at work in our lives and the lives of others.

But now it seems that God has left us. Why would He do that? Did He not promise that He would never leave nor forsake us? Where is He? Why did He go? It brings a terror like we have never known in our hearts. It seems like we have been totally left alone!

GONE BUT NOT GONE

Learning to ride a bicycle for the first time is a scary experience; at least it was for me. Our neighbor helped my sister and I learn. She was a teenager with a kind heart towards kids and Dad was working second shift so was gone during the day and couldn't be there to teach us. That summer Mary taught us. Her methods were conventional, holding the back of the bike as we peddled down the sidewalk, riding with confidence because we knew that she was right behind. When she felt like we were

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ready she would let go and we were on our own. Of course, during this process, I looked back and realizing she was not holding on I would either stop the bike and walk it back or I would get scared and wreck.

Then the day came when she let go and I was totally unaware of it. I was going down the sidewalk talking as I rode. But when I asked Mary a question and she didn't answer I looked back only to discover that I had ridden almost the full length of the block by myself! Mary stood waving at the other end. I was suddenly terrified! I was that far away from her on my own; by myself! But then it hit me that I wasn't alone. Even though she was at the other end of the block she was watching me very carefully. My confidence returned and she never had to push me along again.

In a way it's like that with God. He stays by our side making every step with us. He teaches us in love and pushes us along. We feel safe because we know He is there speaking to our hearts and letting us feel the warmth of His touch.

Then the day arrives when we feel like we are all alone. Where did God go? Why would He do this to me? The questions come like a flood and they are certainly born out of fear – the fear of being separated from possibly the only comfort we have ever known; certainly, the best.

He knows that we must face our fears and we must appreciate His presence. He may allow us to experience these times just so that we know what we have in Him. But He is still there. In the midst of our fright, we may not see Him. Job didn't. He pleaded for a chance to see Him once again. But rest assured that He is not far. His watchful eye is always upon us.

THE BEST WAY TO OVERCOME FEAR

The best way to overcome our fear is to meet it head on. I realize that this is cliché. The words are easy to say when we aren't in the middle of the trial of fear. If Mary hadn't let go of my bike I might never have learned to ride, certainly I wouldn't have known that I could. There came a time when letting go was the only way. It is the same with God. There comes a time when He "let's go" so that we can learn to ride through life. We need Him alright. But we must also appreciate what He has done for us. If we don't have those times when we realize our complete need for God, we might lapse into somehow thinking that we are doing life on our own. We begin to take the credit for success. We become over-confident in ourselves.

Even in these times of loneliness and loss God is there watching, waiting to catch us if we begin to fall. He won't let us down; it just seems that way for a time.

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These trials are for us. They are not punishment for wrong-doing. We've got to get that in our heads. Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sin and in Him that punishment is gone. We think that God leaves us because of sin. We could quote many Old Testament passages that support this. But God's not punishing us under grace. Instead, He is teaching us; instructing us and molding us into that useful tool for His kingdom.

The trial of fear is but one of those teaching methods. When we overcome our fears, looking back, we think, "Man, was I silly for feeling that way!" It's the hindsight thing you know? It's a part of growing faith not a lack of faith. Know that He is always there even when it doesn't feel like it!

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Chapter 11
The Trial of Righteousness
Job 25:1 – 31:40

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*“Moreover Job continued his discourse, and said:
‘As God lives, who has taken away my justice,
And the Almighty, who has made my soul bitter,
As long as my breath is in me,
And the breath of God in my nostrils,
My lips will not speak wickedness,
Nor my tongue utter deceit.
Far be it from me
That I should say you are right;
Till I die I will not put away my integrity from me.”
Job 27:1-5*

Have you ever heard someone speak of another by saying something like, “Aw, I know he’s not perfect but he sure is a good ole’ boy! Why, he’d give you the shirt right off his back!” There are a lot of good individuals like that on this Earth. They are honest, hard-working people just trying to get by in this life. They have fairly good morals and if they see someone in need, they probably would give them the shirt off their back. But they aren’t righteous.

The word “righteous” in its literal sense refers to having a “right standing before God.” It means that we are worthy to stand before the Almighty. In the days of Job, the only hope of righteousness was people’s faith and belief in God. Speaking of Abraham, the Bible tells us in Genesis 15:6 that his belief in God was counted as righteousness. It was the only hope those people of the Old Testament had. There was no sacrifice for their sin as of yet. They were still making temporary animal sacrifices for sin committed and to worship Jehovah God.

The world struggles for righteousness. It has become a trial. It was a trial for Job. I don’t know where exactly Bildad intended to go with his short speech in Job twenty-five but I have to say, he hit the nail on the head. He and his friends had just spent the bulk of this book accusing Job of committing some sin deserving of his loss and sickness. Now in six short verses he speaks of the power and might of the Almighty God then asks the question, “How then can man be righteous before God?” (Verse 4). He goes on to elaborate on how unworthy man is of God and he is right.

In the following six chapters Job doesn’t argue with Bildad about this. He knows he is right. Instead, he speaks about some of the other things he has been accused of. In chapter twenty-six Job is, in a way, agreeing with Bildad. He goes on to further speak of the mighty power of God concluding the chapter with verse fourteen, *“Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power who can understand?”*

Then in chapter twenty-seven he says that he will hold on to his righteousness. In other words, he’s saying, “I think I’m right in this!” He says that he is not wicked and then goes on to speak of the end of the wicked man.

In chapter twenty-eight Job tells how man has been able to go where no creature on the Earth has gone and see the wealth of precious stones. He tells how man mines for these jewels but then says that they

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cannot be compared to wisdom. “Where is wisdom mined?” he basically asks. He ends chapter twenty-eight by saying, “*Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding.*” (Verse 28).

Chapter twenty-nine finds Job wishing for the days of the past. He remembers how that he had helped others and was a respected man in their community. He gave wise counsel to those in need and commanded respect because of his belief in God. In verse fourteen he says, “*I put on righteousness, and it clothed me.*” He was saying that his belief in God gave him all these things and was his adorning.

But it is all different in Chapter thirty. Here Job questions God. He has believed in Him and has done His work yet the respect he had is gone. He is not remembered for all the good that he did but only for his current situation. Job hints at part of his problem in verse twenty-two when he says, “*You spoil my success.*” In other words, “God, You have ruined everything!” His music has turned from rejoicing to mourning.

Finally, in Chapter thirty-one Job takes inventory of his life. It is like he is searching to remember if he has done something wrong that would make him deserving of his current condition. He hasn't lusted for other women, he hasn't lied or walked in falsehood, he hasn't mistreated his servants. He has clothed those in need and given them shelter. He hasn't based his success on the money or belongings he had. He hasn't done any of these things! So why has this happened to him?

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Their belief was much like many today. We have addressed this particular problem already so we won't dwell long on it here but we are speaking of Christians and even entire congregations who believe that somehow our calamities, misfortunes, and pain are related to sin that might be in our lives. God is punishing us for our wrong-doing. I can't say that God won't allow us to be punished for sin but I can say that He doesn't base His love and forgiveness upon our good morals. If He did, none of us would ever have hope of being righteous. Rather, He bases His love and forgiveness upon the blood of Christ applied to our lives. Christ is our sin covering.

Does this give us a license to do whatever we want and not have to worry about whether it is sin against God or not? Of course not. But, as believers in Christ we shouldn't have to struggle with things like that. We should be falling so in love with Jesus Christ that we don't even consider what we can get away with.

What we are dealing with is righteousness – a right standing before God. Before Christ God extended righteousness to individuals based on

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their belief and faith in Him. There were many things that He had to “let slide” because man just wouldn’t have had a chance otherwise.

Job was wrestling with the age-old problem that righteousness was linked with the good deeds we have done. So were his “comforters.” They all had come to believe that righteousness was earned by their well-doing. But it wasn’t. It was because of faith in God.

When we base righteousness on our merits then it becomes an unbearable trial. When we live in belief that God is punishing us when things go wrong and it takes away part of our righteousness then it is a temptation put on ourselves at the whisper of the enemy.

The devil is always whispering. “Look at you! “How do you ever think you can be a righteous person?” “Now you’ve done it! You’ve been disobedient to God and you’ve slipped back a couple of notches in the process of righteousness. You’re going to have to start all over!”

BACKSLIDING

This is commonly called “backsliding.” There are basically two camps of thought on this subject: (1) The group that believes that when we come to Christ regardless what we do, how we feel, or what choices we make, we can never be taken out of the Christian standing. (2) The group that says whenever we commit the slightest trespass against God then we have fallen again from His grace and have to start all over each and every time. Both of these camps of thought are extreme. But as I have always taught, the truth lies somewhere in the middle.

I came from the second camp. I had been raised in church for which I am extremely thankful, but over the years, whether I had misinterpreted what I had heard or whether I had just been taught wrong doctrine, I believed that when I committed evil against God I had fallen backwards and had to start all over. Sin was to be shunned (and that is scriptural) and as a result those fallen in sin were to be shunned (that’s not scriptural). In most groups belonging to camp two, sin is further defined by men’s standards and let me tell you, man can put some pretty rough, hard, and impossible definitions on sin.

I was saved at an early age because of exposure to being in church, and, once again, I am thankful for that. But as I grew into a young teenager, I began to experience some new temptations. I seemed driven to try some things I had been taught were wrong and so it came to the point that I had to make a choice and I chose to “backslide.” Thus, by what I had come to believe I was no longer a Christian.

A year or two later I realized the error of my thinking and knew I had to return to the Lord and so I started all over again; got saved, got

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baptized, etc., etc. I tell you about myself so I don't have to write about someone else. This was the experience I had.

I do however want to insert this as a caution for those who live by this camp of thought. I have respect for you and you have the right to live for God in the way you have been taught. But I have observed over the years a fact worth considering. When teenagers who have been brought up in the legalistic camps stray from God it seems they go "hog-wild crazy." I have come to see that this is a result of being restrained from doing things they see other teenagers doing and so when they choose to "backslide" they want to experience it all.

I am not suggesting that we allow our kids to experiment with sexual desire, drugs, alcohol, and other harmful substances – not at all! But I am saying that we need to realize that some of the taboos taught to kids are temptations waiting to happen.

There are harmful teachings in the thoughts of camp one as well. The extreme in this camp says that whatever is done is already covered by the blood of Jesus and after we have confessed Christ as our Savior then whatever we choose to do we're safe.

It is true that all sin, past, present, and future is covered by His sacrifice. To say that after a person accepts Christ as Lord that he or she will never be tempted to sin again is so wrong that it's silly to even consider it. To be frank, once we have come to Christ, we're probably going to be tempted more than we ever were and sometimes we are going to yield to temptation. We don't have to, but rest assured, we will. We just sometimes give over to the flesh. Most people in camp two will cover those sins up. They will ask forgiveness for them but they don't want anyone to know about their "unrighteousness" and so they just conceal the truth.

Then those who are extreme in camp one will just say, "Oh well, Christ has already forgiven me for that so what's the big deal?" Some in camp one will even justify their actions by saying something like, "We're human; we have to sin."

Of course, we're talking extremes here but I have seen both and they do exist. Both camps will give scriptural "proof" to support their teaching and it gets very confusing. There are truths from both camps. We just need to look at what the Bible is teaching and get to the meat of the matter.

First of all, the Bible tells us in Hebrews 6:4-6, "*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame.*" Some use this passage

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of scripture to insist that once a person has committed themselves to Christ it is impossible to fall away. But look at the verses again. It says *"if they fall away,"* which is to say that we can fall away. What the writer of Hebrews is saying is not that we can't fall away but that if we do, and then return to Christ we don't do it all over again. If we do, we are basically crucifying Christ again. But He was crucified once for all! (See Hebrews 10:10).

Hebrews is still speaking along these lines in 10:26-29 which says, *"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?"* It is telling us that if we willfully sin, rejecting the sacrifice of Christ, then there is no more pardon available. This is it! Not to say that we cannot return to Christian fellowship but we can't start all over again. No, we must return to where we were, ask forgiveness for what we have done and pick up where we left off and go on.

The great Apostle, Paul, also knew that coming to Christ wasn't a sure "shoe-in." He said in 1 Corinthians 9:27, *"But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified."* The King James Version uses the word, "Castaway." Now, I don't believe Paul spent his time worrying and wondering if he would make it. I believe, as seen in his writing, that he knew we have assurance of our salvation. But he also knew that he couldn't just depend on the fact that he was called and feel like that would grant him eternal security. He knew that his security depended solely on Christ but that he needed to discipline himself into obedience to the word.

This next passage is a bit longer but well worth examination here. Romans 11:17-24 says, *"And if some of the branches were broken off, and you, being a wild olive tree, were grafted in among them, and with them became partaker of the root and fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, remember that you do not support the root, but the root supports you."*

"You will say then, "Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in." Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. Do not be haughty, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. Therefore, consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off. And they also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in, for God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and were grafted contrary to

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nature into a cultivated olive tree, how much more will these, who are natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?"

Paul uses the picture of the olive tree representing the Kingdom of God and the cut off branches as the Jews who refused to believe in the work of Christ. They were cut off and those of us among the Gentiles who came to Christ were grafted in the tree in their place. The point is that Paul very plainly lets us know that if we fail to continue in Christ we too can be cut off. And those who were not believers, if they now believe, can be grafted back in. We must not get proud and boastful about our standing in Christ. He did it all for us but if we choose to reject Him, we can be cut out again.

So, what kind of security do we have in Christ if it is not an eternal security? I've always said that I believe in eternal security as long as we choose to remain eternally secure. Once again it is by our own choice. It has always been by our own choice. This world would like to teach us to blame others or something else but when it comes right down to it, it has always been our own choosing. Even when we are sorely tempted and fail, we had to choose at some point to give in to that temptation.

BLASPHEMY

We need to look briefly at one more point that has puzzled men for centuries. Jesus said in Matthew 12:31, *"Therefore I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven men."* This has often been referred to as the "unpardonable sin." People have put many and various definitions to this passage of scripture. But if we really think about it and examine it in light of the Bible, we know that God forgives us for everything when we come to Him by the grace of Christ Jesus and His provision. How can we truly blaspheme someone unless we know them? We can talk against them and repeat what we have heard. But we must know the person before we can really tell any dirt on them. By the same token we must have known the Holy Spirit to really blaspheme against Him. This passage isn't speaking about someone who has never known the Lord and sought His pardon. Rather Jesus is speaking of those who have tasted a bite of the glory of God and willfully turn away, speaking evil of the work of God's Spirit. If they die without repentance, they have no hope of salvation.

John tells us what to do when we do sin against God. Again, we don't just start over. The scripture has plainly told us that we can't do that. John wrote, *"My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"* (1 John 2:1-2). Christ is our hope and our forgiveness. In Him we can go to the Father and ask forgiveness for any sin we commit. It's not starting all

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over but it is admitting our wrong, confessing that we have sinned and then going on in faith in the work of Christ in our lives.

Only our own choice to remove ourselves from His body will keep us away from Him. Once again it is all by our own choice. Man can't pronounce us out of the Kingdom; man cannot excommunicate us from the grace of Christ. Only we ourselves can do that.

This brings us back to the trial of righteousness. It becomes a trial when we are trying to live up to the standards of men. It is a fierce battle when we believe that we can do certain things that will make us worthy of standing before God. When we know that any righteousness we may have only comes through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus and the love He has extended through the grace of God then we don't have to live in a fierce trial but simply rest in the fact that He made righteousness possible, but only through Him. We don't have to battle and believe false teachings to have security in Christ. But we do have to fall in love with Jesus to the point that we aren't worried about losing our salvation. As long as we stay snuggled up to Him and listen to His guiding voice for our lives, we can rest in that.

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Chapter 12
The Trial of Religion
Job 32:1 – 37:24

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*“Therefore men fear Him;
He shows no partiality to any who are wise of heart.”
Job 37:24*

“You’ll be sorry you did that, son,” my dad said.

“But, Dad, it might be a very good thing for me!” I protested thinking that he just didn’t understand. I was old enough to make up my own mind and I did but I had talked with him about a very important decision. I was about to join the United States Army in order to have a job. We were at the dawn of the 1980’s and times were tough. Prices were soaring and jobs were next near to impossible to find. I had spent the past four years trying to sell insurance and had bounced between three different companies and couldn’t seem to make ends meet for my young family.

Not knowing the regulations and rules regarding the military I had determined to go into the Chaplain’s Assistant program thinking that I could work my way up to the Chaplaincy. I soon found out that it didn’t work that way.

I did join the army, did my three-year hitch and found out that Dad was right. Even though I served during peace-time that decision became a source of much hardship for my family. I have always been thankful for the experiences and they have been the subjects of many of the articles I have written but I quickly saw the “error of my ways” and couldn’t wait until the day arrived for my “hitch” to be up. Even though Dad dropped out of school in the third grade he had a lot of wisdom and education that I didn’t realize he had. He had been right again. It’s surprising how that the older we get the smarter our parents seem to get don’t you agree?

Youth is a wonderful but confusing period. It is a time when you think you know everything but continue to find out how little you really know. Elihu was younger than Job and his three friends. The Bible doesn’t say how much younger because we really don’t know how old Job was when all this happened. He could have been a hundred and fifty and Elihu only one hundred because it took place while men were still living in the period of longevity when life spans were becoming shorter but people still lived twice as long as we do today (by the way, there’s a good explanation of longevity but we won’t go into that now).

Regardless their actual age Elihu had been taught to respect his elders. He kept his mouth shut until Job and his three friends had finished their conversation and that's when he finally got the opportunity to speak up. He had listened to all the arguments from Job's three friends who were trying to convince Job that he was guilty of some horrible sin and that if he'd just own up to that and repent, he would be forgiven and all the trouble that had happened to him would go away. In a nutshell that pretty well sums it up.

THE CONTEXT OF WORDS

At the beginning of Chapter thirty-two Elihu had concluded that Job was righteous in his own eyes and his three friends had miserably failed in convincing Job otherwise. Though they were great in age they weren't necessarily wise in his opinion (see 32:9). Elihu felt like he had the answers. Though he said that he wouldn't use the same words as Job's three friends in a sense he did. He said them a different way and some of the things he spoke really made sense. But that's the problem. They do make sense but it is the context in which they are spoken that makes it all wrong.

Job had said that if he could only meet with God then he could bring his argument – present his case - and he felt sure he had grounds to win. But the problem was that he knew that God was too great, and to stand before the Almighty would render him speechless. And indeed, it would as it would any of us. So Elihu told Job that he would stand in God's place. Though he didn't put himself equal with God he felt that he could be God's representative on Earth and so Job could present his case to Elihu and not be afraid.

Elihu felt that he had all the answers because he felt he was standing in God's place here on Earth. He told Job, "*Hold your peace, and I will teach you wisdom*" (Job 33:33). He also told Job that he could talk with him and he would listen but then in the same breath told him to be quiet and listen to him. Elihu wanted to be Job's counselor and I believe from his words that he really did want to help Job but he had no idea what he was doing.

Again, even though Elihu said that he wouldn't use the same arguments as Job's three friends, ultimately, he did. He spoke of the greatness of God and God is great. But he continued with the accusation that Job had done wickedly and God was punishing him for it. He basically flat out said that Job didn't know what he was talking about (see 34:34-37)! He also accused Job of speaking out against God, since God didn't choose to strike him dead when he started, and so his words got progressively bolder and more blasphemous (see 35:13-16).

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Elihu then turned to tell of the awesomeness of the Almighty God. And indeed, He is awesome. I agree with Elihu that human flesh in its sinful state cannot stand before the full glory of God. We are unworthy aside from Christ. But look at his words. In a sense instead of helping Job he was justifying himself as standing in the stead of God. This is the trial of religion.

IN THE PLACE OF GOD

For centuries man has wanted to stand in the place of God. It is a temptation as old as Adam and Eve. The devil had wanted to stand in the place of God – To be exalted above Him and that got him thrown out of Heaven. He tempted Adam and Eve to do the same and they ate of the forbidden fruit in order to be equal with God and that got them kicked out of Eden.

All through the Bible we see men trying to stand in God's place. That's what began King Saul's downfall. He had been waiting for Samuel to come and sacrifice to God before entering into a great battle. Saul got impatient when Samuel was late and performed the sacrifice himself. But I believe that if we read between the lines and look at the motives of Saul's heart, we see that Saul was beginning to think that he didn't need Samuel any more. He was as great as Samuel and so he did the job appointed by God for the priest only. It was an attempt to be in God's place.

God set up the Jewish priesthood so that the people didn't have to come before Him for themselves. When at the foot of Mt. Sinai God spoke to the whole assembly out of Heaven and it was so fearsome that they asked Moses to talk to God about not doing that again. It scared them. Moses became God's spoke person not out of pride or to be in God's place but only by God's direction. Moses, again, at God's direction, set up the priesthood so they could perform the sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. By the time of Jesus' arrival, we see how they evolved.

All through the centuries of Christianity men have tried to take the place of God. While I believe that we should have respect for our Christian leaders and those whom God has placed in His Church to guide the body of Christ, still, we must never forget that we come to God, each of us, on our own. We continue to do that. It doesn't stop after salvation. We can have others agree with us in prayer and we can have others pray for us, but ultimately, we must contact God for ourselves. That's one of the things Jesus came to do: To make us each priests and kings. When another individual seeks control of your life telling you that God has spoken to them on your behalf you can know that God will also speak to your heart and prepare you for what He may be telling you through them. It will be confirmed in your own heart.

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I'm not saying that God can't work in that way. He's God and He can do whatever He wants to. But I am advising that we be cautious of those individuals who want to control other Christians for their own benefit.

The priests of Jesus' day controlled the people by telling them what the Law meant and then putting extreme definitions on them. Their purpose was to control the people. The priests received the best education in the Law and the other Jewish people were to depend on them for interpretation. When ministers of the Gospel do this same thing today it is always for selfish control and motives.

Sometimes it happens without the minister even realizing what he or she is doing. They have been trained and they just fulfill what they have been taught. But careful examination of the scripture can be a revealing thing. We must learn to go to God for ourselves.

Today we hire ministers. In some cases, the process isn't much different than hiring an individual for a job. I am not speaking against a minister receiving wages for his or her work. That is Biblical. But it is more than a job – It is a Divine ordination. When ministers are "hired" they are expected to fulfill certain duties such as calling on the sick, performing weddings, funerals, visitation of members and prospective members, and the list goes on. In many cases church members feel exempt from doing some of these things because they have "hired" a minister to do it for them. That is never true. We are all called to visit others and pray for the sick. If we hire someone to do those things in our place is that really that much different than hiring someone to mow our lawn?

RELIGION

It borders on religion. "But isn't Christianity just another religion?" By the standards of the world and men's definitions it is considered as such. But I want to propose to you that Christianity is not just another religion but in its truest form is the escape from religion.

Religion is a belief in a god that holds to a set of rules that define morals. There are requirements for appeasing the god – the object of worship. There are ceremonies that must be held in the strictest of ways. If these rules are not obeyed and if these ceremonies are not performed correctly, repeatedly, and with the utmost of care, the individual worshipping may be rejected by the objects of worship and its leaders. It can result in severe punishment and in some countries of the world even death.

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Judaism is a religion. Yes, its object of worship is indeed the one true God of the universe. But it is governed by rules and ceremonies. God allowed this religion to develop to prove to man that, even when worshipping the one true God, religion still isn't the way.

Christ came to free us, not only from sin and death but also from religion. This trial that Job found himself in was one of religion. Elihu spoke all the right things. He actually had some pretty good points. But it was still religion. He was saying that if you do "A," "B," and "C" then the result would be "D." Job knew the formulas. He may have helped to come up with one or two of them. But he knew now more than ever that they weren't working.

We want to put God in a box. We define things and look for standards that will make the process work. Our whole lives are like that. We know that if we get good grades in school, go out for sports and participate in other extra curricular activities that it will help insure us a spot in a good college. Then if we get a good college education it will help to secure a good paying job afterwards. It's the formula. We know that if we keep an automobile well maintained, change the oil regularly, keep the tires rotated, and so on and so forth, that it will help to keep the vehicle running longer and smoother. It's the formula. And so, we try to make God work by formulas. If we do all the right things and fill our lives with good works then the formula says that we will secure a spot in Heaven. We think it's the formula.

But God doesn't work that way. In Christ we are free from the religious formulas. We come to Him and He becomes our righteousness as we saw in the last chapter. In Him we find that we have freedom, joy, happiness, and security. But if we study His life on Earth, we will soon discover that He was always going against the formulas. Even when He healed blinded eyes, opened deaf ears, made the dumb to speak, cured leprosy and raised the dead, He didn't do it twice the exact same way. He always did things differently. Why? Because He knew that we'd make a formula out of it. We can't make God live in a box. He will break out every time! He breaks the molds of religion.

That's what He was trying to do for Job. He was allowing the devil to bring these calamities upon him to prove that the formulas of religion just don't work. People are all different. Oh, we have the same five senses and the same basic emotions. But each one of us reacts to these emotions a little differently. It makes us unique. God knew we were that way and also knew religion would never work. We find ourselves bending and contracting to try to contort ourselves into the box of religion and even when we don't like it and it hurts, we feel we must do it in order to make the formula work. But it doesn't simply because our hearts are not in it.

Jesus came to win the hearts of men. He came so that our hearts would not be troubled. He came to heal our broken hearts. He wants us

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to be who we are – unique in our own special way because that's the way He made us.

Men try to make a religion out of Christianity by saying that we need to give a certain amount or that we must be in church each and every Sunday (or Sabbath, whatever may be your case). But the truth of the matter is that God wants us to do the things we do because we feel them in our hearts not because it's just the right thing to do or the way it has always been done.

When we try to fit God into a box then we will find ourselves in the midst of the trial of religion. It can be a gruesome taskmaster! It can make us slaves working mercilessly in man's interpretation and definitions of what God means in His word. But we've got to free ourselves from the box.

When we gather with a congregation, we must go because we want to and we feel God in that decision not because some man or woman told us that we've got to do it in order to make Heaven our home. When we give of our finances, we've got to do it because we feel God directing us not just because someone has said, "You've got to give this much – It's God's law!" Remember that in Christ we are free from the laws of man that require us to follow the formula.

Breathe in the breath of God! Let Him make you a living soul once again. Be free from man's rules and formulas and be free in Christ Jesus! He came to set us free! He came to make us alive! He came to bring us life abundantly not by regulations and formulas but by His own sacrifice that sets us free from religion! Be free indeed!

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Chapter 13
The Trial of the Almighty
Job 38:1 – 41:34

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“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind, and said:

“Who is this who darkens counsel

By words without knowledge?

Now prepare yourself like a man;

I will question you, and you shall answer Me.”

Job 40:6-7

The summer had been a hot and stormy one. None-the-less it didn't stop us from taking a group of kids to the Versailles State Park for a week of camp. It was a wonderful experience as most of the camps we held and attended were.

But an adventure was soon to be upon us. Clouds began rolling in, not just the big white fluffy ones, mind you, but dark, threatening storm clouds. As they ominously covered the sun, we knew that we were in for rain to say the least. As we were rounding up the kids and preparing for some alternate indoor activities the park ranger drove up and reported to us that there were tornado warnings out for the area. We thanked him but inside were wondering, "What do we do now?" Here we were in a wooded area, just a handful of adults – and we were responsible for the safety of all these kids! It was a responsibility that put more than a little scare into us.

The safest place was the shower houses. They were located in a hollow and were partially underground anyway. Built from concrete blocks, it seemed to be the sturdiest building in the camp grounds, so that's where we went. The men took the boys into the men's side while the ladies tried to calm the girls on their side. Of course, the boys acted tough but inside they were just as scared.

I stepped out of the shower house and gazed at the sky. I said some prayers too. I was scared inside but also as curious as a school boy. I had never actually seen a tornado and had always wanted to – from a distance - a safe distance. With a mixture of dread, anticipation, and curiosity, I stood watching as the wind increased swaying those magnificent trees back and forth. It boggled my mind that a wind could be so strong that it could actually send the majestic old trees toppling to the ground, breaking their limbs with seemingly no effort at all.

The wind grew stronger and the skies darkened even more. Then just as suddenly everything became unnaturally still. There were no

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animal noises and, had I been listening, I could have probably heard my own heartbeat in that instant. It was as if all of nature was silently waiting in what I thought could be the calm before the storm. I had heard that just before it really hit everything would become quiet and still. I watched expecting the monster to appear at any moment.

But nothing happened. Just as quickly as the threat of the dreaded beast of wind had come it had been dispelled. The all clear came from the radio we had taken with us into the shower houses. It had passed.

These terrible twirling storms of terror come in various sizes. They range from the enormously destructive gales, typhoons, and hurricanes that drive in from the great oceans of the Earth to the land tornados that have various classifications, to the very curious and mischievous whirlwinds that can arise on a clear afternoon.

Elihu had concluded his speech to Job talking about weather and particularly whirlwinds. It has been speculated that perhaps the sky had darkened and he could see the whirlwind coming in the distance as he spoke to Job. The Bible doesn't comment on that and maybe it's true. Just the same God showed up concealing the whirlwind.

GOD THE ALMIGHTY

We have already commented on how that no man can see the full glory of God in our natural form and not fall dead on the spot. His glory is too magnificent and too spectacular for any man to behold. So, when God chose to show up in a visible form, throughout the Bible He was always in disguise. With Moses He was in a burning bush. With Abraham He appeared as a man. As the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness on their way to the land of promise He was in a thick cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. With Job it was a whirlwind.

It is significant that He showed up in a whirlwind. After all Job had felt like he was in the lock of a terrible storm ever since his ordeal had begun. If I have my weather facts correct usually the whirling winds of the storm are located behind the rain, the hail, the lightening and the thunder. So, it is not unreasonable that God chose a whirlwind to signify that the storm was almost over.

That would be a relief for Job. He had suffered in nearly every area a man can suffer. He had experienced loss and pain. Then the trials of regret, confusion, ignorance, accusation, consequence, pitilessness, comparison, fear, righteousness, and religion had all challenged him. It was time for an answer.

The Lord began to speak to Job from the whirlwind. He started at the beginning of time and pounded Job with questions like, "Where were

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you when I laid the foundations of the Earth?” (Job 38:4). They were impossible questions for any man to answer. This was to be the final trial but this would be one in which Job would have no answer. “Have you commanded the morning since your days began, and caused the dawn to know its place” (Job 38:12). Still the questions came one after another. It was more in a moment than a man could answer in three or four lifetimes.

MAN’S KNOWLEDGE

Sometimes in our modern era of technology it seems that man does know all the answers. We have searched and researched. We have dug through the depths of knowledge that have been accumulated over the centuries. We think we have the answers. Still God questions, “*Can you lift up your voice to the clouds, that an abundance of water may cover you?*” (Job 38:34). I don’t think so. We can barely predict the weather. When the meteorologist says it’s going to be a clear day and an unexpected thunderstorm rolls in somehow, we get mad at him. But he can only look at his charts, the radar pictures, and track the weather. He cannot change it nor can any man. We take what comes.

Before I was married, I lived with my grandmother so as to have a room of my own (she lived next door to my parents so it wasn’t like I was far from home). During the evening there was a particular show I liked to watch but it was on opposite the news. She wanted to see what the weather was going to be. When she would say, “Why don’t we turn it and try to see what the weather is going to be,” I’d respond with something like, “Awe, Grandma, the weather’s going to be what it’s going to be anyway. We can’t change it.” She’d chuckle over that statement and I’d get to finish my show. I said that selfishly not in wisdom. I wanted to watch my show. It is nice to know what the weather could be like tomorrow but we have no choice but to take what God allows to come, be it sunshine or storm.

God asked questions of Job about nature. We can tame certain animals but even then, there can come a time when their wild nature takes over and they are out of control. I once read that a bumble bee should not be able to fly. Its wings are out of proportion to its body and it is not aerodynamically designed for flight. By man’s wisdom and knowledge, it should never get off the ground. But it does. I guess no one told the bumble bee that it shouldn’t be able to fly!

We think we’ve got it all figured out. So did Job even during all his trials. But when God gave him opportunity to speak his case in chapter forty, here’s what Job said, “*Behold, I am vile; what shall I answer You? I lay my hand over my mouth. Once I have spoken, but I will not answer; yes, twice, but I will proceed no further.*” (Job 40:4-5). Who can speak in defense against the Almighty God?

On and on went God's questions. Could Job ever be like God? Then He went on to describe fierce and dreaded beasts called Behemoth and Leviathan. There has been controversy over time as to just what these two creatures are and I have an opinion just like everyone else. For the moment however, let's just consider the fear that these creatures could strike in the heart of man. Why did God conclude His speech to Job by talking about these two creatures? He left them as a mystery because life is a mystery. Just when we think we've got it all figured out God throws in a ringer that messes it all up again. That's what He did to Job and that's what He does to us. Why? So that we'll know that we've got to depend on Him even in the midst of our knowledge and wisdom. Our finite minds will never figure it all out – Not in this life!

GOD'S ANSWER TO JOB'S QUESTIONS

God presented many questions to Job. It seems on the surface that He had just added cruelty to Job's punishment. He never really answered Job's questions. He never told him why he had lost everything including his children and why he had spent this time covered from head to foot with all those painful boils. But Job got the message. Sometimes our answer is simply, "Trust in the Lord;" easy words to say but very difficult to obey.

You see we all have questions of God. There is no doubt that He knows all the answers. It seems like it would be a simple thing for Him to just give us the answer and let us be on our way. But then we'd do just like we've tried to do all along. We'd make God our servant. We'd call on Him when we had a question or a need then just go on our merry ways. It's in our sinful nature. Job had it made before his ordeal. Life was good for Job. But he needed a heart stirring. He needed to be reminded just how almighty God is. He needed some stirring in his pot of life.

And so, we all do. God allows difficulties to arise from time to time just so that we'll be reminded that we don't have it all figured out and we don't have it all under control and in this life we never will. We have a great need for the Almighty God in our lives. We must depend on Him. We have used our technology to invent all sorts of devices and contraptions to make our lives easier. But, guess what? They never seem to get easier. The more we get the more we want. That is true whether we're talking about toys or money, food, or control. We can never seem to get enough.

In our knowledge we have thought to go beyond the need for God. We have split atoms, cured diseases, soared through outer space and much more. But the more knowledge we seem to get the more independent from God we feel. We are not. We must never forget that any knowledge God has allowed us to have has been tainted with our own

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sin. The devil influenced us to get knowledge from the very beginning claiming that it would make us like God. But it only drives us farther from Him.

This last trial of Job, the trial of the Almighty Himself, was one that would humble Job to the point that he knew he could never argue with God. In the awesome presence of Jehovah, he could only submit. He covered his mouth because he suddenly realized that he could say nothing that would be worthy to even utter in God's presence. God wants us to know that. We get high and mighty here on Earth. We tell God how He should do things and command miracles from Heaven like we have reigns on God. But we are no more than Job in His actual personage.

WHO ARE WE ANYWAY?

God will allow us to see just how insignificant we are. It may take a series of trials. He doesn't want to inflict us because of His great love for us. But it is also because of this same love that He does allow us to be tempted, tried and tested so we can return to our rightful places.

We have magnificent privileges in Christ Jesus. But we must always remember that it is only because of Christ Jesus. It is because of Him that God even puts up with us at times. How would we react to someone who was never satisfied? How long would we tolerate one who belly-aches when they don't get a raise and then belly-aches when they do because it isn't enough? How long would we put up with someone who complains when it rains then complains when it stops? I tell you it is amazing that we are even still alive the way many of us speak to God.

God's answers don't always have to be direct answers. Job never got his direct answer but he understood God's answer. The Almighty is God and He can do whatever He wants. Mankind questions God's very existence just because things don't go his way. We come up with theories and explanations that deny God's existence and minimize miracles from Heaven. Because of the way man presents them they sound knowledgeable but when you look under the surface, we discover that they are all a bunch of "hooflaw!"

For instance, I read a theory once that tried to explain the walls of Jericho toppling down after the children of Israel, under Joshua's command, marched around the city for seven days. The explanation went something like this: Somehow Joshua had been able to predict that an earthquake was coming and so he had the people march for seven days then seven times on the seventh day. At that precise moment the earthquake hit and the walls of Jericho toppled over. On the surface that may sound plausible but a close examination of that theory reveals how utterly ridiculous it is. First of all, how could Joshua have predicted an earthquake? We can't even predict one an hour before it hits today?

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Secondly why was only Rahab's dwelling spared? It was on the wall; why didn't it topple over too? The chances of something like that happening are nearly impossible. Yet people will choose to believe that theory rather than the simple fact that Joshua was obedient to what God told him to do and because of it, God granted a miracle! You see how we are?

We need to be knocked down a peg or two and God is just the One to do it! Only He can humble us and still make it turn out for the best. And He does. He will bring us down but even in that action it is an effort to build us up.

Job realized how much He needed God. Even in his terrible condition he suddenly knew that his entire life and existence depended on God. It is so with each and every person that lives, has ever lived, and ever will live on planet Earth. It is God who keeps the universe speeding, rotating, and in order. It is God who keeps this Earth on her spin creating gravity so we can each keep our feet on good ole' terra-firma! It is God that causes the crops to grow from a tiny seed buried in the dirt so we can eat. It is God who makes it all happen.

When we can truly realize our utter dependence on God then we can be humbled to the point that we give up, just as Job did, and let God work. He didn't have to wait for days and days longer to see things restored. As we will see in the final chapter of the Book of Job it happened whenever Job realized what he needed to learn and became obedient to God.

He wants to do the same for each of us. He wants to restore, bless, and fulfill every one of us. But we've got to allow Him to work in our lives. We've got to do some giving up of ourselves in order to make room for what will bring us the most happiness (even though we don't even realize it). When we do, we will see things begin to change in our lives. It isn't requirements to get to Heaven but it is required to have that close, personal relationship with the Almighty. It might cause us some trials but if we stand in Him through them all, we will be found "not guilty!"

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Chapter 14
The End of Trials
Job 42:1-17

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“Now the LORD blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning; for he had fourteen thousand sheep, six thousand camels, one thousand yoke of oxen, and one thousand female donkeys. He also had seven sons and three daughters”
Job 42:12-13

A *strange* feeling had come over the man like he had not known before and it left him questioning. It was almost like a wave of supernatural knowing. His head felt light and dizzy as he gazed up toward the top of the big tent. A church gathering was taking place in the country. That Saturday afternoon they all enjoyed the fruit of a pig roast, fellowship, games, conversation and relaxation.

It was time for singing and sharing. They had erected a huge tent on the grounds, an old fashioned one that had three round posts in the center. Each post was about six inches in diameter and while one man could carry a post it was all a normal man could do to get it to its upright destination.

A gusty wind had blown most of the day and that afternoon was no different. Each group or individual that wanted to sing mounted the platform that had been erected and shared their heart with those who had gathered under the tent to listen. The tent was probably large enough for 100 people to sit, give or take a few. The man normally sat closer to the front but for some unknown reason even to himself, he chose to sit in the back.

He got a few looks from those who knew his habits and were wondering why he chose to sit in the back. He couldn't explain it – That's just how it was. After all it wasn't a "sin" to sit in the back, was it? He remembered nothing in the scripture that said, "Thou shalt not sit in the back!"

He watched as the wind whipped the edges of the tent puffing the inside upward then releasing it as the wind gust would pass on. It resembled the heaving of a great beast as it breathed in and out. But in that moment of seemingly dizziness, it looked as though in slow motion the front post was beginning to lean. "That looks strange," he thought. Then in what seemed like one gentle motion he saw the second post begin to lean. It suddenly dawned on him that the big tent was coming down.

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He jumped up interrupting what was going on at the platform and yelled, "Everyone get out! The tent is falling!" He ran for the last post and grabbed it with both arms locked around he leaned into it with everything in him.

It was like getting into a pushing contest with an elephant and he was losing, but he also knew that if he let go the tent was going down and one of those posts might hit someone so he stayed with it until he was sure everyone was out, then let go and made a dive for that last gleam of sunlight quickly disappearing from under the tent. They thanked God that no one was hurt. The big-top was down but everything else seemed to be okay. Of course, some of the men jumped in and folded the canvas and poles out of the way, the singers resumed their position on stage and with a few rattled nerves those who had been listening re-arranged their chairs and with that they resumed their celebration in the open air.

The man had said, "I'm no hero. I simply did what anyone else there would have done had they been in my position." But he remembered that if he hadn't grabbed that post someone might have been seriously hurt. There would certainly have been pandemonium as people struggled to get out from in under that canvas. He might have confessed to be no hero but several people in attendance that day considered him as such.

Just like that big tent God had knocked the wind out of Job. He went tumbling down before the Holy, Righteous, and Almighty God of the Universe just like the wind laid those big posts on the ground.

Job had listened to all that God had said. No direct answers had come but it had been just a privilege to hear His voice coming from the whirlwind. God had said to Job, "*I will question you, and you shall answer Me*" (42:4). Now there was no sense in answers. How could a mortal man possibly come up with answers to all the questions God had put to him? Job answered God with the only sensible thing any man could have done. He said, "*I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You. Therefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.*" (42:5-6). He wasn't repenting for any of the sins of which he had been accused by his friends. But he was repenting because of his own attitude. He had thought that he could defend himself against God justifying why it was unfair that he had been punished as he had.

Even in the great righteousness attributed to Job he had still had an arrogant attitude toward God. He had still believed in all the formulas that he had come to believe in over the years except that he had been confused by what had happened in the last few weeks.

I've seen it in other people and I have seen it in myself as the years progressed. It is an attitude that believes one is exempt from things because of their long standing with the Lord. Somehow, we begin to feel that because of our good deeds we deserve God's blessings. We see

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ourselves in comparison to those who have not accepted God into their lives. They have not professed Christ as Lord and Savior and we somehow think that we are in special favor with God because we have. A pride of sorts begins to emerge from within us based on our relationship with God. We think we've "got it all together."

GOD KNOWS HOW TO PUT US IN OUR PLACE

Let me tell you that any of us, when we begin to come to this point, are ripe to have the wind knocked out of our sails. This may sound silly to some but I have noticed over the years that when this pride would begin to rise up in me God would do something to put me back in my place. When I would feel like I was getting to be something in the pulpit I'd wake up on Sunday morning with a big pimple on my face. Or I'd cut myself shaving and have a blemish to deal with or I'd have an exceptionally bad "bad hair day." Something would happen that would remind me that I wasn't what I was beginning to think I was.

You see God won't let us go on in our pride especially if we truly are seeking His will. He will allow something to happen to put us back in our place. He had allowed drastic measures in Job's case. I don't really know why God let the devil do these things to Job. I don't really feel that it was for the devil's benefit because we don't read anymore about him after the boils. I suppose he kind of got the message and slinked away. No, it wasn't because God wanted to prove anything to the devil. It was an opportunity to bring Job's love for God into the next level. It was part of his spiritual growth process.

GOD KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING

Everything that God allows to happen to us is part of that growth process. The trials that He allows are all to bring us into new revelation about God. Job now saw God in a clearer light than he had ever seen Him. He now understood more about the awesomeness of God and the unworthiness of mankind. We are only worthy because of what Christ did for us. We can only have a direct relationship with the Almighty because of Christ. We can boast in ourselves all we want but if we really want to be in God's will, He will do something or allow something that will keep us humbled before Him.

The longer I live, and more importantly, the longer I live for Christ, the more I discover that it isn't all about building a congregation of people, or about how many rules we obey, or even about how many souls we have won into the Kingdom of God. To be sure these things are important. We need healthy congregations in God's Church. Although morals do not save us or give us special favor with God it is important

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that we treat our fellow human beings with kindness, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and providing for the poor. To bring others into salvation through the grace of Jesus Christ is a wonderful thing. But our personal relationship with God comes above all these things. Our one-on-One communication and love for our Heavenly Father is our greatest accomplishment.

In the Book of Revelation Jesus gave John words to write to seven different churches the first being Ephesus. This was a zealous congregation of people. They were fervent winning souls into the Kingdom. But they were accused of something that many of us stand accused of yet today. They had left their first love. How could that be? They were full of good works exemplifying the Body of Christ! I've often pondered that. This congregation of people were the nearest to what we might call "the perfect church." How could they be guilty of such a thing?

It was because their lives were so filled up with the good works they did, that they failed in taking time for their own personal relationships with God. Sometimes my words seem harsh to the Church. I know that others misunderstand the message God has given and feel that I may even be against the Church. It is only because God has revealed to us this very fact that today's Church is greatly in danger of this very accusation given to Ephesus. We are losing our first love. We get so caught up in the programs that are going to win souls to Christ, in giving to missions, in youth work, in presenting a dynamic worship team that will bring people into the glory of God, and a good deal many other things, that, if we aren't very careful, we forget what it is really all about. It is about our personal relationship with Christ.

All of these things that I have mentioned can be wonderful tools to witness Christ to others. Dynamic worship is important. Reaching the youth of today where they are is very noble. Missions are vital. But the greatest witness that we can ever produce for Christ is our very own personal relationship with Him. How can we promote Him with confidence any other way? When people see that we are really different – changed - then the truth of Christ -what He wants to do for people - is revealed. Our personal witness isn't the abundance of words we say and it isn't in the fact that we have devoted our every free moment to the programs and outreaches of our congregation. It is in letting Christ live in us. This is what Job was discovering. He saw how insignificant he was and how petty his own works had been. He saw who he really was for the first time standing in the presence of God. It made him repent. That is where God wants to take us now.

JOB'S REVENGE?

It was time to deal with Job's friends. Don't you just love "eating crow?" They had stood firm and stiff in their beliefs. This is what their

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father's had taught them and it was how the majority believed so it must be truth. There was no other explanation but that Job had sinned in some terribly immoral way. Otherwise, God would not have punished him like He had. As we have established over and over Job knew he was not guilty of any of those things they had accused him of. But he now knew that he had been guilty of not truly realizing that God had everything under control all along.

God told Job's friends that they had been wrong and that He was angry with them. Their only solution was that they had to take animals to sacrifice, offer them up as a burnt offering in the presence of Job, and then let Job pray for them. This required them to go to Job and admit that they had been wrong and ask his forgiveness. It also required Job to seek God on their behalf without harboring ill feelings. It required true forgiveness.

Today many say they forgive. What basically happens is that the problem is not really dealt with and the two parties wind up smoothing things over and sweeping it under the rug. The problem with that is brought to light when that dirt under the rug works its way back out. And it will. Without getting to the root of the problem, working it out, understanding the why's and how's of both parties involved, the problem will resurface some day and what we discover is that we haven't really forgiven at all – just saved face in each others presence. That isn't what God is after. What we really must do is be willing to confess our wrong actions and feelings. When we put the whole sordid mess out in the open then both parties have the opportunity to not only forgive but to understand those "why's" and "how's." Then and only then can true forgiveness take place.

In the end Job wound up with twice as much as he had before. But we see a new glow about Job. He's not the same. He's happier. We don't read about him making sacrifices for his children as he had before. He had found a relationship with God that had changed his life forever.

This is what God wants to do for each of us. If we can ever get it into our thick skulls that the trials He allows to come upon us are ultimately for our own good and will build our Christian character up in the end, then we can position ourselves to receive many wonderful and glorious experiences with our Lord. Our own best interest is first and foremost in the eyes of our Creator.

It is significant that, before Job died, he made provision for an inheritance amongst his children. He did something completely out of the norm by naming his three daughters as equal benefactors. This was unheard of in Biblical days. It reflected what he had learned and come to believe about God and that is that God doesn't do things just because that's the way they have always been done. God operates in the now need, acting upon what is needed for each individual in the present.

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Our God has no respect for individuals beyond the respect He has for each of us. We are all equal benefactors when it comes to the Kingdom of Heaven. Isn't that special? Isn't that grand? Isn't that just like our God? What a wonderful God we serve that He would take the time to make each and every one of us special, but then, that's just the way He is!

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Thanks for sharing your time with us and we hope that this has benefited your soul and enhanced your Christian experience.



Job was an extraordinary man. Not many could stand up to the trials and sufferings put on him. Why do we have trials and sufferings? Many answers could be given but this book gives a very practical and probable answer to life's Ordeals.

Jerry D. Ousley is the author of "Soul Challenge" and "Soul Journey" as well as several booklets including the very popular "Help! I Just Got Saved." He can be heard on International Internet Radio daily, Monday through Friday. Visit www.spiritbread.com to find out more.