

GOD'S PURPOSE IN THE HUMAN RACE

John M. Sinclair

Why did God create the human race, knowing in advance that it would fall into sin? Why did God *allow* Satan to tempt Adam and Eve, and lead them into sin? What purpose does suffering serve? Why do saints suffer while many wicked people enjoy health and wealth? Was death part of God's original plan?

What should we tell a saint who is suffering? That it's a sign he must have sinned? — I *hope* you *wouldn't* tell him that; it's the error that Job's friends made. Would you tell him that God is trying to teach him something? That God is preparing him to sympathize with someone *else* who's suffering the same thing? That God is refining him, getting rid of his impurities?

At a time when my "better half" was suffering excruciating pain day-in, day-out, and doctors just weren't finding the cause, I did a lot of deep and serious thinking about these troubling questions. I was simply unable to be satisfied with the "stock answers" we hear so often. For this insight that the Lord gave me into the subject, I'm partly indebted to Don Richardson, author of the bestsellers *The Peace Child*, *Lords of the Earth*, and *Eternity in their Heart*. A recorded discourse of his about the beginnings of his work in West Irian, given at Prairie Bible Institute, gave me some seed thoughts that developed into this insight.

In eternity past, God had plenty of opportunity to demonstrate His power, wisdom, and righteousness to His creatures, including angels; and they glorified Him for it in ways beyond what we can imagine in this present world. However, there was no way that God could demonstrate what His *grace* could do, and receive glory for *that*. Grace could not be demonstrated without the presence of sin. Therefore God created Lucifer, knowing in advance that he would rebel against Him and become Satan; and He created Adam and Eve, knowing in advance that they would *yield* to Satan's temptation and fall into sin. And, immediately after Adam and Eve had sinned, God told them some elements of His plan to provide salvation through "the Seed of the woman" (Genesis 3:15).

A particular wonder of God's grace is the devotion He can win from those whom He redeems by grace—a *far greater* devotion than could be won by obliging them *do* something to compensate for their sin (which we couldn't possibly do) or to *earn* His favour. The redeemed are so grateful to God for His grace toward them that they always want to do *more* to show their loving devotion and gratitude toward Him. On the other hand, Satan is always trying to *spoil* God's demonstration of what His grace can accomplish, and lead all creatures to believe that it's an illusion. In fact, even Satan *himself* doesn't believe what God's grace can do.

The story of Job shows us a couple of heavenly conventions in the spirit world (Job 1:6-12 and 2:1-7), called "heavenly places" in the epistle to the Ephesians (1:3, 20; 2:6; 3:10; 6:12 "high places" same word in Greek as "heavenly places"). At those heavenly conventions, God presented Job as an impressive example of the devotion He had won by grace, as shown by Job's upright life. That subject is of great interest to the *unfallen* angels; they are studying it even now (1 Peter 1:12). Yet Satan protested that *anyone* would devote himself to God if he had the health and wealth that Job had; and he defied God to show what would happen if all that Job had were taken away. He was confident that Job would then curse God. God gave Satan permission to try, first by taking away Job's wealth— and, when that failed to destroy his devotion, taking away his health.

As Mr. Richardson said in his recorded discourse, the question was whether God could win our love without appealing to our selfishness. It is Satan who *put* selfishness into the human heart. Therefore if God couldn't win human love without appealing to human selfishness, Satan would have scored a victory over God— a *dreadful* supposition. But, though Job, amid his atrocious sufferings and false accusations from his friends, sometimes said things that he shouldn't have said, he never stopped loving God, nor turned away from Him.

The references to “heavenly places” in Ephesians, shows that there's a spiritual *war* being fought over this issue of God's grace. We get additional glimpses of that war in 1 Corinthians 4:9; 2 Corinthians 10:3-6, and 1 Kings 22:19-23. That's the central issue of the conflict. When Satan tempts us to commit *any* sin, it's an effort on his part to spoil the image of what God's grace can do, insinuating that the sin proves an absence of loving devotion to God. It's for *that* war that we need “the whole armour of God” (Ephesians 6:11-13).

We score victories for Christ's cause in this war, whenever we show loving devotion to God in *any* way. Sometimes it's by worship and praise (with our whole hearts), sometimes by service (especially if it involves hard work), and sometimes by suffering for Christ's sake. Sometimes our testimony and service *costs* suffering that displays this devotion.

So then, why does God allow saints to suffer? The “stock answers” above are *sometimes* reasons. Even chastisement for sin *might* be a reason, though we must *never presume* that it is (as Job's friends did). But I'm convinced that the ultimate, primary reason for almost all the suffering of saints has *nothing to do with* their personal lives. It's rather to open to them an opportunity to participate in this war in the spirit world, and the consequent spectacle to angels of what God's grace can do. By bearing suffering patiently and without complaining, trusting that God does all things well, we are showing that His grace has won from us a devotion that cannot be destroyed by *any* amount of suffering.

Christians readily agree that when a Christian is persecuted, and even martyred, he's suffering for Christ's sake. But if he suffers from *sickness*, or from an *accidental mishap*, is he suffering for Christ's sake *then*? Or is such suffering just one of the woes of the present world that we must endure, like it or not? Most confidently we may assert that, if a saint's heart does not condemn him (1 John 3:21), then even suffering of these latter sorts **IS** suffering for Christ's sake. There is no accident in a saint's life; whatever he suffers, God has chosen to allow for a purpose. And the ultimate purpose is to show that, because God has won his loving devotion by His grace, that saint continues to love God and devote himself to Him even amid the greatest suffering. To demonstrate *that* by suffering, *certainly is* suffering for Christ's sake.

To understand this, makes possible a much more positive view of God's purpose in suffering. Often when a believer is handicapped by disease or age, or otherwise limited, Christians find something he can do for Christ in his handicapped or otherwise limited condition. They tell him, “here's something you can do for God *even with* your limitations. For example, I knew an aged Christian lady who had so spend almost all her time sitting on her couch with her feet up; but she'd stuff envelopes for missionaries. And, saints with such limitations are often encouraged to serve and glorify God by *intercession*. That's perfectly in order, and there's *some* encouragement in it. However, that way of dealing with suffering, alone, produces a *negative* image of suffering— that it's an *obstacle* that can be *overcome to a certain extent*. The saint with limitations is essentially told that he can serve and glorify God *in spite of* his sufferings.

To see suffering as an opportunity to demonstrate indestructible devotion to God, leads us to consider suffering an *asset*. It gives a person an opportunity to serve God in a *special* way *because of* his handicap or other limitations. The devotion that God has won from him by His grace, could never have

been so effectively demonstrated without the sufferings by which it's unaffected. Therefore when a saint is suffering in *any* way, let us not hurriedly give him the "stock answers." Nor must we simply tell him we don't understand, but have confidence that God has a good reason. Let us *tell* him the *primary* reason for the suffering of saints; it will *encourage him*.

God calls certain saints to fight the good fight by means of hard work for Him, and others to fight it by means of suffering. In either case, the good fight is being fought by demonstrating loving devotion that God has won from us by His grace. Let us submit to God's choice of the means by which we are to fight the good fight. By doing so, we will become *trophies* of God's grace, bringing glory to His Name by demonstrating the wonders of what that attribute of His that hadn't previously been demonstrated, can accomplish. It's for that purpose that He created us.
