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### **THE WAY GOD MADE HIMSELF KNOWN**

*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...* (Genesis 1:1)

The church of Christ has declared in The Apostles' Creed and other creeds that believing in God as Creator is one of the essentials of Biblical Christianity: *I believe in God the Father almighty, maker of heaven and earth, etc.*

God created man and woman in His image and gave them dominion over all the earth and its creatures. (Gen. 1:26-30) God created mankind to have loving relationship with Him as their King, Master, and Friend (*To walk and talk with God in the garden in the cool of the day*), but in order for this relationship to be meaningful God gave mankind free will. This is affirmed in the creation narrative by virtue of Adam and Eve having the freedom to obey or disobey God (Genesis 3), and it is reaffirmed throughout the Bible.

### **WHY IN THE WORLD DID GOD PERMIT THE DEVIL TO LIVE AROUND HERE?**

It is important that we understand that in order to achieve His ultimate purpose in creating mankind, it was apparently necessary for God to allow a powerful evil spirit named Satan (Hebrew) or the devil (Greek) to coexist on the earth with mankind. Following are some Scriptural reasons why God permitted this to be so:

- (1) To develop faith and righteousness in our lives. (Jas.

1:12, 1 Pet. 1:6, 2 Pet. 1:4)

- (2) To maintain humility in our lives. (2 Cor. 12:7)

- (3) To bring about trials whereby we can be rewarded

when we overcome. (John 10:33; Rev. 2:7, 11, 17; 3:5, 12, 21)

- (4) To teach us how to fight. (Jud. 3:21, 1 Tim. 6:12)

- (5) To afflict us in order that we may repent (Job 33:14; 1

Cor. 5:1-7)

- (6) To demonstrate the power of God over satanic power

(Mk. 1:21, 16:17, Ac. 13:6; Eph. 3:10)

- (7) To develop Christlike character (Ro. 5:3-5)

- (8) To develop patience (Jas. 1:2)

- (9) To learn to trust God (Pr. 3:5)

The summary of all of the above is that without an adversary and a tempter freewill would be meaningless. Christlike character (The "Image of God" in which man was originally created) can only be attained in a crucible.

## OTHER EVENTS THAT OCCURRED PRE-HISTORY (BEFORE MAN'S RECORDED HISTORY)

Man fell into sin and rebellion against his Creator (Genesis 3). God's creation was adversely affected: chaos, disorder, suffering, sickness, war, death. (Romans chapters 1-8) God sent a great flood to destroy corruption and give mankind a fresh start (Genesis 6). Time passed and mankind spread over all the earth. Man tried to build his own way to heaven via the tower of Babel, and God confused man's language (Genesis 9). I believe the tower of Babel, as many commentators have said, was not man's effort to build a huge ramp into heaven, but was a "ziggurat," a spiritual tower where man was seeking to attain god-like powers.

## MANKIND WITHOUT GOD

Mankind without God quickly descends into corruption, chaos, violence and self-destruction (Genesis 6). It is in man's nature to worship – either God or a substitute. Anything a man loves, fears, worships or serves other than God is called an idol. The most common idol is man himself. Men also commonly worship the devil, as well as substitutes for the devil: the sun, moon, stars, earth, animals, alcohol, drugs, (sorcery uses drugs to draw close to the "spirits"), kings, emperors, celebrities, "gods" made of wood or stone, etc. Different forms of witchcraft were also universal (seeking wisdom and power by various "spirits," which were actually demons).

The Bible says that the worship of idols is actually the worship of the devil: Deuteronomy 32:17, 21; Psalm 106:36-38; 1 Cor. 10:19-21.

Usually, idolatrous worship involved unclean sexual practices: Baal worship and the Asherah poles mentioned frequently in the Old Testament included fertility rites. Idolatry in Greece and Rome included religious prostitution of girls and boys. (This is still practiced in Hinduism today.) Human sacrifice was also common in much idolatry: the worship of Molech in the Old Testament consisted of burning babies alive. (Mayans practiced human sacrifice in the New World.) The Canaanites practiced all of these things. The Israelites fell into all these abominable practices. Read Deuteronomy 18:9-13. 4,000 years ago, 2,000 years before Christ, polytheism was the common worldwide practice of worship; i.e., people worshipped many gods, many idols.

## HOW COULD GOD REVEAL HIMSELF

### IN SUCH A WORLD?

If you were God (and if you think you are, please call me and let's have a talk), how would you go about making yourself known in such a world? And remember that God had given dominion over the earth to mankind, so whatever He does can't be done solely by His own intervention or by His angels but has to be done primarily by man.

So, about 4,000 years ago chose a man named Abram who lived in Mesopotamia (Genesis 12-15) and in some way not described in the Bible revealed Himself. God said, to paraphrase, "Hey, Dude, I have a big assignment for you and your family and your descendants." Since Abram was an old man and was childless, that was quite a surprise.

Abram was not better than other men. He was a typical man, an idolater – that's all there were on the earth. God formalized his agreement with Abram through a "covenant." God said, "If you will believe in Me, obey Me, worship Me, serve Me, I will bless you with a son and will multiply your descendants, and I will use you and your family to make Myself known in the earth and will bless the entire earth through you." Abram believed the invisible God who spoke to Him, and 25 years later Sarah gave birth to Isaac, whose wife bore Jacob (and Esau), whose wives bore 12 sons (and a daughter), who became a tribe, who were forced to move to Egypt. During the following 430 years the tribe were forced into slavery and grew in numbers to become a nation of slaves (a picture of our lives in the world without Christ).

God sent a deliverer (a type of Christ), Moses, to bring them back to the land God gave them. Joshua led them on a 25-year invasion to dispossess the Canaanites and conquer the land. They were ruled by Judges for 300 years or so. When they demanded to have a king, God gave them Saul (40 years), then David (40 years), then Solomon (40 years). Solomon fell into idolatry, and consequently Israel became divided into a northern kingdom, Israel, under King Jeroboam, and a southern kingdom, Judah, under King Rehoboam (Solomon's son).

Israel, the northern kingdom, was never faithful to God, and Judah, the southern kingdom, was only faithful sporadically. God sent to each of them a series of prophets: Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nehemiah, Ezekiel, Amos, Joel, Micah, etc., pleading with His people to come back to Him so He could bless them, and warning them what

would happen if they persisted in rebellion. They mocked the prophets, beat them, killed them. After almost 300 years, God allowed the Assyrians to conquer Israel and utterly destroy their nation (in 722 BC); after another century Judah was conquered by Babylon and destroyed as a nation (in 586 BC). After 70 years, Persia allowed the Jews to return to their homeland and continue as a nation, as prophesied by the Prophet Jeremiah.

In the midst of all the turmoil and idolatry of an unfaithful people, God was faithful and revealed Himself step by step. There are over 50 names for God in the Bible, and each name reveals something of the character of God: Elohim (A plural name for God, confirming that God is one, but a Trinity), Yahweh (God's covenant name), Yahweh-Tsidkinu (God our Righteousness); Yahweh-Rapha (God our Healer); Yahweh-Shalom (God our Peace); Yahweh-Jireh (God our Provider); etc. In due course, the Messiah, Jesus Christ was born, *From the tribe of Judah*, and so the promise of God to Abraham was fulfilled. Jesus came to fully reveal God and to bless all the earth, all who would come to Him by faith.

## SUMMARY

Stop and consider what an amazing God we serve! About 4,000 years ago God started revealing Himself to one man, then to his family, then to a nation and its kings, priests and prophets. That little nation of Israel was invaded, destroyed, scattered across the world several times, and in 70 AD the Romans seemed to write an end to it. But in 1948 (after about 500 generations) Israel was reborn, as the Bible had prophesied, and it exists today as a testimony to the truth of the Bible and the power of the God who was its Author. A written record started with Moses, who wrote the first five books in the Bible, about 3,500 years ago. This written record was added to until after the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. So the Bible was written during a period of at least 1,500 years and has been safe-guarded and passed down to us for three and a half millennia.

The Bible is a love-letter from our amazing God. It contains His carefully preserved self-revelation, the purpose of history, and His plans for you and me. It is a living Word from our living God.

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## **A GRACE DISGUISED – (2)**

Last month I started a synopsis of Gerald Sittser's book, [A Grace Disguised, How the Soul Grows Through Loss](#), about the sudden death in an auto accident caused by a drunk driver of his wife, 4-year old daughter, and mother.

### WHOSE LOSS IS WORSE?

All people suffer loss. Being alive means suffering loss. Sometimes the loss is natural, predictable, and even reversible. We experience the loss, but after days or months of discomfort we recover and resume life as usual, the life that we wanted and expected. Thus we lose our youth but gain adulthood. We lose a daughter but gain a son-in-law. We remember the losses that lie behind us, and we look forward to the gains that lie ahead.

But there is a different kind of loss that inevitably occurs in all of our lives, though less frequently and less predictably. This kind of loss has more devastating results, and it is irreversible. Such loss includes terminal illness, disability, divorce, rape, emotional abuse, physical and sexual abuse, chronic unemployment, mental illness, and untimely death. The results are permanent, the impact incalculable, the consequences cumulative. Each new day forces one to face some new and devastating dimension of the loss. It creates a whole new context for one's life.

We tend to quantify and compare suffering and loss. We talk about the numbers killed, the length of time spent in the hospital, the severity of abuse, the difficulty of illness, or the complexity of a divorce. I have done so myself. After the accident the newspapers covered the story for several days running. I received hundreds of telephone calls, thousands of cards and letters. I became an instant celebrity – someone whose loss could not be imagined or surpassed. Consequently I heard many comments about my unsurpassed suffering.

But I question whether experiences of such severe loss can be quantified and compared. Loss is loss, whatever the circumstances. No two losses are ever the same. Each loss stands on its own and inflicts a unique kind of pain. My own loss was sudden and traumatic, leaving the landscape of my life a wasteland. Likewise, my suffering was immediate and intense, and I plunged into it as if I had fallen over a cliff. Still, the consequences of the tragedy were clear. I could therefore quickly plot a course of action for my family and me. Within a few days of the accident I sat down with family and friends to discuss how I was going to face my grief, manage my home, and raise my children.

On the other hand, I have a cousin, Leanna, with multiple myeloma, an incurable form of cancer. Her loss has been gradual and subtle, and it will probably continue to be. The landscape of her life is being destroyed slowly, one square inch at a time. Her suffering lingers on and on, and pain wears her down like friction wears down metal. Little inconveniences, like walking with a cane, remind her at every turn that she is sick. She has no idea what is going to happen to her in the next three years or even in the next three months. She worries about her two teenage children, and about her husband, who has Parkinson's disease. That cancer looms over her, casting an ominous shadow over her entire world.

So whose loss is worse, hers or mine? It is impossible to give an answer. Both are bad, but bad in different ways. I lost three people whom I loved deeply and who loved me as well. I cherish the memories of the four years I had with Diana Jane, the twenty years of marriage I enjoyed with Lynda, and the forty-one years I knew my mother. My grief was and is pure and sweet. I lost precious relationships that I had and still long for with all my heart.

My divorced friends face an entirely different kind of loss. They have lost relationships they never had but wanted, or had but gradually lost. They look back on lost years, on bitter conflicts and betrayal, on the death of marriage. My break was clean; theirs messy.

The accident did not leave me with the responsibility of having to care for a disabled loved one. I did not have to attend to injuries that might have taken months or years to heal. I was not forced into making difficult ethical decisions, such as whether to continue using life-support. It was unspeakably horrible watching them die, but their immediate deaths gave me the freedom to concentrate my energies on building a meaningful life and a good home under new – albeit unwanted – circumstances.

Friends of mine have experienced similar traumas, but in their cases the injuries caused disability rather than death. Those disabilities have required years of care-giving, hundreds of thousands of dollars, and constant attention. In some cases, there has been no end to the crises they face, which occur almost daily. Problems keep interrupting their lives, demanding more of their time and resources and draining them of energy. While they love their disabled family members, they also feel resentment, labor under constant exhaustion, worry about money, and wonder about the future. So I ask myself again if it is possible to compare losses. Lynda, my wife, was an unusual woman. She was gracious and energetic, simple, competent, and hospitable. She found joy in serving others and loved her children with all her heart. Our life had found a rhythm of its own. At day's end we talked about the day, discussed how the children were doing, debated issues, told stories, laughed, cuddled, and prayed together. We enjoyed common interests like camping and backpacking, reading, music, gardening, and canning fruits and vegetables. We went out on dates together biweekly. Our relationship was delightfully multi-dimensional. Her absence touches almost every area of my life. I am haunted by the memories.

I was blessed in ways others were not. I am reminded of several women who endured years of abuse in their homes, whether their husbands directed it toward them or toward their children. Such abuse violated their deepest sense of right and wrong, finally driving them to file for divorce. Now they tremble with rage and imagine taking revenge. They feel the horror of betrayal and wonder endlessly why they ever married that kind of man in the first place. They face the difficult responsibility of raising abused children, who are often hard to control because of the violation and pain they have experienced. These women find it hard to trust anyone, especially men. They often feel as if they have no one to turn to.

Every week I hear stories about people's pain. I am more sensitive to the pain now, not as oblivious and selfish as I used to be. I just talked with a woman who is trying to rebuild her life after a divorce, for which she filed after learning that her husband had sexually abused her daughters. I heard about three women who are battling breast cancer. I heard about a man who has struggled with professional frustration for many years now. I learned of a couple who have exhausted every medical option in their battle against infertility. I know of a man whose business is on the brink of bankruptcy. I heard about an elderly couple who recently inherited five grandchildren, all under the age of five, because their daughter-in-law decided that she did not want them anymore and their son is incapable of caring for them. Everywhere there is pain, human misery, and tragedy.

Whose loss is worse? The question begs the point. Each experience of loss is unique, each painful in its own way. No one will ever know the pain I have experienced because it is my own, just as I will never know the pain you may have experienced. What good is comparing? The right question to ask is not, 'Whose is worse?' It is to ask, 'What meaning can be gained from suffering, and how can we grow through suffering?' That is the question I want to explore in the rest of this book."

## **THOSE SELF-RIGHTEOUS BICYCLISTS AND MOTORISTS!**

Ray Scott, a Colorado legislator, has proposed a bike-tax as a means of helping pay for infrastructure like bike lanes. His proposal has stirred up a fire-storm.

Garrett Stealey wrote, "I absolutely hate bicyclists! They run stop signs, don't signal when turning, roll through stop signs with their heads down, not paying attention. They think they're better than everyone else out there. It's high time to tax cyclists and have an even playing field."

Ken McKisson responded, "I absolutely hate motorists. They pollute, are lazy, think they are God in their metal casings, roll coal, are spiking my health insurance from their non-exercise, congest the road, drive drunk, are noisy, think they are better than everyone else, don't contribute to tourism and revenue for the area. Its high time we penalize them more and give rebates and incentives to cyclists."

When the subject of self-righteousness comes up, we usually think of Jesus' parable of the Pharisee and the tax-collector (Luke 18). *Two men went up to the temple to pray*, etc. So we tend to think that self-righteousness is confined to religious people, but I think the bike-motorist story reveals that it is a universal pride/selfishness trait.

America is now divided between red and blue political people, and the self-righteousness and hatred that I have heard expressed is truly frightening. It is as if the folks on the other side of the political divide are sub-human and should be put out of their misery.

The vegans despise the carnivores, and vice versa. The cat people feel superior to the dog people. And the categories can be extended on and on.

It is because our nature has not attained Christ-likeness that we believers express self-righteousness about our personal holiness and our denomination and our religious practices, and I don't think Jesus likes it.

## **GOD'S TENDERNESS**

(From my ancient files...related many years ago by Judy Doyle, then an assistant professor at O.R.U.)

Judy's mother Lonna Tripp, never forgot the bittersweet memories surrounding her own mother's death. Nobody celebrated Lonna's 9<sup>th</sup> birthday. Her young mother, a sweet-tempered, devout Christian, lay gravely ill. She died the next day, leaving Lonna, five sons and a 1-year-old daughter. She knew she would no longer be there to shield the children from their drunken father's angry fists.

Late the next night, little Lonna could not sleep. Trembling with fear, she stood at the foot of the bed she shared with her baby sister, wishing that someone would help her. Her mother, knowing Lonna was terrified of the dark, had always walked with her to their outhouse before tucking her into bed. But tonight there was no one to go with her. Her brothers were asleep, and though she could hear her father snoring in the next room, she dared not wake him. If anyone startled him in his sleep, he came up cursing and fighting. What was she to do?

Lonna will never forget those next moments. "Suddenly, beside me in the darkness appeared a figure of white mist. I wasn't afraid. Somehow I knew it had come to take me outside to the bathroom." The angel followed the little girl outside. Then, after walking her back to the house, the being vanished without a word, taking Lonna's fear of the dark with it. For three days and nights a peaceful, comforting presence hovered over the house and then disappeared.

God took care of the little family. Lonna's older brother, Calvin, was saved and filled with the Spirit. Despite the harsh abuse of their father, Calvin influenced each of the other children to turn to the Savior their mother had loved. And the year Lonna graduated from high school, Calvin led their father, who was on his deathbed, to the Lord.

Whenever you are tempted to doubt God's love and concern for your needs, just remember how the God of the universe sent an angel to take a grieving, frightened little girl to the bathroom. And be assured that He cares for you.

God Bless  
Glenn

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