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## THE PROBLEM OF PAIN, Part 2

(I am continuing to excerpt C. S. Lewis' book, with paraphrasing.)

### Human Wickedness

When the apostles preached, even their pagan hearers were conscious of their sinfulness and that they deserved God's anger. It was against this background that the Gospel appeared as good news. Men knew they were desperately sinful and they feared eternal punishment. But all this has changed. We now have to preach the bad news so that people may comprehend the judgment from which Christ has rescued us.

When men attempt to be Christians without this preliminary consciousness of sin, the result is almost bound to be a certain resentment against God as to one who is always making impossible demands and always inexplicably angry. Most of us feel sympathy with the dying farmer who replied to the preacher's exhortation to repent by asking, "What harm have I ever done *Him*?" Yes, the worst we have done to God is to leave Him alone – why can't He return the compliment.

Now at the moment when a man feels real guilt – moments too rare in our lives – all these blasphemies vanish away. When we merely *say* that we are bad, the "wrath" of God seems a barbarous doctrine; as soon as we perceive our badness, it appears inevitable, a necessary corollary from God's goodness. Modern man is living in utter illusion about his goodness.

- (1) Psychoanalysis, with its teaching about repressions and inhibitions, has convinced us that the sense of shame is an unhealthy thing, and that all our hidden impulses are merely human. (I'm OK, you're OK.) This has resulted in a society that is increasingly shameless. Our "entertainment" and our "education" have become vile, and we have lost the capacity to be shocked and offended.
- (2) We are deceived by looking on the outside of things and comparing ourselves with X. Jeremiah said, *The heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked*. In a moment of time – while your friend hesitates for a word – what things pass through your mind? (Even while we are sitting in church, if some of the disgusting things that flash through our minds were instantly shown on the overhead, we would run out of church never to return.)
- (3) We have a strange illusion that mere time cancels sin. But time does nothing either to the fact or to the guilt of a sin. The guilt is washed out only by the blood of Christ accessed by our repenting and humbly bowing the knee to the Savior.
- (4) We must guard against the feeling that "there is safety in numbers," i.e., if all men are as bad Christianity says, badness must be very excusable. But it is wise to face the possibility that the whole human race is fallen, just as the Bible explains, and the whole human race is facing an ultimate day of justice.

(5) Note that all religions, all mankind, have an understanding about morality that is common in many respects to the teachings of Christ: "I have not slain men." (Ancient Egyptian) "In Nastrond (hell) I saw murderers." (Old Norse) "Slander not." (Babylonian) "Never do to others what you would not like them to do to you." (Ancient Chinese) "Utter not a word by which anyone could be wounded." (Hindu) "Do not bear false witness against your neighbor." (Jewish) "Natural affection is a right thing and according to nature." (Greek) "Take care of old men." (American Indian) "Never desert the sick." (Australian Aborigines) "Death is to be chosen before slavery and base deeds." (Roman)

\*\*\*I mention Jesus Christ among human teachers to emphasize the fact that the *principal* difference between Him and them lies not in ethical teaching (which is here my concern) but in **Person** and **Office**.

(6) God may be more than moral goodness: He is not less. The road to the promised land runs past Sinai. The moral law may exist to be transcended: but there is no transcending it for those who have not first admitted its claims upon them.

(7) *Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God*. Many philosophies shift the responsibility for our behavior in devious way to the Creator or to Nature. (If we evolved from apes then we are doing pretty well.)

(8) In a multitude of ways we claim that we can't do better than we are doing. But consider William Law's simple statement: "If you will stop and ask yourselves why you are not as holy as the primitive Christians were, your own heart will tell you that it is neither through ignorance nor inability, but simply because you never thoroughly intended it."

I have been trying to make the reader believe that we actually are, at present, creatures whose character must be, in some respects, a horror to God, as it is, when we really see it, a horror to ourselves. I notice that the holier a man is, the more fully he is aware of that fact. Toward the end of his life, St. Paul called himself "the chief of sinners." Paul was not being coy with a pretended humility. No, when he said that he was vile, he was recording the truth with scientific accuracy. What Paul needed was a Savior. What you and I need in order to stand before a holy God is a Savior.

## **THE THREE-PERSONAL GOD**

(From *Mere Christianity*)

In space you can move in three ways – to left or right, backward or forward, up or down. They are called the three dimensions. If you are using only one dimension, you could draw a straight line. If you are using two, you could draw a figure: say, a square. And a square is made up of four straight lines. If you have three dimensions, you can then build what we call a solid body: say a cube – like a lump of sugar. And a cube is made up of six squares.

The Christian account of God involves just the same principle. On the human level one person is one being, and any two persons are two separate beings. On the Divine level you still find personalities; but up there you find them combined in new ways which we, who do not live on that level, cannot imagine. In God's dimension, so to speak, you find a being who is three Persons while remaining one Being, just as a cube is six squares while remaining one cube. Of course, we cannot fully conceive a Being like that, but if we can get a faint notion of it then we start getting an idea of something more than a person.

So this is how we may think about it: An ordinary Christian kneels down to say his prayers. He is trying to get in touch with God. But he knows that what is prompting him to pray is also God; God, so to speak, inside him. And he also knows that all his real knowledge of God comes through Christ, the Man who was God – that Christ is standing beside him, helping him to pray, praying for him. So that the whole threefold life of the three-personal Being is actually going on in that ordinary bedroom where an ordinary man is saying his prayers. The man is being caught up into the higher kind of life, the spiritual life: he is being pulled into God, by God, while still remaining himself.

## **MY LAST TRIP TO ISRAEL**

In 2001 Fred Feller and I went on a three-week mission to Israel to work with Joann Dehan, who with her (deceased) husband, Don, founded a wonderful ministry, Sunrise Ministries. (Joann eventually remarried, Bob Atherton, and Sunrise Ministries has grown into a ministry that is impacting nations.) We traveled around Israel and ministered in churches of Russian Messianic Jews (Are you confused?) and had a fabulous time. Joann was very familiar with Israel and took us to see places that tourists don't usually visit or even know about. One of the places was a park in the far north part of Israel where the tribe of Dan was located. Now I am going to rename this article:

### **(THE DEMONIC POWER OF IDOLS)**

You who are familiar with the Old Testament will remember that Solomon followed David as King of Israel, but that when Solomon died, Israel split into two nations: Judah in the south, led by Rehoboam, son of Solomon; and Israel in the north, led by Jeroboam, a commoner who was raised up by God to divide the kingdom as punishment for the apostasy of King Solomon. This story is told in 1 Kings, 11 and 12.

King Jeroboam was afraid that if he let his people travel down south to Jerusalem to worship in the temple they would immigrate to Judah, so he appointed men to be priests who were not Levites (false priests), and he had constructed two calves of gold (idols) for people to worship. He placed one of these golden calves at the southern end of Israel, in Bethel, and the other at the northern end in Dan. (Look at the maps in the back of your Bible.)

The place where the golden calf was placed in Dan is now a historic site located in a large, beautiful park. Fred and Joann were looking at something else, and I climbed up the winding path leading to the site of the golden calf. The setting was beautiful. Green trees, shrubs and flowers, along a winding path leading up to a "bema." (I know that "the judgment seat of Christ" mentioned in 2 Cor. 5:10 is the "bema" in the Hebrew language, but in the informational literature posted in that park in Dan they also called this site a "bema.")

Of course the "calf" was long gone, but the stone foundation on which it stood was still in place after about 2,900 years!

The foundation was about the size of a tennis court, and apparently the calf, actually a bull, was enormous. It was late in the afternoon when I climbed to the site, and it was situated so that the setting sun would reflect off the gold, and as I saw that golden bull in my imagination (THIS IS THE POINT I HAVE BEEN BUILDING UP TO) I got an excited feeling inside, and I felt my heart being drawn to that golden calf which had been on that site almost 3,000 years ago!

You are probably thinking, “Glenn, you are really weird.” Hey, you won’t get any argument about that from anyone, including me. But I’m telling you that in that moment God confirmed to me what the Bible declares: that there is a demonic power connected to idolatry, and it is incredibly deceptive and strong.

Consider the following Scriptures: *They (the people of Israel) sacrificed to demons, not to God, to gods they did not know. They have moved me to anger by their foolish idols. (Deut. 32:17, 21) They served their idols, which became a snare to them. They even sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons, and shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan; and the land was polluted with blood. (Psalm 106:36-38) What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons. (1 Cor. 10:19-21)* The Bible is revealing that the power behind idolatry is a demonic power. (We should also reflect on America polluting the land with the innocent blood of aborted babies, but that is another subject.)

What is an idol? Is it only a “golden calf” erected on a platform? Of course not. An idol is anything or anyone that people love, fear, worship, or serve that takes precedence over the one true God. It can be: money, security, comfort, fame, spouse, children, nation, sex, alcohol, drugs, gambling, me/myself/and I, etc. Perhaps you struggled with an addiction in your life, as I did. Why do addictions have such incredible power to wreck and destroy people’s lives? Behind every idol is a demon. I’ve known countless people, as you have, who destroyed their family for love of alcohol or drugs or money. It doesn’t make any sense unless you realize the spiritual power behind that addiction. I know of a man who abandoned his wife and two precious children for pornography. I know of a lady who just two months ago lost her inheritance of over \$250,000 in a few days in a Las Vegas casino. That is irrational, even insane. There is a supernatural power involved in addictions, which are one form of idolatry, that people cannot resist. **Jesus came to set the captives free!** The reality is that every one of us will serve something. We will serve either the true God or a substitute for the true God, an idol.

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## **EBOLA, CONTAGIOUS AND DEADLY**

There is a headline in today’s paper about a nurse in Dallas who has contracted the Ebola virus despite wearing protective gear. Very scary for health care workers, who are demanding an investigation and new safety protocols.

This gives us some idea of the way leprosy was regarded in Bible days and the way lepers were isolated to prevent contamination (see Leviticus 13 and 14). Leprosy seems to have been a kind of symbol or type of sin, for the Bible refers to the leper being “cleansed” rather than being “healed.”

Under the law, a person who touched a leper was also considered “unclean.” The leper’s sickness, uncleanness, transferred to the clean person, and he had to follow prescribed rules to prove that he was not infected.

Therefore, the story of Jesus and the leper in Matt. 8:2-4 has deep significance. *And behold, a leper came and worshiped Him, saying, “Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean.” Then Jesus put out his hand and touched him, saying, “I am willing; be cleansed.” Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.* Wow! Is that hot or not!

Under grace, a Spirit-filled person who touches a “leper” makes the leper clean. The Spirit in the believer is transferred and heals or cleanses the leper.

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## **ARE YOU RENTING A STORAGE SHED?**

I heard a preacher on TBN say: “If your house is so full of stuff that you need to rent more space to store more stuff, maybe you have too much stuff! There are people out there who need some of your stuff, so why don’t you stop holding onto your stuff and give some of your stuff to those who are stuffless and be a blessing to them? Isn’t renting more storage space a lot like ‘building more barns’? That was the man Jesus called a fool.”

When I heard that preacher say those things, I thought he was very rude. I would never say anything like that and risk hurting someone’s feelings. It was that preacher on television. And Jesus. So don’t get upset at me. Thank you.

## **SELF-PITY VERSUS THANKSGIVING**

The other morning I woke up feeling kind of depressed and sorry for myself. If you are over 80 years old, you probably have several reasons to feel that way. For that matter, that is true if you are over 60, or 50, or 40. Amen?

Then I went to church and Bob Clifford told about his ministry trip to Africa last year. He told about how those poor people in Sudan had endured 20 years of civil war and seen family and friends slaughtered, and how they were constantly on the edge of hunger and starvation. But when they got a little church building of their own, made of bricks they made of dirt by their own hands, they were so grateful to God that they danced and praised God for several hours.

I truly felt ashamed of myself, and I repented and asked God to help me.

Self-pity is one of those temptations that can slip up on us, rob us of all joy, and sabotage our peace and our witness for the Lord. Self-pity is a symptom of a sick focus on ourselves, which is, of course, the great enemy of a victorious Christian life. We must choose to offer God “a sacrifice of praise;” that is, we must praise Him regardless of how we feel. Amen?

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## **MINISTRY**

- Have a prison trip scheduled first weekend in November.
- Also a trip with ministry team to Mexico City and Guadalajara, leaving here on November 20. (Mexico City and Guadalajara are an 8-hour bus trip apart.) If you can help out with the cost of this trip, around \$800, it would certainly be appreciated. (As the steward in Jesus’ story (Luke 16) said, “I’m too old to dig ditches, and I’m ashamed to make a cardboard sign and stand in front of Walmart.”)

God Bless

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I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry.

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