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May 2011

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THE REASON FOR IT ALL?

The first verse in the Bible tells us where everything came from: *In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth....* But nowhere in the Bible does God tell us why He created the universe. I believe it has to do with love. At His deepest level, *God is love* (1 John 4:16). God created beings something like Himself ("Made in His image.") capable of receiving and giving love. John Townsend observes that "Though God is self-sufficient in some way that we can't fathom within the connectedness of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, He deeply desires a personal relationship with us. He is not satisfied with our external obedience, rituals, or compliance. He wants a connection - from the heart: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and strength.* (Deut. 6:5) *But I lavish unfailing love for a thousand generations on those who love me and obey my commands.* (Ex. 20:6) *I love all those who love me. Those who search will surely find me.* (Prov. 8:17)"

But if the very nature of God is love, why did He create a world where evil, suffering and death would even be a possibility? God does not tell us, but it must be necessary in order to attain for man what God sees as the highest good. When Job challenged God and called into question His goodness (73 times!), God did not defend Himself or answer Job's complaints, He simply said, in effect, "I'm God and you're not. My power, wisdom, and love are beyond your comprehension. Quit complaining, accept the universe as you find it, trust and obey Me." What we see in the story of Job was that the presence of God settled Job's heart so that his questions evaporated. That has also been my experience.

One of the highest points of my life came out of possibly the lowest point in my life. There was a time when I was a pastor that I came to the end of myself. On that night I sat in my office for many hours and felt that I could not go on. I recognized that I was a failure in every way, I felt that my ministry was a sham, and I really wanted to die. I was immobilized by self-hatred and self-pity. Then God showed up. He entered through the door of my office. He did not make himself visible, but I sensed His presence in a manner I cannot describe. He gradually crossed the room and stood right next to me. My heart was beating wildly. I felt waves of love emanating from His presence. This was occurring at a moment when I was fully realizing the complete bankruptcy of my character. I was breathing as if I had just run a hundred-yard dash. I was sure He was going to speak to me or appear to me, but He just stood next to me, pouring His indescribable love over me, for one full hour. Then He gradually crossed the room and left by the door. My questions were all gone. My depression and self-loathing were gone. The Bible speaks of a peace that passes understanding. I had it. During the years when I had been a drinker, I had imbibed a great quantity of alcohol to escape my troubles and to achieve a chemical high, but I had never experienced anything remotely like the euphoria and exaltation that accompanied His presence. That is what we were created for! To live in relationship with our Creator, the lover of our souls.

Frequently when we minister to people, we will conclude the prayer time by inviting the Lord to come and manifest Himself or reveal Himself to them in some way, and usually He will do that. (I suspect He would do it every time except for some sort of resistance in the person we are praying for.) When that happens it is a wonderful and glorious thing. In studying the subject of inner healing and deliverance for almost 40 years, I have learned a lot of insights that can be helpful to hurting people. These insights are based on scriptural truth, and they are significant to our lives. But one minute of the presence of the Lord brings more healing than all of my teaching and ministry. I am sure that the Lord's presence here on earth is filtered through a lot of pollution in the atmosphere, mostly our interior atmosphere. Just think what it is going to be like to stand in His presence on that Day! Glory Hallelujah!

You and I were created to walk with Him. He wants us to love Him: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength.* We love Him only because He first loved us. Are you experiencing His love in your life? I am not implying that we should always experience His presence with such overwhelming euphoria. That was a once-in-a-lifetime experience that was a gift of pure grace. If His presence was always so glorious to us, I don't think we would mature. Remember that Peter, James, and John experienced Jesus in His full majesty on the Mount of Transfiguration, but immediately they came back down to the valley where there was an epileptic boy who needed ministry. Nevertheless, let us heed His promise to us: *If you seek Me with your whole heart, you will find Me.*

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU HAVE ETERNAL LIFE?

(How do you know you are genuinely a Christian?)

Great days, that is the most important question we will ever consider. About the year 90 AD, almost 60 years after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, the only surviving Apostle, John, wrote a little circular letter to the churches near Ephesus to answer that question. His letter has come down to us as the epistle of 1 John. In 1 John 5:13, John says, *I have written these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, **that you may know that you have eternal life**, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.*

John wrote by divine inspiration, so God has given to believers down through history three tests to prove the genuineness of our faith and to show us whether we truly have eternal life:

- (1) The test of belief
- (2) The test of obedience and righteousness

The test of love

(First) - The test of belief:

1 John 2:1b-2 - *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.*

2:22-23 - *Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is the antichrist who denies the Father and the Son. Whoever denies the Son does not have the Father either; he who acknowledges the Son has the Father also.*

4:2-3 - *By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world.*

4:10, 14-15 - *In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loves us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins. And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent the Son as Savior of the world. Whoever confesses that Jesus is the Son of God, God abides in him, and he in God.*

(Second) - The test of obedience and righteousness: 2:3-4 - *By this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. (Reminder: In the Great Commission, Matthew 28:18-20, the resurrected Christ gives His commission to the church: *Go and make disciples of all nations.* And what is a disciple? Jesus defines it in Verse 20 - *Teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you.*)*

2:29 - *If you know that He is righteous, you know that everyone who practices righteousness is born of Him.* (Note: It is in the gospel of John, John 3:16, that Jesus talks to Nicodemus about being "born again." Now in the epistle of John, God defines being "born again" not just as believing in Christ, but also as "practicing righteousness.")

3:4-10 - *Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. Whoever abides in Him does not (practice) sin. Whoever (practices) sin has neither seen Him nor known Him. Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born of God.*

3:21-22 - *Beloved, if our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God. And whatever we ask we receive from Him, because we keep His commandments and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.*

(Third) The test of love. 3:23-24 - *This is His commandment: that we should believe on the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, as He gave us commandment.*

4:7-21 (selected) - *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. We have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear. We love because He first loved us.*

Combination of tests of belief, obedience and righteousness, and love.

5:1-5 - *Whoever believes that Jesus is the Christ is born of God, and everyone who loves Him who begot also loves him who is begotten of Him. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God and keep His commandments. For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that overcomes the world - - our faith. Who is he who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.*

CONSEQUENCES

I recently had a long conversation with a man who has worked for many decades with high school and college age young people. He told me that in talking with people in their 30's and below it doesn't do any good to tell them that something is wrong, not acceptable, and that there will be bad consequences if they do it again. He said you have to reason with them and appeal to them about right and wrong, but it is useless to warn them about doing certain things. I didn't understand what he meant. He explained that these young people have been raised in a culture where their teachers and even parents had no authority to enforce discipline or punishment. If an adult touches a youngster, he can call 911 and have the adult arrested, or if it is a teacher he can have him fired. So people have grown up ignoring anyone who corrects them by warning them about adverse consequences.

Wow! We have set up an entire generation to ignore the warnings in scripture. They think that God is just like their elders in present day America and that they can thumb their noses at Him with impunity. Big mistake! The Old Testament contains many promises of blessings for the Jews **if** they would walk in obedience to the covenant which God graciously gave to them through Abraham, but then God goes on to warn them again and again of the curses, the consequences, that would come upon them if they rebelled against Him and walked in the way of the godless nations. Deuteronomy 28 and following is one place where God enumerates the tremendous blessings or horrible curses that depend totally on the choice of the people. He warns them that their disobedience will eventually cause them to be cast out of the land of Israel and scattered across the whole earth. This is exactly what happened.

The New Testament is the story of God's amazing grace when He sent His only son to die for our sins, and through faith (surrender) to Him we can escape the consequences of sin. Paul tells the Thessalonians that Jesus "*rescues us from the coming wrath.*" (1 Thess. 1:10)

The gospel message makes no sense at all if there is no coming wrath. There are no consequences for evil behavior either here or hereafter, so we don't need to be rescued from anything. Surveys show that the majority of members of evangelical churches (those that supposedly believe the Bible), believe in universal salvation and do not believe in hell. That means they believe that "if there is a hereafter" there will not be a judgment because everyone is going to heaven. Mother Teresa is going to heaven, but so is Hitler, Saddam Hussein, and Osama bin Laden. That means that Jesus' death on the cross was a meaningless charade and He was a misguided fool. Likewise, those who believe in Him and follow Him are misguided fools.

Jesus said, *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who after killing the body has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him.* (Luke 12:4)

Paul warns us in Gal. 6: *Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit from the Spirit will reap eternal life.* There are hundreds more verses in the New Testament that declare to us not only that "*God is love,*" but also that "*God is a consuming fire.*"

I believe we have to continue to preach the whole counsel of God and depend on the Holy Spirit to bring conviction and truth to those who have been trained to ignore all warnings and to live smug and Christ-denying lives.

PROOFS OF THE RESURRECTION

These are a few of the proofs of Christ's resurrection:

- **Eye witnesses.** 1 Cor. 15 lists all of the eye witnesses of Christ's resurrection, including 500 at one time, many of whom were still living.
- **Cowards to courage.** The eleven apostles were transformed from cowards who were hiding from the Jews to courageous men who were martyred for their faith.

- **Birth of the church.**
- **Worship on Sunday.** The day of worship for believers was moved from the Sabbath (Saturday) to the first day of the week, the day Christ arose.
- **Changed lives.** Millions of people have been set free from their sins - their fear, anger, bitterness, cynicism, lusts, addictions - to live loving, responsible lives.
- **Miracles.** As is true for many of you, I have personally seen some people healed in ways that can only be described as miraculous. I have seen twisted backs and legs straighten out and heard bones cracking and snapping as they were put back in place. I have seen a few cases of blind eyes opened and deaf ears opened. I have not seen anyone rise from the dead yet, but I am hoping to see that before I die. There is a story about an old man who had been saved after being a drunkard for many years who was being confronted by an atheist that was ridiculing the idea of miracles. The old man said, "I have seen a miracle. I have seen Jesus change whiskey into groceries for my family and shoes for my babies." Amen.

OBSERVATIONS AND QUOTES

- I must admit that I was glad and relieved when Osama bin Laden was killed by our Special Ops Seal team, especially when I learned that he was still directing terrorism against our country and others. But I felt uneasy about the celebrations that broke out in our nation. Proverbs 17:5 says, *He who mocks the poor shows contempt for their Maker; whoever gloats over disaster will not go unpunished.* The book of Obadiah (1:12) has a warning to the people of Edom: *You should not look down on your brother in the day of his misfortune, nor rejoice over the people of Judah in the day of their destruction, nor boast so much in the day of their disaster.....* Of course, it is a different situation, but still it made me very uncomfortable to observe the laughter and celebration over someone's death.
- Bayless Conley said that when he was a new Christian he frequented a certain tailor shop, and the tailor was a big, profane guy who obviously did not know the Lord. One day as Bayless was leaving the shop and getting in his car he felt an impression that he should return to the shop and talk to the man about his soul. He thought that would be kind of awkward and decided he would talk to the man on his next visit. The next day someone said to Bayless, "Did you hear about that tailor? He walked into his shop this morning and dropped dead." Bayless went off by himself, dropped onto his knees, and cried out to God for forgiveness. But it was too late for that tailor to have the opportunity to receive Christ. Bayless made a promise that he would never ignore a prompting like that for the rest of his life, and he never has. Let's you and I make a similar promise to the Lord.
- **GOD HATES MIXTURE.** I have been planning a teaching with this title but never have got around to it. Deut. 22:11 says, *You shall not wear a garment of different sorts, such as wool and linen mixed together.* What in the world does God have against mixing two different types of material? If that law was in effect today, we would have to throw out most all our clothes. But the point is not about clothes, it's about mixing our faith in God with idols, other values, other lovers. So it applies to all of us.
- **THE VINEYARD PRAYER MODEL.** Following are some of the tips the Vineyard churches are given about praying for or ministering to people:
 - Ask for the compassion of Jesus.
 - Keep the interview brief.
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to come, and then wait on Him to come.
 - Pray with your eyes open (so you can see what is happening).
 - Pray with authority, believing God will speak to you.
 - Pray taking risks and don't be afraid to fail.
 - Ask the person how they are doing and what they are experiencing.
 - Physical Phenomena are sometimes associated with the Holy Spirit's activity. These phenomena should not be equated with the Holy Spirit; they are an individual's physiological and emotional responses to the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. Examples: Shaking, stiffening, change of breathing, rocking, weaving or acting drunk, laughing or crying, glistening or perspiring, heat or coolness, fluttering of eyelids, falling.

God Bless,
Glenn

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