

**THE
MYSTERY_{OF}
SUFFERING**

THE
MYSTERY_{OF}
SUFFERING

WE ARE ACCOUNTABLE TO A HOLY AND
SOVEREIGN GOD, THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH.

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Published by Redemption Press, PO Box 427, Enumclaw, WA 98022.

Second Printing 2012.

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Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations used in this book are taken from *The Revised Standard Version* of the Bible.

ISBN 13: 978-1-63232-139-8

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2007903067

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INTRODUCTION



A quick succession of alarming developments throughout the world in recent times has presented unprecedented challenges. These have compelled people everywhere to take a hard look at the state of our world, and to ponder where the human race is headed. Some of the developments appear good, with apparently desirable benefits, such as advances in science, engineering and medicine. Much of what we see in other facets of life, however, keeps us baffled and frightened. We are beginning to realize that science, engineering and medicine cannot deal with the weightier matters of life. A casual look at various human institutions will reveal a progressive slide into a state of anxiety and chaos that leaves experts in all fields of human endeavor scrambling for illusive answers, and the rest of humanity stunned because of what is happening.

The first casualty of these rapid developments is the human family. Women sought equality of opportunities with men in positions and pay in the workplace, and today there are laws guaranteeing women equal access to work and equal pay with men in most nations of the world. Women not only obtained parity of access to jobs and pay but they also sought and obtained equality of authority in the home. A man and his wife equally share in the ownership of and responsibility for their home

and family. However, divine authority over the home rests on the man. The woman bears the husband's name and the children are named after their fathers. All human civilizations have acknowledged and maintained this divine arrangement in the home and the human race prospered, flourished and advanced. With the advent of the women liberation movement, the divine authority in the home was not only challenged but has been virtually overthrown.

In all human institutions except the home (marriage), there is always an acknowledged head and lead person. Where there is a president there is a vice president. They are equal before the law as citizens of a country in every respect, except that the president is in charge and the vice president honors, respects and lives with the arrangement, and does not challenge or seek to usurp authority of the president. The vice president may have differing views with the president but the president's views always prevail.

In like manner, there is always a pilot and a co-pilot in any aircraft, a commanding officer in any military formation, principals and vice-principals in schools, chairman and vice-chairman of the board of a corporation, president and vice president of a corporation, a coach and assistant coach of a team, and so on. This arrangement has endured in all human organizations because it works well. Even where a vice president is richer, more educated and more intelligent than the president, the acknowledged line of authority is strictly maintained to avoid chaos and anarchy. Sadly, the human home has become an exception and chaos has resulted. It is no longer a question of who is right or wrong; the truth is that the human family has unraveled as a result.

A man who is allowed to exercise his God-given authority in his home brings stability, confidence, discipline and balanced life for children, who will become the future of a nation and carry on the human traditions that perpetuate the human race. The home run by a single parent or where the divine authority has been overthrown or stripped away will raise children with values that are alien to and opposed to values that create stability in the world, engender peaceful co-existence of peoples and respect for authority, and value human life above that of

mere animals. The nations of the world were organized as the United Nations for the purpose of upholding these values that are now being overthrown through the fall of the human family. The damage done and still being done to the human family is taking its toll to varying degrees on humanity all over the world. Evil has started in the home and the consequences are permeating all facets of life.

Resulting from the collapse of human values right from the home, governments are now legalizing immorality and shutting down voices of reason in the guise of protecting human rights and freedom of speech. Immorality, greed, witchcraft, virtual and actual violence, insensitivity, insincerity and deception are now enthroned and accepted as part of the culture of the world. Things once regarded as evil in former times—such as disrespect for parents, the aged, and those in authority, having children out of wedlock, publicly exposing human nakedness, sexual immorality, abortion, homosexuality, indecent, filthy, coarse and impolite expressions, wide spread use of addictive drugs, slavery, prostitution, gambling, and the like—have become acceptable and normal in the minds of a great many people, and are spreading like wild fire all over the world. These things are practiced and spread through the news media, academic institutions, medical institutions, fashion and apparel industry, sports and entertainment organizations, some religious organizations and unfortunately, individual homes.

As we progressively devalue ourselves through accepting, propagating and acquiescing to unacceptable conduct and lifestyles, the world has been witnessing an escalation in the intensity, severity and diversity of human diseases and illnesses in both the young and the old, increased violence in all levels of society, intense financial stress and anxiety afflicting most people, frequent and highly violent storms ravaging nations, fires, and earthquakes, global economic decline, and the inability of nations to safeguard themselves from developing internal chaos, and the loss in the world of all innocence and simplicity that once was. This grave state of affairs has prompted countless people all over the world to begin searching for answers to why we suffer, and what, if any, can be done.

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If you are looking for answers, look no further. This book will lead you on a search to find the riches of the mysteries of God that will reset the path of your life and turn you away from the destruction that has been ravaging mankind.

Throughout the book I address the issue of suffering in the world to show that God abundantly revealed that the suffering and afflictions we face are not random or chance occurrences and they are not without finite remedies. God's word of power spoken long ago established and totally controls the course of all events in the universe, including suffering. By that same word of God's power he revealed that there are specific conducts or actions and thoughts that are inherently unsafe and will without fail bring us suffering and miserable death. You need to know this. God, in his infinite mercy, has revealed to us these unsafe conducts that we may keep away from them. He has made available to us his power to follow only safe conducts for our own good. Whenever we wander away from safe lifestyles, we would experience afflictions, and if we repent or turn away from our unrighteous conducts and confess them to God, his power will again be made available to mitigate or overcome the afflictions that have set in.

God also revealed that there is an invisible enemy, Satan the devil, that operates on earth, and whose primary objective is to invent, reveal, glamorize, teach and propagate unsafe conducts and cultures to draw man with him to oppose and fight God, with grave consequences. Those who follow righteousness or God's approved conduct and who help and teach others to follow righteousness also face the wrath of Satan, the enemy of all righteousness. Those who follow righteousness face a different kind of suffering known as persecution. You will learn how to distinguish the two forms of afflictions of the enemy. Whatever the nature of the affliction the enemy brings against you, God has revealed to us his unfailing remedies to suffering. These remedies will transform and shield from harm whoever reads this book, accepts God's revelation of why we suffer, and follows his recommended action plans.

CHAPTER 1

THE CHRISTIAN DILEMMA IN UNDERSTANDING SUFFERING ON EARTH



Often you hear about or witness suffering and untold hardships assailing people—wars, famines, poverty, droughts, marital problems, divorces, unemployment, murders, diseases, floods, accidents, and all manner of man-made or natural disasters. Do you ever wonder why they occur?

A great many people think that these are mere chance occurrences, and they happen in your life when you are out of luck. Others attribute suffering to destiny – you have been destined to suffer, there is no reason for it, and there is nothing you can do about it.

Many Christians are confused because they believe there is a God who is just, righteous and merciful, yet he allows such grave suffering on his people. How is that possible? Does God get satisfaction out of seeing people suffer, or does He have no power to stop the suffering of humanity? Are there things on earth that can and do occur on their own power outside God's control? What happened to all the great promises God has made to His people who now wonder why they still suffer? Consider the following examples of the many great promises of God that saturate the entire Bible:

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The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

—Psalm 34:7

The young lions suffer want and hunger; but *those who seek the Lord lack no good thing.*

—Psalm 34:10

When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles.

—Psalm 34:17

Because you have made the Lord your refuge, the Most High your habitation no evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent.

—Psalm 91:9-10

A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand; but it will not come near you. You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.

—Psalm 91:7-8

And there was given him the book of the prophet Isaiah. He opened the book and found the place where it was written; “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.”

—Luke 4:17-19

You shall serve the Lord your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of you. None shall cast her young or be barren in your land; I will fulfill the number of your days.

—Exodus 23:25-26

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These are some of the many wonderful promises God has made to His children who wonder why they still suffer endlessly and grievously as they do. Can God lie, or are the writers of the Bible and preachers lying or making things up? Is it possible that there is some set safe ways of living on earth we are required to follow that we are ignoring, hoping God will understand our human limitations and change the world to accommodate our lusts? Is it then possible that we don't understand how holy God is or what holiness is, and why He wants us to be holy or free from spiritual defilement or sin, as He is? Does He intend that through safe conduct we will avoid sin that causes suffering? Is it possible that we still don't understand the purpose of God in sending Christ to come and redeem us? Don't you believe we need a redeemer? Don't you believe He came because of our sins, and that with sins came suffering and death, and that He came to redeem us from sin and its consequences—suffering and death? Our Christian faith is anchored on Christ, that He came in the flesh and was without sin but bore our sins in his own body and paid the price we were to pay. Because sin brings suffering and death, He suffered and died prematurely as full payment for the sins of mankind, that those who believe and *turn away from sin* may be spared suffering and premature death, for it is written:

Because he cleaves to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name. When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble, I will rescue him and honor him. With long life I will satisfy him, and show him my salvation.

—Psalms 91:14-16

You shall serve the Lord your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from the midst of you. None shall cast her young or be barren in your land; I will fulfil the number of your days.

—Exodus 23:25-26

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Grace to you and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father; to whom be the glory for ever and ever. Amen.

—Galatians 1:3-5

Some Christians have been misled into believing that their suffering—diseases, penury, accidents, barrenness, loss of their entire property to floods or to fire, depression, phobias, chronic crippling pain, blindness, and the like—is an approval of their superior Christian faith and standing, and is, therefore, for the glory of God, since by it they advance in the kingdom of God. They believe it is a cause for rejoicing. How is that possible, seeing that it is for redeeming us from these that Christ came? If Christ came to redeem us from these, our *continuing to suffer them as unbelievers do* cannot be for the glory of God. Go through the congregations of all major denominations and all churches to observe the same nature and intensity of suffering among them as among unbelievers. Visit hospital wards and you will also observe no differences between Christians and unbelievers among those suffering from incurable or chronic diseases, regardless of their ages. Wherever you go in society—schools, workplaces, the military, and even retirement homes, you will not find any differences in the prevalence and intensity of afflictions between believers and unbelievers. Something is definitely not working, as it should in the lives of many Christians, *if* God's Word or promises are true. Because God cannot lie, the problem lies with us. We have rejected the Word of God concerning the source of the suffering of all humanity, Christians and unbelievers alike—sin, our individual and collective sins, and we are all needlessly paying the price.

Fruitful Christians, however, face an additional source of suffering arising from persecution. Persecution results exclusively from actions of other human beings and human institutions under Satan's control. Satan's purpose in persecution is to discourage you from living a righteous life and serving God through taking the message of salvation

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to the unsaved and injecting biblical views and values into public policy. Persecution is not responsible for accidents, diseases, floods, fires, marital problems, poverty, barrenness, and the myriad of other afflictions devastating many Christians. Let us find out God's revelation of why we suffer these afflictions, and the solutions he has provided. Unless we believe God's revelation of the cause of our many afflictions, His solutions will not work for us since all things we receive from God come through faith (Mark 11:24; James 1:5-7).

Through scriptures such as the following, God has revealed that there is an afflicter who afflicts humanity through sin, and that Christ came to deliver us from the afflicter and sin and from the afflictions sins bring:

And there was a woman who had had a spirit of infirmity for eighteen years; she was bent over and could not fully straighten herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her and said to her, "Woman, you are freed from your infirmity." And he laid his hands upon her, and immediately she was made straight, and she praised God. But the ruler of the synagogue, indignant because Jesus had healed on the Sabbath, said to the people, "There are six days on which work ought to be done; come on those days and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." Then the Lord answered him, "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath untie his ox or his ass from the manger, and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

—Luke 13:11-16

And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, "You dumb and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him, and never enter him again." And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse; so that most of them said, "He is dead." But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose. And when he had entered the house, his disciples asked him privately, "Why could we

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not cast it out?” And he said to them, “This kind cannot be driven out by anything but prayer.”

—Mark 9:25-29

Now he was casting out a demon that was dumb; when the demon had gone out, the dumb man spoke, and the people marveled.

—Luke 11:14

Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward, Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse befall you.”

—John 5:13-14

And getting into a boat he crossed over and came to his own city. And behold, they brought to him a paralytic, lying on his bed; and when Jesus saw their faith he said to the paralytic, “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.” And behold, some of the scribes said to themselves, “This man is blaspheming.” But Jesus, knowing their thoughts, said, “Why do you think evil in your hearts? For which is easier, to say, ‘Your sins are forgiven,’ or to say, ‘Rise and walk’? But that you may know that the Son of man has authority on earth to forgive sins”—he then said to the paralytic—“Rise, take up your bed and go home.” And he rose and went home.

—Matthew 9:1-7

There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, “Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all the others who

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dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish.”

—Luke 13:1-5

The above scriptures make it clear that sin is the cause of suffering of all people and that although not everyone will suffer the same fate or in the same way, those spared suffering for the moment will similarly suffer for their sins unless they turn away from sins or repent and receive forgiveness. It is not a question of if but when God’s judgment will come. Many misconstrue God’s mercy and slowness to anger to mean that God condones sins or forgets to discipline the sinner. They, therefore, live under the illusion that there are no consequences for sin since they fail to see any immediate consequences of their sins or any links between their sins and some burdens in life they are carrying. The scripture says that God will not leave the guilty (those who fail to repent and receive forgiveness) unpunished (Numbers 14:18).

Christ came on a mission, and that mission has to do with the activities of Satan in our lives as a result of our sins. Our sin gives Satan legal right to oppress or afflict us. Sin, a *spiritual poison*, like physical poisons, has a unique nature, and that nature is destruction. Satan has a destructive or sin nature and he is the author of sin. Anyone that has been redeemed who again obeys or follows Satan instead of God when dealing with *any* issues of life willingly exposes himself to and receives again Satan’s nature, which is spiritual poison, and be defiled, or commits sins. As a consequence, he will experience within his body and in his affairs or circumstances the effects of sin—suffering, destruction, chaos, and disorder.

Deep down, many Christians are confused as they watch in disbelief the devastation going on in the lives of apparently good people in the church, in spite of the great promises of God. The possible explanation of this confusion could be that many church leaders are not so sure themselves why Christians suffer. Those who do know may be afraid to openly declare it for reasons best known to them. Could it be they want to

please man instead of God by trying to void the Word of God concerning suffering? God says that those giving false comfort to the millions who are suffering by holding and teaching that sin is not responsible for our suffering, have wearied Him with their false teaching, according to the following scripture:

You have wearied the Lord with your words. Yet you say, "How have we wearied him?" By saying, "Every one who does evil is good in the sight of the Lord, and he delights in them." Or by asking, "Where is the God of justice?"

—Malachi 2:17

As humans, we fail to see the righteousness, justice, and mercy of God, for instance, in the death of a young mother of three small children during labor in the birth of a fourth child, leaving behind all four children for an unemployed husband. How is it possible that a righteous God will allow terrorists to blow up, in New York and Washington DC, in one morning, three of the most symbolically significant buildings in the world, destroying thousands of lives? How about the many children who are dying daily of painful childhood diseases, abuse, neglect, and malnutrition? What did they do to deserve their fate? Why would an airliner fall from the sky and kill all passengers aboard? Why are so many killed in the protracted violence in the Middle East and other troubled areas of the world? Why is there such great poverty and misery in much of the third world? Why are so many devastated by AIDS or cancer or incredible birth defects? Why are so many marriages in deep trouble today? Why do volcanoes, earthquakes, tidal waves, storms, landslides, floods, and wild fires bring so much destruction on people year by year? Why do crops fail? Why are there scandals in churches?

If these things happen to unbelievers, why do they also happen to Christians since God's promises are true? Is there really no distinction between believers and unbelievers? Are there any benefits here on earth for being Christians? The answer is, of course, yes (1 Timothy 4:7-8).

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Do you then believe that the promises of God are not true? These are indeed tough questions for many in the church to answer to the satisfaction of all who believe that God is just, merciful, righteous, holy, and omnipotent.