

The Problem of Evil

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Chapter 1

The Problem with Free Will

One of the most difficult and persistent questions in history is how a loving God could allow evil to occur in the earth. Usually, men explain evil as a creation of Satan in order to remove all responsibility from God's shoulders. Yet the problem with that view is that it lessens the problem but does not resolve it fully. The leftover problems that this explanation leaves must be ignored in order to make the theory workable.

For instance, if Satan is the creator of evil, who created him? Did not God create him? Did God create a defective angel? Was Satan a perfect angel with a free will which caused him to sin? Do all angels have free will? Is God taken by surprise when an angel falls? Is not a creator responsible for what he creates?

The common explanation to the problem of creative responsibility is "free will." If Satan has a free will, then he is said to be fully responsible for all that he does, leaving God innocent of anything evil that happens in the world.

This principle then extends to man as well. If man does evil, then he does so by his total free will, leaving God innocent of anything that men do.

These explanations come at the expense of God's sovereignty, of course. Is God incapable of creating any being without giving them a free will? Is God really an innocent Bystander in history? Is God really a helpless Superman in the sky who has all the POWER to stop evil, but is too much of a Gentleman to do much about it?

The leftover problems are: (1) When God created beings with free will, did He not know that they would start doing evil things? (2) Is a Creator not responsible for that which He creates? (3) Why would a good and all-knowing God create either spiritual or physical beings with the capability of doing evil things?

We are usually told that such things were *necessary* in order to avoid creating a bunch of robots. Well, first of all, necessity does not remove liability. We are back to our original question, except that instead of asking how a good God could create evil (or evil beings with free will) we must now ask what it was that seemed to *compel* God to create them this way. And how does such reasoning eliminate God's liability?

We have been told that this was the only way God could end up with a quality product in the end of time, and that God knew ahead of time that only a tiny percentage of men would "pass the test" and become the sons of God. We are left with the impression that God did not like this result—that He grieves over it—and yet this All-Wise God could find no other way to achieve His goal of bringing forth children.

The bottom line is that God's sovereignty and wisdom are greatly eroded by this explanation. The view first postulates spiritual beings who do things according to their own will, independently of God, and then postulates billions of human beings each having their own will and domain independent of God. By the time we enter all of these into the equation, we find that God is largely shouldered out of His own universe.

Worse yet, all of these independent gods in the spirit and in the world have no problem using force and coercion to impose their wills upon others in the earth—yet the rules somehow forbid God to do the same. Who makes up these one-sided rules?

Then also God's very wisdom and capability comes into question. Was He not wise enough to make a plan that would save everyone? Was He incapable? Does man's free will trump God's will? Is man the master of his own destiny, except for all the coercion taking place at the hands of other men or the things that the devil made them do?

If men are being coerced or forced by other men or spirits, then men are really only as free as their level of authority. As they rise in authority, they get to force and coerce others who then have less free will. But only the top authority—the king perhaps?—seems to approach having total free will. Everyone else is being forced to be obedient, even against his will.

Once again, we come full circle to the original concept that God (the Highest King) is the only One with total free will. Of course, if we believe that God and Satan are two independent gods of equal power, then we would have to conclude that both God and Satan have total free will in their respective domains, while man's will is limited by the devil's force and coercion.

To this mix, we must add an additional factor. Did any man have the power to choose his own parents? Or the religion into which he was born? Or his class or economic status? All of these are powerful factors in determining whether or not he will be a Christian, a Muslim, a Hindu, or a Jew. How much free will does a man really have to know Jesus Christ as you know Him? How much free will to accept Jesus did the man have who was born in the heart of the Congo a thousand years ago?

Can we really say that men have free will when we all know that many of the most important choices in life were never theirs to make in the first place? Is this not a limitation on the concept of free will?

There is another theological view that affirms that God is totally sovereign. John Calvin was rather famous for this view. He set forth the view that God sovereignly chose a few to be saved and most to be burned in hell. He did not leave this to any random chance or to man's free will. God foreknew all and predestined all to be either saved or burned in the end, he claimed.

Such a stern view, of course, does tremendous damage to our idea of the Love of God. But in Calvin's day, life was difficult, and it is doubtful that he really understood the concept of Love. He could not reconcile a Sovereign God with a God of Love, and so he chose to define God by His Power rather than by His Love.

The problems with this view are quite obvious to most people. Who wants to believe in a tyrannical God who is powerful enough to save everyone but deliberately chose not to do so? Again, there are a host of leftover problems with Calvin's God that remain unanswered.

In my view, the only way to reconcile a Sovereign God with a God of Perfect Love is to make Him so powerful that He can save everyone on the planet. To do so, however, one must also make Him totally Just. But how can a just God save everyone, considering the fact that there is so much evil in the world? Is there no way for an all-wise God to do this?

I believe that there is a way to save all mankind while preserving God's sovereignty, love, mercy, and justice—and every other part of God's character. If it could be shown that He is powerful enough to save all, loving enough to save all, and wise enough to overcome the problem of evil in the world without violating His own just character, would not this be the ideal God to follow? Would not everyone admire such a God and want to follow Him, not by compulsion, but by love?

That is the kind of God that I follow. This is the secret to really knowing God for who He is. Those who truly seek Him will find Him, but I have discovered that most people do not know that such a God even exists. Such a God is “too good to be true.”

Others have been so abused that they do not want God to change the hearts of their abusers and to save them. Their heart bitterness and emotional wounds will not allow them to forgive and let go long enough to conceive of such a God. They are looking for a God powerful enough to protect them from abuse, but not so loving as to work in the lives of their abusers, to turn them from their sin, and to save them.

Most people, however, simply do not know that the Scriptures set forth such a God, because they have been warned against Him by those who set forth alternate viewpoints. As we look at this more closely in this book, I will point out Scriptures for your consideration that you may have missed in the past.

Chapter 2

Defining Evil and Sin

There is no place in Scripture where we are told that evil is a creation of either man or the devil. While it is true that men DO evil, and that evil certainly exists in the world, God always takes credit for it in the ultimate sense.

All evil is the result of Adam's sin. Evil is ultimately the divine judgment for sin. Evil is the result of sin. Therefore, evil is not a CAUSE but is derivative. For example, God told Adam and Eve that in the day they eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they will surely DIE. Death is evil, and it is the consequence of sin, the effect of a prior cause.

All evil stems from this one act, the “original sin,” and is merely an extension of that first great evil called “death.” Who would question that death was the consequence of sin by the justice of God? Hence, in the great chapter setting forth the sovereignty of God, He tells us in Isaiah 45:7, “*I form the light and create darkness; I make peace and CREATE EVIL; I the Lord do all these things.*”

Not only death, but also calamities and pestilence are evils which God may bring upon a nation for their sin. All judgment for sin is “evil” from the perspective of the ones affected by it—until they come to see that such judgments were sent by a just God to judge sin.

This is not to say that God SINS. Most people object to God creating evil on the grounds that it makes God a sinner. But such a view is taken only when one does not know the difference between evil and sin. God creates evil, but God does not sin.

The Hebrew word for “sin” is *khawtaw*, which means “to miss” or “to fail to hit the mark (goal).” The definition of sin is made clear in both the Old and New Testaments. First, in Judges 20:16 we read,

¹⁶ Out of all these people 700 choice men were left-handed; each one could sling a stone at a hair and not MISS [*khawtaw*].

Here the meaning of the word is clear. It has to do with not missing a target. When the target, goal, or standard is the law of God, then to miss has moral implications. We call it “sin.” In this sense, Paul tells us in Romans 3:23, “*For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.*” In other words, the glory of God is the goal—the mark—and all men, in shooting toward that goal, have found their “arrows” falling short of that goal. All have missed the mark.

God creates evil, but God never fails to achieve His goals. He never misses the mark. If God were ever to fail to reach His goal, He would become a “sinner.” So if we understand the divine plan, which is His goal, and see it, not as wishful thinking but as the divine target of all history, then we will know the end from the beginning, because God will not fail to reach that goal.

There are many who think that God spends most of His time dreaming about what might have been, could have been, or would have been—if only Adam had not sinned. Such a mindset would produce many regrets, spawned from the despair of a great divine Failure. Was Adam's sin outside the overall divine plan? Was God taken by surprise? If so, then God is a failure and thus a sinner by biblical definition.

But no, God forbid! God was neither surprised nor handicapped by Adam's sin. The divine plan will succeed in the end. Neither mankind nor the devil can stop the least part of God's plan for His creation.

Evil is only sin if it misses the mark. Mankind has been given a mark to hit, a goal to achieve, a perfect standard. It is set forth in Scripture in general, and in the law in particular. The law is the expression of the moral and judicial side of God's character. When men do evil to each other, it is a sin, because they fail to achieve the perfection of the glory of God. However, when God does evil, it is according to His perfect wisdom; it has purpose, and His arrow always hits the bull's eye. Though we do not always understand what He is doing—because we do not see the end from the beginning—we ought to have faith that He is a good God who will work all things together for good (Rom. 8:28).

Job is set forth in Scripture as a primary example by which we may understand the concept of evil. First, we are told that “Satan” needed God's permission to afflict Job with “evil.” See Job 1:12 and 2:6.

Why did God allow this? The book makes it clear that God had a higher purpose, not merely to test Job, but to bring Job to a greater level of understanding in the end. Job already knew more than the average Christian about the source of evil, for he said in 2:10,

¹⁰ Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity? In all this Job did not sin with his lips.

The word translated “adversity” (NASB) is the Hebrew word *ra’a*, which means “evil” and is so translated in the KJV. It carries the idea of calamity and anything which men call “evil.”

Job's friends tried to tell him that surely he was harboring some secret sin in his life. This would explain why God was judging him (or allowing Satan to judge him). But in saying this, they sinned with their lips, and in the end Job was required to pray for them (42:10).

At the end of the story (42:11, 12), Job's family came and “*comforted him for all the evil that the Lord had brought on him. . . . And the Lord blessed the latter days of Job more than his beginning.*”

In other words, when the Lord does or allows evil to befall us, it is ultimately for the purpose of blessing us. This is the basis of Paul's statement in Romans 8:28,

²⁸ And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

It is perhaps no coincidence that God worked anonymously to make men label this verse “8:28.” The number 828 is 2 x 414, which is the factor of “Cursed Time,” and it illustrates the fact that even God's so-called “curses” are ultimate blessings.

There are many other Scriptures that have direct references to God doing “evil” without sinning. Amos 3:6 says, “*If a calamity [ra-a] occurs in a city, has not the Lord done it?*” God always takes credit for bringing judgment upon a city or a nation—including Israel—in order that they might know the Source and purpose of their judgment, which they call “evil.”

Divine judgment is never coincidental, as historians may think. While God uses “natural causes,” He always stands behind history as the First Cause of all things. This is the story presented in Scripture, whether God was hardening Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 10:1) or putting a hook in his jaw (Ez. 29:4) to ensure that they would do His bidding.

We are called to get to know the God of the Bible, so that we begin to comprehend Him and the way He thinks by the mind of the Spirit. This is often difficult, especially the more evil we see and the more that bad things happen to us personally. Our perspective is simply too limited, too personal, too myopic, and so it is fortunate that we ourselves are not God.

We must ultimately come to the same conclusion as Joseph did, after being sold as a slave by his own brothers, and after being imprisoned for years through false accusation. In Gen. 50:19, 20 he said,

¹⁹ Fear not; for am I in the place of God? ²⁰ But as for you [brothers], you thought evil against me; but God meant it for good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save many people alive.

This attitude is the primary mark of spiritual maturity in Scripture. All the bitterness and anger of his youth had melted away, once he saw the greater purpose of God in all the “evil” done to him. He had ceased to think of good and evil dualistically. He now saw both good and evil with a singular mind as proceeding from God and having an ultimate good purpose.

Chapter 3

Duality, Evil, and Illusions

There are two very different views about the concept of duality. One view says that a dualistic mindset means *recognizing the existence* of two worlds: the material world and the spiritual world. According to that view, all that we see with our physical eyes, all evil, all pain and suffering, and all death is merely an *illusion*.

By this, they mean that the material world does not really exist, except in our minds. They say that we create our own reality by the power of the mind, and if we could simply achieve a singular mindset by eradicating all recognition of what they call illusion, then we could come into the Kingdom of God and become immortal without dying.

Of course, most of the people who have taught this in the past are long dead. And yet many continue trying to attain such a “singular” state of mind, thinking that where others failed, they will succeed. Such people are in bondage to their own self-effort and mental discipline.

Such a view is radically different from mine. To me, God is the ultimate Reality, and all that He has created is a derivative of that Reality. Though forms change, they are very real. Though all form is mortal, it is very real, for it is part of God's creation. It does not honor God to call his creation a mere illusion.

God does not create illusion, nor does the mind of man create reality. Reality already exists independently of our recognition or assent. When man's mind attempts to create its own reality or deny the existence of what already is, it is just another attempt by the carnal mind to control the situation by the power of thought.

The natural (carnal) mind exists, along with everything else God created. But it was created to be a servant to the spirit, not its master. When a man thinks that he may create his own reality by the power of his own mind, he is a prime example of one whose mind rules his spirit. His carnal mind looks at what God has created, sees matter, evil, and pain, and then disagrees with God. He then sets out to throw off the yoke of the spirit with an inner coup, and sets about to create the illusion of a new reality in its own image.

The result is not the creation of truth, but of illusion. In the name of singularity, such people deny the existence of what God has created and enthrone their own illusion of reality.

The material world is not an illusion. God created it and called it “very good” (Gen. 1:31). God does not create illusion. Man creates illusions by disagreeing with God. Creation is not an illusion; but man's *perception* of God's creation can certainly be an illusion.

Illusions have to do with perception, not reality. Our goal is not to enthrone denial, but to see the world with innocent perception as a little child. Our goal is to see God's creation as it is and to accept it without alteration. Anything short of this puts men on the path toward mental illness.

I have read many authors who deny the existence of the material world. In 2006, while taking the ferry from Washington to Victoria, B.C., my wife read a book advocating such a view. In our study of truth, we are not afraid to read alternate views, because our minds are better able to grasp truth by seeing its opposite. Thus, it is good to compare viewpoints.

However, we try not to be ruled by our natural minds. That means we subordinate the mind's dualistic comparisons of truth and illusion to the power of the spiritual, singular mind. We do not deny the existence of evil, nor of illusion itself. We recognize *the reality of illusion* as expressed in this book. But we see it as just another temporary evil that will ultimately work out for good. That deluded author is experiencing illusion so that he will appreciate the truth that will later be revealed.

Yet at the same time, we recognize that not all are so blinded to truth. In Romans 11:7 Paul contrasted the remnant of grace (the elect) with “the rest” who were blinded. I have no mandate or calling to open the eyes of the blind. That is the job of the Holy Spirit. I cannot create such a reality by the power of my own mind, and my spirit will not do so except as a conduit for the Holy Spirit.

I can only set forth truth as I perceive it, knowing that I am still learning and growing along with everyone else. Those who are of like mind will resonate to whatever truth I can present—and forgive where I fall short. Deep calls unto deep. The Spirit of God recognizes the Spirit of God in others.

In the book that my wife recently read, the author finally admitted his belief that Jesus Christ did not really need to die for sin. After all, in his view, there is no sin, no evil, no matter, no pain, and no suffering. Because sin itself is just an illusion, there was no point in Jesus dying for an illusion. Since there is no pain or suffering, he says, how could Jesus experience any pain or suffering? And if the wages of sin is death, then the wages of the illusion of sin is the illusion of death.

Thus, it is clear that this viewpoint not only destroys reality, but it forces us to deny the Cross and the very purpose of Christ's coming. I have claimed for years that this is what such men are teaching, but I never had an actual quotable example of this. Everyone else leads the reader only to the brink of that conclusion without actually saying so, lest the alarm bells go off in the minds of their audience.

It is imperative that we understand this aspect of the Gospel of Christ. It is imperative that we know the difference between illusion and reality and how to deal with it, lest we end up denying the Cross in the name of Jesus.

Our natural minds are dualistic by nature. The mind understands all things by their contrast. The mind understands black by its contrast—white. It understands what is long by its contrast—short. It understands good according to its perception of evil. The natural mind's inability to see with a singular "eye" (Luke 11:34) is only a problem when it refuses to submit to the leading of the spirit. When it does, however, then the truth can be known that from God proceed both good and evil, and that even the "evil" things God does actually serve a good purpose in the end.

We were created as "living souls" with a finite mind that was meant to serve our spiritual mind in which dwells the Holy Spirit of God. This soulish realm, along with everything else in creation, is real, for God did not create it as an illusion to be denied. The soulish mind naturally thinks in a dualistic manner, for this is the extent of its capability, but this is not "bad" or "evil" in itself. It only becomes evil when it stages a coup against the spiritual mind and then sets out to create a "better" reality in its own image. That so-called "reality" is the real illusion.

In Isaiah 45:7 we read that God creates evil. Men's soulish minds disagree with this for various reasons, primarily because they do not understand such a reality. If they cannot handle such a reality and cannot find the biblical answer to it, they often go into denial. The mind revolts, refuses to remain in its servant role, and then sets out to correct the situation. But because the mind itself is finite, it can only create illusions when it functions independently of the spirit.

The author mentioned earlier claims that he is called to be a creator, and that he can create reality by the power of thought. He further says that we cannot expect God to do it, because we ourselves have been called to do it. There is a grain of truth in what he says, because we have indeed been called to participate in the creation of the new heavens and the new earth. But we must do so only by the power of the Amen (Rev. 3:14).

An "Amen" person is a responder, not an initiator. He is a double witness of what the Spirit does, not a creator that expects God to bear witness of him. Apart from Him, we can do nothing (John 5:30; 15:5). As long as He is the Head directing the body, we have authority. But when we make ourselves the head, we can only scream at the universe and create more illusions of how we think things ought to be.

In other words they think to themselves, "If I were God, I would have done it this way—" thereby improving upon God's creation by eradicating all matter, human flesh, evil, pain, and suffering. Perhaps such people should read the book of Job again.

Chapter 4

The Will and Plan of God

Evil is not an illusion, but it certainly is a matter of perspective. When Stalin starved millions of people during the 1930's, it was “good” from his perspective and “evil” from the perspective of those who were starving. Both good and evil, as viewed by men, are matters of perspective.

I do not mean to say that there is no good or evil. There is. Both are very real, and, yes, there is certainly an absolute difference between right and wrong. I am not attempting to teach moral relativism. What I mean to say is that both good and evil stand positionally below the First Cause, who is God alone. God is good, and God is not evil, but yet God stands above both, using both for His good and perfect purpose.

To express these concepts in human language is not easy, and it is only possible for the human mind to accept and understand insofar as it is revealed by the Holy Spirit. Since I am still in the growth stage, I cannot claim either personal perfection in understanding nor expression, so I ask that you be patient and forgiving with me as I try to discuss these ponderous issues.

In the book of Romans, the apostle Paul makes a distinction between the plan and the will of God. In Romans 2:17, 18 Paul says,

¹⁷ But if you bear the name of “Jew” and rely upon the law and boast in God, ¹⁸ and know His will [*thelema*] and approve the things that are essential, being instructed out of the law.

The will of God is expressed here in terms of the law. “*Thou shalt not covet*” is the will of God. So is “*Thou shalt not steal*.” The law defines sin, for sin is lawlessness (1 John 3:4), and Paul says “*by the law is the knowledge of sin*” (Rom. 3:20).

Because of this, some would rather not learn the law, for such knowledge results in a consciousness of sin, which they say is “negative” and must be eradicated from the mind. Those who succeed in their goal are then able to sin without twinge of conscience, and this creates an illusion of righteousness.

Paul uses the term *thelema* to describe the WILL of God for us. This word is applicable on the human level to govern our dualistic minds. The law defines sin and righteousness for us and allows us to examine and analyze our attitudes, motives, and actions accordingly.

But Paul also uses another Greek word to describe the PLAN of God. We read of this in Paul's discussion of the sovereignty of God in Romans 9. In verses 9-13 Paul sets forth the story of Jacob and Esau as an example of His sovereignty, saying that God chose Jacob and rejected Esau before they were even born, “*in order that God's purpose according to His choice might stand, not because of works but because of Him who calls.*”

Those who do not understand the mind of God or His sovereignty attempt to water this down, saying that God knew ahead of time what Esau would be like, and that is why God rejected him. But Paul says no such thing. He says that God chose them before they had done either good or evil in order to show us that it was *not by works*, but purely by the sovereignty of God.

Of course, this sounds terribly unfair and “evil” to the carnal mind, but this is only unfair to those who do not understand Romans 5. One cannot properly understand the “unfairness” of God's plan if one has not understood the end of the story set forth in the fifth chapter. There, Paul makes it clear that the first Adam brought death upon all men (Rom. 5:12); even so the Last Adam (Jesus Christ) brought life to all men (Rom. 5:18).

Both scenarios came upon all men without their consent and apart from their own will. These decisions were made by God alone. In Adam, He imposed the death penalty, not only upon Adam, but upon all of His descendants—and, indeed, upon all of creation (Rom. 8:22). This would be terribly unfair and unjust, according to the law of God, which says through Ezekiel that the children shall not die for the sins of their father (Ez. 18:20).

Whenever we see God doing something that seems unjust or unfair, we can be sure that it is only because we are not seeing the whole picture. If we could see the end from the beginning, we would know that God is both just and good. The problem is not with God Himself, but with our finite perception and limited perspective.

Only when we combine Romans 5 with Romans 9 can we see the true justice and wisdom of God. God has imposed a temporary injustice upon all men, making all men pay for the sin of their father, Adam. This was done by the law of authority and headship, by which those under authority are adversely affected by the sin of their head.

In the same manner, however, the injustice is fully overthrown and rectified by the same law of headship in that Jesus, the Last Adam, has brought justification to all men (Rom. 5:18). Both acts and both results were done outside the will of man. Hence, Paul says in 1 Cor. 15:22, 23, “for *as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all shall be made alive, but each in his own order.*”

The only qualification to the overall principle is the fact that not all will be made alive at the same time. *Each in his own order* [tagma, “squadron”] indicates that there is a certain procedure that must be fulfilled before they enter into immortality. Not all are saved at the same time, nor, indeed, will all be saved in this life time. Most will be saved in the “lake of fire,” as the early Church clearly taught. (See my booklet, A Short History of Universal Reconciliation.)

Yes, there is a second opportunity for salvation. There is no Scripture saying otherwise. In fact, the law itself provides for a second Passover (“justification by faith”) for those who do not keep the first Passover. See Numbers 9. This is prophetic of things to come.

But getting back to our point of departure, Romans 9 gives us a second example of God's sovereign will over man's limited will. In Rom. 9:17 Pharaoh was divinely raised up to oppose the will of God for a season in order to declare God's name throughout all the earth. Verse 19 concludes,

¹⁹ You will say to me then, Why does He yet find fault [with Pharaoh]? For who resists His WILL [*boulema*, “plan”]?

The law defines the will of God, but the plan tells us His sovereign will, the heavenly perspective, the bigger picture. The will of God to Pharaoh was to “let My people go.” The plan of God was to harden Pharaoh's heart (Ex. 7:3; 10:1) in order to DELAY the fulfillment of His will until ten plagues had judged Egypt. Yes, God always took credit for this. We can disagree with Scripture to our own detriment, but we will not change the facts as they are written.

Viewed from the perspective of the finite mind, God was unjust in His dealings with Pharaoh. But when we understand that God's plan includes the salvation of all men, including Pharaoh, we begin to comprehend the mind of the spirit and see the end of the story.

In fact, God freely and unabashedly takes credit for doing what is seemingly unjust, because He is fully confident that in the end all creation will be reconciled in Christ. Col. 1:16-20 says,

¹⁶ For by Him all things [*ta panta*, “the all”] were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created by Him and for Him. . . . ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things [*ta panta*, “the all”] to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

“The all” of creation in verse 16 is “the all” that Christ reconciled at the cross in verse 20. Not just Adam and His descendants, but all of creation will be set free in the glorious liberty of the sons of God (Rom. 8:22). In fact, the manifestation of the sons of God is good news for the rest of creation, for they are the first-fruits of creation (James 1:18). See my book, Creation's Jubilee.

Our perspective is the *thelema* (will) of God, but as we submit to the mind of Christ and His *boulema* (plan), we are able to understand the purposes of God and see creation from His perspective. We are then left as awestruck as Paul when he says in Rom. 11:33,

³³ Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! . . . ³⁶ For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

Our limited perspective gives us an illusion of injustice, when in fact God is discovered to be totally sovereign and totally just. He will maintain His justice by holding all men accountable for the sins done in their life times; but He will teach them righteousness by means of His righteous judgments, “for when the earth experiences Thy judgments, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness” (Isaiah 26:9).

Chapter 5

The Fire of God's Judgment

Man's judgments are always flawed, because they proceed from the finite mind that does not see the end from the beginning. The only way that we can judge all things perfectly is by the spirit, and this requires submitting the soulish mind to the spiritual mind and deferring to the spirit.

Man's mind thinks dualistically, and this is most evident when we judge and even when we interpret God's judgments from our dualistic point of view. Many years ago the Persians developed a religion based upon the idea of "Persian Dualism." It was the best that the human mind could conceive. They believed that in the beginning, light and darkness became mixed, and that the purpose of history was to separate them once again into their respective zones.

Thus, they believed that in the end, God would obtain all the "good" people, while Satan would obtain all the "bad" people, and these would then coexist throughout eternity in their respective zones (that is, heaven and hell).

This idea permeated the Middle East and soon became adopted by Bible-believers. They began to interpret the Bible dualistically. But even so, a great number of early Christians rejected such Dualism and taught that God would save all men after the sinners had been purged by the "lake of fire."

Augustine, the "champion of eternal torments," admitted in his writings that "most people" disagreed with his idea that the unbelievers would be tormented for eternity. I gave this quote, among others, in my book, Creation's Jubilee.

The idea of eternal torment appears to be taught clearly in Scripture, because the Greek word *eonian*, "*pertaining to an eon*," is translated as "eternal" or "everlasting." But this Greek word did not mean to convey the idea of endlessness. For a full discussion of this word, see chapter five of my book, The Judgments of the Divine Law.

The incorrect translations of *aionian* began with Jerome who translated the Bible into Latin. His translation is called the Latin Vulgate. When he came to the word *aionian*, he rendered it by the Latin word *aeternas*, from which we get "eternal." The problem is, *aeternas* had a double meaning: (1) an age, and (2) an unlimited period of time. This left the door open for vengeful Church leaders to interpret *eonian* according to the alternate meaning of *aeternas*.

When the weight of theological interpretation shifted from the Greek-speaking world of the Seven Churches in Asia to the Latin Church of Rome, the Roman Church moved to stamp out the view of the Reconciliation of All Things. This began in the year 400 A.D. with the controversy between Theophilus of Alexandria and John Chrysostom of Constantinople. I told the well-known story in my book, A Short History of Universal Reconciliation.

This is one of the most unfortunate events in Church history, for it caused later Church Councils to declare the Reconciliation view to be heretical. It forced the people, in essence, to give up their Greek word *eonian* and to adopt the secondary meaning of *aeternas* when speaking of divine judgment for sin. After 1,500 years of this tradition of men, it is difficult for Christians to believe that there could be any alternative to "eternal torment."

But the Scriptures themselves have not changed, and now anyone can see how the words *aeon* (eon) and *eonian* are actually used in their own Bibles. As I showed in chapter five of my book, The Judgments of the Divine Law, many theologians of all denominations admit that the word does not mean "unending time." These include Dr. Robert Young, who put together Young's Concordance and his Literal Translation of the Bible.

If the first obstacle to understanding divine judgment is to grapple with the DURATION of "hell," the second is to understand the NATURE of the "lake of fire." In other words, is the lake of fire a literal fire that tortures people? Or is the "fire" symbolic of the divine law itself, which nowhere makes torture a remedy or judgment for any sin?

All divine judgment proceeds from His nature and character, because God will always remain true to Himself. He appeared to Israel only as a consuming "fire" (Deut. 4:12). In Deut. 33:2 we read that He sent His "fiery law" to Israel, or a Law of Fire. It was meant to consume "the flesh," to correct all sin that a man might commit against God or his neighbor.

Many years after the time of Moses, God asked the prophet in Jer. 23:29, "*Is not My word like fire?*" Yes, it is like fire, because it proceeds from the mind of God, who has manifested to us as a Consuming Fire.

In Daniel 7 we are told how the Ancient of Days will come to sit upon His throne and judge the world. Verse 9 says that “*His throne was the fiery flame; his wheels burning fire.*” A throne or a judge's "bench" is a symbol of law. When a king sits upon the throne, or a judge sits upon “the bench,” it indicates that he is about to judge according to the law. Thus, the throne is portrayed as fire, because the law is the fire.

Then Daniel 7:10 reads,

¹⁰ A river of fire was flowing and coming out from before Him. . . the court sat, and the [law] books were opened.

The “river of fire” is the judgment of the law upon the people. John saw this same scene in Revelation 20, except that he saw a “lake of fire,” rather than a river. Daniel saw the *origin* of the fire coming from the fiery throne itself, while John saw the *result* of the fiery stream as a “lake.”

Yet in both cases it is clear that God judges according to His own law, not according to the laws of man. God's law demands restitution, not torture. And where restitution is not possible (such as in the case of murder), God's law tells the judges to defer it to the Higher Court, removing the person from society so he can do no further damage. His case then awaits the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of time. This is why the law provides for a death penalty in such cases. Man's courts are incapable of dealing with every kind of criminal case, so it must await a Higher Court which has the ability to judge such cases.

Isaiah 26:9 says,

⁹ . . . for when the earth experiences Thy judgments, the inhabitants of the world learn righteousness.

Here the prophet tells us the mind of God and His purpose for lawful judgment. Torture does not teach people righteousness. It only wounds them. Never-ending judgment with no possibility for forgiveness only makes men bitter and angry, locking them in sin. It is not possible to reconcile creation by means of torture. Only Love is adequate to the task.

The time of the “lake of fire” will be the age-abiding judgment in which the believers will be given authority over those who used to be unbelievers—for, you see, once unbelievers have been given a corrective interview at the Great White Throne, it is not likely that they will emerge as unbelievers. The unbelievers will be under authority in that age and will learn righteousness BY EXAMPLE through those who have been perfected in Love.

According to law, the unbelievers will be “sold for their theft” (Ex. 22:3). Those who purchase them are called “redeemers,” for they redeem the sinner's debt note. The Court then entrusts the sinners into the hands of responsible redeemers, who will be given authority over creation, ruling and reigning with Christ.

These will be responsible to reform the sinners by Love, teaching them of the character of Jesus Christ, and bringing the sinner into spiritual maturity. This time of judgment is called “the second death,” which is the kind of death through which all believers must pass. Paul says, “I die daily,” and the sinners in that day will not be able to bypass this death process built into the law.

Yet this is not the end of the story, for the last enemy to be abolished is death itself (1 Cor. 15:26). This occurs at the great Jubilee of history, as prophesied by the law of Jubilee, where all debt (sin) is cancelled by this marvelous Law of Grace. This is the moment all creation is anticipating (Rom. 8:22). God fully intends to reconcile all of creation to Himself, so that He loses nothing. This is His plan, and He will not fail.

Chapter 6

The Evil of Imposed Mortality

All judgment for sin is evil. God imposed death (mortality) upon all mankind when Adam sinned. This has been the root cause of all subsequent evil in the world that man has done as a consequence of this mortal condition or weakness.

Many do not understand this, and even Bible translators have tried to correct Paul's writings, thinking that he made a mistake. A key misunderstanding is seen in the NASB translation of Romans 5:12,

¹² Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned.

As translated above, it seems to say that through Adam, sin entered the world—because he was the first sinner. And then death came as a result of sin. Then, as Adam begat children, this death (mortality) spread to them as well—“because all sinned.”

We are left with the impression that Adam's children all became mortal *because* they sinned. The implication is that if they had not sinned, they would not be mortal. This is incorrect, and it is not what Paul was actually saying.

The Concordant Literal New Testament translates it this way:

¹² Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, ON WHICH [*eph ho*] all sinned.

The Greek phrase, *eph ho*, means “on which,” and is the equivalent of “therefore.” It does not mean “because.” This is crucial, because we need to know what caused what. Did mankind become mortal BECAUSE they sinned? No, it is the opposite. Mortality was passed into mankind ON WHICH they all sinned. Mankind sins because they are mortal. Mortality is their fatal flaw, their weakness.

So the order of events is this: First, Adam sinned. God imposed the death penalty upon him, which we know as “mortality.” From there, we find that all of his children were born mortal as well. This mortality made them weak and susceptible to sin. Therefore, all have sinned.

Mortality was the judgment for Adam's sin. Mortality is the *first* death. The second death is the lawful judgment for each individual's sin. Hence, Rev. 20:13 says, “*they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds.*” The second death—the lake of fire—does not judge mankind for Adam's sin, but for their own sins. Hence, Rom. 8:23 says, “*the wages of sin is death.*”

But yet there are two kinds of death. The first is mortality, while the second is submitting to the discipline of God through a baptism of fire. The fire consumes the flesh, purifies the sinner, and makes him into the image of the All-Consuming Fire that is God's character. Christians submit to this divine judgment during their life time; unbelievers do not, and so they will be forced to do so at the Great White Throne.

This judgment at the Great White Throne establishes the justice of God, for it is not an endless torture with no possibility of salvation. Such concepts of eternal torture are, in themselves, unjust judgments as defined in the divine law. All mankind will be held accountable for their actions at the Great White Throne, if they have not appropriated the cross of Christ as payment for their sin.

But such justice does not absolve God of imposing the sentence of mortality upon all mankind. Men were born mortal. If they had been immortal, and had become mortal only after they sinned, it would have been impossible for a woman to miscarry or get an abortion, for the unborn child would not have had opportunity yet to commit any sins.

Death, or mortality, was not an unjust penalty for sin, nor did it come to Adam without warning. But it was technically a violation of God's law for Him to impose Adam's death penalty upon the rest of us before we had even sinned. And so once again, we are left with the problem of evil—the fact that God imposed the death penalty upon all for the sin of one man, Adam.

This imposition was done by the law of headship, to be sure. We cannot question the justice of God from that standpoint. But even the law forbids judging the children according to the sins of their fathers. Thus we read in Deut. 24:16,

¹⁶ Fathers shall not be put to death for their sons, nor shall sons be put to death for their fathers; everyone shall be put to death for his own sin.

This is affirmed by the prophets, for Ezekiel 18:20 says,

²⁰ The person who sins will die. The son will not bear the punishment for the father's iniquity, nor will the father bear the punishment for the son's iniquity; the righteousness of the righteous will be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked will be upon himself.

In a time when it was common to put a man's entire family to death in revenge for one member's offense, this was a very important law that established God's righteous standard. Why, then, did God appear to do this in the case of Adam's sin, which He imputed to us and then imposed the death sentence of Adam upon us?

By God's own standard of righteousness, this was unjust. Most theologians today are ashamed to admit this, because they can present no solution to the problem. They are aware that the only solution possible is that God intends to rectify this temporary injustice by saving all mankind. But they find this solution unacceptable, for they want to retain their belief that God intends to torture people with infinite heat for ever and ever. One would think that if the love of God dwells in men, they would be searching for a way that God might save all mankind! If the Bible even hinted of such a possibility, one would think that they would eagerly search it out to see if it might be so.

Instead, I have found that the opposite is true. Men have actually been offended, drawing back and saying, "*I'll have you know that one of the greatest blessings in heaven will be to watch those people burn in hell.*" Others actually make a game of this, teaching that the saints in heaven will applaud as the sinners scream in pain.

This is not biblical Christianity, nor does this in any way reflect the character of Christ or His Law. Torture is not one of the judgments of the law. It is one of man's laws, which they have imposed upon God and now teach in His name.

When I was young, I was taught to define death as "separation from God." Many Scriptures were brought in to buttress this definition. But when I finally studied it for myself with prayer, I discovered that separation from God was not the definition of sin, but a natural consequence of death. To be cut off from the Life-Source is certainly death. But separation is an immediate by-product of death, not death itself. Adam hid from God and separated himself AFTER he sinned. To redefine death as "separation from God" twisted the Scriptures and only caused confusion between the meaning of mortality and immortality.

Such a view then warped the entire meaning of divine justice. Whereas God imposes the death penalty for sin, men came to impose the penalty of fiery torture for sin. The purpose of divine judgment shifted from justice to deterrence, especially in the Latin-speaking Church, for the Roman mind valued "law and order" more than justice itself. Certainly, any carnally-minded nation had the same tendency, but the Romans perfected it.

True justice, as defined in God's law, makes justice the first priority, while deterrence is secondary. The purpose of justice is to correct the sinner and restore the broken relationship with his victim. Justice restores equilibrium to the divine order through balance. Hence, the law says, "*an eye for an eye*" (Ex. 21:24). In other words, the judgment imposed by the judge must always fit the crime--no more, no less—though monetary compensation could be made as the equivalent of an eye.

This is why God's law does not permit torture for any sin, for torture is mere punishment that does nothing to change a sinner's heart or to restore a broken relationship through restitution. When man defines "hell" as never-ending torture, claiming that this is divine justice, it truly is an "evil" as man views evil, for it has no purpose except to punish without end. It is only "good" to men who are motivated by revenge. It is not "good" as God defines it, for God's evil is good because it always has good purpose and is motivated by Love.

When Adam ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, his soul began to rule his spirit and he began to think dualistically. Good and evil were separated into opposites, instead of two aspects of good (i.e., Love and Justice). It was inevitable, then, that Justice would be seen and defined as an opposite to Love, instead of as a derivative of Love having an alternate application. As this dualism progressed in religious philosophy, "hell" became hotter in the attempt to restrain the ever-increasing evil among men. Deterrence trumped justice.

But God spoke to Moses and gave Israel a perfect law by which we might know His mind and how to establish a perfect system of law. For this reason I have been amazed when well-meaning Christians fear the divine law as if it came from a God of Vengeance. They run from such a God and draw near to Jesus, the God of Love, not knowing that Jesus was the Law-giver who appeared to Moses while Jesus was in His pre-incarnate state.

Such a dualistic mindset makes the Old Covenant (“Testament”) an opposite of the New Covenant and tends to create two opposing Gods, each with a different purpose and character. No, the Bible is a single Book and must be viewed as a progressive revelation of the Kingdom of God, with each revelation building upon the previous foundations.

The strangest of all ideas is that the divine law is somehow more to be feared than the New Covenant God who is thought to impose torture upon sinners. In the divine law, stealing one dollar brings divine justice that says I must return two dollars to my victim (Ex. 22:4). The Church, however, largely discarded the law and then substituted its own ideas of deterrence, telling us that stealing even one dollar is punishable by never-ending torture in hell.

That is not divine justice as defined in the law. That is only purposeless punishment imposed by carnally-minded men who claim to know better than God the true meaning of justice. Their dualistic philosophy leaves the universe eternally with heaven and hell, light and darkness, all coexisting perpetually with no thought to restoration or reconciliation. Such an end separates evil from good, but never reconciles creation, as the Scriptures teach.

When Paul says in Col. 1:16-20 that “the all” of creation is “the all” that was reconciled in Christ, this can only occur if divine justice is good. Justice is only good if it has a good purpose and is imposed in Love. Anything short of the reconciliation of all creation falls short of Paul's expectations of God. Hence, divine justice is *eonian*, not everlasting, and it restores balance to the divine order, rather than imposing mere torture.

This is the God of the Bible.

Chapter 7

God's Sovereignty and Man's Authority

We are now ready to deal with the most perplexing question concerning the problem of Evil. It is the problem of liability for Adam's sin. To determine liability, most people argue from their perspective of God's sovereignty vs. man's free will. But those arguments are based largely upon dualistic thinking. Either God's will or man's will are set forth to prove all liability. Singular thinking, however, makes room for both in their proper order.

As Creator, God's will is sovereign. As Creator of heaven and earth, He OWNS all things. In Lev. 25:23 the law says that "*the land shall not be sold permanently,*" because God OWNS it by right of creation. Yet each tribe and family in Israel had certainly been given *authority* over their portion of God's land. There is no contradiction or exclusiveness in establishing God's sovereignty AND man's authority.

Man's authority is as real as God's sovereignty. The difference is quantitative, not qualitative. It is expressed by two Greek words in the New Testament: *exousia* and *dunamis*. Man's authority (*exousia*) is authorized by a higher power; God's sovereignty (*dunamis*) is self-derived. And so, any time man exceeds his area of authority, it is a trespass against God's sovereign will.

The laws of liability are based primarily upon ownership. If a man digs a pit and does not take proper safety precautions by covering it, and if an ox falls into that pit, the one who dug it is liable by law to pay for the dead ox (Ex. 21:33, 34). Likewise, if a man lights a fire and it spreads suddenly, burning another man's crop, the man who lit the fire is liable (Ex. 22:6).

In both cases, liability is determined by ownership, not by the "free will" of the ox nor the will of the wind that blew the fire. Because God is the Creator of all, He is ultimately liable by law for the actions of all His creatures including all men (His "oxen"). That is the responsibility of ownership.

Yet the Bible shows that God has always held man liable for sin as well. On what legal ground? Because man has God-given authority in the earth (Gen. 1:26). Thus, in the law, if a man goes on a journey and entrusts his property to a neighbor for safe keeping, and if that property is destroyed or damaged, the neighbor can be held liable (Ex. 22:7-13).

Liability in such cases is shared between the owner and the responsible neighbor, depending on the situation. If the property were stolen without the neighbor being negligent or complicit in the theft, the owner bore the full liability for the theft. If, on the other hand, the neighbor was negligent or complicit in the theft, then he was held liable.

God always holds himself liable according to His level of sovereignty based upon His ownership. But He also holds man liable according to the level of each man's authority. This makes it possible for God to judge man lawfully, and we see the judgments of God throughout history. Yet His judgments are restrained (not everlasting), because God holds Himself liable for imposing mortality upon mankind, on which they sinned.

In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve sinned, and God held them liable for that sin, according to their level of authority. But at the same time, God held Himself ultimately liable on His level of sovereignty based upon ownership. Hence, He came to earth to die for the sin of the whole world. 1 John 2:2 says,

² And He Himself is the Propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world.

There is no contradiction or double jeopardy in this. Both God and man are held liable, each on their own level.

Christians tend to remove all liability from God in order to keep Him from being tainted by Adam's sin. But this is done at the expense of His sovereignty, and it ignores the simple fact that God created all things. Such "solutions" proceed from our dualistic reasonings, where we argue about whether God is sovereign or man has "free will." There is no such biblical phrase as "free will." Let us stay with the biblical term "authority," which keeps us from straying into dualistic arguments that only make God's will and man's will mutually exclusive.

When God created the Garden, He included a tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He did not put a fence around it. In effect, He "dug a pit," and did not cover it. As a result, the "ox," fell into the pit. Who is liable? God is liable, according

to His own law. But, you say, Adam was fully liable, for he fell of his own free will. Whether Adam had a free will or not is beside the point. The fact is that God owned Adam by right of creation. Furthermore, He allowed it to happen—in essence, by digging a pit without covering it..

Others say the devil did it, because he tempted Eve. Alright, who created the devil? We cannot shift the blame so easily, because a Creator owns and is responsible for that which He creates, regardless of what the creature does. Certainly, God could have prevented the devil from tempting Eve. The devil's freedom to tempt Eve was not due to his ability to outrun God or because he was too powerful for God to subject to divine judgment. He was not even smart enough to take God by surprise—though some people actually teach this!

Ultimately, our view must be determined by God's own decision and judgment. Thus, we find Him being “*slain from the foundation of the world*” (Rev. 13:8). He actually took responsibility upon Himself for the actions of His creation. Yet this did not obligate Him to take SOLE responsibility, for He had given man authority, and that authority made them accountable as well. Hence, we see God judging man according to his works (Rev. 20:12, 13).

Judgment itself proves man's authority and the fact that he trespassed outside of his lawful boundaries by his will. Man does have a will, but to use the term "free will" is usually inaccurate, because most people use the term dualistically to limit God's sovereign will over man's will.

In Lev. 25:23 we see that man's land could not be sold permanently. He had the authority to sell it only until the year of Jubilee. The Jubilee placed a limit upon man's use of God's land. Man is made of the dust of the ground (Gen. 2:7), and so our bodies are part of His “land.” We have been given authority over our "land," even as Israel was given authority over their inheritance. But God still retains sovereignty.

Thus, while we may “sell ourselves” into sin (or to “the devil,” if you prefer), we do not have the authority to do so in perpetuity. Our “land” must always return to God—not because of the will of man, but because of the sovereign will of the ultimate Land Owner, who is God Himself. No man can incur a debt to sin that is so overwhelming that the Law of Jubilee cannot conquer it in the end by grace alone.

God's will always trumps man's will in the end. It is done by grace. Meanwhile, however, God is teaching man the proper use of will through the experience of evil, for without such experiences and “choices,” there is no way for him to learn, mature, and become a son of God.

In the realm of man's choices, man must learn the laws of God to know good and evil, right and wrong, sin and righteousness. The soul naturally interprets good and evil as opposing one another. Yet as the soul submits to the spirit, it yields to a higher understanding that includes the purpose of all things and sees history as a singular plan of God that is very good. It gives up its pursuit of power over the spirit and, instead, submits its limited understanding, will, and authority, to the greater understanding, will, and sovereignty of the spirit.

As the soul gives up its own illusion of “free will,” which is really just the pursuit of power in disguise, it begins to find TRUE freedom of will by submitting to the sovereign will of God functioning through one's spirit. In putting on the mind of Christ and the power of Love, the soul is set free of bondage to its own limited perspective. In its place it adopts the an understanding of the Love of God proceeding from the spirit. The soul becomes a love-slave to the spirit. And in the bonds of Love, the soul's will finds true freedom.

Not many arrive at this place during their allotted life time. But God is bringing forth a first fruits company of sons for whose manifestation all creation groans (Rom. 8:22). They are called as sons to do the works of their Father and through the proper use of their will and authority, they will show all others by example the path by which they may all become the sons of God.

When that last enemy (the second death) is destroyed, God will be all in all (1 Cor. 15:26-28).