***Suffering and Sin - CA-014***

I worked as a sign painter for 29 years for a big company whose offices were in New York City. I worked in Arlington, Texas with some more workers. We were organized labor, and every three years, we would meet with the management of the company to decide on our wages and benefits for the next three years.

I was not a very popular person. If you're a believer and you're working out in the world, you understand this. I was the butt of jokes and so on. But it's very interesting, and you probably understand this, too, that when people have a problem, guess who they go to? The Christian – the person that they don't really like to be around, and they like to joke about. But when they have a problem, that's who they go to.

So every three years, the other workers would come to me, and guess who they would want to go negotiate with the big shots. They didn't want to do it, but they would want me to do it. So I was naive enough that, the first time, I accepted that as something of an honor. Later on, I didn't consider it an honor. But every three years, for 30 years almost, I would go up to the office, and sit with a man from New York as he would fly down, and negotiate our wages and benefits.

I had some very interesting experiences because the workers would give me a list of proposals that they wanted to be put into effect. I was really embarrassed, especially the first time. I mean, they were asking for a $5 an hour increase over what they were already making, and just unbelievable increases in vacations, and sick leaves, and workers' rights, and so on. My embarrassment was well-founded because I remember the first time the labor lawyer from New York looked at the paper and he said, "This is the most preposterous thing I've ever seen. This is totally ridiculous. This is unbelievable. I can't believe you have enough nerve to even give this to me – seriously."

And I had to agree with him, but I tried not to let him know that I agreed with him. But I noticed something very significant. If you gave me a piece of paper that I thought was the most absurd thing I'd ever seen, I think I'd probably just wad it up and pitch it back to you. But he would always tell me how preposterous and how ridiculous this was. But he would very carefully put it in a manila folder, and put it in his briefcase, and then he would say something like, "Well, let's talk about these preposterous proposals. When do you want to meet again and talk about them?" And every day, for at least a week, we would sit and talk about these proposals that he felt like were so preposterous they didn't even deserve to be discussed.

Then I would notice something else. He would tell me, "You asked for more money, but what I was planning to do was ask you people to work for less money, because we're just not making profits like we should, and you're going to have to give up wages. You asked for more sick time and more vacations, and you're really going to have to give up what you've got. I just can't afford to give you any more. So we would go on like that for several days talking about these proposals that didn't deserve to be talked about.

But the second significant thing I noticed was that Friday morning, about lunchtime, about 11 o'clock, he would start offering things that were so ridiculous that they didn't even want to be talked about. He would say something like, "OK, now it is time that we really got serious about this. I've been planning to ask you to work for less money, but I can see you need more money. Everybody does. So I'm not going to give you that $5 an hour, but what about 50 cents an hour? And I'm not going to ask you to give up any of your time off – your sick leave or vacations. In fact, I can see everybody needs some more. So I'm going to give you one day of each."

Of course, I would be so flabbergasted (at least the first time before I caught on), I would say, "Well, let me think about that." He'd say, "OK, let's take some lunch. Then after lunch, we'll talk some more about it."

After lunch on Friday afternoon, he would come in, and the first time, it just really freaked me out (to use a vernacular). His collar was unbuttoned; his tie was loose; his face was red; and, he was just throwing things all over the place that he had said were very important. He just said, "Forget it. I've asked you to give up this, this, and this. Forget it. You can keep that. OK, I said I could only give you 50 cents an hour. I'm going to give you a dollar an hour. Will you take that? And I said I could give you a day of sick leave. I'll give everybody three days of sick leave."

I noticed the later in the afternoon we got, the more nervous he would get, and the more he was willing to throw overboard in concessions. Finally, the first time, when we made an agreement, about 4 o'clock Friday afternoon, he turned to one of his aides and said, "Quick, get me to the airport. I have a plane to catch."

Now, the reason I tell you this story is because I learned something. I learned that he wasn't there with a spreadsheet out before him, with cold brute facts telling him that we can only give so much. He wasn't saying, "This is the absolute truth." Not with that attitude. He had an agenda. He had a bias. He didn't throw my paper away. He took very good care of it because when it was all over, he wanted to go to his boss and say, "Just look at that. Just look at what they were demanding at first, and look at what I beat them down to. They were demanding $5 an hour, and I beat him down to $2 an hour. Just look at all these other things. Didn't I do a good job?" He had an agenda.

Secondly, he wanted to be finished in time to catch his plane. I theorized that his wife had probably told him, "You've been gone all week. You've been down in Texas, and I'm tired of it. I want you to spend the weekend with us, and I want you home Friday afternoon in time to take me out for dinner," because this man was really worried about getting on the plane on time to get home. He had an agenda. He was not objective.

Everybody has an agenda. We are all biased. We want things to come out a certain way. So when you're dealing with unbelievers as a Christian apologist, you're not dealing with people who are objective. You're dealing with people who have agendas. And our job as Christian apologists is to help remove stumbling blocks on the road between that person and Christ. So some of the stumbling blocks that they come across, and these are sometimes real objections to Christianity, but remember that each unbeliever has his agenda. He has his bias. And it's always personal. It's not objective. It's always personal.

**Suffering**

One stumbling block is the problem of suffering. They always throw this at you. In yesterday's paper, there was an article about the new movie that's out, The Passion of Christ. They had interviewed different people to see what they thought about it. One man, a college student, said, "I just don't understand why a good God would have to send His Son to suffer so that people could be forgiven for their sins. I just don't understand that." That's usually the way it begins: "I don't understand." OK: "You don't understand." There's a lot that we don't understand. And because someone doesn't understand something doesn't mean that it is not true.

**Pessimism**

So there are some possible answers that people run across when they're looking at the problem of suffering. Why do people suffer? Some of the possible answers are, first of all, the answer of pessimism. Pessimism says that that's just the way things are. Evil outweighs the good. It's just part of the system. You can't fight it. You might as well join it. You might as well learn to accept it. There are religions that are built on this – Buddhism, for example. Buddha said, "You know, you're not happy because you want things. The remedy is to just stop wanting things, to stop desiring. Put your desires out. Then look forward to someday when you can be in nirvana. That means you won't have any desires. You won't be unhappy because you desire something you don't have. You won't desire anything. You'll know absolutely nothing. Isn't that something wonderful to look forward to?

But there's something in the human soul that just says, "That's not right." This, as I've heard people say, "This ain't the way things are supposed to be." Things are supposed to be better than this. Life is supposed to have something good in it. Suicide is abnormal. Most people want to keep going. There's something desirable about life, even when it's not what you feel like it should be. There's just something in the human soul that says pessimism is not true.

**Naturalism**

Naturalism is another answer for suffering in the world. That just means it is natural. That's the way it is. It doesn't mean anything. That's just the scientific explanation. It's neither good nor bad. It just is.

Have you ever noticed that the people who say this many times are the people who are the most bitter against God because He allows suffering? But then if they were right, if it is just natural and there's nothing you can do about it anyway, and nothing that anybody can do about it, why even bring God into the picture? Naturalism itself does not have an axiology. Remember that axiology is the study of intangibles such as values. In a universe of brute facts (of scientific truth only – facts that have no meaning), there is no room for axiology. So the fact that someone is asking that question, even if they claim to believe in naturalism, that fact, that they're worried about it, is a double-edged sword. It carries the seeds of its own destruction of naturalism.

Before the Bible, and before people were exposed to the concept of one God, in heathen and pagan societies where they had forgotten about the revelation that they had – before that, nobody ever worried about it. The Greeks did not have an explanation for suffering or evil in the universe because the best God they could come up with was Zeus, and he was corrupt. You could bribe him. He was always getting angry at people, and then getting in a good mood with somebody. He would throw temper tantrums, and he could be influenced and bribed. So the Greeks, as intelligent as they were, as great as they were in philosophy, never came up with an answer to the problem of suffering. If there is a good God who exists, why does He allow suffering? It was only people who were exposed to the Hebrew Scriptures who even attempted to answer that. The book of Job is the first attempt to answer this question of why an infinitely good God ever allows any suffering.

So naturalism has the seeds of its own destruction. A person can claim to be a naturalist, believing only in natural phenomena (nothing supernatural), and they can ask, "Why does suffering exist?" If so, they have just contradicted their own case.

**Legalism**

A third answer that human beings give to the question of why suffering exists is the answer of legalism. Job's friends in Job are the epitome of this. They said, "Job, all of this bad stuff has happened to you because you've sinned. You've transgressed against the law of God, and you have to pay the consequences. There's some truth in this. Sin causes suffering, but all suffering is not caused by sin.

Someone may say, "He is a Chinese man. Therefore he is a human being." That is true. But it isn't true to say, "If he is a human being, he is a Chinese man." So you have to be careful. Sin causes suffering, but all suffering is not caused by sin.

Sometimes we do violate the laws of God, and we have to suffer the penalty. But that doesn't explain a vast amount of suffering, and we can't explain it. In John 9:1, the disciples had an interesting experience with Jesus: "As He (Jesus) passed by, He saw a man blind from birth, and His disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned? This man, or his parents, that he would be born blind?'" They were coming from the legalistic point of view. Somebody sinned. So this man was born blind. All suffering is caused by sin, and so maybe he sinned as a spirit in heaven; or as a fetus, before he was even born in his mother's womb, did he sin? Or did his parents sin, so God punished them by giving him a blind son? They knew somebody had to have broken God's law, or he wouldn't have been born blind, from the legalistic position.

"And Jesus answered, 'It was neither that this man sinned, nor his parents. But it was so that the works of God might be displayed in him.'" Nobody had sinned, except Adam originally, that brought suffering into the world. But you couldn't say that this man's dad or mom, or even the unborn child had sinned, and that was why he was born blind. Only God knew. He knew the answer, and it couldn't be explained by legalism.

Sometimes the best people seem to suffer the most, and sometimes the worst people seem to get by the easiest. So legalism, although there may be some grains of truth in it, is not the explanation for all suffering.

It's interesting when you're having problems, and your believer friends very self-righteously tell you, "Well, you must have sinned. Just come clean; confess;" and; so on. But when they have a problem, it's always beyond their control.

**Pantheism**

Another explanation (not a valid explanation, either, for suffering in the world) is pantheism. Pantheism says that everything is God. All throughout nature, everything you see is God. So when you see evil and suffering, it's just not there. You just think you see it. It's an illusion.

Christian Science, which is neither Christian nor science, is probably the epitome in the West of this type of thinking. If you don't think you're sick, then you're not sick. If you try to convince yourself you're not sick, and you still find yourself sick, then you're just not thinking strongly enough. You think you're sick, and that's why you're sick.

I saw Kenneth Copeland on TV once talking about how he had a swollen leg once. I don't remember what the problem with his leg was. But he just decided that, although he was in pain and he could hardly walk, that that wasn't real, because he had asked God to heal his leg, so it had to be healed, and he would just concentrate on being healed. He was at the airport, and a porter saw him limping along and said, "Sir, let me get you a wheelchair." He said, "I don't need a wheelchair. Healed men don't ride in wheelchairs." And so he kept trying to convince himself that sin and suffering weren't real.

That's a part of pantheism – that evil and suffering is just an illusion. It's not real. But I think five minutes of intense pain can make any pantheist a realist. Let's get real about this. Suffering is real, and people do suffer. So we can eliminate pantheism.

**Finite Theism**

And then there's finite theism. It comes along every few years under a different name. Right now, "open theism" is one of the expressions of finite theism. Theism, of course, means belief in a god. Finite theism means that the god you believe in is not infinite. And this comes in different forms, like there are two powers in the universe – a power of good and a power of evil. That's known as dualism. The good power may be doing the best he can, but still, evil is pretty powerful too, and it's just liable to defeat good. Then finite theism says, "Yes, there is one God – the God of the Bible, but He's just like the rest of us. I mean, He's not perfect. He's doing the best He can, but He's still got a lot to learning to do, and a lot of growing to do. He's doing the best He can, but He's got a long way to go, so be patient with Him. That's basically finite theism.

Now, this is not the God of the Bible. If the God of the Bible were anywhere near that, He wouldn't have been able to have inspired the Bible, and to have preserved it for all of these centuries. Not only that, but He calls upon people to commit themselves to Him. He promises them forgiveness of sins and eternal life, and a finite God could not promise anybody anything, because how would you know that He is even going to be victorious in the end? How would you know that He could even do what He promises? So we cannot seriously consider finite theism.

**Instrumentalism**

And then there is instrumentalism, and that's the belief that, "Yes, suffering is real. There's real evil out there, and it's not pleasant, and God knows about it. But somehow He works it into His purpose. He uses it as His instrument. It can even be ennobling. It can develop character." Now, there's some truth in this, because just think about everybody that you admire. They came through adverse circumstances. We admire people who achieve victory over suffering and adverse circumstances. Sometimes it seems like the greatest achievers are people who have had the most against them. Sometimes the believers with the most noble character and the greatest spiritual maturity are people who have gone through a lot of suffering. So instrumentalism comes closer to explaining suffering in the world than any of the other philosophies. God can use it for His purpose. It can build character. It can be ennobling.

However, it doesn't explain everything, because sometimes it's best just to say, "We can't explain it." The very fact that people demand that Christians explain everything shows some innate faith in Christianity. It shows that somehow people recognize that this is where the answer is. You never hear about anybody demanding from an Islamic person an explanation for all the suffering and evil in the world, or to a Buddhist, or to any other world view. It's only us Christians who bear this burden. The best thing we can do is say, "All world views have problems. If you adapt the world view of an atheist; an agnostic; a Buddhist; a Muslim; or, anything else, you're going to run into a wall at some point, and you're not going to be able to explain something."

Now, in Christianity, that wall is far, far removed. You can explain a whole lot from the Word of God that nothing else can explain. But even as a Christian, you have to come to a point and say, "I don't have the answer. Only God knows that." And that makes sense, because if the Bible is the Word of an infinite God, and we are finite beings, then it just stands to reason that we wouldn't be able to understand everything. There would be some mysteries. If we could explain the mind of God perfectly, then He wouldn't be God, would He? Because we would understand Him imperfectly, we would be as smart as He is. So it's best to say, "I don't have all the answers, and I don't pretend to, but I can give you some of the answers." Fortunately, God has never required us to understand everything. He just enables us to live with it, and to recognize that some things are mysteries. Some things such as evil and suffering are not to be understood, but conquered, overcome, and to live with the mystery.

**The Lord Jesus Christ**

Now, you're not going to get far in explaining human suffering adequately without the Lord Jesus Christ. It's only in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ that we begin to understand the first thing about it.

Now, turn over to John 11. Some of you know that I've done six funerals since July. At each one, I've read John 11:33, when Jesus visited the family of Lazarus, who had died: "When Jesus therefore saw her (Lazarus' sister, Mary) weeping, and the Jews who came with her were also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit, and was troubled." You've heard me say this at funerals. Here was God incarnate. He knew that He had victory over death, and that in just a few minutes, He would be raising Lazarus from the dead, but just being in the presence of the human suffering brought on by death, Jesus was deeply moved in spirit and was troubled and sad. Jesus said, "And where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see."

Then regarding verse 35, there's a sense in which this is the shortest verse in the Bible. When I was a kid in Sunday school class, and I had to memorize a verse, I'd always go to this one: "Jesus wept," because it's the shortest verse in the Bible. But there's another sense in which this is the longest verse in the Bible, because we could spend a lot of time speculating and wondering. Jesus knew He was about to put an end to this. They would no longer be weeping, but rejoicing because their brother, who had been dead four days, and his body was already decaying, was going to be alive. But Jesus was deeply moved in spirit. Jesus wept. Jesus suffered.

Do you want to talk about suffering? OK. Why does God allow suffering? Why does He allow people to suffer? Sometimes the best people do the most suffering. We can speculate. We can say, "Well, He's building character in them. He's helping them to grow spiritually." Maybe sometimes it may be discipline, although you better be careful about attributing God's discipline to other people, because, again, sometimes the best people who seemingly need to be disciplined the least are the ones who suffer the most. It just doesn't explain a vast amount of suffering. What about children – innocent (so-called innocent) children? Of course, they have an old sin nature, but a baby who has never committed a sin can be born with deformities. People are killed in war and earthquake and famine. We better just say, "I can't explain anywhere near all suffering, but I'll tell you this: Jesus, who is God, suffered. He played by the rules that we have to play by."

And not only did Jesus suffer, but He could have stopped the suffering at any minute, and He didn't. At any moment, He could have looked up and said, "Father, I've had it. I don't want any more of this." And bingo! He would have been back in heaven. You and I would have been bound for an eternity without God – an eternity in the lake of fire.

His suffering was caused by love. He did suffer. Hebrews 2:17: "Therefore, He had to be made like his brothers (us) in all things, so that He might become merciful and a faithful High Priest in things pertaining to God, to make propitiation for the sins of the people. For since He himself was tempted in that which He has suffered, He is able to come to the aid of those who are tempted."

Did you know that where Jesus referred to Himself in the New Testament, He called himself "the Son of Man" more times than He called Himself "the Son of God?" And the first heresy in the early church was not that Jesus was not God, but that Jesus was not fully human. Jesus was fully human. He was fully God too – 100% God, and 100% man. I don't understand that. The best that I can do is just put a label on it – the hypostatic union. But I don't understand it. Maybe you can explain it to me. But he was fully human and fully man. He suffered. Can God suffer? Well, Jesus did as a human being.

So Jesus was not a bystander (not a spectator) in suffering. He suffered more than any human being ever has.

And we know also, if you've read the book of Revelation, that all evil and suffering is going to be wiped out some day. God will wipe away all tears. We've read the last of the book so we know how everything's going to turn out.

People say, "Well, why doesn't God put a stop to all unjust suffering? Well, He has. He has proclaimed the sentence. It just hasn't been executed yet in His timetable.

But in the meantime, let's look at a couple of verses in the epistles. There's one in 1 Corinthians: "No temptation or no trial has overtaken you but such as is common to man." Whatever might befall you, these things happen to everybody, believers and unbelievers. Aren't you thankful that you're a believer? Because God's word doesn't say, "If you suffer." It says, "When you suffer." Suffering is universal. Aren't you thankful that you are a believer? "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man, and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it."

Then 2 Corinthians 12:9: "And He has said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you. My power is perfected in weakness.' Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weakness so that the power of Christ may dwell in me." God is definitely going to wipe out all suffering someday. In the meantime, He has given us these two promises to live with. Not to mention Romans 8:28, that God takes all things (the good, the bad, the suffering, and the good times), and He brings good out of them. He turns it all to good for those of us who are members of His family.

Again, evil and suffering are not problems to solve, or problems to explain. They are mysteries not to understand, but to overcome. God has given us His Word that He has overcome them.

**Sin**

Another stumbling block is sin. Here's where we get more into the agenda that people have than we did with suffering, although you get into that there too. It seems like people are saying, "If you can just explain this to me, I'll believe in Christ as Savior. I'll believe the gospel. If you can just explain why a good God allows good people to suffer. If you can just explain the existence of evil, I'll become a Christian."

OK. We're Christian apologists. We are ready to give an answer to everyone that asks us the reason for the hope that is in us. We can explain some suffering. Part of the explanation is we just can't tell you why everybody suffers. We just have to trust God that He has given us His promises. He has overcome it. The sentence hasn't been executed yet.

**Determinism**

But what about sin? Everybody recognizes that human beings are sinners. There is something bad. Even people who don't like the word "sin" agree that there are some things that just aren't right. So they explain these by determinism. Determinism means that what people do, they're really not responsible for. It was caused by preexisting conditions. You may think that you're responsible when you make a decision, but the decision was actually made for you. You couldn't have made a different decision even if you had wanted to. That's what determinism means.

**Biological Determinism**

The first one is biological determinism. That says that people do bad things because of biological factors. You've got the wrong genes (the wrong DNA). Human beings haven't evolved enough yet. We still have animal portions in our brains. So after a few more billion years, we will have evolved totally into human beings, and we won't do these bad things that are more animal-like than human. This is biological determinism – that everything we do that is bad is determined biologically, and we couldn't change it if we wanted to. Now, nobody really believes this. It is just something that they like to talk about.

**Sociological Determinism**

Then there is sociological determinism. People do bad things. We're really born as good people, but society makes us bad. All the rules and regulations that people try to cram down our throats turns us into bad people. It depends on what philosopher is explaining his sociological determinism as to who the bad guys really are. With Marx, it was the middle class and the landowners. The wealthy were making people bad by making them have to work for a living. In the French Revolution, it was a royalty and religion – the Roman Catholic Church. But there are always going to be scapegoats.

With the movement back in the 1960s, it was more than civil rights. With the riots and so on in the 1960s, it was the white people who were trying to exploit the blacks. That was the cause of all evil. Blacks were really born as really good people, but it was mistreatment by the whites that made them bad. I remember one of the slogans was, "Every white man's head in a urinal." If you could just get rid of the white people, everything would be OK. People would be good like they were supposed to be.

In the French Revolution, one of the leaders of the French Revolution said something like, "We will never have a fit society until every priest is strangled with the guts of every king." So there are always scapegoats. If you're looking for sociological determinism, there's always somebody who corrupts good people.

But we know that, in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had a perfect environment, and sin still entered, so we can't blame it on the sociological conditions.

**Humanism**

Humanism tries to give us the answer by saying people are born basically good. But some people don't have enough education. If they were just given the right education, they could live good lives and be good people. Some people don't have enough money. They don't have enough to eat. If they were just fed properly, then they wouldn't want to hurt anybody. They would just want to be good people and have a good life. Basically, what humanism says is that we will solve all your problems if you'll just turn your lives over to us, the experts. This is the voice of antichrist. If you'll just make me your king, and turn everything over to me, whether it's the educators, the scientists, or whoever, we will take care of it for you. But we know better than that.

**Psychological Determinism**

Then there's a psychological determinism. This is where Freud and his boys come in. That is that what you do has already been determined for you by your subconscious. There are always two reasons for the decisions that you make. One is the reason you tell people and you tell yourself, and one's the real reason that you don't even know about that is in your subconscious. No one has ever seen a subconscious. Freud never showed anyone the subconscious because he never saw it. It is his invention. Freud said that people believe in God because they want a father figure to trust. And that was just his belief and his opinion, which is no better than yours. Your opinion can be that people don't believe in God because they don't want to believe in God. They don't want to admit that they have a Creator and an owner, because they don't like to be owned.

All of these people have an ax to grind. They all have their own agenda. All sinners at heart (human beings, everyone – the natural man) believe in justification by faith, because everyone is saying, "I am justified by what I believe. As long as I'm sincere, and as long as I really believe it and I really live it, whatever it is, I'm justified by my faith." They just have the wrong faith. The apostle Paul said in Romans 8:1, there is therefore no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." The world is going around saying, "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in humanism; socialism; Freudian psychology;" or, you name it – their brand of justification by faith.

OK, we've looked at sin, and it's real, and it's ugly, and people do bad things because people are bad. What's the answer? Well, the Word of God gives us the answer. Romans 12:1-2 says that we need to be, "Transformed by the renewing of our minds." We need to become a different kind of people – people who love good and want to please God rather than people who want to have their own selfish agenda fulfilled.

In Luke 6:45, The Lord Jesus Christ gave it to us right here: "The good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, brings forth what is good, and the evil man, out of the evil treasure, brings forth what is evil, for his mouth speaks from that which fills his own heart." Why do people do bad things? Because they're bad on the inside. How can people do good things? By having the imputed righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ through faith, and as a result of that, having their minds transformed by taking in the Word of God under the control of God the Holy Spirit, and with the right motives, they can do good.

Now, how do you know this? Well, you can know. In 2 Timothy 1:12, the apostle Paul says, "For this reason, I also suffer these things, but I'm not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day." The apostle Paul says, "I know who I believed in. I know that He's trustworthy; I know that His grace is sufficient; and, I know that for every trial, He will give me a way out. He will not put on me more than I can bear. He will always give me a way to come out, having profited from it."

Matthew 16:17: Here's where it all begins: "Jesus said to him (to Peter),"Blessed are you, Simon BarJonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father, who is in heaven." We can know the truth, and we can believe the truth because of who and what God is, and because of the activity of God the Holy Spirit. 1 Corinthians 2 tells us that the natural human being, the natural mind, just does not understand the things of God. We've looked at this many times under Dr. Danish's teaching. We could read the whole chapter and learn something. But the bottom line is what is in the last words of the chapter: "We have the mind of Christ." We have the Word of God in written form, so we know what God thinks. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit as our enlightener who can teach us the mind of God.

Romans 8:14-15 is a very precious passage: "For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God." Are you born again? Are you a son or a daughter of God? Then, if this is true, you are indwelt by God the Holy Spirit, and He is constantly (24 hours a day), as Dr. Danish used to say, "Cranking out guidance for you: providing the truth; the teaching; and, the enlightenment that you need. The question is whether or not we're going to pay attention to Him and obey.

Verse 15: "For you have not received the spirit of slavery, leading to fear again, but you have received the spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry, 'Abba' (Father)." "Abba" was an intimate family turn like "Poppa" (or Daddy), so we can have an intimate relationship with the infinite God because God loves us and desires to be intimately involved in all the details of our lives.

Now, how does all this happen that we trust in God, and we exercise good faith (a good faith acceptance of His good faith offer); as a result, we're born into His family spiritually; we're indwelt by His Holy Spirit; we're led and enlightened by His Holy Spirit; we become totally different people; we become people that, instead of wanting our old sin natures to be satisfied, we want to please God; and, we're capable of doing divine good? How does this happen? Well, I have to be like Nicodemus in John 3:9: "Nicodemus said to Him, 'How can these things be?'" And I asked the same question, "How can this be? What are the mechanics?" And I just have to say, "I don't understand."

Jesus said something like the work of the Holy Spirit is like the wind. You can tell when the wind is blowing. You can tell when the wind has moved things around and done things. But you really can't analyze the wind. You can't see the wind. That's the way the Holy Spirit is. You can't analyze the work of God the Holy Spirit. But I can tell you this. You can tell the next time someone is saying, "Well, if you'll just explain all human suffering, and if you'll just explain the existence of evil to my satisfaction, then I will become a Christian." You can tell him what you know, and then you can say, "Turn to John 14:21: 'He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me. He who loves Me will be loved by My Father. I will love him and will disclose Myself to him. I will reveal Myself to him. He will know Me.'" That's like the apostle Paul said, "I know whom I have believed in."

"But Judas (not Iscariot) said to him, 'Lord, what then has happened that you are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?' Jesus answered and said to him, 'If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word, and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make our abode with him.'" So God can become real to a person who is a God-denier if he exercises that good faith (trust) in the provision that God made for him.

Some amazing things will happen. I'll just give you a couple of quick examples. Acts 16:14: "A woman named Lydia from the City of Thyatira, a seller of purple fabrics, a worshiper of God, was listening, and the Lord opened her heart to respond to the things spoken by Paul." Lydia was on the right track. She was a worshiper of the Old Testament God. I'll tell you what. God can open a person's heart, even if they are a God-denier, and they turn to Him. He can open your heart.

In Ephesians 1:18, He can open the eyes of your understanding: "I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, and what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints. Even as a Christian, God can open your understanding, because these were Christian people at Ephesus that Paul was writing to. If He can do that for a believer, and we were all once unbelievers, He can open the understanding of an unbeliever so that they can understand how that they are a sinner, and nothing they do will ever amount to anything to impress God. It's only the work of another that they have to trust in. This is made clear to them when the Holy Spirit opens their understanding.

Now, if it's all up to the Holy Spirit, why should we even bother? Why should we even be studying Christian apologetics? Well, it's like this. The Holy Spirit does not work in a vacuum. We can walk into a shut-up room, and we see light coming in, and we say, "Where is that light coming from?" And then we notice there's a hole in the ceiling, and the sunlight is coming through the ceiling. There are two causes for that. You know, for most things you can't say, "What is the cause?" There are usually more than one cause. So there are the causes of the light in the ceiling. There's the sun, first of all. There wouldn't be any sunlight if the sun didn't exist. Secondly, there's the hole in the ceiling. So as Christian apologists, we provide the hole in the ceiling. We shoot holes in these mistaken beliefs and world views – these agenda that people have because they want to continue in their sins. So they come up with these objections for Christianity. What about all the suffering in the world? What about evil? What about sin? And so we shoot holes in those. Then the Holy Spirit shines His light in. He graciously allows us to be His partners in an enterprise that will not fail.

1 Thessalonians 1:5: "Our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit with full conviction." We're dealing with the gospel. We're dealing with supernatural power. It is represented by the sunlight. Our apologetical answers are represented by the hole in the ceiling. What is really pitiful is someone who cannot see the light because they refuse to. No one is as blind as the one who refuses to see.

Leon Adkins, 2003

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