



Bible Study Guide

No. 35

(August 2006)

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Suffering..

Is God fair?

By Paul Kroll

If we believe in God, we have to wonder why he doesn't eliminate mindless suffering from our planet. Yes, why doesn't he make this bad world right? Why doesn't he stop the hurting?

If God really cares, author Philip Yancey asked in his book *Disappointment with God*, "Why won't he reach down and fix the things that go wrong – at least some of them?"

Rabbi Harold Kushner asked the same question in his national best-seller, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. He told of a personal tragedy that caused him to rethink everything he had believed and been taught about God.

His son, Aaron, died at age 14 of progeria, the "rapid aging" disease. Aaron was short, bald and appeared to be an old man even as a young child.

Why did the Kushners have to suffer this tragedy? They were decent people and didn't deserve this. Rabbi Kushner wrestled with this question. He asked in his book: "If God existed, if He was minimally fair, let alone loving and forgiving, how could He do this to me?"

Why do innocent people, average people, nice people suffer? Why should anyone suffer? It has been a question asked again and again down through the ages. It may be the important issue of our lives.

"There is only one question which really matters," wrote Rabbi Kushner, "why do bad things happen to good people?"

How, then, do we make sense of our world, our sufferings? Mr. Yancey explored these issues in *Disappointment With God*. He had to admit: "I knew I would have to confront questions that have no easy answers – that may, in fact, have no answers."

The questions about suffering affect all of us in some way. Even if we or our family escape tragic accident or illness, we will have other crosses to bear. Perhaps it's loneliness, rejection, grinding poverty, a broken relationship, a troubled childhood, fear or guilt. And none of us escapes the ultimate tragedy death. Why is the world — your life — buffeted by suffering?

God above, tragedy below

One article like this cannot answer everything about human suffering. It can, however, give something helpful in the way of directing our thoughts. One of

these keys is to distinguish between what God is and what life brings.

God is fair, but life sometimes isn't. God is good, but people often do bad things. God is perfect, but we make mistakes that sometimes cost us dearly. As long as people do bad or evil things, other people will be hurt. If a robber shot you, you and your family would suffer.

As long as humans make mistakes, there will be suffering. If we could just take back that one decision or action that caused so much suffering. Oh, if we could eliminate one tiny mistake. But we can't. As long as nature is what it is, it will manifest itself as both Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. We will be blessed both with rain for our crops and cursed with typhoons that flood, destroy and kill. As long as we are physical and subject to breaking down and wearing out, sickness and death will be our lot.

Decent people will often suffer, and those who do terrible evils will often prosper. Jesus Christ pointed this out when he said that the rain falls on both the "righteous and the unrighteous" (Matthew 5:45).

Consider what the world would look like if it could be fair as we want it to be fair. No accidents could happen no criminal act could occur; no natural disaster could affect us. That kind of world would have no logic. The natural laws that govern cause and effect would have to be different in every circumstance.

Would God stop carelessness and irresponsibility? Would he stop everyone from being hurt, from coming down with illnesses and diseases? What about death? Would God abolish death? He'd have to if sorrow and suffering were to be eliminated.

During our entire lives we would be like helpless babies, always under the interventionist eyes of our spiritual parent, God. No longer would we be free moral agents or thinking beings, allowed to consider possible courses of action and to make choices.

We might agree that a world without suffering seems something of a fantasy. However, the question of God's fairness doesn't go away easily when we see so much suffering in the world.

God's perspective

Paul dealt with this issue in the book of Romans, chapter 9. He did so in the context of an important question: Why were only a few being called to

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salvation in the early New Testament church? Was God unjust in denying salvation for everyone at that time? Why did the vast majority remain "without hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12)?

Paul explained God's view of things by citing the example of the Pharaoh of the Exodus. In rescuing Israel from slavery in Egypt, God destroyed the Egyptian nation in the process. But wasn't that unfair? Paul asked: "What then shall we say? Is God unjust? Not at all! For he says to Moses, 'I will have mercy on whom I have mercy'" (Romans 9:14-15).

The Israelites would certainly have said God was being fair! At last they were being freed from slavery. Life was certainly coming up roses for them. But if we had been Pharaoh or the Egyptians, our attitude would have been quite different. For starters, our secure world had just gone crazy on us. Our crops were destroyed. Our boys were massacred and drowned in battle. Our herds were slaughtered. Our country was wrecked. Our firstborn sons had been killed.

Had we been Egyptians at the time, only one conclusion would have been possible: God (or any number of the gods) was grossly unfair to us. Here was God mercifully intervening in human affairs to make life better for an entire nation — the Israelites. But there was still something unfair in the grand scheme of things. Another nation — Egypt — had been humiliated and destroyed.

Paul had only one answer to such apparent contradictions of life. We must trust God to work out his purpose, as he sees fit. And, to be sure, God does have a plan of salvation for all humanity.

No answer to "why?"

Paul had responded to the question of God's fairness. But he didn't answer the question directly. His response to his readers was to inquire — Why are you even asking?

Paul's response was a stinging rebuke: "Who are, you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" (Romans 9:20).

But don't we have the right to ask God: "Why did you make me so I would get cancer or suffer a stroke? Why wasn't I a clay pot with a different design?"

But Paul refused to directly answer "Why?" He defended God's wisdom and justice. Paul wrote: "Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!" (Romans 11:33).

Paul insisted that no matter what our suffering, we must accept that God is wise, merciful and just. Paul was saying that God allows human suffering because he is God. God is so great, his thoughts so far above ours, that inferior human logic does not apply to his actions.

There isn't always a clear why to suffering. It's really the wrong question to ask. A specific why looks back to something that we can't change. We must look forward by asking: What purpose is there to life, unfair as it may sometimes seem? What future does God have beyond this life of suffering?

We should understand God correctly. He is not an advocate of suffering for its own sake.

God hates suffering

One example. More than 2,500 years ago, the prophet Jeremiah surveyed the carnage of the city of Jerusalem, sacked by the Babylonians. Inside the besieged city, starving mothers had eaten their dead children.

Jeremiah looked past the suffering of a sinful and dying generation to a future with hope. "Men are not cast off by the Lord forever," he said (Lamentations 3:31). "Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men" (verses 32-33).

But it was in Jesus Christ that God showed his attitude toward human suffering. He once and for all demonstrated he does care by sending his own Son to this earth. Jesus lived; agonized and died by the rules of life, the same ones we live and suffer by. It was actually God in the flesh who came to suffer with us. It was the greatest example of God's love possible. Jesus Christ himself said it: "Greater love has no one than this that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13).

Less than 24 hours after saying this, Jesus, as God incarnate, gave his life for all the world. He had suffered and died for human beings, to take away their sins and open up salvation for those who would believe. John witnessed this death of God in the flesh. The sacrifice of Jesus Christ exemplified love. John expressed it eloquently: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

In the crucifixion, God put to rest for all time any idea that he doesn't care about us during our suffering. In the future resurrection of the righteous, God will give them immortal bodies and make their lives suffering-free. The tortured, the cancer victims, the unloved, the paraplegics, the lost and lonely — everyone who has suffered and is suffering — will suffer no more.

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God will swallow up suffering and death in the victory of eternal life. He will be the God who cares, the God who is seen, and the God who is fair. Then, God will be known to all humanity. He will act as healer and life-giver, one who does not take pleasure in human suffering.

In that new world, described in the final chapters of

the Bible's last book, Revelation, God will dwell with his people. Revelation chapter 21:4 tells us: "He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

If we or our family escape tragic accident or illness, we will have other crosses to bear.

Alternative lifestyles;

Homosexuality, Same-Sex Marriage, And Jesus

By Jonathan Buck

Pastor of several Canadian churches

Homosexuality and same-sex marriage aren't going away. Quite the opposite, in fact; they've already been established as legal rights. Now the pressure is on to also have them socially validated as acceptable practices throughout the culture.

Meanwhile, Christians, flop all over the spectrum as far as their response goes. A case in point was a meeting of ministers from several denominations in my hometown that convened to discuss the pros and cons of same-sex marriage. Half of those present condemned same-sex marriages on moral grounds and the other half condoned it on compassionate grounds. There was no meeting of minds, it was either condone or condemn.

But Jesus neither condoned nor condemned when faced with a woman caught in adultery. I wonder, then, if his verdict would have been any different if the woman had instead been caught in a homosexual act. All he said was, "I don't condemn you, but go and sin no more." At no point did he condemn the woman to the fires of Hell, but neither was he soft on sin.

However in that meeting I mentioned, it was like hearing one half of Jesus' statement, "I don't condemn you," from one half of the room, and the other half of Jesus' statement, "go and sin no more," from the other half of the room. No one put both Jesus' statements together.

This is a pity because instead of witnessing to Jesus' perfect balance between compassion and a call for repentance, the Christian Church's witness on homosexuality and same-sex marriage is divided into two separate camps. Each camp has a point in its favour, but to preach only one half of Jesus'

statement is like preaching only half a witness to him.

It's also raising serious questions in the minds of those observing the Christian Church in action, because on the one hand the Church appears to have no feeling and on the other, no guts. Jesus, however, had both. "I don't condemn you," he said, showing his enormous compassion for the predicaments we humans get ourselves into, but he also said, "go and sin no more," because he wasn't backing down for one moment in telling the lady that her sin must be stopped. He didn't condemn, but he didn't condone, either.

So, is that how Jesus would've dealt with homosexuality and same-sex marriage today? Well, why not? The scriptures tell us that homosexuality is still as much a sin as adultery, so why should it be dealt with any differently? But that's the big question, isn't it? Right now the Church is divided in its answer. If a homosexual or a same-sex couple approached a church (any church) today, then, what response would they get? Or to put it another way, what response should they get, for that church to be an effective witness to Christ?

The Church is a witness to the power and desire of Jesus to heal a broken world. It's in the business, just like he was, of healing and restoration. So, how does one do that job effectively? Well, we have one of Jesus' case histories, the woman caught in adultery, to give us a clue. It was a delicate balancing act between heartfelt feeling for her human weakness and strong admonition to change her life for the better. He didn't say, "I don't condemn you, please

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carry on sinning,” like some Christian churches today who allow people to continue in their sin in church. Yet, neither did he say, “You’re going to Hell, because of your sin,” like other Christian churches who don’t allow some types of sinner to enter the church at all. Jesus did neither; he neither condoned nor condemned.

For me this is a perfect illustration of how broken human beings are healed and restored.

It’s through a combination of compassion and a call to repentance—of not condemning and not condoning. In combination they work wonderfully. Tip the balance too far either way, however, and problems result. Leaning too much toward compassion, for instance, can cause a church to become soft on sin. That’s no help to people when sin lies at the root of humanity’s problems. However, leaning too much toward morality can cause a

church to become hard on sinners. That’s no help either, when love lies at the root of humanity’s solutions.

I imagine, then, that if Jesus was the minister in a church and he was approached by a homosexual or a same-sex couple, his first response would be compassion, because they are hurting people who’ve been messed up by sin—just like everyone else. He would also let them know they are entering the church to recover from sin, not continue in it. Why? Because the Church exists to heal a broken world, and to heal a broken world needs both compassion and a gutsy call to repentance.

It’s both, not one or the other.

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Abraham's Example of Faith

A study of Hebrews 11:8-19

Hebrews 11 is a description of faith in action—how God's people have always lived by faith. In this chapter, several verses are devoted to the example of Abraham, whom Genesis says specifically believed God (Gen. 15:6). He is rightly called "the father of the faithful."

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going (Heb. 11:8, based on Gen. 12:1).

The author's purpose here is not to prove that Abraham had faith (the readers already knew that), but to give examples that 1) illustrate a life of faith and 2) encourage the readers to have similar faith when they are pressured to abandon Christianity. So the author selects situations from the life of Abraham that are similar to situations the readers are in. Just as Abraham had been called out of Mesopotamia, they had been called out of Judaism toward a promise they could not see, and they obeyed and went.

By faith he made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise (Heb. 11:9). It is possible that the readers had physically left their homeland and moved to a new city, but the author is probably suggesting that the readers felt like strangers religiously. They probably met in a house church instead of a synagogue; they did not have a feeling that they had a permanent place. Welcome to the club, the author says. Abraham felt like that, too, even when he was in the Promised Land.

God does not want us to view this world as a permanent home, because he has something better for us. We are encouraged to see the future with Abraham: ***For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (v. 10).*** Canaan had many cities with foundations, but they were all destined to crumble, because they were built on physical foundations, and the cities were filled with violence and idolatry.

Abraham was looking forward to something far more permanent than stone. Genesis says nothing about this, but our author believes that Abraham had religious motives that were similar to his own. We should look to the future reward, not to the circumstances we are in right now.

Verse 11 has a translation problem because the sentence seems to have Sarah as the subject, but the

Greek verb refers to the father's role in reproduction. Some translations choose to put Sarah as a parenthetical thought (Even though Sarah was old, Abraham was made able to father children...). Others, such as the TNIV, make the verb appropriate to a mother's role: ***And by faith even Sarah, who was past age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.***

Sarah laughed; so did Abraham (Gen. 17:17; 18:12). They both thought they were too old to have children, but God blessed them with a child anyway. Abraham even had children after Sarah died (Gen. 25:1-2). The author's point is that God did what he had promised, and we should also consider God faithful, and trust him to keep the promises of salvation he has made to us.

And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore (Heb. 11:11, referring to Gen. 22:17). Just as God made the universe from something that could not be seen, he made the Israelites from something humanly impossible.

Summary

The author is not done with his examples yet, and is not even done with Abraham, but he interrupts his list of faith-accomplishments to summarize some lessons from the story for the benefit of his readers. ***All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own (Heb. 11:12-13).***

The point: We do not receive all the promises of God in this life. Although we are given eternal life, we still die. But the gift is real, and the promise will be kept. We have to trust God on it. (We certainly can't bring it about on our own power!) We look to God, not this world, for meaning and purpose in life. Our current life is just a temporary training time. We do not "belong" here; our permanent home and

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allegiance is the kingdom of God, and that is where our hopes should be.

If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (vv. 15-16).

No one really thought that Abraham ever wanted to go back to Mesopotamia, but he could have if he wanted to. He could have turned his back on God's promises, but he did not. In contrast, the readers of Hebrews were tempted to go back to where they had come from—back into Judaism. Don't do it, the author seems to say. There is a better country waiting for you through Christ. Heaven is calling, and God will be pleased if you are faithful, and he is planning on your presence in his kingdom.

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob

The roll call resumes in verse 17, with Abraham's most severe trial: *By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned"* (vv. 17-18, referring to Gen. 21:12 and 22:1-18).

Abraham could not see how God would keep his promise, but in faith he did what God told him to do. He did not know how God would do it, but he guessed at one possibility: *Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead (Heb. 11:19)*. Abraham himself had once been "as good as dead" (v. 11); the same God who gave him life could also give Isaac life. When Abraham took Isaac up the mountain, he told his servants that "we" will return (Gen. 22:5); he did not expect Isaac to stay dead.

As the story turns out, however, God provided a substitute sacrifice (just as he later provided his own Son as a substitute for us), and Hebrews concludes: **and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.** In Abraham's mind, Isaac was as good as dead, but he was rescued from it.

The author has given many details about Abraham; now he picks up the pace with a rapid-fire summary of three descendants: By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau in regard to their future. By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of Joseph's sons, and worshiped as he leaned on the top of his staff. *By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones (Heb. 11:20-22, referring to Gen. 27:27-40; 48:10-20; 50:25).*

Isaac and Jacob believed in the promise of God, and passed it on to their children. Jacob, blind and on his deathbed, blessed Ephraim and Manasseh—acting on faith, not sight. Joseph also acted on the promise that God gave Abraham. Although Joseph was prince of Egypt, he knew that his descendants would later move to Canaan, and so he directed that his bones should also be moved.

Questions for discussion

- When God called me, did I understand where I was going? (v. 8)
- How "at home" do I feel in this world? (v. 9)
- Am I prepared to die before receiving the promises? (v. 12)
- Have I ever wanted to go back to where I came from? (v. 15)
- When faced with death, do I think of God's promises? (vv. 21-22)

Michael Morrison

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Lesson 27 - Mark 5:1-18

Jesus Is coming

They went across the lake to the region of the Gerasenes. When Jesus got out of the boat, a man with an evil spirit came from the tombs to meet him. This man lived in the tombs, and no one could bind him any more, not even with a chain. He had often been chained hand and foot, but he tore the chains apart and broke the irons on his feet. No one was strong enough to subdue him. Night and day among the tombs and in the hills he would cry out and cut himself with stones.

When he saw Jesus from a distance, he ran and fell on his knees in front of him. He shouted at the top of his voice, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won't torture me!" For Jesus had said to him, "Come out of this man, you evil spirit!"

Then Jesus asked him, "What is your name?"

"My name is Legion," he replied, "for we are many." And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area.

A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. The demons begged Jesus, "Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them." He gave them permission, and the evil spirits came out and went into the pigs. The herd, about two thousand in number, rushed down the steep bank into the lake and all were drowned.

Those tending the pigs ran off and reported this in the town and countryside, and the people went out to see what had happened. When they came to Jesus, they saw the man who had been possessed by the legion of demons, sitting there, dressed and in his right mind; and they were afraid. Those who had seen it told the people what had happened to the demon-possessed man—and told about the pigs as well. Then the people began to plead with Jesus to leave their region.

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with him.

Some people feel sorry for the pigs in this story—a poor, innocent herd of snorting and grunting swine minding their own piggy business on the hillside, and Jesus lets a bunch of evil spirits enter them and run them off a cliff to their deaths in the sea. I don't feel sorry for the pigs. I didn't feel sorry for the halibut I ate for dinner last night either. That halibut sacrificed its life so that I could have some protein. I don't know how many beasts, birds, fish, trees and plants have likewise died so that I, by eating them, wearing them or otherwise using them, might live. The herd of pigs that night on the shore of the Sea of Galilee died instead of the child of God whom Jesus travelled across the dark and stormy water to save (see Mark 4:35-41).

No match for Jesus

The man's demons, so powerful he describes them in terms of a Roman legion of 6,000 warriors, made the man torture himself (Mark 5:5). They caused him to be ostracized and chained (verses 3-4). They caused him unrelenting anguish and misery; but they could not destroy him.

Evil spirits these were, hateful and cruel, bent on destruction of whatever they possessed. The instant they entered the pigs, these demons destroyed them. But they could not destroy the one man they possessed.

Under the old covenant, the one Hebrews 10 says was fulfilled in Christ, pigs were ritually unclean, and as such were not even to be touched, much less eaten, by children of the covenant. Jesus, in effect, "sacrificed" a whole herd of swine for the sake of this one tormented man living among the tombs. To Jesus, the deliverance and restoration of one human being is worth whatever sacrifice it takes—even Jesus' own torture and death on a wood cross at Golgotha.

How long had this man lived in the graveyard under the unforgiving power of this legion of demons? We aren't told. But we do know this: Jesus was coming. In Mark's story, the only reason Jesus crossed the Sea of Galilee that evening—bringing the disciples through a storm they feared would kill them all, but which Jesus calmed with a word—was to deliver that poor man from his bondage.

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Jesus is coming

What are your demons? What has you in self-destructive bondage? Know this: whatever your devils may be, they do not have the power to finally destroy you. Jesus is coming; he's coming for you, to set you free. Not even death can stop him—his or yours; he conquered death itself. He can free you from anything.

The song says, "Put your hand in the hand of the man who calmed the waters..." Maybe that's what the Gerasene demoniac wanted to do when he ran to Jesus after seeing him from afar (Mark 5:6). But all he could do was fall on his knees and let the demons do the talking (verse 7). It didn't matter. Jesus came to save him, regardless of the odds, regardless of the depth of the pit the man was in, regardless of the man's inability, because of the demons, to ask Jesus to save him.

Jesus freed him and banned his demons forever by way of the pigs drowned in the sea, symbols of the uncleanness and the end of the demons, as well as of the personal sacrifice of Jesus, who took the uncleanness of the world upon himself and cleaned it—that you and I might live free in him.

It has been said that most people have a hard time relating to the story of the Gerasene demoniac, but that drug addicts relate to it easily. That makes sense. I think that anyone who takes sin seriously, like Jesus does, relates easily to this story. Like the demoniac, howling away in the dark from the tombs, even when our sinfulness darkens our hearts, somewhere deep inside we know our need, and we know Jesus is the one who has come to set us free.

Mike Feazell
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Tell Peter

By Eugene M. Guzon

The life of Peter, Jesus' friend and leading disciple, is a lesson for all who are discouraged. He struggled with the same despair but, through the faithfulness of our Lord, he found acceptance and forgiveness.

Peter was a man of contradictions—impulsive and bold, yet affectionate and loyal. He responded eagerly to Jesus' call (Matthew 4:18). He left his net, his boat, his fishing trade and his familiar surroundings. He was also the first of the disciples to recognize who Jesus was (Matthew 16:16).

However, his strong and positive leadership qualities had a down side. He could be too assertive, and would sometimes have to be brought back into line. Like when Jesus was foretelling his suffering and death, and Peter began to rebuke him, saying: "Never, Lord...this shall never happen to you!" Peter was firmly put in his place by the Lord's reply, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men" (Matthew 16:21-23).

Only a few verses before, Peter had been commended by Jesus as blessed to have the revelation of the Father. He was now reprimanded for being used as a mouthpiece for Satan. Knowing that his dynamic friend was also vulnerable, Jesus later told him, "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers" (Luke 22:31-34).

The impulsive Peter answered Jesus with a solemn pledge of loyalty: "Lord, I am ready to go with you to prison and to death!" Brave words, but he was setting himself up for his greatest fall.

'Not me, Lord'

The night before Jesus' death, he said to his disciples, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written: 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee" (Matthew 26:31-32).

Peter found that hard to accept. He may have said to himself, "Maybe the others, but not me!" Soon, however, he denied the Lord three times, fulfilling Jesus' prediction. Just as the cock crowed and Jesus was led out by the soldiers, he turned his eyes to Peter. That gaze was too much for Peter to bear. He

had betrayed his friend and his Lord in his hour of greatest need. Overcome with guilt, he wept bitterly. During the next few hours, Jesus was beaten, crowned with thorns and killed by the soldiers. All the disciples were filled with grief, but perhaps none among them experienced the depths of Peter's discouragement and shame. How could he face the other disciples? Would they—would anybody—ever trust him again?

Mentioned by name

The resurrection of Jesus brought new hope—and fresh anxiety. The angel at the tomb that morning told the women who came to anoint Jesus body: "Don't be alarmed. You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples *and Peter*, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" (Mark 16:6-7).

How do you think Peter felt about that? Not only had the Lord risen from the dead, but he had mentioned

Peter's name in particular. Imagine how that must have made Peter feel. Why had he been singled out? Was it because of the denials?

By this time Peter must have known for sure that Jesus was indeed the Christ, the Son of the living God! All Jesus' claims about giving his life as a ransom for many were true. But would he have anything to do with Peter, after Peter had denied him—not once, but three times over? Peter soon got his answer. Jesus still accepted him, trusted him and loved him, despite the way Peter had turned against him. Peter soon found out that the words, "tell Peter," were an expression of love, confidence and forgiveness from Jesus.

"Tell Peter." What loving words of assurance for one who had been unfaithful. The Lord was saying, "No matter what you have done, there is forgiveness, there is hope. I am alive. I am with you all the way. I offer you a new beginning."

The rest is history. Peter spent the rest of his days proclaiming boldly the good news of the Lord he once denied. He became a mighty witness to the

"Peter's legacy is of one who failed, but through Jesus, had a new and meaningful life for the glory of God."

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gospel of Jesus, finally sealing his faith with his own blood in martyrdom. Peter left us a legacy of one who failed, but with the power of Jesus, one who had a new beginning and meaningful life for the glory of God.

Do you feel discouraged? Are you, like Peter, dismayed at the extent of your inadequacies, the pressure of living your faith, and those times when you too may have denied Jesus in your life?

Jesus knows what Christians will be facing in this life. Our faithfulness will be tested many times—through temptations, through rejection, opposition and discouragement. But in those words to Peter, we

can see the will of our Lord that we will be able to bounce back and prevail. And as those times come to us, we too can be a source of strength and inspiration for others.

Take heart! Be encouraged by the words of the Lord through the angel in the garden. His message is as much for you as it was for the one who felt he had gone too far to ever be accepted again.

"Tell Peter!"

Eugene M. Guzon is the National Director of the Worldwide Church of God in the Philippines

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Christian History Corner

**THE PROTESTANT CHURCH IN HITLER'S GERMANY
AND THE BARMEN DECLARATION**

By Paul Kroll

On January 30, 1933, German President Paul von Hindenburg appointed Adolf Hitler Chancellor of Germany. But less than two months later, Hitler was the nation's dictator.

Many German Christians at first openly welcomed Hitler's Nazi party to power as a historic moment of Christ's work on earth through and for the Aryan "Volk." A leading Lutheran theologian wrote in 1934, "Our Protestant churches have welcomed the turning point of 1933 as a gift and miracle of God." A "faith party" of "German Christians" began to develop and grow in influence. In their first national convention in April 1933, in Berlin, the delegates stated their goal to reorganize the 27 Protestant regional churches in Germany into a single, national church under the leadership of a national bishop. The "German Christians" published a number of programmatic papers during 1932-1933 that give us an insight into their hopes and goals. They wanted an evangelical church rooted in German nationhood based on an Aryan model. "We want a vital national Church that will express all the spiritual forces of our people," stated one "German Christian" document from 1932.

On June 28, 1933, with Hitler's authorization, Ludwig Müller, a fervent Nazi, took over chairmanship of the council of the Federation of the 27 regional Protestant churches. A new constitution established a single "Protestant Reich Church." On September 27, 1933, Müller was elected national bishop by a synod dominated by "German Christians."

Restrictions were immediately placed on the clergy. They had to be "politically reliable" and accept the superiority of the Aryan race. Pressure was exerted to expel Jewish Christians from ministry. The Nazi "Führer Principle" was to be adopted by the churches, which was a claim that Hitler was "lord" over the German church and that its Christ and Christianity were uniquely Aryan.

Confessing Church and Barmen

Some German Protestant pastors, led by Martin Niemöller (1892-1984), stood in opposition to the "German Christians." In September 1933, Niemöller sent a letter to all German pastors, inviting them to join a Pastors' Emergency League. Niemöller asked the pastors to pledge themselves to be bound to

Christ as Lord, teach the gospel message of the Scriptures and the historic Confessions of the Church. Aryanism, a doctrine of racial superiority, was to be rejected as anti-Christian teaching.

In April 1934, the League created the Confessing Church. It included ministers and churchmen from Reformed, Lutheran and United Churches, as well as other church groups. The Confessing Church took its name from the fact that its members had pledged themselves to affirm the great historic Confessions of the Church.

The leaders of the Confessing Church met on May 29-31, 1934, at Barmen. Here they issued the historic Barmen Declaration, drafted by Reformed theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) and Lutheran theologian Hans Asmussen with input from other Lutheran, Reformed and United Churches leaders. One of the original signatories of the Declaration wrote, in retrospect, that Barmen "appeared to us then like a miracle from God."

The Declaration was written in direct opposition to the national church government—the "Faith Movement of the German Christians"—rather than against the Nazi regime itself. It challenged Christians who were attempting to bring the Protestant church into line with the nationalistic ideals and aspirations of Nazi rule. However, since the "German Christians" were a proxy for the Nazi state, the Declaration became also a prophetic condemnation of Hitler's totalitarian rule.

The Barmen Declaration expressly asserts that Christ alone is the one Word of God—the source of all authority and truth—whom we must hear, trust and obey. It rejects the notion that other powers apart from Christ could be sources of God's revelation.

It stands on the principle that Christ cannot be co-opted by, used in the service of, or be remade in the image of religious or political ideologies created by fallen human beings and structures in opposition to God. Barmen confesses the reality that God's grace for us cannot be reinterpreted or replaced by ideas and programs growing out of human creaturely self-interest and evil designs.

In these ways, Barmen speaks not only to the times and crisis of the church in Nazi Germany, but to Christians throughout the history of the church and in our time and place.

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Bible Study Guide No. 35

Loving in deed

By Pete Ahlstrom

One day my mother helped throw her littlest brother out of the haymow.

The haymow, a hay storage area high up under our barn's roof, was one of the five farm kids' favourite play places.

The farm cats loved the haymow, too. There, they could run, jump, and chase each other to their hearts' content. That day, as they frolicked, one of them misjudged the edge and fell out. The youngsters watched, fascinated, as it twisted, turned, somersaulted, and finally landed on its feet, unhurt, on the wooden "driveway" two stories below!

"Did you see that?" the kids asked. Their next question was perfectly logical (well, almost): "Do you suppose a person could land on his feet like that?"

The four oldest kids could only think of one way to find out. They grabbed their youngest brother's arms and legs, dragged him kicking and screaming to the edge, threw him out, and watched to see what would happen.

Two things happened. First, Gilbert did not land on his feet. Second, it was about two weeks before any of the four older children could sit down again!

That all-too-true incident underscores the Bible's emphasis on "love your neighbour."

Because any of us can get "thrown out of the haymow" at any time. Sickness, accidents, divorces, natural disasters, wars, or crimes can do it.

We try to solve those problems ourselves. But sometimes, as with Gilbert, a "safe landing" just isn't possible. The Bible teaches we're to be there to pick each other up, help mend any broken bones, and get each other back on our feet, healed.

I went to church for many years without ever understanding what the Bible meant by "love your neighbour." Finally, I learned it isn't about feeling love; it's doing it. Love means to help, to be kind, to give, to visit, comfort, and encourage, to show each other courtesy, patience, forgiveness, and mercy. We're to do that for our own families, for the poor, immigrants, orphans, widows, and single mothers, for the sick, handicapped, prisoners, lonely, and elderly, for government workers, Christians from other churches, and even our enemies. We're to help with needs they can't meet, like food, clothing, housing, jobs, money, and justice.

Is it important? God sees how much we love him by how much we love our neighbours! Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matthew 25:40).

Biblical love is selfless. It means asking, "If Jesus were sick, out of work, hungry, or homeless, how would I help him?" It means walking where others walk. It means learning the real needs of our real neighbours. Above all, it means *doing*

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And now for something completely different!

A nice little lighter piece from the Christian Odyssey section... *Hmmm*:

Thank God for church ladies with typewriters. These sentences actually appeared in church bulletins or were announced in church services:

- Bertha Belch, a missionary from Africa, will be speaking tonight at Calvary Methodist. Come hear Bertha Belch all the way from Africa.
- The Fasting & Prayer Conference includes meals.
- The sermon this morning: "Jesus Walks on the Water." The sermon tonight: "Searching for Jesus."
- The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled due to a conflict.
- Miss Charlene Mason sang "I will not pass this way again," giving obvious pleasure to the congregation.
- A bean supper will be held on Tuesday evening in the church hall. Music will follow.
- Potluck supper Sunday at 5:00 PM - prayer and medication to follow.
- This evening at 7 PM there will be a hymn singing in the park across from the Church. Bring a blanket and come prepared to sin.
- Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door.

If you would like to discuss with us any information printed in this free booklet please contact:

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