

Complete In Christ

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A few years back, a New York rabbi named Harold Kushner, wrote a book called, *When Bad Things Happen To Good People*. His book was on the New York Times best seller list for almost a year. As its title suggests, Kushner tried to deal with, and come up with, an explanation for all the tragedies we see in life. People have always tried to come to grips with this issue. The basic question is, "How can God allow bad things to happen to seemingly innocent people?"

Rabbi Kushner deals with the issue of life's tragedies by arguing that bad things happen, because in reality God is not totally Sovereign. He is not all-knowing, nor all-powerful. The rabbi believes that in the end God will ultimately triumph, but that at times, here and there, things do get out of God's control. He advises his readers that the best they can do in light of this, is to forgive God, and then do what God does - just get on with life.

The rabbi believes that it is better for us if we come to terms with the fact that God is not all-knowing, or all-powerful; rather than thinking that God is not all loving or good. That is the way he would have us deal with the question of why bad things happen to good people. Not only do I think his answer leaves much to be desired, but I think he and the rest of us are asking the wrong question. The question to ask is not, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" But, "Why do good things happen to bad people?"

In the gospel of Luke there is an unparalleled account, where some people ask Jesus Christ about the reasons behind two tragedies. In the one, a group of Galilean worshipers were killed by Pilate and his Roman soldiers, while they were sacrificing in the temple. The soldiers cruelly mixed the Galileans' blood in with the sacrifices. In the other tragedy, a tower of some kind accidentally fell and killed 18 people. The people who questioned Jesus Christ supposed that the tragedies occurred because the victims were bad sinners. Our Lord's response shows a lack of real understanding of life on the part of those who asked the question.

And Jesus answered them and said to them, "Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish" (Luke 13:2-5 NKJV).

A harsh response, lacking in compassion? I don't think so. The Bible paints a vastly different picture of mankind than we paint. We tend to think everyone is basically good. The Bible teaches just the opposite. It teaches that from the time of Adam's fall, there is no one truly good, no not one. In Romans, chapter 3 we read, "...There is no one righteous, no not one" (vs. 10).

And thus, the amazing thing is not that bad things happen to good people, but that good things actually happen to bad people! The amazing thing is that in the face of man's rebellion against God we don't see worse tragedies. The amazing thing is that God graciously offers to save and redeem people in Jesus Christ, rather than letting us all die. For as the Scriptures teach, "...the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 6:21).

The Word of God teaches us that there are basically only two groups of people, those who are in Adam and those who are in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15 we read,

For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.

The word "in" is the Greek preposition *en*, and it carries with it the idea of being within the very center of something, of being surrounded within an object, or a sphere of influence. It indicates permanence and continuance, unless a stronger force comes along. As Adam is the founder and head of the human race, all who are descended from Adam are said to be in him. The end result of this union is death. Preceding that death are all the pains and problems and sorrows that afflict every life.

But as we are going to see, Christ Jesus is the founder and the head of a new race of people. And all who are in him, find their lives lived with fullness of blessing. Because of the amazing grace of God in the Lord Jesus Christ good things can happen to bad people. The apostle Paul tells us of these good things in his letter to the Ephesians,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence (Ephesians 1:3-8).

Notice the phrase "in Him" repeated over and over again in these verses! To have life in Christ is to have a far more significant and satisfying existence than anything we could ever imagine. To have life in Christ is to have the resources and remedy, to deal with the fundamental concerns of life. It is to be able to live life with great blessing. These verses describe for us our blessing, and status, and glory because we are in Christ.

First, verse 3 tells us that we have in Christ, every spiritual blessing. All who are saved by faith in Christ are given in him every spiritual resource they may ever need to live life abundantly. We are given love, and grace, and peace. We are made righteous, and are given strength, and hope. In Christ we are granted everything we may ever need to enjoy life and to have a vital relationship with God.

Secondly, verse 4 says that in Christ we were chosen from before the foundation of the world, to stand before Him as those who are holy and without blame. We stand before God bathed in His love! We were chosen in Christ to live our lives in a distinctly different manner from everyone else. Being blessed by God in Christ, we were chosen to enjoy the fruit of our new status with God, the fruit of love, and peace and joy. And we can carry this fruit of our

blessing in Christ, into all our relationships, and into every circumstance. The Bible says that we can be,

fruitful in every good work... strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and long suffering with joy (Colossians 1:10-11).

This wonderful section of Ephesians continues by telling us in verse 5, that we were predestined to be adopted as God's sons. Literally, this means that in Christ we have been legally designated as God's heirs. In Christ we have been given a spiritual treasure that is inexhaustible and incorruptible. And there is nothing in life that could ever compare to this inheritance, good or bad. In Romans, chapter 8, we learn that,

The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs -heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together. For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us (Romans 8:16-18).

In the fourth place, we have been "accepted in the Beloved [Christ]" (Eph. 1:6). In other words, in Jesus Christ we have free access to God, we stand in the light of His good favor, and have available to us all the resources of our God. The practicality of this truth is that we can have a bold and loving confidence in our God as the following verses make clear.

in whom [Christ] we have boldness and access [to God] with confidence through faith in Him (Eph. 3:12).

Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:19-23).

And lastly, Ephesians 1:7 points out that in Christ we have redemption and forgiveness of sins. In redemption we are bought out of the world's slave market, rescued from the power of sin. We are rescued from the world's foolish wisdom that really only leads to slavery rather than liberty. We are redeemed from the corrupting influences of our age. And in redemption we are redeemed, or delivered from the powers of spiritual darkness. As Colossians states,

He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14).

Those who are in Christ are delivered from the manipulating influences and captivating powers of every devilish force. The believer in Christ never needs to be under the tyranny of the demonic. Never! And in Christ we are forgiven of our sins, cleansed through and through, spiritually healed and reconciled to God. In Christ we are totally saved.

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by [in] His life (Romans 5:10).

What a shame that the world around us scours the junk yard of the world's religions and philosophies, collecting trash to deal with life's problems, when the bountiful and practical blessings of God are freely given to us in Jesus Christ!

What really makes a difference in life? How do we deal with the problems we face? Do we deal with life by deciding that, yes, God is good, but incapable of real help? Do we just get on with life thinking that maybe a change in jobs, or cities, or even a husband, or wife will solve our difficulties? Do we look to education for answers, to more governmental intervention? Government and its laws change very little, if at all. Education simply provides us with more facts, or with more questions. Moving to a new location physically, or emotionally only changes the scenery, not the real issues of life!

It is changed people who change everything. And it is only God who changes people by taking them out of Adam and placing them in Christ. If you are a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, you have

been radically changed. You are a part of a new race, a new creation, with new potential and a new destiny. And we are called to live differently.

For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus; that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again. Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer. Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:14-17).

Once we believe in Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior we are no longer who or what we were before. Even Jesus Christ is not now what he was according to the flesh. He is now glorified, filled with all the fullness of God. And in him, we are in all reality, a new creation, a new species. We can now live with new power, new purpose and with a new hope.

The word for "new" in vs. 17, is the Greek word *kainos*, meaning not new in time, but new in quality. Verse 17 means that we have a new nature, different from the old. It means the believer can live in a new manner, with new power, bringing new results.

In salvation God recreates us and places us in Christ. In doing this, He gives us new life. He makes us new people. We now have divine power for the present, and hope for a new future. As Colossians 1:27 says, it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." Old things, old fears, old hurts, old inabilities, old aspirations, can be gone, and all things can be made new! As a new creation in Christ life takes on a freshness and a freedom that was simply impossible while we were still in Adam. We are given new life and new hope, only by being born again. This is what Jesus told a man named Nicodemus.

There was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him." Jesus answered and said to him, "Most

assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" (John 3:1-3).

Without the new birth there is no new life, there is no new hope. Newness of life comes from being born again. Now, it would be good to stop and think about this man Nicodemus for a moment. He was a Jew, one of God's chosen people. He belonged to one of the strictest sects of his time. He was a member of the ruling council of Israel, the Sanhedrin. He was a teacher of the law and he earnestly endeavored to live righteously before God.

But he was also a descendant of Adam and thus possessed Adam's fallen nature and destiny. No matter how hard this man tried, he could not achieve on his own, what God could give him in Christ. Nicodemus needed to be radically changed, to be born again. In the Old Testament the prophet Jeremiah said to Israel,

Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Then may you also do good who are accustomed to do evil? (Jeremiah 13:23).

No one can change what is a part of their intrinsic nature. As Jesus Christ continued to tell Nicodemus,

That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit ... You must be born again (John 3:6-7).

We must be given a new life.

The word "birth" always carries the meaning of new life. And the life always partakes of the nature of the parent. A little puppy has the nature of a dog in him and nothing will change that. A human being has the nature of Adam, and nothing can change that except to be taken out of Adam and given a new birth in Christ. The only way to escape the death and tragic way of life that is found in Adam, is to be created anew in Christ.

And you He [God] made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them (Eph. 2:1-10).

How can good things happen to bad people, to people who are dead in trespasses and sins? The answer is the grace of God in Christ Jesus! Those who are saved are now God's "workmanship created in Christ." The word "workmanship" is translated from the Greek word *poema*, a word used for a significant and extremely valuable work of art. The word was used for a masterpiece. We are God's masterpiece! His new creation in Christ!

Being a Christian doesn't mean making a few minor adjustments to life. It doesn't mean trying a little bit harder to be a little bit better. It doesn't mean forgiving God for His missing the call and then moving on! Being a Christian means that you have undergone a radical spiritual transformation in Christ. Now we can and we must make a radical change in our thinking and in our living. The excellency of our whole Christian life depends on understanding our secure position in our Lord.

Romans 3:24 tells us that we were justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Romans 6:11 states that we need to reckon ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ. Romans 6:23 declares that the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ. Romans 8:1 simply states that there is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ. Romans 8:39 boldly proclaims that nothing past, present, or future shall ever be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Corinthians 1:30 joyfully announces that God has placed us in Christ, and that he has become for us

wisdom from God and righteousness and sanctification and redemption. 2 Corinthians 1:21 tells us that it is God who establishes us, or fixes us in Christ, indicating our security. 2 Corinthians 2:14 proclaims that God always leads us in triumph in Christ. 2 Timothy 1:9 says that God saved us not according to our own works, but according to His own purposes that were given to us in Christ before time began. And Philemon verse 6 says that the sharing of our faith becomes effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing that is in us in Christ! The heart of the gospel is that we are complete in Christ!

As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you

are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power (Colossians 2:6-10).

We must not allow ourselves to be robbed out of our fullness in Christ by worldly wisdom. In Christ we are complete. In Christ we move out of death into life, we move from tragedy to victory! Being in Christ is a vital, spiritually organic, intimate union that involves a shared life, a shared love and a shared destiny which no one can ever change.

My Christ He is the Lord of lords, He is the King of Kings.

He is the Sun of Righteousness, With healing in his wings.

My Christ he is the heaven of heaven.

Upon his glorious name I call.

My Lord, my Savior, My first and last.

My Christ is my all in all!

[This article is taken from Chuck's book *Christ Our Life* which is available from Grace Ministry USA, 7359 N. Hoyne, Chicago, IL 60645]