

13. Christ in the Crucible

Biblical material: Matt. 2:1-18; 27:51, 52; Luke 2:7, 22-24; 22:41-44; John 8:58, 59; Rom. 6:23; Titus 1:2.

Quotes

- Liberty is the possibility of doubting, of making a mistake,... of searching and experimenting,... of saying No to any authority - literary, artistic, philosophical, religious, social, and even political. *Ignazio Silone*
- Nothing is more difficult, and therefore more precious, than to be able to decide. *Napoleon Bonaparte*
- Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves. *Abraham Lincoln*
- Freedom is the oxygen of the soul. *Moshe Dayan*
- Nations grown corrupt/ Love bondage more than liberty; Bondage with ease than strenuous liberty. *John Milton*
- Most people want security in this world, not liberty. *H.L. Mencken*
- Freedom is not an unlimited license, an unlimited choice, or an unlimited opportunity. Freedom is first of all a responsibility before the God from whom we come. *Alan Keyes*

Questions

How free are we? In what way do our ideas about freedom depend on our concept of God? How does God honor our freedom? Why does Christ's coming to this world show us God? Was he in a "crucible"? How? What should Jesus' suffering tell us? How can God end suffering while still being committed to freedom?

Discussion

"Whenever we look at the issue of suffering, the question comes: How did sin and suffering first arise? Through divine revelation we have good answers: They arose because free beings abused the freedom God had given them. This leads to another question: Did God know beforehand that these beings would fall? Yes, but obviously He thought it was, as C. S. Lewis wrote, 'worth the risk.' Worth the risk? For whom? For us, while God sits in heaven on His throne? Not exactly. The freedom of all His intelligent creatures was so sacred that, rather than deny us freedom, God agreed to bear in Himself the brunt of the suffering caused by our abuse of that freedom. And we see that suffering in the life and death of Jesus, who, through suffering in our flesh, has created bonds between heaven and earth that will last throughout eternity." (Sabbath pm lesson)

This statement raises many questions—about God's foreknowledge, about predestination, about the way in which God grants and protects freedom. Many have wondered how a God who knows the future can still be a God who gives freedom to his created beings. Often predestination and foreknowledge are confused. But if we trust God, and know that he is completely trustworthy, then we can have complete confidence and place our free choices in his hands, even though he knows them before we make them. For he does not change towards us, despite our choices.

As we read again the story of the birth of Jesus as recorded by Matthew (2:1-18) we're struck again by the graciousness of God, coming as a baby with all that means. Jesus identifies with us, seeks to experience life as we do, and does so from a divine perspective—knowing what

should have been. The difference between what he created and how human beings now lived must have been a perpetual pain. Jesus' crucible experience was far worse, yet not as a testimony to any "blessing from suffering" but simply because there was no other way. He prayed for the cup to pass, as we all do, but chose to follow the trustworthy path of his Father.

Comment

"Now what does the crucifixion mean and how does that suffering and death bring peace once again to God's universal family? I believe that in the light of this great controversy all christian beliefs take on a much broader and deeper significance - especially the gospel. You see, so long as we are preoccupied with our legal standing before God, the gospel seems to focus on what God has done for me . . . me . . . me, and you too, of course. But when we take this larger, great controversy perspective, the gospel is the truth about our gracious God that ends the war, confirms the loyalty of the entire universe, and wins some of us back to repentance. I believe that the most important of all our beliefs as christians is this truth about our God: that He is not as His enemies have made Him out to be - arbitrary, vengeful and severe - but rather, that He is precisely as His Son has shown Him to be.

"When He was here on this earth, He said, 'When you have seen Me, you have seen the Father.' (John 14:9) And the Father is just as gracious and willing to forgive as His Son. Could there be any better news than this? This is the everlasting good news that holds the loyalty of the universe and will make us eternally secure in the hereafter. This is the good news that we need to share with all those who don't realize that they are members of God's family here on this earth. So the ultimate question for our series is: Is God really like that?" A Graham Maxwell, *Conversations About God* tape series, #1

Ellen White Comments

In matters of conscience the soul must be left untrammled. No one is to control another's mind, to judge for another, or to prescribe his duty. God gives to every soul freedom to think, and to follow his own convictions. "Every one of us shall give account of himself to God." No one has a right to merge his own individuality in that of another. In all matters where principle is involved, "let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind." Rom. 14:12, 5. In Christ's kingdom there is no lordly oppression, no compulsion of manner. {DA 550-1}

...to deprive man of the freedom of choice would be to rob him of his prerogative as an intelligent being and make him a mere automaton. It is not God's purpose to coerce the will. Man was created a free moral agent. {2MCP 421}

The law of love being the foundation of the government of God, the happiness of all intelligent beings depends upon their perfect accord with its great principles of righteousness. God desires from all His creatures the service of love—service that springs from an appreciation of His character. He takes no pleasure in a forced obedience; and to all He grants freedom of will, that they may render Him voluntary service. {PP 34}

The further the Pharisees separated from God, the more eager they were to manufacture commandments restricting the freedom of their fellow men. They bound heavy burdens upon them, grievous to be borne. They transgressed the commandments of God, and mingled with them the traditions and maxims of men. These traditions they exalted above the word of God. "In vain they do worship Me," said Christ, "teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." {17MR 200}