

Chapter 3....

WHY?

Why did my loved one die? Consider these two scenarios.

Scenario 1

Why did my beloved daughter die when she was only 33 years old? How could God allow her to leave a baby not yet a year old? I had even prayed and asked God to let my daughter live to raise her child.

Why does my granddaughter have to go through life never really getting to know her mother? Why does her daddy have to be both father and mother to this sweet child?

Scenario 2

Why did God bless me with such a wonderful daughter for 33 years? She had a difficult time getting pregnant, and just when she was ready to give up, God blessed her with a baby. It was my greatest desire that my daughter spend eternity in heaven, and I am so thankful that I can be confident that we will share this eternal blessing together.



Why did God allow my granddaughter to be spared? If she had been in the car with her mother, she would have been killed in the accident. The car seat was demolished. Why did God give my granddaughter such a wonderful Christian daddy to raise her? She has brought joy into all of our lives even as we went through the sorrow of losing her mother.

Yes, she will have questions about what happened to her mother when she gets older. But my granddaughter is blessed to have both sets of grandparents living close to her, and they are all faithful Christians, as are others in her extended family.

Application

Perhaps you have already guessed it. Scenario 1 and Scenario 2 are the exact same circumstance, but viewed from two different perspectives.

We may be oblivious to our blessings and seldom wonder why God has chosen to bless us. But when we suffer a loss, one of the first things we ask is: WHY?

God's Will

Many times well-meaning people will say to us after a tragic loss, "It was God's will." Surely they make this statement trying to be a comfort. However, some may hear the comment and think, "What kind of God would cause a mother to be taken from her child?"

One of the best answers I have ever read or heard is taken from the November 19, 2004 issue of *Gospel Minutes*. A reader asked, "Dear brother Clem: Are man's days numbered? A friend of mine contends that

everything that happens in this world is God's will.
Please comment. - E.J., TN"

Here is Clem Thurman's enlightening reply:

"The days of our years are threescore years and ten. Or even by reason of strength fourscore years; Yet is their pride but labor and sorrow; For it is soon gone, and we fly away...So teach us to number our days, That we may get us a heart of wisdom" (Psalm 90:10-12). Note that the numbering of our days is done by us, not God. The admonition in this Psalm is that we might apply our hearts to wisdom, realizing the brevity, and learn to use each day God gives us to give Him glory.

Is everything that happens God's will? Is it the will of God that an innocent child suffers at the hands of a dope-addicted adult? Is it God who is responsible for the rape and murder of an innocent young girl? Is it God who causes the heart and the body of a wife to break at the hands of a drunken husband? No. God is not responsible for misdeeds of this life. The idea that everything that happens is "God's will" is just not true. The bad things that happen are Satan's doings, not God's.

The apostle Paul wrote of his "thorn in the flesh" and called it "the messenger of Satan" (2 Cor. 12:7,8). He prayed to God that the thorn would be removed, even though he was still willing to accept it. But he never attributed that "thorn in the flesh" to God. He never blamed God for it.

It was Satan's work, and he so characterized it.

Satan is still at work in this world. "Be sober, be watchful: your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour, whom withstand steadfast in your faith" (1 Peter 4:8,9). I was called to preach the funeral of a fine Christian lady not long ago, who had been killed in a head-on collision by a drunk driver who was going ninety miles per hour (according to police) the wrong way on a divided highway. One of the first things someone said to me at the funeral home was, "It was just God's will that she die." I don't believe it! God didn't put the liquor in that man who caused the wreck, the devil did that.

Surely Satan's power and influence is circumscribed by God, but the devil is still allowed to work through evil people and wield power in our world. While we recognize the sovereignty of God, we must also recognize that He allows Satan some activity. So, let us not blame everything on God. Neither let us despair of striving to improve ourselves and the world around us. Let us "number our days" to use all of them for the Lord.

After reading brother Thurman's comments, you may still be wondering, "Even if God did not *cause* a tragedy, why did He *allow* it to happen? Couldn't He have used His providence to protect my loved one?"

The Wednesday night after Angie's death, a brother in Christ gave a devotional and talked about his desire to

understand *why* God let such a precious one be taken from this world. The main thought that stuck in my mind was this: If God never let bad things happen to Christians, people would want to become Christians for the wrong reason. God must allow Christians to suffer, because if He didn't people in the world would not be able to see how God helps Christians through times of trouble. Months later a close Christian friend told me, "Barbara, you don't know how many people are watching you to see how you handle this tragedy in your life." We need to study the principle found in 1 Peter 2:19-23, and follow Christ's example.

God's Family

God put us on this earth to love and worship Him. He gave us earthly families to care for us. He gave His people a very special family, which is called the church in the Christian Age in which we live. If you are studying this chapter as part of a Ladies' Bible Class, please sing the song, "God's Family" at some point during your class.

As you prepare for the class (or study alone), read the book of Ephesians, which gives a beautiful description of God's family. Even before the world began, God planned that we would be adopted into His family (Eph. 1:4,5). Like Paul, we often "give thanks" for our brothers and sisters in Christ (1:16).

Chapter 2 of Ephesians describes how God had a plan for our salvation. In spite of our sins, God has mercy on us. He brought us together in this family through the sacrifice of Christ (2:4-13). In verse 19 Paul tells the Ephesian Christians that they are "fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God."

Chapter 3 explains, “That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel” (v. 6). Aren’t we thankful? Under the old law, the Israelites (Jews) were God’s chosen people. I don’t know about you, but I’m a Gentile, and I am very thankful that I, too, can be a part of God’s family! May we feel the awe expressed by Paul in verses 14 and 15:

For this cause I bow my knees unto the
Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, Of whom
the whole **family** in heaven and earth is
named.

Chapter 4 presents the unity of the family of God, the body, the church. Paul uses the illustration of the human body, showing that Christians each have different jobs to do, but the body functions properly when we all work together as God planned. The last part of the chapter admonishes us regarding sins we should avoid and the love we are to show in our daily lives.

Chapter 5 begins with Paul calling them “dear children” and instructing them to be “followers of God” (v. 1). He continues to teach about sins to avoid and tells them to “walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us” (v. 2). The instructions in the last half of the chapter further depict our spiritual family, showing the parallels between the husband-wife relationship and the relationship between Christ and His bride, the church.

The last chapter of Ephesians instructs regarding our human relationships with one another as children and parents -- servants and masters. No matter what our station in life may be, we can be “strong in the Lord and in the power of his might,” even in times of tragedy, as was discussed in Chapter 2.

Do you have your spiritual armour in place? Are you ready to battle Satan? We may go through life thinking that tragedy only strikes others. To some extent I know that is what I thought.

Many years earlier I had lost a brother, and a few years later my father. I was fully recovered. Although these two deaths were hard for me, there is no way I could have even imagined losing my daughter – the mother of my only grandchild – the daughter who told me I was her “best friend” – the daughter who confided her deepest secrets to me. Angie will never call me again. She will never come to visit.

Did God take Angie from me? NO! But why did He allow her to be taken? I will never fully understand in this life. I do know that God does not view my life as I view it (Isaiah 55:8,9). He can see the whole picture. Only God knows how many souls may be saved because of Angie’s life and this event we think of as a tragedy. It is comforting to know that “The Lord also will be a refuge for the oppressed, a refuge in times of trouble” (Psalm 9:9).

God put us here to love and serve Him. He sees the big picture, and we are only looking at the small dot of our short lives. Job’s experiences are written in the Bible to help us understand that Satan is active in this world, and God is with those who love Him. It is comforting to know that “the Lord blessed the latter end of Job more than his beginning” (Job 42:12).

God blessed my life by giving me Angie. God has given me a church family to comfort me in my time of grief and sorrow.

Yes, we know Christians have to suffer heartaches. We know that the world is watching. They can see

whether or not we remain faithful through our trials. Suffering may cause us to consider whether or not we have the right relationship with God, and make any needed changes. It is true; we are the only “Bible” some people are reading. Will our example lead them to read God’s Word and be saved eternally?

As I proofread this chapter, I realize how much has changed in the few months since it was first written. Eric found a beautiful Christian woman and married her. They met at a grief counseling session.



Connie lost her first husband to cancer about two years before Angie died. Because Eric and Connie were both striving to please God, He brought them together through His providence. Now Sophie won’t grow up without a mother. This is truly an answer to many prayers offered up to God on behalf of our family.

In later chapters we will be studying how our recovery from loss is linked to the way we use our lives in service to God. For now, let me say that although this book is very difficult for me to write, it is also healing to my soul.

We can’t shut our tragedies away. We must face them and overcome them. As we grow stronger as children of God and members of His family, we will be able to reach out to others and show them that:

Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning (Psalm 30:5).

STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. When Paul prayed for the “thorn in the flesh” to be removed from him, what did he indicate was the source of the “thorn” and what was God’s reply (2 Cor. 12:7-10)?
2. According to Ephesians 1:3, where are spiritual blessings found?
3. Becoming God’s adopted children was planned even before the world began, according to Eph. 1:4,5. This adoption cannot take place until we come in contact with Christ’s blood (v. 7). How does that take place according to Romans 6:3-6 and other passages?
4. Christ is the head of the church, which is His body (Eph. 1:22,23). When we are part of the church we are no longer strangers. What two ways is our relationship described in Eph. 2:19?

5. Ephesians 3:6 speaks of Gentiles becoming “fellowheirs [with the Jews] and of the same **body**” (the church). How does Galatians 3:16-29 further explain this thought?

6. Explain how the church family works together as one body (as is taught in Ephesians 4).

7. List at least six Christian character traits mentioned in Ephesians 4:20-32 which are very important to the unity of the church family.

8. List at least six sinful characteristics mentioned in Ephesians 5:1-11 which must be avoided by Christians.

9. What is the parallel between Christ and the church as compared to the husband and wife (Ephesians 5:22-33)?

10. How will the church family be stronger when each individual family unit follows the instructions in Ephesians 6:1-4?

11. When the church family follows the admonitions in Ephesians, how will it enable us to be prepared to comfort those who are in need, and especially those who have lost close family members or friends?

12. How can we be comforted by knowing that Jesus was willing to die on the cross so we could become His adopted brothers and sisters (1 Peter 2:21-25, Hebrews 5:8,9; 12:1,2; Philippians 2:5-11)?

THE LOST

There is a vast difference between losing a saved friend or relative and losing a loved one who is lost eternally. How can we cope with such a catastrophic loss? How would a lost loved one who has passed away view our existence on this earth?

The closest we can come to grasping an understanding of this is to consider the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man went to the hades realm, and was in torment. Lazarus also went to the hades realm, but he was being comforted in paradise ("Abraham's bosom"). This account takes place prior to the judgment day, when Jesus will judge us all, and we will go to heaven or hell to spend eternity.

The rich man could see Abraham and Lazarus (whereas in hell there is total darkness). He begged Abraham to send someone to warn his brothers, so they would not end up in torment with him. Please pay special attention to this: The rich man **did not want his brothers with him.**

It is only through the comfort of God and Christian loved ones that we can recover from losing one who did not live a Christian life. Sadly, I have seen some who fell away from God and the church when an unsaved loved one died. It is hard to fathom their reasoning.

Do they believe that by living a Christian life they are somehow condemning the loved one to hell? If so, that is totally wrong. No matter how they live, their loved one will spend an eternity in either torment or happiness. In Romans we learn that "we shall all

stand before the judgment seat of Christ...So then every one of us shall give **account of himself** to God" (Romans 14:10,12).

Clearly, our loved ones will not be condemned because of our lives here on earth. They will answer for their lives and we will answer for our lives (2 Cor. 5:10).

Perhaps some fall away when a loved one dies because they do not have a strong faith. "We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves" (Romans 15:1). If you are weak in the faith, begin working hard to grow stronger! Be faithful to worship services, study your Bible and pray daily. Strengthen yourself before a tragedy strikes. If you are weak now, and are already facing adversity, lean on strong brothers and sisters as you work to build up your own faith. You won't be doing your lost loved one any favors if you join him or her in eternal punishment.

Be An Example

Another factor to consider is this: What about your loved ones who are still alive? What can you do to help them find a home in heaven one day? First and foremost, you must set the right example! Paul told the Corinthians, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1).

Before you can be sure you are setting the right example, you must examine your life and compare it to God's Word. Are you sure you are saved? The only way you can know is by studying God's Word. You **cannot** know you are saved



by the way you **feel**, or even by what **you think**. You can only know you are saved by comparing your life to the scriptures.

Jesus warned, “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and **many** there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and **narrow** is the way, which leadeth unto life, and **few** there be that find it” (Matthew 7:13,14).

Jesus further taught that many who **think** they are saved will be quite surprised on the judgment day. He said, “Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works?” (Matt. 7:22). He will tell them He **never** knew them (v. 23). We must be like the wise man who heeds what the Bible teaches (vv. 24,25). One who does not listen to what Christ was teaching is like a person who builds his house on the sand. When trials come (“rains descended, and floods came”) this foolish person will fall (v. 27).

Turn from Error

The ignorant person is **not** the one who admits making a mistake. The ignorant person is the one who refuses to accept that he has made a mistake, and therefore will never correct it.

Which of these was Saul of Tarsus? Saul later became the great apostle Paul because he was willing to **admit** his wrong choices and turn from error. Paul told Agrippa:

I verily **thought** within myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the

name of Jesus of Nazareth, Which thing I also did in Jerusalem: and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities (Acts 26:9-11).

Paul continues to explain about his conversion, which is also recorded in Acts 9:1-21. While Saul was on his way to Damascus to persecute the Christians, he saw Jesus in a vision. Saul was blind after the vision, and remained blind for three days, while he prayed. Although he prayed fervently and fasted, Saul was **not** saved until he was baptized, at which point his sins were washed away (Acts 22:16).

There are so many today who reject Saul's wisdom. They refuse to admit they could possibly be following error. Hence, they will never be saved.

My Conversion

For many years I worshiped God by following man's teachings, without understanding the error of my ways. I wanted to do what was right, and I thought I was doing what was right! But there were so many things I did not comprehend.

Why were there so many denominations, I pondered? Surely a just God would not say that **many** paths were all right! Why didn't we worship on Saturday, like they did in the times of Jesus?

When I moved to Eudora, KS, I met a woman who would eventually lead me to the truth. Dorene patiently answered my questions with Bible passages and invited me to a non-denominational church. There I learned that the church began on the day of Pentecost, as is taught in Acts 2. None of the denominations where I had worshiped taught that they had a beginning on that day!

I began to learn how various errors crept into the church. One of the first departures was that of elevating one elder in each congregation to a special office, where they would meet with other similarly elevated elders from many other congregations. Finally one man was set above all the others. Many other departures entered the church, including baptism of babies, sprinkling instead of immersion for baptism and musical instruments in worship.

After hundreds of years, some tried to return to the truth. But instead of just going back to the Bible and finding out what the early Christians did in the book of Acts, they tried to get rid of each individual error. Many errors were overlooked as these denominations began. Others decided to look back to Acts and follow only the Bible examples.

Yes, that is the church to which I wanted to belong! They are merely Christians, with no denominational ties. They worship as did the early Christians and teach baptism for the remission of sins, as we read about in the book of Acts.

It would have been so easy to refuse to admit error! How we must humble ourselves to say we were wrong! But if the great apostle Paul, who had put Christians in prison, could admit he was wrong, surely I could. I was baptized for the remission of sins in 1972.



I had even learned why Christians worship on Sunday instead of Saturday. The old law was “nailed to the cross”! (Colossians 2:14). The example in the New Testament, after the church began, was to worship on Sunday. (Of course we can worship God other times, but Sunday was, and is, the special day when Christians meet to partake of communion and give of their means. There is no Bible direct statement, implication, nor example of the Lord’s Supper taking place on any other day of the week [Acts 20:7]).

When I studied history books, I found that musical instruments were added to the worship **hundreds of years** after the church began on the day of Pentecost. WOW! Our worship is in vain, or worthless, if we practice the commandments of men instead of worshiping as the Bible teaches (Matthew 15:8).

Jesus taught parables about the coming kingdom, or church. He lived on this earth 40 days after His resurrection and taught the apostles about the church, or kingdom (Acts 1:3). Earlier Jesus had told Peter that his confession that Jesus is the Christ is the foundation upon which Christ’s **church** would be built (Matthew 16:16-18). Jesus is the rock (1 Corinthians 10:4) and the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20). Jesus said that Peter would be given the keys to the **kingdom** (Matthew 16:19). Well, keys open doors! The door to the church of Christ was opened on the day of Pentecost when Peter taught those present to be baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38) and those who obeyed, and were baptized, were added to the

church. Acts 2:47b states, “And the Lord added to **the church** daily such as should be saved.”

The Lost

You may be asking yourself, “What does this have to do with the death of loved ones who are lost eternally?” The answer is this: When we know what the Bible teaches about how to be saved and how to worship God, we are going to know how to teach our loved ones who are **alive** so they won’t join those who are lost eternally. **We can’t do anything about those who have already left this world.** But we **can** do something for those who are still here! We can set the right example and work to teach them the truth!

But wait! We must be very careful about **how** we go about teaching the lost (Col. 4:6). We won’t be winning any souls to Christ if we go around saying, “If you do such and such you are going to hell.” Yes, we do know a tree by its fruits (Matthew 7:19-21). And it is right that those who don’t obey will “go to hell.” But if we can’t teach the truth **in love**, we are never going to save those souls from hell!

We can teach that those who obey God will spend an eternity in heaven. We can show how much God loves each person by loving him or her ourselves. Jesus said, “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:35).

If loved ones have died in their sins, and we have no hope of ever seeing them again, the greatest comfort we can have on this earth is to teach others about Jesus and God, and how to spend an eternity with them. Letting others join our lost loved ones is no comfort at all! Living unfaithful lives so we will join our lost loved ones will never bring peace into our

lives. The only peace we can have in this life is to obey the Bible and teach others to do likewise. Jesus spoke these words of encouragement:

Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid (John 14:27).

Earlier He had told the apostles:

Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also (John 14:1-3).



STUDY AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The first five questions are taken from Luke 16:19-31.

1. When the rich man and Lazarus died, where did they go?

2. Since Jesus gave this Bible account while he was alive on this earth, we know the judgment had not yet taken place. Even so, the rich man knew he was condemned. What did he ask of Abraham for himself?

3. What did the rich man ask of Lazarus for his brothers who were still alive?

4. Would the rich man have been comforted to have his brothers with him for an eternity, first in the torment section of the hadean realm, and then in hell after the judgment? Would you, if you were in the rich man's condition?

5. If we live long enough, we will all lose a close friend or relative who was not living a Christian life. What does this Bible account teach us that we can do here on earth for living loved ones who are not saved, that would be carrying out the rich man's request to Abraham for his brothers?

6. What do **you think** may be some of the reasons Christians fall away from God and the church when a lost loved one dies?

7. What was Saul's spiritual condition in Acts 9:1,2?

8. In Acts 9:6, Jesus told Saul to "go into the city, and it shall be **told** thee what thou must do." Was Saul saved by praying?

9. What was Saul **told** to do in Acts 22:16 (a recounting of Acts 9), in order to have his sins washed away?

10. If we still lived under the old law, what are some of the things we would have to do? (See Exodus 20:8; 21:17; 23:15; 35:2,3; Leviticus 1:2-4; 2:1-3 for just a few examples. Aren't you glad we live under the new covenant!)

11. Keep in mind to whom Paul is speaking in Colossians 1:2. Then read Colossians 1:13 and Acts 2:47. How do these verses viewed together prove that the kingdom and the church are the same thing, and that we are already in the kingdom if we are saved? (Also compare Rev. 1:9 and Heb. 12:28.)

12. Read 2 Corinthians 5:11. How does this verse describe the rich man we studied earlier, and why should we be more diligent to reach out to the lost?