

Oh God, Where Were You When I Needed You?

The family was shocked beyond comprehension! Caught in a snowstorm in Alaska, they had kept their heater running. The snow had piled high around the car and, without their knowledge, deadly carbon monoxide had seeped into the automobile. The gas—heavier than air—had first reached their twin boys, asleep on the floor. Groggy, wondering what was causing their sleepiness, the parents gradually became aware something was wrong. The father struggled to open the windows to change the air! They grasped their twin baby boys—shook them, rubbed their little arms and tried frantically to awaken them. But it was too late! Their cries of anguish were lost in the blackness of that Alaskan night with its billions of softly falling flakes. But *WHY? WHY*, if there is a loving God in heaven, do such tragedies strike? *WHY DID GOD LET THOSE BABY BOYS DIE?*

The preceding story was related to me by the father of the boys, an executive in the radio business from Alaska, when he attended the National Association of Broadcasters convention in Chicago, Illinois.

I had been invited to give the invocation at a dinner for about 2,000 radio-station owners and managers from all over the country; the main speaker that day was Paul Harvey.

During the recess after lunch, one of the radio executives asked if he might ask me a personal question. He then related the tragic story of his two baby sons' death. He had already asked his own pastor, or perhaps two or more ministers. He and his wife were searching for some understanding; they needed to know *WHY—WHY* would a loving God allow this to happen?

How *WOULD YOU ANSWER?*

If there *IS* a God, and if *GOD IS LOVE*, then *WHY?*

Now, if someone asks some other person that question, he has a perfect out. All most people have to do is to cluck away sympathetically, or, if genuine emotion is really felt, show some sincere empathy with such a tragically bewildered parent. However, it only requires a polite disclaimer: "I've always wondered about

that *too*,” or, “Well, I don’t know. I lost a son in Vietnam, and I have never understood why he had to die when all these others...”

But this was different.

I am a minister.

He had asked a minister: a man who had been preaching the Word of God over his radio station for years, a man who had just finished delivering a heartfelt prayer to God in front of 2,000 hard-bitten businessmen.

No minister could simply shake his head and profess he didn’t *have* the answer to such a tragic, perplexing question. But the gentleman told me he had already asked two or three others, and they merely muttered something vague about “mysterious” ways of God and faith and such, and allowed as how “His ways are past finding out.”

By the time the man and his wife wrestled with these vague generalities for a while, they were as distraught and puzzled as ever. Hurt, bewildered, feeling deserted in their most desperate hour of need, they kept reliving their anguished attempts for hour upon hour to revive their twin boys, their frantic mouth-to-mouth resuscitation, their desperate tears, their prayers.

“WHY DID GOD LET MY TWO BABY BOYS DIE?”

I began to explain.

Tragedies—by the Millions

I told the man I could only try to understand the depth of his grief and that I would fall short—that only a parent who had actually experienced such heartbreak could *really* empathize with him. Then, in nowhere near so detailed a fashion, I began to explain why God had not stepped in to prevent their deaths.

The man and his wife were not alone in their suffering.

That same night—from Africa to Japan, from China to Brazil, from Canada to Australia—millions of tragedies were unfolding. Tiny babies were dying of malnutrition and starvation, a slow, terrible death of hunger far different from drifting off to sleep, the sleep becoming deeper and deeper until death.

I mentioned, without attempting to overstate the case, about the distraught parents I had seen interviewed on TV whose children had been kidnapped and killed, about the hundreds of automobile accidents that same night, about those born deformed, blind and diseased. I tried to show, in a brief few moments, that the whole world “groans and travails in pain” (Romans 8:22).

In war, it seems, it is always the innocent bystander, the children, the women and the elderly, who are victimized. Today, in nations all over the world, vicious terrorism is aimed at the helpless civilians whose only crime is being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Despots carry out vicious pogroms, attempting to eliminate all opposition.

WHY do about 50,000 Americans die every year in automobile accidents? What about the tens of thousands who LIVE THROUGH THE ACCIDENTS to spend the remainder of their lives disfigured, crippled and in pain?

And WHY WAR?

WHY does God allow such a mountainous pile of human woe and misery? Human ears cannot hear the wails and weeping of the hundreds of thousands, the screams and sobs of the injured and dying, the moans of those in their hospital beds. But GOD CAN!

So WHY does HE ALLOW IT?

If God is God, then He is ALL-powerful! God’s Word says He knows every hair on your head, every sparrow that falls. He says He cares even for the birds that fly and other living creatures—and that HE CARES FOR YOU!

Then WHY?

Not God’s World?

This is not God’s world! That’s right, it is *not* God’s world, not *His* society, not *His* social, economic, religious, cultural or governmental *system*. It belongs exclusively to *man*, but it is under the invisible *sway of* a great archdemon called Satan the devil!

He is called the “god of this world.” Notice! “In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not...” (2 Corinthians 4:4). He is the

“prince of the *power of the air*” (Ephesians 2:2), utilizing the very *elements* (as in the case of Job and the whirlwind that destroyed his family) of this earth for his evil purposes.

He is a “roaring lion” walking about, seeking “whom he may devour” (1 Peter 5:8). He is that great fallen archangel, called a “dragon,” who *deceives the whole world!* (Revelation 12:9). He currently possesses rulership, the control and sway over governments of the world, over the nations.

On the other hand, God says the “world is mine, and the fullness thereof!” God is the supreme RULER in heaven who says, “Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance: behold he taketh up the isles as a very little thing ... It is He that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in...” (Isaiah 40:15-22).

How can this be?

Is it Satan’s world? Or is it God’s world?

The answer is it is GOD’S EARTH, God’s “world,” in the sense of the good green spaceship earth He gives us to live on and from which we came. But it is SATAN’S SOCIETY, Satan’s CIVILIZATION!

Jesus prayed: “I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I pray not that thou shouldest *take them out* of the world, but that thou shouldest *keep them from the evil*.

“They are not *of* the world” (John 17:14-16).

From the Beginning

From the very beginning of recorded civilization—from the Garden of Eden—mankind has rejected God’s laws, God’s way of life, God’s *rule* over mankind! Adam and Eve began the first “scientific experiments in attempting to follow Satan’s wily “advice” and try to determine for *themselves*, apart from God’s *revealed* knowledge, whether the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was fit for them.

From the days of the ancient patriarchal society until the flood, only a small handful of men would follow God's laws, His way of life. The majority went their own way until God said, "My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh..." (Genesis 6:3), and the whole world, save Noah and his family, was destroyed by a flood.

Soon Nimrod, a "mighty hunter," and his mother-wife, Semiramis, a high priestess of Baal worship, organized some of the first cities on earth, gathering people together into a manmade "society," the first true "city-states" of history. He built Babel (called Babylon), and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar (Chaldea) (Genesis 10: 9, 10).

By the time of Abraham, the whole of the earth, save a tiny handful of men who were obedient to God's laws, was in the spiritual darkness of Satan's sway, having gone into polytheism (the worship of nonexistent pagan "gods" of their own imagination) and suffering every evil as the result.

Following the generations of Abraham, to his grandson Jacob (whose name was changed to "Israel") and his sons, who are the progenitors of the "twelve tribes of Israel," the Bible shows God once again intervened in the affairs of manmade governments. He called HIS OWN NATION out of slavery, under Moses, and established them as a "kingdom," a human society under an appointed human government, which was under God!

But, even *before* coming to Sinai and the giving of the Ten Commandments, the people began to murmur against Moses and began rejecting the government of God!

"How long refuse ye to keep my commandments and my laws?" asked God, before He gave the codified Decalogue! (Exodus 16:28).

Then came the delivery of the Ten Commandments. One of the most important principles of Scripture is revealed in that context during the great and awesome ceremony of the quaking, smoking and fiery mountain, the giving of the Ten Commandments and the people's acceptance of God's laws!

Earlier the people had said, "All that the Eternal hath spoken we will do" (Exodus 19:8). But, following the spectacular sights of the mount, and the delivery of the law, notice what happened! "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the

lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.

“And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but LET NOT GOD SPEAK WITH US, lest we die” (Exodus 20:18,19). The people didn’t *want* any direct communication from God; they wanted God to go off somewhere and disappear and not frighten them like that; they wanted a go-between, an intermediary!

Following the establishment of Israel in their own homeland, God ruled over the people through His human servants the judges. It was like a theocracy: God dealing directly with the judges and they in turn dealing with the people.

But during Samuel’s day the people decided they wanted a KING, just like other nations! They wanted a tall, attractive, *human* ruler, a person who would be a mighty military leader, a person of striking appearance and charm. “But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the Eternal.

“And the Eternal said unto Samuel, Hearken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for *they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected ME*, that I SHOULD NOT REIGN OVER THEM!” (1 Samuel 8:6,7).

Through Ezekiel, God showed that His people had continually REJECTED His laws, His statutes, His WAY OF LIFE, down through the centuries! “Because they had not executed my judgments, but had despised my statutes, and had polluted my Sabbaths, and their eyes were after their father’s idols. Wherefore I gave them [over to] also statutes that were NOT good, and judgments whereby they should NOT live. And I polluted them in their own gifts [pagan sacrifices], in that they caused to pass through the fire all that openeth the womb, that I might make them desolate, to the end that they might know that I am the Eternal” (Ezekiel 20:24-26).

Over and over again, God’s Word stresses how His people TURNED AWAY FROM HIM! Time and again He shows how the “whole world lies in darkness” and says, “There is NONE that is good, no not one!”

From the days of the ancient Israelites until now, people have not wanted God to interfere in their daily lives!

Put another way: People don't want God "Sticking His nose into their business"! They want to be FREE to make choices and decisions, live their lives as THEY see fit without any outside interference, restrictions, laws or penalties!

Notice! In speaking of the period of the judges God says, "In those days there was no king in Israel, but every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6), and "In those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in HIS OWN eyes!" (Judges 21:25). This is the LAST verse of one of the bloodiest books in the Bible-filled with the wars, murders, intrigue and heartache of carnal human nature. And the *reason* for all this is plainly stated: "Every man did that which was right in his OWN eyes!"

That is the very ESSENCE of human nature!

Human nature is vanity, jealousy, ego, greed and lust! It is a SELF-oriented, SELF-willed, SELF-determined, SELF-centered spirit of SELF-seeking! Perfect self (complete, not "perfect" spiritually) is found in the major ingredients of self: (1) self-preservation, (2) self-determination and (3) self-perpetuation!

People do NOT WANT GOD INTERFERING IN THEIR PRIVATE, PERSONAL LIVES!

Consider the smoker or drinker, or the person who habitually exaggerates or lies. Do such persons want an invisible presence to STOP them from reaching for their cigarettes? Do they want God, in unseen, spiritual POWER, to PREVENT them from satisfying their physical lusts? Would a person wish God to *prevent* him from tipping a glass of liquor to his lips or cause him to be tongue-tied and UNABLE to speak each time he lies or exaggerates?

Can you imagine the scene?

A person would attempt to reach into his shirt pocket for a cigarette. But a strange look would come over his face as his arm stopped halfway up, and his fingers could not reach his shirt! He would struggle, try his other arm, try forcing the one arm up there with the other hand! His face would grow beet-red with anger and frustration! He would begin to thrash around in his chair and then fall to the floor in every conceivable, contorted position. He would desperately struggle to reach those cigarettes! He would be screaming, yelling, and cursing! He would call upon a friend and ask *him* to give him a cigarette, only to find the

friend, TOO, couldn't reach HIS!

Can you imagine it? They would probably go completely CRAZY in frustration—probably go mad.

No, people don't WANT God around on a moment-to-moment-basis, interfering in their private lives, forcing them to do what is RIGHT and what is GOOD for them, instead of *allowing* them to do what is NOT RIGHT and what is BAD for them.

It is Your Own Choice

You are a free moral agent! You are a creature of free choice. God MADE you that way! You are a tiny spark of life in the black vastness of a limitless universes human being, on planet earth, with the vast potential of being made a very son of God, being born into His very FAMILY someday, becoming LIKE HIM! (1 John 3:2).

But, believe it or not, God has not willed to produce "Instant character"!

He knows that perfect character takes VOLITION; it takes the cooperation of the person who is *building* that character! Character is the ability to discern the right from the wrong, and then the WILLpower to FORCE the self to CHOOSE THE RIGHT WAY!

That is a choice God will NEVER make *for you!*

Notice this! "See, I have set before thee this day life and good, death and evil; in that I command thee this day to love the Eternal thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments, and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest LIVE AND MULTIPLY: and the Eternal thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

"But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them;

"I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely PERISH, and that ye shall NOT prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over to Jordan to go to possess it.

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore CHOOSE LIFE, that both thou and

thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:14-19).

God says we must CHOOSE!

He earnestly hopes, yearns and wishes that we might choose the way HE wants us to choose—to *choose life*! But He decreed that WE MUST MAKE A CHOICE!

Few realize that by *delaying their choice—putting off* their choice, as if attempting to *defer* the final day when they must "choose ye this day whom ye shall serve," as Elijah said to those who were following the prophets of Baal—they are actually CHOOSING DEATH! By *failing to* choose LIFE, they do not realize they are NEGLECTING salvation!

"How shall we escape, if we *NEGLECT* so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him ... ?" (Hebrews 2:3).

We are completely free to CHOOSE the way of life we wish.

Do you know you could choose, if you wish, to WORSHIP THE DEVIL? God will not interfere. He will not intervene. You are free to do so if you so will it.

Many times sincere Christians are simply AMAZED at how God seems to stand by, NOT PREVENTING evil actions of evil men. Years of patient service, of church-going, prayers, study and striving to live a clean, righteous life can make many people *unaware* of the immense capacity for EVIL of other men. Often the sincere sheep of Christ's fold are simply AMAZED that God seems to *allow* various assorted forms of evil to occur, almost as if, once a person is in God's own protection member of the very Body of Christ, the Church—it is IMPOSSIBLE for him to act in such a terrible fashion!

Many times people are INCREDULOUS that God "permits" other men to act in satanic, evil fashion—failing to realize that God DOES NOT DEAL IN PREVENTIVE LAW!

This is a *vitally important point*!

It is *paramount* in understanding WHY God allows human tragedy, human suffering or human failure!

Think for a moment! Do the Ten Commandments PREVENT SIN? No, they only

point out WHAT IT IS! They tell men: DO NOT SIN!

God shows elsewhere (Romans 6:23) that the wages of sin is death, death for *all eternity*, death from which there is no resurrection! He says (Romans 3:23) that *all have sinned* and come short of the glory of God. Could anything be clearer, concerning the LACK OF intervention in His creation, the attitude of letting MAN make the decisions, the concept of free moral agency? Call it a “hands off” policy, if you will!

God says, “DON’T SIN!”

He says, “CHOOSE LIFE!”

He urges men NOT to sin, and then shows that *all have sinned*! He shows, then, that HE HAS NOT PREVENTED man from sinning! The law exists—immutable, unchangeable and eternal. But the law of God is not being enforced by unseen policemen. There are no arrests made for breaking it, only for breaking the laws of man, if and when some of man’s laws happen, albeit by accident, to overlap the laws of God.

No attorney files charges against you for lusting, for having another god in place of the real God, for lying, stealing or Sabbath-breaking. No judge passes sentence on you to punish you for these sins, which God says are worthy of the *death* sentence!

But God DOES take note! In His heavenly “court” each sin is carefully noted, each infraction written down, as it were. But, when those sins are REPENTED of, the slate is wiped clean through the atoning blood of Christ, and God says He will remove your sins as “far as the east is removed from the west,” and “their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more!” (Hebrews 8:12).

Though God’s law is SPIRITUAL, and just, and holy, and good (Romans 7:12-14), it is not yet *being enforced* in human societies! Though there is an *automatic* penalty for breaking God’s laws—the penalties of sullied conscience, broken character and ruined lives—the millions are UNAWARE that their daily problems come from the consequences of rejecting God’s laws, from inviting God to “get out” of their lives!

So God pleads with all flesh to CHOOSE LIFE. He shows we are free moral

agents, free to make any choice we please. He shows that He will not—NOT YET—interfere with whatever choice we make, even though *He urges* us to make the RIGHT one!

Choosing to repent—to get on your knees before your God and your Savior, Jesus Christ, and call out to Him for forgiveness for your sins, to ask Him for His saving grace, the undeserved PARDON for iniquities, to apply the sacrifice of His shed blood to cover YOUR sins—all this is YOUR PERSONAL, PRIVATE CHOICE!

When and if you ever MAKE that choice, then, and *not until then*, will God begin intervening in YOUR PERSONAL, PRIVATE LIFE!

“Just in Case”

Millions have a “just in case” religion! They may go to religious services a few times a year, or even regularly, as a habit, as a part of the expected daily way of life of a religious community.

But many of these same people would not hesitate to lie just a little, to cheat a little, to minimize or exaggerate the truth just a little, to lust after material goods or other persons, to dishonor their parents or cut a few corners on their income tax reports, or to break God’s Sabbath day in either ignorance or intent.

But when *trouble* strikes they hope God will be RIGHT THERE—on the spot, NOW!

It has been said there are no atheists to be found on life rafts after days at sea with no food and water; no atheists to be found hopelessly lost in the woods; no skeptics, doubters and agnostics suspended by a fraying rope near the bottom of a well.

Dozens of thrilling escape stories—whether during war or from the hazards of shipwreck, landslide, flood or fire—relate how people, in extreme moments of terrible stress and fright, will *call out to God!*

Usually they’re PRETTY DIRECT ABOUT IT!

Though they may be a little embarrassed by having to “say grace” over a meal, or be called upon for a reading or a prayer in church—maybe a little taken aback by being chosen to prepare a study for the businessman’s Bible study—now,

suddenly, they cut through all the embarrassment, all the formality! They *call out* to God, probably even forgetting to say anything by way of introduction! Thousands have yelled at the top of their lungs, “O GOD! SAVE ME! ”

Sometimes God has done just that! Other times it seemed He didn’t hear or didn’t act!

Who can say why, in different circumstances?

But many a person has made a “pact” with God in such times of dire stress. A famous movie star had a skiing accident on the slopes. A ski pole became embedded in his chest and actually partially pierced the outer wall of the heart! He was millimeters from death. A big, rugged, muscular man, about six feet, six or seven inches and extremely handsome and masculine, he lay there with the realization death was upon him.

Months later, after skilled surgeons and specialists had removed the deadly metal and attended his wounds, he had recovered. He related on national television how he had come to a very deep, personal relationship with God during that time, that he had dedicated his life to an entirely new set of values and standards, that the very *purpose* in living and the meaning of death had become profoundly interesting and important to him.

How many people have called out, “O God, if you’ll only do this or that or the other, then I’ll do this and that and the other”? How many millions have silently promised they’ll quit smoking, or cussing, or drinking; that they’ll start going to church somewhere or in other ways “turn over a new leaf” and start cleaning up their lives, if only God will grant them a special miracle, perhaps save the life of a loved one, a child?

MILLIONS suspect there may be a God.

They express it in many ways, usually in vague terms about the “great Someone out there somewhere,” as in “somebody up there likes me!”

And those suspicions are *right*. There IS A GOD! And, without their knowing it, He is only a prayer away. He is NEAR unto those who call upon Him—not “way off somewhere” in the great nothingness of space, unable to intervene or help!

But, you see, there is an AUTOMATIC breaking of that connection, just like

someone blowing up a power station and plunging a whole city into blackness, *if you* only give token lip service to Him, only have Him in your mind “just in case,” but do not let him RULE in your daily life!

All have sinned! And sin is the transgression of God’s perfect LAW, the Ten Commandments! (1 John 3:4). Jesus said, “REPENT ye, and believe the gospel!” (Mark 1: 15).

This is the same as saying CHOOSE LIFE!

But, by merely living what most people would call a “good life” *apart from* the daily obedience to God’s perfect law, you AUTOMATICALLY *separate* yourself from God! HE DOES NOT SEPARATE HIMSELF FROM YOU; it is YOU who breaks the “circuit.”

The Holy Spirit of God is described by Jesus Christ as “rivers of *living water*” (John 7:38). He describes God’s Spirit as *wind* that flows back and forth (John 3:8). Electricity and magnetism are not “inventions of man” but the miracles of a divine Creator Being who set in motion the forces, energies and laws that regulate matter! There is DUALITY throughout God’s creation. Positive and negative, north and south, the magnetic poles of the earth!

You have been created to *need* God’s Holy Spirit! The “spirit in man,” which is that spiritual essence that lifts the brain of man to the level of MIND, far, far above that of animals, is capable of being *begotten* with GOD’S HOLY SPIRIT! *Think* for a moment of the analogy of human, physical birth! The male sperm cell must *unite* with the female and the union of the two produces a new, separate HUMAN LIFE!

Christ is the firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29), and we are to become HEIRS of God, BORN of God, by a resurrection When we are BEGOTT’EN of God, a *new spiritual being* has begun, is being formed, as surely as tiny, microscopic human babies begin in the womb of the mother at conception!

But God’s Holy Spirit doesn’t enter our elbow, or our knee, or our big toe! It comes INTO OUR MIND! Perhaps we are “negative” and God’s Spirit could be likened to “positive.” When the TWO unite, a spark of life is struck, a current begins to flow, and we are *spiritually alive*!

When you turn on your light switch, you are establishing a connection which

permits a *current* of electricity to flow! The current flows *through* the incandescent bulb, heating its element white hot and giving off light. Break the current and the light is shut off!

God Almighty is NEAR to those who want to establish a DAILY RELATIONSHIP with Him, who want to receive of HIS HOLY SPIRIT through repentance, baptism and the laying on of hands! But those who have NOT received of that Spirit are NOT CONNECTED to God—there is a *barrier* between them, a separation!

But WHO CAUSED THAT SEPARATION? Who threw the switch? Who cut off *whom*? People wonder why God does not seem to be instantly available when they need Him—and usually they only need Him when they really “need” Him.

“Behold, the Eternal’s hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: but *your sins* have hid his face from you, that he will not hear” (Isaiah 59:1,2).

No, God is not inferior, ill-equipped or unable; HE is not weak or sleepy and inattentive to answer when we call, but He says OUR SINS have created a BARRIER between the human race and God! He says WE are responsible for “pulling the plug” and causing that separation! He says WE are the ones who have broken the circuit—HE isn’t! God says we have it backwards!

He says we ought to be asking, “O man, where were you *when you needed God*?” NOT asking, “O GOD, WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I NEEDED YOU?”

The difference is, we need God ALL the time, and we begin to think we only need Him in emergencies!

But most people do not feel they are separated from God, do not feel cut off, rejected of Him, as if they are outcasts and *contrary* to God! Most people feel they are reasonably “good,” that they are undeserving of life’s tragedies, miseries, disappointments and unhappiness. Millions of us ask, “Why me, O Lord?” when problems come.

Being Carnal is not an Insult

What *is* our “goodness” before God? Millions of us feel we’re not so bad, feel we’re making reasonable efforts at being good people—minding our manners,

being friendly, striving to measure up to acceptable behavior before our friends and neighbors. Millions of us might be embarrassed to sit down to dinner with robbers or murderers. We don't count ourselves "criminal" or "bad people" in any sense of the words. We do the best we can. So what's wrong with that?

There may not be all that much "wrong" with millions of people who feel they are "good people" in the sense of criminally wrong, evil through and through. Oh, they might scream or yell at their mate, or cuss just a little now and then, or maybe they smoke, or some of the more liberated ones even sample a little marijuana on occasion. Probably they don't feel especially sullied at going to R-rated movies or telling sex-oriented stories or purchasing one of the many pornographic magazines.

Life the way millions live it can be pretty tedious. What with the continual conversations about injustices on the job, low pay and high prices, terrible tax burdens, consumer rip-offs by profiteering companies who seem to care more for the dollar than their customers' health or wellbeing, it's enough to keep most people a little on the sour side.

We have our minds on the mundane, the day-to-day struggles of living in this clashing crescendo of too much, too fast, too soon, or not enough, not when we want it, and much too late. We're occupied with ourselves, our own self-struggles, the day-to-day pursuits that secretly drive us, that urge us onward, that make us what we are.

"For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit" (Romans 8:5).

To be "after the flesh," the way the old King James translation has it, means merely to be human, to be earthly, fleshly and minding the things of our own humanity. It is not meant to be an insult, saying we're *less* than human or somehow so evil that we ought to be taking the kicks and curses every day. It is only stating the simple facts of our fleshly humanity.

"For to be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace" (Romans 8:6).

These same millions, including millions of church-going people who feel they are "good folks," can be carnally minded. That is, they are mostly concerned, in a day-

to-day sense, with the problems of our own environment, our own personal problems, our desires, hopes, dreams, lusts, secret inner urges, our irritations, jealousies, resentments and hates.

The word “carnal” means “fleshly.” In Spanish, the word for meat is *carne*. When you buy a can of “chili con carne” you’re reading a Spanish label, not an English one, which says you’re buying chili with meat in it. Perhaps God means to tell us all we’re really only a group of “meatheads” who think in the mundane sphere of our own personal, physical senses, looking out at the world around us as though we wore the proverbial card shark’s green eyeshade, pulled well over our brows, so we can see only the “around,” only the immediate horizon, never looking up, as it were, at the broader vastness of God’s great realm in the whole universe.

God doesn’t mean to *insult* us by telling us we’re carnal! Our babies are born that way—we were that way—and there is nothing sweeter to loving parents or to God Himself, probably than a newborn, tiny baby.

Perfect humanity, perfect carnality (which is not perfect in a spiritual sense, but is “complete” in its fleshliness, its earthliness), is pretty well incorporated in the mind of a tiny child. Innocent of any evil thoughts in a calculating way, the little baby is nevertheless a collection of the unbridled, unrestrained, uncontrollable impulses, emotions, bodily processes, lusts, appetites and fleshly senses that make us what we are. Hungry? The child will cry, waving its little arms and legs about, knowing no other way to express the physical discomfort or to cry out for the warm, satisfying feeling of a full tummy and mother’s comforting smell and touch. So what’s so ugly about the carnality of a sweet baby? Nothing ugly about it at all; it’s the way we were MADE! But we were created as if partially *incomplete*! We were created as a *potentially far* greater being than we are! Our great potential, our immense, awesome, breathtaking spiritual possibilities—are beyond our human comprehension!

God has made us as *vessels*, incomplete without the missing ingredient of His Holy Spirit! Without it we can still be “good” part of the time or even most of the time. “Good,” that is, according to man’s own rationale, according to the assessment of the world around us, which the Bible proves is not God’s world, but under the invisible sway of the archenemy of mankind, Satan! (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2; Revelation 12:9).

Within our humanly devised societies, we can conform to standards that we feel are good and decent and still be totally “carnally minded” in the sense that we are *omitting* a vast dimension from our lives, NEGLECTING to do many things which God wants us to do—omitting thought, commitment and action which we should have as a very part of our beings!

God does not hate these carnal vessels He has created and made subject to vanities! “For the earnest expectation of the creation waits for the manifestation of the sons of God [the resurrection to IMMORTALITY!]. For the creation was made subject to vanity [a useless striving after wind, false goals, false hopes, false objectives], not *willingly*, but by reason of him who has subjected the same in hope” (Romans 8:19,20).

God is the Designer of the human mind and body, and He designed our human minds to *need His Spirit!* Without it we are carnal, taking chances with every other person in a fatalistic, worldwide game of “Russian roulette.”

Here we are in a motorized, mechanized, glittering world of technology, of machines and smoking engines, of aircraft, ships, trains and automobiles, of rushing traffic, humming elevators, screeching subways, purring fans and silent electrical switches. Sometimes our machines betray us, as did the automobile on the black, frozen night on the road from Fairbanks to Anchorage when a couple cried out in their anguish and despair.

From the hapless millions of the “third world,” the “have-nots” of the world who suffer from malnutrition and starvation, to the more than 50,000 Americans who die every year in automobile accidents, we take our chances with life-separated from God’s daily intervention, carnally minded (which is “death,” eventually), living our lives as best we can and looking about in outrage, bewilderment, helplessness, anger and shock when sudden tragedy overtakes us, wondering, “Why me, O Lord?”

No, it’s no insult to be carnally minded—to be told we are—but it is an insult to God for us to STAY that way once we know!

Time and Chance, and Circumstance

People of all races, languages and religions have differing concepts of God, of life, and death, and the hereafter. By the millions we humans like to believe *our*

own concepts are the best. After all, it is our concepts we live with, not those of others.

Millions of us like to imagine, we have some sort of halfway relationship with “God,” either a cozy, personal relationship or a more distant, philosophical, fatalistic one. But the instant tragedy strikes—the moment we feel we really NEED the quick intervention of God—we call out to our concept, to our God, and stand bewildered, hurt and confused if the answer we seek is not immediately forthcoming.

The Greeks at Ephesus, in the first century, had many concepts of divinity. They were polytheistic, believing in “Diana” of Ephesus, to whom a massive, elaborate temple was dedicated, complete with its own prostitutes, whose trade was a practical part of the temple worship. There was “Askiepios,” the great “healing god,” who had another temple, and various ones dedicated to the cult of the worship of the emperor.

The people were as real as you or I.

They had concepts of a god, or perhaps several gods. And to them, as they talked to their gods and fingered their amulets, or prayed to their little statues in the niches of their homes or went to one of the awe inspiring temple services to watch the sacrifice of animals, or perhaps even of humans, they were quite “aware” of the other world in which their various deities dwelt.

They too had their concepts. They too had various cozy, personal relationships with the ideas in their own minds.

But Paul said of these Greeks’ former way of life, “That at that time ye were *without* Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and WITHOUT GOD in the world” (Ephesians 2:12).

Oh, they *thought* they were godly enough; they went to their religious services, they had their philosophic and even deeply personal relationships with their various “gods.” Perhaps, in their own way, according to their own sociological customs and traditions, they were good people” too.

But Paul said, “Wherein in time past you lived according to the course of this

society—according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience—among whom we all had our daily way of life in times past following lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires and appetites of our physical bodies, and of our minds. And we were, naturally, the children of wrath and hatreds, just like other people. But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love toward us ... has raised us up together and made us sit in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus” (Ephesians 2:2-6 paraphrased).

Though the Greeks in Ephesus were “good Greeks” in many ways—and though they *thought* they had a relationship with “God” in one way or another—the truth was they were “without Christ” and *without* God in the world!

But, people reason, *they* just were dumb, polytheistic, ancient *Greeks*, and *we* know better!

But DO WE, *really*?

Then why do we observe some of the same ceremonies and customs they did? Why do we call our months by the wrong numbers and pagan names? Janus was a pagan deity, and we still use “January”; September is the ninth month, but “September” means the seventh, “October” the eighth, “November” the ninth and “December” the tenth, when they’re actually the ninth, tenth, eleventh and twelfth. That’s because pagan Roman emperors had to name months after themselves, to elevate themselves to the level of “Juno” the goddess of love, sex and fertility (which is why we have “June brides”), so, when Julius Caesar gave himself thirty-one days, Augustus, not to be outdone, decided to have the same number and “stole” the day from “February.” Millions still observe the “Saturnalia” under the name of “Christmas” with its symbols of sex and fertility (holly berries and mistletoe), with its identical trappings of the same ceremony that antedates all Christianity.

We observe, by the millions, the same “Ishtar” (pronounced “Easter”) in commemoration of Nimrod’s wife, Semiramis, found as “Isis” among the Egyptians and “Diana” among the Ephesians and Greeks. The trappings are the same: rabbits for rapid procreation and fertility, eggs as a sign of life and sex, lilies because of their obvious symbolism representing copulation—but the same millions who do all this do not see the ancient pagan mysticism and instead claim to see “Christ.”

In these and literally dozens of other ways, we live our daily lives in a paganized society, oblivious of the origins of our customs and rarely, if ever, asking WHY we do the things we do!

In our own way, we are just as paganized and “without God in the world” as were the ancient Ephesians and Greeks. The difference is, our names for God are not “Zeus,” or “Diana,” or “Askelepios”; they are “God” and “Jesus.”

But do these names we use remind us of the *real* divinity of which they speak? A name should have meaning; it should convey the personality and being of the person or object being named. Many times, in discussion, someone has asked you if you knew a certain person. Your mind scans your memory bank of that name and tries to select a face, color of hair, a personality. Sometimes you have made the mistake of saying you thought so and found later that you didn’t really know the person being spoken of—It was someone else. Sometimes you have answered yes and you were right.

Job thought he knew “God.” He prayed, worshiped, spoke endlessly of this “God” he thought he knew. Read the laborious arguments he advanced in his own self-righteous cause against his antagonists in the book of Job! But finally God Himself spoke with Job, as the account goes, and began showing Job some things about the real God—His creativity, His omniscience and His power! In self-effacing humility, and in near shock over his stunned surprise at the great magnitude of God—at the incredible difference between the way he had imagined God to be and the way He really was—Job said, “...I have spoken things I didn’t understand, things too wondrous for my mind, which I didn’t even know. Hear, I beseech You, and I will speak; I will urgently request of You, and please tell me—I have heard of You, God, by the hearing of the ear—but now my mind’s eye REALLY SEES You. Because of this I abhor myself and repent in dust and ashes!” (Job 42:3 paraphrased).

Like millions of us today, Job had a concept in his mind about “God.” When the name was spoken, his memory caused a certain image to leap into his mind. But, without his realizing it, the image that came to mind was *false*, a false image, just as surely as if Job were guilty of “idolatry,” of having another “god” before the REAL God—a different personality and being from the *REAL* God. The ancient Ephesians were not different. They too had various false, imaginary images of who “God” was, and they were even farther afield than Job.

What about you? What about those who suffer with the day-to-day fatalisms of time, and chance, and circumstance? Most have totally false, ethereal concepts of “Jesus Christ” and “God”

Millions do not know the *REAL* God, the real Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

So, clothed in our own “goodness,” rationalizing ourselves into a reasonably acceptable behavioral pattern, thinking our own thoughts of religion, philosophy and moral codes, we feel cheated, hurt, bewildered, betrayed, when terrible times strike!

Jesus knew people were perplexed with these same questions during His day!

There had been two sensational mass deaths—one a mass murder, the other sheer accident—wherein many died. People were asking the same questions then that they ask today. “Why those poor people? Where was God when they needed Him? Why did God allow this to happen?”

Some of the religious leaders may have been equally as cruel, shallow and guilt-ridden as some today and might have answered, “Perhaps there were lessons they needed to learn.”

But does someone “learn a lesson” who is suddenly killed by tons of falling brick and mortar? Does a tiny, sweet child, going to sleep against the cold in a stalled car and then slipping into death through breathing poisonous gas, learn something? Do the anguished parents need this brutal lesson to shock some terrible sins out of their own lives?

Many *miss the point* entirely!

This is NOT GOD’S world! The millions have invited God OUT of their lives through their own free choice, and God is cooperating with them—showing it is our own way of life, our “sins and iniquities” (which we call “good”) that have separated us from God.

We are “without God” in the world, in spite of our form of religion!

Jesus was asked about two tragedies by people who had the same ideas of mysterious, selective punishment. “There were present at that season some that told him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.

“And Jesus answering said unto the, Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you NO! But, except you repent, you shall likewise perish!” (Luke 13:1-3).

Jesus was not saying these men “deserved” some terrible death—having been discovered sacrificing in some manner against Pilate’s decrees and having been summarily murdered on the spot! He said *NO* to the idea they must have been guilty of greater sin and specially singled out for God’s wrath! He said, in effect, it was simply a matter of “time, and chance, and circumstance.” And, except we repent, except we break down that barrier that separates us from God, except we establish a *daily* connection with HIM, “you shall all likewise perish.” He means we are only out here, in our technological world of machines which sometimes betrays us, taking our chances *APART* from any direct interference from God one way or the other!

He continued, “Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them. Do you suppose they were sinners above all the men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you No, but, except you *REPENT*, you shall all *likewise perish!*” (Luke 13:4,5).

Here He speaks of sheer chance. A mere accident. Ancient mortar finally loosened from its hundreds of years’ exposure to the wind and rain and a section of tower wall came crashing down on a group of eighteen men! This tragedy was well known, a mass death. The people had come to Jesus plainly puzzled over the deep spiritual questions about these two cases of mass death—one plain murder and the other sheer chance. Obviously, since Jesus so strongly addresses the questions of “sinners above all else,” the people had supposed this was the case. They were assuming God was *RIGHT THERE*. They assumed these men were going about their daily lives with their own concepts, their own values and standards, their own personal relationships with “God,” and could not imagine why that “God” was not *INSTANTLY* there to *PREVENT* such terrible tragedies!

Jesus showed God had *NOTHING TO DO WITH IT WHATSOEVER!*

God was not even *IN* the picture—for He had not been *INVITED* in! No, these men were not “sinners above all else”; they were sinners *JUST LIKE* everybody else! They didn’t think of themselves as “sinners,” for most human beings have trouble living with too much of a guilt complex. They, like most of us, probably rationalize around in their minds to the point they felt like reasonably “good people.”

Surely their friends and relatives who came to Jesus thought them deserving of better treatment at the hands of God than they got! But they, like so many millions today, didn't understand that it was *MAN* who first invited God to get out of His world! It was *MAN* who said, "Don't let God speak with us!" It was *MAN* who said, "Make us a king like the other nations." It was *MAN* who cut himself off from God by his own societies, his own governments and socioeconomic systems, and his own free religions! It was man, through exercising *his own free choice*, who pulled the plug and separated himself from God so that he became without God in the world."

God simply was *NOWHERE AROUND* when these tragedies struck. And, in that lonely, isolated car in that black Alaskan snowstorm, when those two terribly stricken parents tried to revive their little twin boys are in the millions of huts and hovels from Bangladesh to the Sub Sahara, from China to Brazil, where hundreds of thousands of little babies were likewise dying, though from slow starvation or the ravages of disease, and in all the trenches, foxholes, tanks, ships and aircraft of all our wars, as young men have been killed by the millions—God simply was not a part of it. He wasn't in it, not involved. It wasn't "His war"; it wasn't "His society."

God doesn't bother with your life unless *YOU ASK HIM TO IN ADVANCE!*

Jesus said, "Except YE REPENT" you shall all "likewise" (though sheer time, and chance, and circumstance) perish!

It is only when we finally realize that we need God *all the time*—when we know we must repent of our sins and call out to God in repentance, calling upon the saving grace of the shed blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us of our carnality, when we are baptized (Romans 6), and when we *OBEY* the command of God to "*REPENT, and be baptized* every one of you for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38)—that God says He is willing to make Himself a *PART* of our everyday lives!

God does not deal in preventive legislation. He does not *PREVENT* man's wars, or our bad diets, or religious taboos and superstitions. He does not prevent us from manufacturing deficient automobiles that can kill us in bizarre circumstances. He does not *PREVENT* us from forgetting to leave windows open, if we are in an enclosed place, or shutting the engine off. He does not *PREVENT* ancient mortar

from weathering, or brutal soldiers from killing.

But God promises to be a *daily PART* of our lives if we establish that connection! If we approach HIM. If we *seek Him!*

God says, "I have spread out my hands all the day unto a rebellious people which walk in a way that is not good, after their own thoughts. A people that provoke me to anger continually to my face ... that say, 'Stand over there by yourself' to me and, 'Come not near me'" (Isaiah 65:105 paraphrased).

He says, "Seek ye the Eternal while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: let the wicked forsake HIS WAY, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the Eternal, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon!" (Isaiah 55:6,7).

Those poor parents weren't being punished. They weren't sinners above all else; they were good people, according to our own concepts of goodness. But God was not involved in their terrible loss any more than He was involved in the mass deaths during Jesus' day, or in the wars and sufferings of man from the first murder until now.

YOU can have God's tender mercies; *YOU* can have His *DAILY intervention* in your life; you can have the very mind and presence of Jesus Christ living His life over again within you, if you will do what Jesus asks!

"REPENT," He says, "COME UNTO ME," and says His yoke is easy and His burden light! He says He will draw all men unto Him and that He is "not willing that any should perish but that all should have eternal life!"

And those parents? Their dead twin boys? Probably they do not yet realize that in a very short time now those little boys will be *RESURRECTED TO LIFE* again—and, hopefully, their own parents by that time may well be in Christ's OWN KINGDOM!

Spiritual beings, as loving parents, can take care of children MUCH more effectively than fleshly ones! God intends a happy ending, finally, even for the terribly stricken family who cried out, "O GOD, WHERE WERE YOU WHEN I NEEDED YOU?"

YOUR life can have a happy ending, from now on, if you are willing to discover the

REAL Jesus Christ, willing to find out what is sin and to REPENT of sin, calling out to God to forgive you and to wash away your sins under the shed blood of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Then you will always know your God is near; you will know you need Him all the time, every day! He has already made it plain He wants You in His Kingdom, or you wouldn't be on this earth in the first place!

It is you choice—your decision.

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The activities of the Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association are paid for by tithes, offerings and donations freely given by Christians and co-workers who are dedicated to preaching the gospel according to Jesus Christ.