



"Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, vision cleared, ambition inspired, and success achieved."  
—Helen Keller

**03-Feb-17**

## **Life Doesn't Work on a Balance Sheet (Part Three)**

The fact that [God](#) Himself grieves over human sinfulness and the separation it causes—which we learned in Part Two—begs the question of why God created an order where even He and the Word are not immune to suffering. The basic answer is that They made themselves vulnerable to such sufferings the instant they decided to make man in Their image. As soon as They created fallible man with the ability to choose between right and wrong, life and death, good and evil, [love](#) and [sin](#), give and get—to choose things that result in suffering—They exposed Themselves to the certainty that humanity would choose to rebel.

The [book of Revelation](#) pictures the Lamb as slain from the foundation of [the world](#). This implies that, upon establishing this order, Their suffering was guaranteed. Yet, because of Their purpose and Their love for Their creation, They were willing to allow it.

The apostle Paul tells us in [Romans 5:12](#) that sin entered the world through Adam, "and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." However, death is more than just the state of being in the grave.

When the Bible speaks of "life," it usually refers to more than the mere physio-chemical existence of a creature, that is, beyond the fact that it is breathing and perhaps thinking. Life, in its truest sense, is God-life—living the way that God lives. It describes a superlative quality of life, rather than just whether a man is breathing.

The Bible applies the concept of death in the same way (see, for instance, [Luke 9:60](#); [Ephesians 2:1](#)). It can describe an inferior manner of life. A man can be breathing and thinking yet be dead for all intents and purposes because the life he is living is not God-life and not worthy to last beyond his allotted threescore years and ten. Under God's purpose, it would not be fitting for a corrupted, defiling life to extend to eternity.

Thus, when death entered because of sin, it was not limited just to cessation of life. With it came a quality of life vastly inferior to God-life, even though it might take decades, or even centuries in those early millennia, before the life actually ended. With sin and death entered evil and suffering, which are simply the result—the consequence—of living contrary to how God lives.

But life doesn't work on a balance sheet. Sometimes we cause our own suffering directly, but at other times we suffer as a result of a neighbor or an ancestor living a life of death. Likewise, sometimes we sin, yet somebody else ends up suffering—perhaps right away or maybe much later down the line.

It may not seem fair or just in the specifics, but when we remember the big picture, we see that as soon as Adam sinned, suffering became a part of our existence. In fact, if anybody has ever experienced hardship in trying to earn a living, he can trace it back directly to [Genesis 3:17-19](#), God's curse on Adam. This does not mean we can condemn Adam, though, because if we contemplate this just a moment longer, we can surely recall something we have done that has caused suffering for someone else.

The apostle Peter's first epistle tells us what a Christian response to suffering should be:

For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. For what credit is it if, when

you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: "Who committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth"; who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously. ([1 Peter 2:19-23](#))

Sometimes we suffer as a direct result of things we have done, in which case Peter instructs us to endure the suffering patiently. At other times, we suffer when we do the right things, in which case we should still endure the suffering patiently!

Our High Priest set the example for us. Yet, verse 23 points out another example that He set: He committed Himself—His life and its direction—to Him who judges righteously. Remember that Jesus cried out to the One who could save Him from death, but then He accepted the Father's righteous, fitting judgment that He should endure it, knowing that it would not be the end ([Hebrews 5:7-8](#)).

We were called, then, not just to suffer, but also to experience obedience to God's will amid suffering, pain, and injustice, as Christ did. God allows us to experience the consequences of man rejecting Him, even though there may be no direct correlation between our actions and our sufferings. This is part of God's perfecting process for us. Peter's instruction is, no matter what we are going through, to follow Christ's example of committing ourselves to the Father's righteous judgment of whether we will be delivered before or after the suffering.

We have an opportunity to be part of a kingdom of priests ([Revelation 5:10](#), margin). Remember, though, that our High Priest was not made complete for His role until He suffered *and* submitted to God's determination of the depth and duration of His suffering. If we are to follow in His footsteps and serve in similar roles, we can expect suffering to be a necessary part of *our* perfection as well, so our responses should reflect His.

[Revelation 21:4](#) gives a confident assurance that suffering will not last forever: "[And God] will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or [mourning](#) or crying or pain, *for the old order of things has passed away*" (*New International Version*; our emphasis). By the time this occurs, humanity will have had its fill of suffering, having learned that the only good way to live is God's way. Everybody will know that deviation from it only causes a world of hurt.

As we learned, the Father and the Son opened themselves to suffering, yet Their suffering with us will ultimately turn out to be the solution to all of man's suffering. This order will pass away, thankfully, inaugurating a time when suffering is absent because sin is absent, a result of all being at one with God.

Until then, we do suffer—but we also trust that God sets the bounds of that suffering and that He uses it as part of *our* perfecting, just as He did for [Jesus Christ](#). Truly, as Paul wrote, the sufferings of this present order "are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" ([Romans 8:18](#)).

- David C. Grabbe

---

## From the Archives: Featured Sermon

### [New Heavens and New Earth](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

God never does anything haphazardly. Together, God the Father and Jesus Christ have been planning for the fulfillment of what we are observing in the Last Great Day- the ultimate increase in the God family of perhaps 40 to 50 billions of individuals. As God showed meticulous awareness of David in Psalm 139, He also is aware of all of His called out children, destining them to be kings and priests in the millennium, co-heirs with Christ, in the first resurrection. Following the disastrous, stressful time of Jacob's trouble, at which time Israel will have gone into captivity, God will re-gather a remnant

of the outcasts (from captivity all over the earth) in the latter days, breaking their oppressive yoke, bringing them to repentance and rest, returning them to the land of their fathers in Jerusalem where the law will go out from Zion. Israel, by yielding to God's Law, will finally become a sterling example to the world. The entire millennium will be spent preparing for the resurrection of over 40 billion people, at which time God will give ample time to warrant fair and accurate judgment. As the family matures, God will discard this old world, replacing it with a more glorious, permanent inheritance—a new heaven and earth!

---

## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[Dead to the Law?](#)**

by Earl L. Henn

Romans 7, verse 4, says that we are 'dead to the law through the body of Christ.' What does this mean? Earl Henn explains the meaning in its context, showing that it refers to the 'old man' which perished at our baptism.

---

If you would like to subscribe to the C.G.G. Weekly newsletter, please visit our [Email Subscriptions page](#).

---