

A. SUFFERING & FORGIVENESS

1. **Elie Wiesel** [born September 30, 1928][1] is a Romanian-born Jewish-American[1] writer, professor, political activist, Nobel Laureate, and Holocaust survivor. He is the author of 57 books, the best known of which is Night, a work based on his experiences as a prisoner in the Auschwitz and Buchenwald concentration camps.] **had stated in the press that he cannot forgive Bernie Maddoff for his fleecing of the funds for the Holocaust projects, Jewish orphanages, widows, etc. Why?**
2. **In orthodox Jewish thought ‘deliberate wrong doing’ is different from ‘innocent intent wrong doing’. Maddoff’s deliberate wrong doing is unconscionable, and whether he is repentant or not is not helpful unless he makes complete restitution – something he has been completely unwilling to do.**
3. **In Jewish thought, the nation or state of Israel is more important than individual alone. Damage inflicted on the Jewish social or national fabric is unconscionable for a Jew.**
4. **In Christian thought - deliberate wrong doing is horrible, and the ramifications may be horrendous – but not to forgive is spiritually crippling for the individuals and the society involved.**
5. **In light of the foregoing... what should be a Christian’s response to 9-11-01?**

B. DEMONOLOGY

1. **Idolatry & Demonology:**
 - a. **Dr Louie talks about his childhood faith of ancestry worship... very common in the Chinese and Asian cultures. In his home they had a small shrine with pictures of their departed grandfather and would offer little bits of food and brandy on the shrine and also burn incense. Though reverential, this is an obvious form of idolatry. But is this innocent or nefarious?**
 - b. **Many Asian and other ethnic restaurants, businesses, homes, properties, etc. – will have pagan idols they revere for good luck and good fortune, or for protection. Some are prominently displayed, some more concealed... this is also idolatry.**
 - c. **Feng Shui has grown extremely popular in Western Culture, especially with the emigration of many Chinese in the last half-century. It is described as an ancient Chinese system of aesthetics believed to use ancient astronomy to integrate the laws of Heaven (astronomy) and the laws of Earth (geography) to help one improve their life and luck by receiving positive energy. In this way it represents a classical form of magic, which seeks to control natural energies for the benefit of its practitioners.**
 - d. **Demons are directly linked with idolatry and magic – all worship that is not focused on the ‘One True God’ is a potential avenue for demons and spiritual counterfeit. There**

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is no ‘innocent’ use in this regard... when you tread upon this soil you expose yourself to dangers in the spirit realm.

- i. When leading someone from such a heritage to Christ... the 1st thing you need to do after they have responded is to break the hold of demonic influence. If they have any such idols or shrines, they need to destroy them – not just put them away in a box, but break them up and/or burn them... and get them out of their homes.
 - ii. Demons have no power over Christians, but many people and young Christians open themselves to demonic influence and oppression because of past influences they haven’t properly dealt with.
 - iii. The notion that demonic influences can be secondary or indirect – that is thinking another’s direct demonic contact can influence another’s secondary contact is false.
 - iv. Demons are real spiritual powers, there is a reality there that validates Wicca-animism, Spiritism, and Pagan faiths – but they are not all powerful... and they have no power except that which we Christians give them in fear or ignorance.
 - v. Paul’s teaching that food sacrificed to idols may be safely eaten demonstrates the lack of secondary influence – they have primary influence only.
- e. The new-age spiritual ideals [AKA-‘Oprah Spiritualism’] that the spirit realm is all benevolent and innocent and good is false – there is real evil there, and there are ramifications for those who expose themselves to it... becoming involved with idols, crystals, mantras, Eastern meditating practices, etc. They may be represented as being innocent, but they are not! And we as Christian leaders need to be aware of this and take it seriously... especially if we are speaking into the lives of those from this background.
- f. Christians should:
- i. Not engage in aspects of spiritual warfare they know nothing of – we can do harm and suffer harm in dealing with powers we know nothing about [Acts 19:13-16].
 - ii. Refer to those who have been called to the ministry of deliverance.
2. OT Demonology – Lev 16:7ff & Law of Atonement
- a. In Leviticus 16:1-34 speaks about the Day of Atonement – what is interesting is this passage begins after the sin of Aaron’s 2 son’s committed approaching God in an unworthy manner... a reminder that God’s Holiness necessitates a proper and deferential human response. In this passage there are some interesting verses that speak to what appears to be OT demonology. 2 goats are chosen and by lot one is sacrificed, and one set free into the wilderness outside of the camp after the people of

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- God have laid hands on it transferring their sin to it [scape goat]. So... to whom is this goat being sent to?
- b. The RSV lists Azazel who is linked with Gen 6:4-5 sin by inter-testament books. The sin mentioned in Gen is about spiritual beings transgressing [most likely demons] who were having sex with humans and prorogating offspring. This is weird stuff, but it speaks to a spiritual reality that exists. The level of sin here is great... God established boundaries and these acts go way beyond it.
 - c. Azazel has been referred to as the “goat demon” that was reputed to live in the wilderness outside the camp. Presumably God’s presence kept it at bay, but it was free to roam outside the people’s camp.
 - d. In making sacrifice... one goat is sacrificed on the altar as a propitiation for God; the other ... the scapegoat... is given over to the wild. Being inside the camp in proximity with the Pillar of Fire/Cloud reminded the people of God’s inherent protection. However, outside the camp evil lurked and was due its price.
 - e. This provides an interesting spiritual duality – the atonement sin remedy is somehow bifurcated...
 - i. There is the portion that makes us right with God.
 - ii. There is another portion to remind the people that evil is real and not only around, but hungry and bloodthirsty... a roaring lion ready to devour [1 Pet 5:8].
 - f. This raises interesting thoughts as to how sin is connected in the supernatural spheres. Again, we should not be fascinated by this, or overly worried about it as we are safe in Christ where we are more than conquerors [Rom 8:37-39]. But we should be aware that there is a reality out there that others can fall prey to.
3. OT and NT texts both had plenty of interaction with demons and the supernatural. Scripture speaks of these realities without much precursor or explanation... their existence was taken for granted.
- a. Most modern thinkers just discount this as an ancient superstition that has no impact on us... moderns have unfortunately discounted almost all supernatural interaction... in some cases even the spiritual vitality available in the Spirit of Christ is discounted if not ignored.
 - b. The reality is... there are Spiritual powers – and they are represented by both positive-Holy influences, and evil-negative influences. These are there and they are real. This is not to frighten us, but to make us aware of the reality.
 - c. There are inherent risks when venturing into realms where we do not belong, or have not been called into.
 - d. An unhealthy fascination with evil and occult is inherently dangerous and unwise.

C. DEPRAVITY

1. **The primary blockage to Christianity is not demons, or spirituality, or scientific thinking – but rather it is human depravity. Depravity is the Fallen state of humanity... the fact that we were made perfect but through the Fall are now broken people living in a broken world awaiting redemption.**
2. **In understanding depravity we should not focus primarily on the questions of sinfulness vs. goodness, or ability vs. inability – rather it should be thought of as the context of fallen man responding to a perfect God. There is a huge void we cannot bridge without the cross – we know we need help.**
3. **One question that tends to polarize groups based on their theology is what is the extent of one’s ability to respond to Jesus? How broken are we? How far does Grace extend? The problem has to do with balancing God’s sovereign call with human free will.**
 - a. **Most Calvinists argue that the Fall has totally damaged humanity to the point that we can’t hear God, and can’t respond to God. God thus must initiate and complete Grace on our behalf... we have no say in the matter. You are either chosen for heaven, or chosen for hell. In this theology free will doesn’t exist... God’s Sovereignty is everything.**
 - b. **Most Arminians argue that while God must provide for our ability to hear God’s Call which is offered to all of humanity who then bear the responsibility to listen and accept, or ignore and reject God’s offer of salvation. Free will exists and is not in competition with God’s Sovereignty... both are preserved.**
 - c. **Dr Louie suggests when thinking about the matter of depravity in the fallen state... think in terms that humanity retains some vestige of the “Image of God” in which we were created.**
 - i. **How “total” is human depravity? Is every spiritual aspect obliterated... or diminished? If there is no spiritual awareness remaining meaning and we cannot even ‘hear’ God unless He first initiates contact, does it make sense that God could still hear us?**
 - ii. **We don’t know what vestige of Imago Dei remains, but it seems that something is there. This would seem clear by the Scriptural references to General Revelation – Paul taught his Pagan audience in Romans 2:15 that the Spiritual reality existed and people were accountable to their response to it.**
 - iii. **Instead of thinking about depravity as total, think of it as seriously diminished. Because God’s Spirit infuses and supports/holds together all of creation, and because God knows everyone’s heart and our deepest fears and longings both good and bad... He still hears our calls for help, and our pleas for direction. Into this diminished condition Grace descends.**

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- iv. Another way to think about spiritual awareness is to visualize the matter as if someone had driven off a cliff and they're down in an inaccessible location where we can't help them, but we can see them and respond with them... they are definitely seriously injured and it looks like their head is damaged, but they seem able to hear and communicate in rudimentary form. Into this state the Spirit alone can communicate and bring grace.
4. Theology plays out in the following faith approaches dealing with the possibility of depraved humanity being able to respond to God. Each of these approaches has Scriptural support.
- a. Judaism and Islamic View [Old Testament perspectives]:
 - i. Most religions acknowledge that we're injured as a person and need spiritual help.
 - ii. Most faiths [Islam, Judaism, etc.] offer a means [Law and rites] to restore us supernaturally.
 - iii. In most faiths our free will is intact and we can respond to God without additional help, and we have the ability to directly help ourselves.
 - iv. Only Christianity affirms that we are not just incapable of helping ourselves, but we are in fact dead now and dead in the future without God.
 - b. Arminian – Semi-Pelagian View:
 - i. We are broken and wounded, but still conscious – we have the ability to hear and respond to God. God being the Good Father that He continues to call out to wayward humanity inviting them back into relationship.
 - ii. People's freewill choice to accept help is still intact, though we lack the ability to help ourselves.
 - iii. When God offers help we can hear and respond to the offer without His direct enabling us to do so.
 - iv. With freewill we can choose to go on with our relationship with God, or return to our old manner of life... 'as a dog returns to its vomit so a fool returns to his folly' [Proverbs 26:11; 2 Peter 2:22].
 - c. Wesleyan View:
 - i. Freewill is gone and our ability to help ourselves is gone – we are dead in our sin.
 - ii. God graciously provides "Prevenient Grace" – which offers all of humanity the ability both to hear and respond to God's offer of help through the gospel.
 - iii. Prevenient grace alone is not enough – it does not allow us to follow God or to please Him, but it does give us the opportunity to hear and respond to accept God's offer of Grace.
 - iv. Prevenient grace is God's provision to allow humanity to respond to Him.

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- v. Response is our own choice, and our choice remains effective as long as we persevere in faith and continue on with God. We can lose our salvation.
- d. Calvinist-Reformed View:
 - i. We are dead beyond reviving without direct supernatural help.
 - ii. We need regeneration before we can even hear let alone respond to God's offer... without God's preemptive regeneration we are incapable to hear or respond to God.
 - iii. Human choice is not a factor – God ordains who is chosen and who is not. Some are created for heaven, and others for destruction – we have no say in the matter... it is God's sovereign choice. There is no such thing as 'free will' – it is a myth.
 - iv. When called, God's choice is 100% effective – no one called can lose their salvation, though some who appear to have fallen away were never really called to begin with.
- e. Generic Evangelical View:
 - i. Regeneration and personal faith somehow come into play simultaneously... we don't know how it works.
 - ii. There is a tension between grace-faith responses. Somehow God's Sovereignty and human free will play out together.
 - iii. Gospel call of God and the effective call of human response occur simultaneously.
 - iv. Those who genuinely respond in faith are secure in their redemption – even though there may be little overt proof they are in fact saved.
 - v. Those who renounce their faith were never saved, those that were saved but leave will come back before the end.
- f. Gospel Centered Proclamation View:
 - i. There is power in preaching the gospel that triggers and enables a human response. Gospel proclamation is key to evangelism... it engages the human mind/heart with the Spirit to convict and redeem.
 - ii. Verbal proclamation opens the window for response by faith.
 - iii. Acceptance is then an individual choice – God does not compel or reject, thus freewill is intact.
 - iv. The hand of God on our life is seen after the fact of our response to Grace in retrospect – looking back we can notice signs of His presence.
 - v. The Word of God is powerful [Rom 10:14] – the message itself is empowering and enlivening.
 - vi. Once one truly responds to accept God's offer in faith believing, God's promise to sustain them prevails [Phil 1:6].

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g. Questions –

i. Is grace now open to all nations... or just the people of God?

- 1. OT – ‘Day of Atonement’ covered the sins of those alive at the time and only as they appropriated the grace afforded by faith.**
- 2. NT – is ‘Grace’ as the Atonement in Jesus an extension of the OT application... or is it something totally new?**
- 3. Diachronically we see a development of redemptive Grace playing out from the OT to the NT – where the Law and Grace are related, but with the NT Grace light-years beyond the Law.**
- 4. The Grace we have from God in Jesus’ Atonement is unquestionably superior to the Law in every way... though we won’t know all the details until we learn of it from Jesus in heaven. Thus to be dogmatic is really pretty silly on our part. We know it works, but we understand so little about it all.**

ii. Which of the preceding theological approaches rings closer to your understanding of God and His Grace?

- 1. Psalm 9:18**
- 2. John 3:16**
- 3. John 10:28**
- 4. 2 Peter 3:9**

D. FAITH – IN TERMS OF SPHERES AND TIME

1. Spheres:

- a. On one hand – faith is as simple as sitting on God’s lap in child-like faith... and accepting what He offers out of love. Such was the thief on the cross next to Jesus who came only in acknowledgment of his own need and faith. He had nothing to offer, and his theology was certainly imperfect... but he trusted Jesus.**
- b. On the other hand – faith is as complicated as costing you everything... and walking away with Christ naked and vulnerable. Such was the choice of the rich young ruler [Mat 19:16ff] who had a measure of generosity and Law abidance, but could not abandon himself to Jesus. This story is important... evidenced that it is recorded in all 3 synoptic gospels - Mat 19:21; Mark 10:21; Luke 18:22.**
- c. Zacchaeus – demonstrated both generosity and restitution in coming to Christ... and Jesus acknowledged that salvation had come to him as a result.**
- d. Gospel of John – makes faith a simple matter as of a child coming before Christ, and as hard as a camel going through the eye of a needle. There is this tension in coming to saving faith of simplicity and complexity.**

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- e. **1 John** – the same author as the gospel now adds lines drawn in the sand – simplicity and clarity now seems obfuscated.
- f. **Different approaches to Gospel Grace** – where Scripture demonstrates He has chosen the ‘poor and the foolish’ over the ‘rich and the wise’.
 - i. Many groups hold to a “creedal assentation” approach to salvation – they provide their own group of faith doctrine statements that you are required to ascribe to, and your affirmation attests to your salvation. The problem is that Scripture doesn’t support a creedal approach.
 - ii. Other groups hold to a “free simple” approach to salvation – all you need to do is accept the truth as offered by Jesus and receive the free gift with an emphasis on the forgiveness of sins, and you are good to go.
 - iii. Another approach argues for the “Lordship approach” – there are three components... a decision, and a commitment, and faith that leads to demonstratable action.
 - iv. Another group remains “vague” – in not wanting to pin salvation down to something specific just trust in response to the offer as presented, but being nondescript you end up with people who don’t know what they believe or why they should believe it. The problem is that in order to advance the Kingdom of God, you need specifics not vague generalities.
- g. **Mat 19:13-15 and Mat 19:16-26** – it is not accidental that these two stories are presented back to back:
 - i. 19:13-15 is simple childlike faith – a child has a nature of trust... it usually wouldn’t occur to them not to trust. When the one they trust offers them something they accept it without question. It wouldn’t occur to them to distrust one they expect to help them.
 - ii. 19:16-26 is an example of trusting as a mature person... it is no longer simple black & white, it is shades of grey. Reason comes into the picture and the mistrust we have of ourselves and others in Fallen creation complicates a faith-trust response.
 - iii. The transition from childlike trust to mature trust is much more difficult and complex. What are the differences?
 1. Children disconnect intellectual acknowledgment from experiential responsiveness. Children just accept, they have no counterbalance to trust.
 2. For the mature – the intellectual and material barriers make trust more difficult... we have gained objective reasoning, but at the expense of reflexive responsiveness.

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3. The more layers of barrier you add as a mature person, the more that has to be overcome... hurts, wealth, pain and suffering, discouragement, etc. all complicate faith.
 4. The rich young ruler had great wealth & prestige – worldly barriers he had to overcome, and he couldn't.
 5. Zacchaeus had wealth and he also had ethical shortcomings [those whom he had charged improperly] to overcome – but he did.
 6. Trust is complicated by all that you are – what you have, what you know, what you believe, what you have experienced, etc.
 7. Trust is intrinsically simple – yet complicated by our personal sin appetites and our general fallen nature, as well as our past failures and our past successes.
 8. True faith has to come to grips with all of these aspects within our own life in the context of an understanding of our personal sin and need.
 9. Conviction by the Spirit sets the stage... until you are aware of your failure and inability to do things on your own, trust on the part of an adult is really unlikely.
 10. Trust looks different to different people – the question becomes... what hinders you from it? What prevents someone from placing their allegiance in conviction to Christ? We each have our own issues... and we each have to make our own choice.
- iv. Trust also changes over time – it becomes different as we grow older and is continually redefined by our world and experiences:
1. Sanctification is a process of the outworking of trust over time. It is not merely the “godification” of my sin nature... that is looking more respectable and godly; rather it is the utter destruction of what was wrong in me and the transplantation of a new nature-identity in Christ.
 2. Perseverance is not just holding on to a fixed and specific belief structure – it is adaptively weathering cultural change through our life experiences through the years... while growing in increasing dependence and intimacy with God.
 3. Gospel trust is thus simple but not minimal... it is complex but not necessarily mere wild abandonment... it demands discipline and growth.
- v. Trust also involves human motivations – and these also change over time.
1. Fear and trembling need to be balanced by love and tender care. Awe and wonder are necessary, but they must be experienced in the context of a God who loves me.

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2. Needs and wants must be defined and segregated. We all have needs that God wants to satisfy, but we also all have wants which God doesn't promise we'll see satisfied in this life.
 3. Understanding the love of God is crucial – Eph 3:14-21.
 4. Faith, love and hope are not separate abstractions – but functionally integrated aspects of trust over time... faith is the ignition, love is the engine, and hope the destination of our life journey.
 5. We need to understand how trust works out over time in the course of our own life... and to be able to articulate how this can play out in the lives of others.
2. Time – Eternity: Trust-Faith takes shape in our concept of eternity.
- a. Endurance – trust in continuance through life and circumstances has to have a future hope to anchor it.
 - i. Hope ultimately sustains trust.
 - ii. Trust is most easy at the beginning of life and the end of life – because you know you are not in control and your need is great. It is most difficult in your younger career building years when you are working toward establishing life amid a world that doesn't support Kingdom of God values.
 - iii. There is no contradiction between the childlike faith, the Zacchaeus faith, and the woman at the well's faith.
 - iv. There is no contradiction between the lack of faith of the rich young ruler and the Pharisees.
 - b. Person of Christ – the recognition of “who is Jesus” is crucial and comes from an inward response.
 - i. “Blessed are you Simon” [Mat 16:17] – the recognition of the Sonship of Jesus is the center of the gospel.
 - ii. The object of faith is crucial – as we age our perception of who Jesus is... is complicated by the world conditions around us.
 - iii. Redefinition of faith involves sin/forgiveness, Law/guilt, Grace/redemption, hope/future – it is a flowing and dynamic paradox.
 - iv. As with all expressions of love and dependence – our relationship with Jesus needs to be guarded, maintained and cultivated over time... it is not a simple “once done” deal... but something that requires daily picking up your cross and following Jesus in faith and obedience.
 - c. Grace – bathes us with God's love and care.
 - i. Perfection is not the issue – we all are not perfect... but God's expectation of perfection drives us to Grace.

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- ii. We are not required to overcome the world... because Christ already has done so.
 - iii. We are required to continue in faith – and my confidence must remain in Jesus and in His sufficiency, not my own.
 - iv. Jesus’ promises – that His sheep know His voice... that no one can take them from Him... and that they will never perish – sustain us.
- d. 1 John lines in the sand:
- i. 1:8-9 – understand our frailty and need of forgiveness... this is Grace.
 - ii. 2:3-11 – “by this we know” ... interactions with others.
 - iii. 2:15-17 – values are worldly or other-worldly.
 - 1. Our hope has to change over time... it will grow and mature along with our faith.
 - 2. Our hope drives us to dependence which transforms us.
 - iv. 3:1-24 – transformed nature:
 - 1. Forces us to come to grips with sin that continues within until we are perfected in Heaven. The curse of sin leading to death is removed, but the necessities of continuing in faith in a fallen and broken world remain.
 - 2. Change/transformation is a barometer of our faith – it moves greatest at times of our greatest need and dependence and maturity.
 - 3. Trusting Christ for our sufficiency through His means of Grace is a transforming influence... we have a role to cooperate with the Spirit, but the Spirit does all the heavy lifting.
 - v. There are degrees of application of faith as ascribed through these lines in the sand... it is not a one size fits all process. It is not unequivocal... faith allows us to overcome overtime. There are seasons as well.
- e. What makes you Godly? How do you define Christian thought & behavior?
- i. Is your hope in this world... or the next?
 - ii. Are you justified by your actions... or grace?
 - iii. Are you judgmental... or gracious to others?
 - iv. Are you indifferent to others... or promoting relational intimacy?
 - v. Is your life inconsistent and segmented... or are you evidencing consistency and personal holiness?
 - vi. Is your life a reflection of contemporary ideals... or are you being conformed to the image of God in Christ?
 - vii. Christian Godliness is not mechanical... it is motivational.
 - viii. We can do good apart from God... but without dependence on God we cannot be transformed into Godliness.

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- ix. The increase of Christ is a progressive goal over time.
- x. The ongoing life is a struggle... with peace, love, and joy to sustain us.
- xi. Victorious living [triumphantalism] is not necessarily a constant reality... but we should be aware of change and growth occurring in our life.
- xii. Understanding how much we have been forgiven is a direct barometer on how much we love [Luke 7:37-50].
- xiii. Faith is all about attitude and heart... it is not just about knowledge or works. The Pharisees were sure of what they thought they knew, and were too comfortable in justifying themselves in a form of righteousness.
- xiv. The impetus is to live out your faith in the world... it is not organizational [institutional church], but rather holistic life of an organism [the Body of Christ is the indwelt community].
- xv. The form of church/faith experience will change over time – heart and attitude are more constant.

3. Hope

- a. What is it? What does it look like?
 - i. There is a hope you have when there is no hope left. This hope is exclusively in eternity... it is what is left when you come to the end of yourself at the end of your life, and your own mortality is staring you in the face. It is the thief on the cross experience. Eternity is the greatest comfort for those facing their own weakness or demise.
 - ii. There is also a hope available in this world... proverbs tends to deal with faith and hope in earthly [not worldly] context. There are ways to make your life better... to make things work more smoothly, but these are secondary things, not primary things.
 - iii. Too many church congregations live as functional Pharisees rather than Children of the Kingdom of God.
- b. Our 'spiritual barometer' can range somewhere from 100% to 0%:
 - i. 100% - Enraged – can't sleep, can't function.
 - ii. 80% - Anxious – nervous and lack of peace.
 - iii. 60% - Bothered – try to put things in their place but struggle.
 - iv. 40% - Concerned – aware and analytical, but things are mostly in place.
 - v. 20% - Peaceful – aware and working, but also relaxed & peaceful.
 - vi. 0% - Total peace.
- c. Personal victory may be helping people more by degree.
- d. Wisdom is being able to judge and minister in terms of progress not arrival.
- e. Trust is the overall umbrella that covers it all.