



December 12, 2021

Dear Ministry Partners,

It has been another turbulent year, which has led me to reflect on the following.

THE BEST OF ALL POSSIBLE WORLDS

The world is collectively waging war against God. We neither like the way He made us nor the way He made the world. We feel driven to correct His many mistakes. The rebellion is on, for none can deny the suffering and inequities of life. How can this world be the work of a loving, omnipotent God?

In 1710, the renowned Enlightenment figure Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz opined in his *Theodicy* that our world was not only the handiwork of God, but the “best of all possible worlds.” He was a serious and brilliant Christian, having invented calculus contemporaneously but independently of Newton. Some believe that he was the last “universal genius,” possessing all the knowledge in the world. But few have shared his opinion. In fact, Voltaire, shocked by the 1755 great earthquake of Lisbon that killed 60,000 people, disagreed so vehemently that in *Candide*, he placed this quote in the mouth of a fool. Most today would agree with Voltaire. But might Leibnitz be right?

Recall a point made by C.S. Lewis in *The Problem of Pain* that if God is all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful, then how can He fail to produce a perfect creation? Even the introduction of sin into the world should be unable to disrupt His plans. He said this despite having survived the horrors of the trenches of World War I. But even if we

concede this powerful and difficult to refute point, still ours does not *feel* like the best world possible.

We must be missing something. I suggest that something is purpose. To answer the question of whether this is the best of all possible worlds, one must consider the reason for which it was made. If the purpose is to maximize human happiness, then clearly this is not that world. But we must remember that two purposes are being served – those of God and those of man.

God's glory and interests far exceed ours. Though I know this to be true it is an unnatural thought for me and one which I must train myself to believe. By Providence, ours is a fallen world in which, if we are to have any hope, we must be thrown a lifeline. Jesus Christ is that lifeline. In Christ, we see attributes of God that we might not otherwise have known. His grace, mercy, long-suffering, and identification with the contrite and lowly are not seen apart from redemption. His glory is maximized in Jesus Christ.

With respect to the interests of man, it must be observed that in sending Christ, God has already given us His best. There is no greater gift than Jesus. And the gifts continue. Having sent us His Son, Christ in turn sends us the Holy Spirit to indwell us. Our world is a place of suffering, but no one has ever suffered in such divine company. We are never alone, even, and perhaps especially, in our suffering.

Furthermore, in Him we are given a second and third and an almost infinite number of chances. The work of Christ and the multiplicity of second chances afford us an opportunity to grow, mature and become Christ-like. If there is anyone else in the universe to whom this second chance offer and capacity for growth has been made, they are unknown to us. We too easily take for granted the second chance offer. The gifts of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, second chances and the ability to grow and change are the greatest expressions of love that God could show a rebellious people.

In the Fall and subsequent redemption of man by the blood of Jesus Christ, the glory of God is maximized, in that His Son now takes center stage to a watching universe. But redemption is in response to our sin,

and because God hates sin, it must be expunged from us. The Roman Catholic Church teaches the concept of Purgatory, a place after death and before heaven in which one's sins are purged before entering eternity. The concept of purging our sins seems biblical but the time and place for this is extra-biblical. The time and place for the purging of our sins is not after death and in Purgatory but now and on earth.

Our fallen world is the best of all possible worlds, not to maximize human happiness, but to purge us of our sins. Recall Revelation 22:11: "Let the one who does wrong, still do wrong; and the one who is filthy, still be filthy; and let the one who is righteous, still practice righteousness; and the one who is holy, still keep himself holy." Something important is permanently fixed in us at the time of our death. If this does not strike terror in us, then we have not understood.

If this is the God-ordained purpose for our lives on earth, the question then is, am I taking full advantage of it? Do I have the same sense of urgency and single-mindedness about the purgation of my sins as I do for—well, you fill in the blank? Only the Holy Spirit can kill my sin, but He does so for the obedient, who consciously strive to practice a life of love, obedience, and self-denial for the sake of Christ.

On earth our exhortation is to exult in tribulations and consider it all joy when encountering various trials. We do so because by faith we know that this is how God purges us of our sins, replacing them with the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

I write these things with shame because I know how poorly I suffer. One of the important functions of fellowship is comfort, encouragement, and exhortation when a brother or sister suffers. We must be loving, humble, and teachable enough to give and receive this.

To summarize, this is the best of all possible worlds for the redemption of sinful and rebellious humans. Heaven is the best of all possible worlds for fully redeemed people. And the purpose of both worlds is the maximal glory of God. Any alternative is the worst of all possible worlds.

There is a city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. That city is the best of all possible worlds for the simultaneous glory of God and the maximization of human flourishing and happiness.

And it awaits those who have utilized our present perfectly imperfect world to prepare for it. May God grant each of us the strength, courage, endurance, and good sense to do so.

“These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world.”

John 16:33

Gail & I thank you all for your love, prayers, encouragement and support this past year! Your friendship is a constant demonstration of God's generosity and goodness to us. We wish you a very Merry Christmas, as we celebrate the birth of our Lord Jesus, God's greatest gift, and all the second chances He supplies.

With love,

Jerry & Gail