



---

Conducted by  
Frank Worgan

---

*“In Romans 8:22, Paul says that ‘the whole creation groaneth together until now’. What does he mean?”*

The recent controversy which resulted in the resignation of the coach of England's national football team, for reasons we need not detail here, has been a sensational and

confused affair. On the one hand, the media has persistently called Mr. Hoddle 'a born-again Christian' - (a peculiar expression which reveals both a careless use of the English language, since this designation is tautological, and in ignorance of scriptural teaching, since, unless one is 'born again', as **John 3;3-5** clearly teaches, he is not a Christian) and, on the other hand, Mr. Hoddle has apparently denied that he *is* a Christian anyway! I must say that, if his religious views have been accurately reported, I, for one, have no difficulty in accepting his denial.

### *A False Doctrine*

The theory which declares that fellow human beings are born either physically or mentally disabled as a punishment for, or as a result of, offences they are suspected of having committed in an imaginary former existence, has no place in Christian teaching, and I find it surprising that, among millions of words which have been written and spoken about the affair, very little indeed has been offered to explain what the Christian scriptures really do teach on the connection between sin and sickness.

### *What Jesus Taught*

As we think about this month's question perhaps this where we should begin.

In **John 9**, we read that, on seeing a man who had been born blind, the Lord's disciples asked him:

*"Master, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"*

Now, the fact that they had asked this question does not mean they were students of Mrs. Eileen Drewery, from whom Mr. Hoddle appears to have learned his theology. They asked, because among Jews of that period, there were Rabbis who tried to explain the problem of sickness and disability by declaring that human beings were born disabled as the result of sin committed in a former existence. The sin which caused the sickness may have been committed either by themselves or by their parents.

This theory is manifestly false, if only because the poor sufferer has no notion and no recollection of the sin he is supposed to have committed, and one would have thought that it is an essential element in the dispensing of justice, that the accused is given to understand of what offence he is guilty; and thus why he is being punished.

However, brought up to be familiar with this belief, the disciples of Jesus wanted to know where the responsibility lay in this man's case. Was he suffering as a consequence of *his own sins*? Or was it because of *the sins of his parents*? They obviously thought that the responsibility for his blindness lay with either the one or the other.

Apparently, Mr. Hoddle would have agreed with them. Since he believes in re-incarnation, he would have said, *"The karma is working!"* He would have said the man's blindness was related to a previous existence.

**Verses 3 and 4 of John chapter 9** show that the Lord Jesus instantly dismissed this idea. Indeed, He did not even condescend to dignify it by offering an explanation, or by continuing the discussion! He stated bluntly, *"Neither this man nor his parents."* The subject - closed!

### *Punctuation!*

Sadly, there follows in verse 3, a statement that has been rendered in a way which I find quite impossible to accept and which, for me, creates a profound difficulty. More than that, I think it is misleading

The statement is, *'but that the works of God may be made manifest in him.'*

Now, according to this rendering, the man had been born blind and compelled to live in darkness for a considerable period of his life, in order that, when he reached manhood, God could work a miracle on him.

Think about this. If this rendering is accurate, it means, that as it stands, from birth to manhood, even though his affliction was *not* a punishment for sin committed in some imaginary previous existence, the man had been burdened with this distressing

handicap because God had deliberately inflicted it upon him, in order to use him as an object lesson.

It implies that his affliction was intended to play a part in some divine plan.

I suggest that this dilemma has been created because of the manner in which the passage has been punctuated. Look again at verse 3, and consider the following.

Remove the comma after the word '*parents*' in that 3rd verse and replace it with a period. Remove the period at the *end* of verse 3 and replace it with a comma.

This results in verse 4 no longer beginning a new sentence. Instead, it becomes a continuation of the Lord's statement and the passage reads very differently. This is what we now read:

*"Neither this man nor his parents.*

*But, in order that the works of God may be made manifest in Him, I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; night comes, when no one can work."*

The Lord is saying, in effect, *"This man was not born blind as punishment for anyone's sin. But, I must do what the One Who sent Me to do, whilst I am in this world, because the time is coming when My work will end."*

Please dismiss any suspicion that we are 'tampering' with the scripture when we render the passage in this way, because when the original Greek manuscripts were written *there were neither commas nor periods*. The punctuation, provided by the translators, is not divinely inspired and I suggest that, punctuated in the way I have indicated we have a rendering which is in harmony with the nature of a loving and gracious God.

*The 'Day'*

Notice the word '*day*'; '*while it is day*.' The '*day*' to which the Lord referred, was the duration of, or '*day*' of His earthly ministry. That ministry must be understood in the light of the statement He made in the synagogue at Nazereth, when, after having commenced His ministry, He first returned to the city in which He had been brought up (Luke 4:16-19).

That day in the synagogue He spoke about His mission. He was aware that the townspeople were curious to know why, after being baptised by John, instead of returning home as other young men had done, He had commenced a ministry of His own. The people had heard that He was preaching and performing miracles. Therefore, when He returned to the town, He explained His behaviour by referring them to the prophecy in Isaiah 61, commencing with verse 1.

But if you compare the two passages, you will see that He actually adds something to the prophecy!

*"The Spirit of the Lord GOD (Adonai YHVH) is upon Me, because the LORD (YHVH) has anointed Me . . . to bring good tidings to the afflicted" . . . and the recovering of sight to the blind . . . to proclaim the acceptable of year of the Lord."*

The words underlined are the Lord's addition to the passage in Isaiah. It was because this was His mission that, confronted with the man who had been born blind, the Lord said, *"I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh when no man can work. As long as I am in the world I am the light of the world."*

In John 20:30-31, John, who records the miracle of the healing of the man born blind, explains that it is one of the '*many signs*' which Jesus performed in order to convince men that He is the Christ, the Son of God, so that, by believing, they might have life through His name, And, because the Lord was 'the Great Physician,' this blind man became the recipient of the grace and power of God, demonstrated by the Christ in the course of His ministry.

His blindness was not a divinely inflicted *punishment* for sin. We must accept this,

because Jesus tells us. But, of one thing, we may be sure, it was certainly a *consequence* of sin, just as, in the final analysis, is all the world's ills. This the scriptures *do* teach!

But the matter of suffering as a '*consequence of sin,*' and **Rom. 8:22**, I must regrettably - leave for the next issue, for lack of space.

*(The question Box is empty! If you want this feature to continue  
please send your questions to:*

*Frank Worgan, 5 Gryfebank Way, Houston, Renfrewshire, Scotland. PA6 7NZ).*