

DON'T BLAME GOD

By Curtis Dickinson

One of the prime questions after the destruction of the World Trade Center is summed up in one word: WHY? It is not hard to find out what motivated the hijackers; their associates have repeatedly told us that it was because of the U.S. foreign policy that has resulted in the deaths of thousands of their people in places like Iraq and Palestine. Whatever justification for such actions the State Department may have these Middle Easterners consider them to be acts of war and reason enough for the attack on September 11.

However, there is another why that is even more prominent in the minds of many. "Why did God allow it?" Religious publications echo this question, and then answer it by listing the sins that are rampant in our country. Jerry Falwell and Pat Robertson agreed, on a TV program, that it was because of the millions of abortions and the national approval of homosexuality. They later realized that this was a condemnation of victims of the attack as though they were guilty of these sins. They apologized, but many people still say that it was God's judgment on our country.

Such a thought raises more questions. Why the penalty on the WTC employees rather than on Hollywood, which is the chief promoter of said sins? Also, we understand that there were Christians on the hijacked planes. Does God make Christians to become involuntary participants in a scheme to kill others, both Christians and non-Christians? Hardly likely.

There is a popular idea, held as a religious tenet, often heard in the expression, "God is in control." Indeed, God is all-powerful, but does this mean that terrorist acts, war, and all the evil taking place is according to God's purpose and will? Does He control all events that take place? Was He in control of the Muslim hijackers as they performed their suicidal feat? If so, then why should their colleagues be punished for the deed?

God certainly has power over His creation and power to control all people and all events. The question is does He exercise that power to control all things? There are many who claim that He does. A. W. Pink argues earnestly, "God foreordains everything which comes to pass...God initiates all things, regulates all things..." Edwin H. Palmer agrees: "God is in back of everything. He decides and causes all things to happen that do happen...he has foreordained everything after the counsel of his will (Eph. 1:1): the moving of a finger...the mistake of a typist – even sin." (Quoted from *The Berean Call*, Feb., 2001.)

This concept of God's sovereignty would mean that He causes people to sin and then condemns them for committing the sin He caused them to commit.

Atheists ask, "If your God is all-powerful, and in control, then why does He allow such great evil and suffering in the world?"

Here is the place to point out that, contrary to popular theology, there are some things God cannot do! This may come as a shock to hard line Calvinists, but the very fact that God is God prohibits Him from doing many things that His finite creatures do all the time, such as lie, steal, sin, etc. Because God is righteous and holy, it is impossible for Him to do an evil act or prompt anyone else to do so. “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted, neither tempts He any man...” (James 1:13-14). Yes, I know the scripture (in some versions) speaks of God tempting Abraham, but the meaning here is that he tested Abraham’s faith. In Deut. 6:16 the people are told to “not tempt the Lord” and Ex. 17:7 says “they tempted the Lord,” but in each case it is speaking of provoking the Lord and challenging Him to do their will. He wasn’t tempted for a moment.

There are other things that God cannot do. He cannot change. He cannot lie or make mistakes. He cannot be absurd, illogical, self-contradictory, sadistic, or wantonly cruel. He cannot force people to love Him.

The Bible is filled with scriptures that hold man fully responsible for his own actions. It is absurd to say that for God to be sovereign He must reserve all decision making for Himself. Nothing can diminish God’s sovereignty. In sovereign power He created man with a mind capable of thinking and willing and then instructed man in the proper use of that mind and will. Jesus said, “If any man wills to do his will he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God, or whether I speak from myself” (John 7:17).

Here Jesus stated the simple fact that each person must exercise his own will in responding to the gospel. God commands us to repent and believe the gospel, but if we refuse to do so, we come under His sovereign judgment upon all who reject Him. If we obey, He exercises His sovereignty in giving us eternal life. In either case God exercises sovereign power over all mankind. It actually demeans God’s sovereignty to teach that He cannot give His creatures, made in His image, the freedom of moral choice.

There are many Biblical examples of God executing temporal punishment on people for their sins, such as: Pharaoh’s army, King Saul, Ahab and Jezebel, Ananias and Sapphira dying at Peter’s feet for lying, King Herod for refusing to give God glory. But there are also people who were examples of righteousness who suffered tragedy or death, such as Abel, Joseph, Job, Jeremiah, Isaiah, John the Baptist, Stephen, Paul and other disciples.

Jesus taught us not to see the hand of God in every tragic event. “Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. Jesus answered, Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans because they suffered this way? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. Or those 18 who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them – do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:1-5).

Among those who died at the World Trade Center were devout and industrious Christians, along with Atheists and rebellious sinners. It is illogical and unbiblical to say that God was displaying His wrath against the nation’s sins.

Neither is God to blame for the persecution of Christians. This arises from the hatred of those who “refuse to have God in their knowledge” and who are like Cain, who killed Abel “because his works were evil and his brother’s righteous” (1 John 3:12). Much of the suffering in the world, including the horrors of war, is due to man’s evil works in resistance to God and His purpose.

In the creation process God set in place certain laws, called “natural law,” to make things work according to a certain (Divine) order. Much of the suffering taking place is due to people violating these “natural laws.” Go too long without rest and you might fall asleep at the wheel and kill yourself or others. If we continually eat food that has no nutrition or that is contaminated with various processed additives we will suffer from various diseases.

These laws apply to all, whether Christian or not. The rate of cancer, diabetes, and heart failure is the same for Christians and atheists. Of course, God can intervene and suspend His “natural law,” and that is called a miracle.

There is also the wonderful fact that God works to help each Christian achieve His purpose. “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you both to will and to work, for his good pleasure.” (Phil 2: 12-13). God does many works in answer to prayers when those prayers are in harmony with His purpose.

His purpose, however, is not to give us a paradise in this world but to prepare us for the eternal paradise to come. His goal is not that we should be rich in material things, but rich in His spiritual blessings. His purpose is to have a people in His image, ‘holy and without blemish before Him in love.’ Toward this end, we are assured that to them that love God, all things work together for good, even to them that are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28). While God is not responsible when evil things happen, He is able to use them for the benefit of His people in carrying out His purpose.

Yes, the nation deserves the wrath of God for many sins, and for the public denial of Jesus as the Christ. So do other nations, for all have sinned. There is a day appointed for judgment. In the meantime, God is long-suffering; not wishing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). The good news is that through the atoning death of His son,

Jesus, we have been “delivered from the wrath to come” and have the hope of immortality in the day of resurrection. By His sovereign mercy it is our privilege to receive His grace and to respond in gratitude, obedience, and love.

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