

The Pastor's Pages



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The last issue brought forward another question that we hear of all too often. One of theodicy or suffering. **Why does God allow suffering and by allowing it, does he cause it?**

The story of the man whose wife had a hole in her heart brought this question to light. The simple truth is that what God does not do is as important as what God does. In saying that we know that God did not make us to love him by forcing us to. It would seem this is obvious by all the people in the world who do not love God or who do not even acknowledge God's existence. So a question we could ask of ourselves is, what are the consequences that come from not loving God?

We know that turning from God is considered sin and in the Old Testament we see the phrase, return to the Lord your God quite often. To be turned towards God brings salvation and to turn away from God brings the opposite, eternal death. But what are other consequences of this.

When we are deceitful and deceptive by lying to others we hurt ourselves and others as well. Our sin is destructive to all for it damages or destroys relationships. We know this is not our Lord's intention for Jesus told us that we were to love the Lord our God and to love our neighbor as ourselves.

So sin brings about more sin. In the example above, one lie calls for other lies to "cover up" the fact that we lied in the first place. When we focus upon ourselves and our own wills rather than God's, we come to ignore the needs of others and the needs of creation. All of this brings about suffering. Suffering that is not the will of God, but that comes from the result of our sins against God and one another.

There is also the suffering that occurs through natural events, floods, hurricanes, tornadoes, etc. God made the world and declared it was good, but there are natural events that we consider destructive for we are sometimes in the paths of these events. We have heard of the recent fires in the west of the United States and they come from the natural order of creation, through lightning or through the negligence of humanity. Is it God's will that these fires occur? We know that they actually burn vegetation, undergrowth and often lead to renewal of land afterwards, but when our homes are

built in the areas where they occur we may come to blame nature or God for those things. However, is it right to do so?

In the book, Crossing the Threshold of Hope written by Pope John Paul II, he speaks of how we hold God responsible for suffering when we question God for allowing it. In a sense we judge God while we knowingly build houses near the coast knowing that there are hurricanes, when we build homes in tornado alley and then are angered when they are destroyed. In knowing the history of Pompey we know that building a city near a volcano is not the wisest thing to do. So part of suffering comes from the natural order of creation and the decisions we make in placing ourselves in harm's way.

Finally, we might ask ourselves what we know of God. God is a God of compassion, a God that chose forgiveness rather than judgment, mercy rather than punishment and in sending his Son, God offers forgiveness to all the world. Does this sound like a malicious God, a being with ill intent? Even the suffering that was endured by Christ was at the hands of humanity.

However, we should realize that when we do suffer that we are never alone, for God walks with us in and through that suffering. Remember the 23rd Psalm, Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will not fear for thou art with me. God never leaves or forsakes us. And when it comes to following Christ and being a Christian, what happens to us is not nearly as important as how we respond to what happens.

The apostle Paul wrote in Thessalonians that we should not grieve as others, as ones who have no hope, but should remember that our hope is in Jesus Christ. We face suffering knowing the one who suffered for us even unto death, that we might have life eternal. And it is Jesus' eternal love that should bring us comfort and encouragement in whatever we may face in this life. God be praised for that eternal love.

Shalom,

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