

Previewing the Issue

Hollywood has yet to make it. They would be too crazy to do so. It just wouldn't work.

Have you ever seen a movie where the bad guy gets away and the good guy loses? Sure you have! But think about it closely. There was always something redeeming about the situation. Either the bad guy was the one that the movie made you identify with; therefore, it was really the hero that was getting away. Or, through the loss of the good guys, decency was somehow accomplished. But nowhere did evil win... simply for the sake of evil. Moviegoers wouldn't put up with it. They would hate it. They would tell their friends to avoid it. Why?

It would violate our society's sense of justice! That sense of "rightness" that each of us have deep within us.

Sometimes the sense of "rightness" that we feel gets perverted in our selfish pursuit – but it is still there. Sometimes it gets ignored when it is not as convenient – but it is still there. The challenge that we all face, is that of doing what is RIGHT, even when it is not expedient.

Probing the Scriptures

God gives us clear instruction in His Bible on how we are to live. One verse that summarizes well what is expected of us is in the book of Micah.

Micah 6:8:

But he's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what GOD is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, And don't take yourself too seriously— take God seriously.

☐ God is requiring three things of his followers. What are those three things?

☐ Which of those three do you do well with? Which are a struggle for you?

☐ Write out your definition of just.

Justice

☐ Do you think it is different than the word fair?

Notice how Nelson's Bible Dictionary Defines Justice:

JUSTICE — the practice of what is right and just. Justice specifies what is right, not only as measured by a code of law, but also by what makes for right relationships as well as harmony and peace.

The English term “justice” has a strong legal flavor. But the concept of justice in the Bible goes beyond the law courts to everyday life. The Bible speaks of “doing justice” (Ps. 82:3 ; Prov. 21:3), whereas we speak of “getting justice.” Doing justice is to maintain what is right or to set things right. Justice is done when honorable relations are maintained between husbands and wives, parents and children, employers and employees, government and citizens, and human beings and God. Justice refers to neighborliness in spirit and action.

☐ Why do you believe that we spend more time today talking about “getting justice” than “doing justice”? Why?

☐ What is the difference between just and legal? What is it?

☐ Can you think of a situation that may be legal... but not just?

Read the following proverb from the scriptures:

Proverbs 22:22-23:

Don't walk on the poor just because they're poor, and don't use your position to crush the weak, Because God will come to their defense; the life you took, he'll take from you and give back to them.

☐ Who are the “weak” and “poor” that you encounter during your week?

☐ Who is pleading their case? Could You? Why or Why not?

☐ What happens to your relationship with God when you use your position to “walk on” or “crush” others?

Perusing other Pages

One of the most difficult challenges presented to the Christian faith is the problem of evil. Spend some time this week reviewing this article by Eric Frank entitled: “Why Doesn’t God Do Something... NOW”

A study on the justice of God (theodicy) is as much practical as it is theological. Most people will never read Charles Hodge or Benjamin Warfield, but they will look at their own lives and experiences, as well as those of others, and ask such questions as: How?, Why?, and What for?

The gruesome images portrayed on TV. seem to make this sensitivity even more acute. Graphic pictures from Bosnia, Somalia, and other places bring the tragedies of thousands (often little children) right into our living rooms, causing us to come to grips with the bleakness that many experience.

The same questions that have plagued mankind for centuries still confront us today: "Why does evil come?," "Where is the justice of God?," "Why doesn't God do something?" Usually responses like these come from people who are sincere in their concern, and yet feel compelled to indict God with complacency and wrongdoing. Even those within the Church are not immune to this disposition. Often, without perceiving it, Christians can lose sight of the sovereignty and mercy of God and begin to doubt his wisdom.

Inquiring into these matters is not necessarily wrong. The Scriptures list many examples of saints who questioned God about the trials of life. In James, the Lord's brother instructed believers to ask God for wisdom when they were being tested. However, in the same context the saints were exhorted to ask in faith and single-mindedness and to never accuse God of wrongdoing (James 1).

Using this biblical passage as a paradigm I have endeavored to answer two questions in this article. First (something frequently asked by those who are antagonistic against God), "Why doesn't God do something now?" And second, "What should the Christian perspective be concerning world crises?" There are no solid answers to these dilemmas apart from the Word of God. All the wisdom that we can hope to attain must come from the Bible.

Why doesn't God do something Now?

For everyone who has read the Scriptures and has a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ the first question stated above is nonsense. In the Gospel of John Jesus said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (Jn. 5:17). Since the fall of man God has continued to work his will and bring salvation to his people. Therefore, a more accurate question to ask would be, "What is God doing now?"

From a mere human standpoint, suffering indicates God's apparent unwillingness to rescue people, because it seems as though He is not doing anything. However, the Bible reveals God as more than just a Savior, but as the righteous Judge. Theodicy not only means God executing justice for his people, but the opposite also, a just judgment for sins committed.

Justice

Scriptural evidence supporting this doctrine is abundant. Both Noah and the Israelites were preserved through an overwhelming flood, while their adversaries found judgment in a watery grave. During the time of Abraham the Amorites were allowed to continue in the land of Canaan because their sins had not reached their full measure, but four hundred years later they found no mercy from the descendants of Abraham or God.

Although this teaching is not popular today, evidence of God's judgment on sin will become an ever-present reality to us. In all of the synoptic Gospels Jesus' Olivet discourse is recorded with vivid language;

And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. And there will be *famines, pestilences, and earthquakes* in various places. All these are the beginning of sorrows"...For then there will be great tribulation, such as has not been since the beginning of the world until that time, no, nor ever shall be. And unless those days were shortened, no flesh would be saved; but for the elect's sake those days will be shortened. (Matt. 24:6-7, 21)

These verses make it clear that eventually this present world order will be judged and brought to an end, and God's Kingdom will be fully manifested and established. He will wipe away every tear, and pain and sorrow will cease.

Even though we should continue to pray that relief would come to those who suffer tragedy, let us never lose heart at *apparently* unanswered prayer. Instead let us pray, "Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven;" our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.

Some may ask, "What about God's people who find them-selves in the midst of these world judgments? Can God in his omni-science distinguish between the righteous and the unrighteous?" These are good questions. The answer is tucked away in the small book of Habakkuk, and has become a cornerstone of Pauline, Augustinian, and Lutheran theology: "The just shall live by faith."

This almost sounds like a pat answer, and yet it is very pertinent for this discussion. Habakkuk the prophet complained to God about the sin in his homeland, Judah. The Lord told him that his complaint would be answered; God was raising up the Babylonians to execute His judgment. This aroused another objection from the prophet, "How can you judge my country by using a nation that is more sinful" (text question summarized). God did not give the reasons for His sovereign choice; the proud Babylonians would be judged. In the mean time "the just will live by faith."

But what does this mean? Habakkuk was distinguishing between nations, while God was looking upon individuals. The transgressions of Israel were as evil as the sins of the Babylonians; only those who had faith in Judah (and Babylon if there were any) would live.

The apostle Paul picked up on this same theme in the book of Romans. In chapter one Paul quotes from Habakkuk describing the gospel that he preached among the Jews and the Gentiles. In almost an identical context he places this promise of life within a setting of God's judgment;

For in it [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith [faith of Jews and Gentiles]; as it is written, 'The just shall live by faith.' For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men who suppress the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:17-18).

The reference to *all* ungodliness and unrighteousness describes the sins of both Jew and Gentile, "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Ro.3:23, NIV)

The passages in Habakkuk and Romans hold the same assurance; even in a time when God is judging the world, the just shall live by faith. The life that we receive by faith is eternal. Even if believers perish in the midst of calamities, the promise of everlasting life will never be nullified.

This whole subject raises another important question; "Does suffering always indicate God's displeasure and judgment?" Once again the Bible gives us helpful insight.

Toward the end of Jesus' ministry our Lord encountered a man who was born blind. The disciples asked Jesus a theological question, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus promptly answered that neither the man nor his parents had sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him (Jn. 9). There was a deep purpose for this man's affliction; God would glorify his own name by healing his blindness, and the man, although he was blind for a season, rejoiced anew with physical and spiritual sight.

The O.T. is also steeped with similar examples. Joseph could see the hand of the Almighty even in the wicked plots of his brothers; "You intended to harm me (Joseph told his brothers), but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives" (Gen. 50:20). In order to preserve his people during a time of judgment, the Lord sent his servant Joseph ahead to Egypt. During the famine that followed Israel and his descendants found deliverance through a surprising candidate. What seemed to be a hopeless situation for Joseph was really the beginning of a perfect plan of salvation.

The oldest book in the Bible is also exclusively devoted to the causes of suffering. In Job the patriarch and his three "friends" discuss why he had lost his possessions, family, and even his own health. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar were convinced that the righteous Job had sinned greatly before God, while Job maintained his innocence.

The readers of this discourse have an advantage over the three men. In chapters one and two we read of a heavenly council between God and Satan. The accuser charged that Job only loved God because of material and physical blessings; if these were removed he would curse the Almighty to His face. God, on the other hand, knew that Job's piety was genuine and that he would maintain his integrity even in the midst of calamity. The Scriptures give this testimony showing that God's keeping power is greater than Satan's power to test: "In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong" (Job 1:22).

After Job, the three "theologians" and young Elihu gave their long-winded speeches, God spoke the final word from a whirlwind:

Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding (Job 38:2-4).

Although Job had not cursed God in the beginning like Satan said he would, as his three friends continued to denounce him for his "hidden sins," Job began to elevate his own righteous character above God's supreme wisdom for his life; he justified himself instead of God. In chapter 31 Job said, "Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense, let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing. Surely I would wear it on my shoulder, I would put it on like a crown" (vs. 35-36).

In the response that God gave Job, the Almighty did not explain his actions; He merely pointed to the mysteries of the universe and asked Job to explain them. Just as the stars of the heavens were under God's sovereign control so also were the circumstances of Job's life.

God's infinite wisdom is beyond our grasp. All that we need to know is that the Lord of all the earth will do right and that all things work together for our (believers) good and God's glory. The Lord did not leave Job in this state of calamity, "The Lord blessed the latter part of Job's life more than the first" (42:12). Truly all things worked together for his good and the Lord was magnified even more in his life. Job's final words before God are enough to respond to the question, "Why doesn't God do something now?"

I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. You asked, "Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?" Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. (Job 42:2-3)

What Should the Christian Perspective be Concerning World Crises?

Hopefully, by endeavoring to answer the first question much of the perspective that we should have has already been answered. It is clear from the Scriptures that God is continually working his will in all of the happenings of this world. In his sovereignty God glorifies his name and brings deliverance to many, and at the same time sends judgment on both nations and individuals. Therefore, we should understand all circumstances in the light of God's omniscience and omnipotence. The God of all the earth will do what is right.

Justice

Promises for believers should also be a part of our outlook and a true comfort to us: "All things work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose," and even in the midst of judgment and wrath, "The just will live by faith."

However, we have not considered one important point that is crucial for a proper Christian perspective on suffering. How do we view this life? Are we biblical or are we conformed to a worldly viewpoint?

Those who do not know the Lord Jesus Christ perceive this life as coming to an end with no hope of heaven. We, however, are not to sorrow as those who have no hope, but we are to comfort one another with the promise of the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Many times we have a worldly perspective on our suffering, when we should have our hearts fixed on the Kingdom of heaven. The sufferings that many go through are painful and real, and yet there is a light at the end of the tunnel. The Apostle Paul had the proper perspective, "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18). Paul placed his sufferings (more than many of us will ever suffer) on a scale with the glory of heaven; there was no comparison for him, nor should there be for us.

Our life now is like a drop of water taken from the ocean of eternity. If we have to suffer now, understand that soon we will stand before the throne of God with resurrected bodies; never again will we hunger or thirst or have pain and sorrow for the former things will have passed away.

Conclusion

Is God doing something now? Yes, my heavenly Father is always at work, both willing and doing his good pleasure. What should my perspective be concerning crises? The God of all the earth will always do what is right. He is able to discern between the righteous and the unrighteous, and soon those who are faithful will receive an inheritance that will never perish, spoil, or fade that is reserved in heaven for us. Come quickly Lord Jesus!

Processing Together

Anyone who has kids has heard the phrase, "that's not fair!" uttered more than once.

Is life fair? Why, or why not?

Is God fair? In what ways.

Is God just? What is the difference?

Read together this story from the life of Jesus Christ. It takes place in John.

Jesus went across to Mount Olives, but he was soon back in the Temple again. Swarms of people came to him. He sat down and taught them.

The religion scholars and Pharisees led in a woman who had been caught in an act of adultery. They stood her in plain sight of everyone and said, "Teacher, this woman was caught red-handed in the act of adultery. Moses, in the Law, gives orders to stone such persons. What do you say?" They were trying to trap him into saying something incriminating so they could bring charges against him.

Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger in the dirt. They kept at him, badgering him. He straightened up and said, "The sinless one among you, go first: Throw the stone." Bending down again, he wrote some more in the dirt.

Hearing that, they walked away, one after another, beginning with the oldest. The woman was left alone. Jesus stood up and spoke to her. "Woman, where are they? Does no one condemn you?"

"No one, Master."

"Neither do I," said Jesus. "Go on your way. From now on, don't sin."

According to the Jewish law, what was the legal penalty for this woman's affair? What do you think of that?

Is there anything in this story that makes you question the justice of her penalty?

How does Jesus respond?

What does he command her to do?

Do you feel that Jesus acted justly in this situation? Why, or why not?

Justice

- ▣ Have you ever been tempted to do something which was legal, but would be considered unjust? What was the issue? What was the outcome?

Putting it into Practice

- ▣ Can you think of someone specifically that you would dread to meet again because you have not been completely just in your dealings with them?

- ◆ Who is it?

- ◆ What was the situation?

- ◆ What could you do this week to make things right?

- ▣ What area of your life do you struggle most with as it pertains to justice? In other words, what area do you have the most difficulty in doing what is right?

- Financial
 - Employer
 - Employee
 - Family/Children
 - Co – Workers
 - Other _____

- ▣ Is there a person or a situation in your life that you are taking advantage of? It may be legally permissible, but is it just? Think through the following questions and develop a plan to address this area.

- ◆ What is the issue?

◆ Who is affected?

◆ What steps need to be taken to make it right?

◆ Who will hold you accountable to do this?
