

The Ways of God

"May the LORD look upon you and punish you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his courtiers – putting a sword in their hands to slay us.' Then Moses returned to the LORD and said, 'O Lord, why did You bring harm upon this people? Why did You send me? Ever since I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, he has dealt worse with this people; and still You have not delivered Your people.' Then the LORD said to Moses, 'You shall soon see what I will do to Pharaoh: he shall let them go because of a greater might; indeed, because of a greater might he shall drive them from his land.'" Exodus 5:21-6:1

God selected Moses from tending another man's sheep to redeem His people from slavery. Moses obeyed God's instructions only to find himself humiliated before God's people; they saw him as the source of their pain rather than as their deliverer. God orchestrated this opposition, bringing Moses to the place of utter failure and hopelessness. Now God is ready to begin His work.

This last verse when God says in essence, "I will receive the glory; you will receive the pain!" applies to Pharaoh, Egypt, Israel, Moses, and everyone else on earth. If you cannot accept this, then you cannot accept God. If you want God, you must accept pain. If the Bible teaches anything, it teaches that our lust for autonomy is so acute that pain is essential for redemption.

Paul says the "the goodness of God leads to repentance." However, His goodness is seen in the pain and opposition He brings into your life. Without pain, His goodness alone will not lead you to repentance; it will lead to presumption and sin – even for the elect. Also, we note in Revelation 16:21 that pain by itself drives men away from God rather than to Him.

You do not thank God for your pain, opposition, and humiliation; you thank Him for loving you so much that He is willing to afflict you with them. You can ascribe your pain to His cruel indifference, or to His patient correction. However, if you cannot thank God for doing this to you, you cannot accept God, and of course, He will not accept you.

¹ Romans 2:4

Tolerating Poverty

"For there will never cease to be needy ones in your land, which is why I command you: open your hand to the poor and needy kinsman in your land." Deuteronomy 15:11

God creates people poor, and then He commands His people, "And when ye reap the harvest of your land, thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field, neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest. And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard, neither shalt thou gather every grape of thy vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger: I am the LORD your God."¹ Again He warns, "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment: thou shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor honour the person of the mighty: but in righteousness shalt thou judge thy neighbour."²

Why did not God, when He established the Theocracy, also establish a system that ensured the elimination of poverty? Nations around the world seek to establish laws that mitigate the disparity between rich and poor. Why does it appear that this is more important to man than it is to God? Jesus said, "The poor you will have with you always."³ Although Jesus ministered to the poor, He never rebuked government for allowing people to be poor; He never called man's tolerance of inequality a blight on his ability to properly govern himself.

Although any endeavor to answer this conundrum is conjecture, simply because God never addresses the question, we can nonetheless make this application: life is intrinsically unjust, at least as we perceive reality. Even if man eliminates poverty by dividing the common good among the common man, he still must live with the inequalities of life brought about by Providence. People are born autistic, blind, severely deformed, etc. They suffer from terrible diseases that make them dependent upon others for their wellbeing. All the advances in science will not eliminate such suffering.

Into this mix God places His people, requiring them to respond biblically. On the one hand, you cannot blithely pass by those in want and say, "Be ye warmed and filled..."⁴, and yet Jesus warns, "What shall it profit a man if he gains the world and loses his own soul?"⁵ What do you profit a man if you meet his temporal needs and he spends eternity in hell?

God does not want man to solve his problems; rather He wants man's problems to drive him to Jesus for His grace, forgiveness, and salvation. As you seek to biblically respond to the needs of others, never forget that God created those needs to both draw needy people to Himself, and to test you. May God grant all of us a double portion of His wisdom on how to pass His tests.

¹ Leviticus 19:9-10 ² Leviticus 19:15 ³ Mark 14:7 ⁴ James 2:16 ⁵ Mark 8:36