

Punishment
John R Gavazzoni
December 28, 2002
Thousand Oaks, CA

Editor's note: The following essay is John's commentary on a brother's questions about Ultimate Reconciliation. The questions follow, and after that, John's comments. Jan Antonsson

+++++

"In my opinion, the entire old testament (which is supposed to be the task master that brings God's children to that which is perfect) is full of do's and don'ts and judgments and bloody sacrifices, as well as violent terminations of humans by God himself. The carry-over of this action is found in the new testament with Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-5), and Jesus' retribution of the money-changers in the temple, etc.
(Matt. 21:12).

"I have a feeling, based on scripture, that God Almighty is not only a God of love and paternal care, but an extremely judgmental being. Scripture states that He is slow to anger (Ex. 34:6; Num. 14:18), and prolonging the days until man's wickedness is complete that He will require an accounting of each of us for our action (Matt. 12:36; Jude 1:15).

"Scripture states that to some He will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant" (Matt. 25:21,23). And to others He will say "Depart from me, I never knew you" (Matt. 7:23). Where will the second bunch go and to what demise? This gets into the area of election and predestination of which I am completely baffled. Be it Calvinistic or otherwise, I go near this subject and my mind goes to Jell-O.

"That is why I brought up the subject of salvation. Is it that we are being saved from God's vicious judgment and allowed to come to Him, foibles and all, by recognizing and claiming what Christ has done for us? Or are we just going to be amongst a higher class of individuals in the next life, or will there be a heaven and hell separated by a great void?

"Do I believe that God is capable of being mean and destructive?
Cruel?
Vicious?

"Ask those guys at Sodom and Gomorrah, or the folks at Mt. Sinai, or the two Hebrews who were just doing what they thought was the right thing to do when the ark of the covenant was about to fall, or Pharaoh, or even Job.

"As Jesus said, 'Don't fear those guys who can take your life, but rather fear (phobias) God who can take your life and send you to Gehenna' (Matt. 10:28). Why would He want us to fear God if there were not the potential for disaster?" End quote.

+++++

Dear Doug (not his real name),

I'm finally getting around to carefully reading this honest outburst, you might say. One can certainly appreciate the confusion about trying to reconcile the claims that God is caring and paternal, and yet, seemingly, vicious and judgmental. The attempts from the so-called orthodox church to reconcile this apparent conundrum are pathetic at best.

One must factor in, not only the severe acts of God recorded in scripture, but also the whole of the human condition, for they all end up back at His desk. Most of the problem stems from the fact that folks seem to require that God be "nice" rather than "mean." Well, He's neither nice nor mean. He's passionate: "I, the Lord your God, am a passionate God," (Ex. 20:5; Deut. 4:24). That's the better translation of the Hebrew, instead of "jealous God." He's passionate in regard to His purpose of bringing all of creation into "the liberty of the glory of the sons of God" (Rom. 8:21).

Once the Spirit of Truth sets us free from conventional theological presuppositions, one thing that inevitably occurs in the process of our hearts being flooded with light, is that, contrary to all the preachers belching out their futile attempts to correct the problem of evil for God; evil is a necessary, transitory, component in the outworking of His eternal purpose.

Anyone who can't see that it was God Himself who set up the Adamic race to sin and suffer all the consequences pertaining to death toward a glorious end, is still in spiritual infancy.

Paul is clear on that matter. His teaching is quite explicit. God consigned all men to disobedience that He might have mercy upon all (Rom. 11:32). The creation was subjected to futility not of its own will but by the will of Him who subjected in hope (that is in certain, confident expectation) that, by His working, evil would act as a kind of catalyst that would serve to prepare men to fully assimilate the grandeur of the purpose of perfect love (Rom. 8:20).

One must, if he is not to remain in a theological morass of confusion, make as his frame of reference, the great peak of revelation---from which we, with sanctified logic, can extrapolate down into the valley of the human condition---that God is Love. God IS Love. That's what He is.

Thus it is impossible that He should order, or if you prefer, permit any situation that does not serve the purpose of His love. "The suffering of the present time is not to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18).

The suffering is related to the glory, but the experience of the glory of God will be utterly disproportionate to the suffering so necessary for the full unfolding of the glory of His grace, and our assimilation of the same. Christians love to claim that verse exclusively, and though it has a special application to the believer in the eons, it is inclusive of the whole Adamic race and the whole creation through the church, which is His instrument to make known His manifold wisdom to principalities and powers (Eph. 3:10). God is doing something so glorious that even the agony that sends forth a groan from all creation, understood in that context is, in the balances of eternity, as nothing.

We easily miss two facts. One: that God is dealing with men, not only individually, but racially. He is in the process of saving the human race, so we, from our vantage point, do not yet see how the general suffering of all, or the great suffering of a few, can be, and indeed are, part of His salvific work for the planet and the cosmos, which requires

an interplay of good and evil, pleasure and suffering, longing and fulfillment.

Two:---And this is one of the great blind spots of, especially, organized Western Christianity---- God's dealing with men and the whole race, does not end at the point of physical death. This is a myth that came out of the dark ages and which has absolutely no scriptural support. I would be glad to elaborate on that statement if anyone wishes to question it.

Once one is gripped by the totally pervasive truth that God is Love, he will begin to respond to God with that normative response that the uncorrupted gospel calls forth and which St. John speaks of in his first Epistle, saying, "We have known and believe the love God has for us" (I John 4:16). Here is the test of faith. Do we know and believe the love which God has for us and the whole world when faced with the demonic situations that scream at us, demanding that such an assumption and trust is utterly foolish.

It would be nothing to believe that God loves the world and is about His business of doing ultimate good for us all, when there are no situations to tempt us to the contrary. In such an environment, God would be known as a nice God, but never experienced in the passion of His love. It is in the valley of the shadow of death that love finds its opportunity to reveal itself at its best.

If God is love and He also creates the Waster to destroy (Isa. 54:16), and creates good and evil (Isa. 45:7) as the scriptures attest, then, the mind freed of the demonic doctrines of corrupted Christianity, can easily see that there is a glorious purpose in, and resolution of the present contrarianism that afflicts us all, in some way or another. It is in the awful fire of human adversity that those things that abide (faith, hope and love) reveal themselves to be unshakable and eternal.

This is the love of God expressed: "But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that made us whole, and with his stripes we are healed" (Isaiah 53:5, RSV).

Stay tuned for future, seminal samplings.

