

Here Where Dogs Bite and Bees Sting: Part Two

How the Corruption of Free Will Has Affected Nature

In the [first part](#) of this three-part series, I talked about how we corrupted God's gift of free will by choosing to sin, to turn away from Him. This began the history of the curse of sin. One of the results of the curse of sin is that all of nature is now imperfect. Much to our chagrin, everything is now dying. And as I mentioned in Part One, many of us see this as all God's fault.

C.S. Lewis tells about the death of his mother, a turning point in his early life. He recalls praying for a miraculous resurrection. When none of this took place, he completely rejected that there could possibly be a good God.

An older Lewis conceded that the subject is much more complicated than he had thought as a young man. In *Mere Christianity*, he wondered "...How had I got this idea of just and unjust?...(*Mere Christianity*, 40). What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" It is this thought that convicted Lewis of the over-simplicity of his atheistic beliefs. A little further on in *Mere Christianity* he says it is also an oversimplification to say, yes, there is a good God in heaven and that God has made it so everything is all right.

Evil does exist in both man and nature and God obviously doesn't quell all of it. It is not that it is too powerful for God or even that it is equal with Him. It is not like there is not an equal, dualistic battle where good and evil do perpetual battle with one another with evil continually limiting God. The story of Scripture shows that the evil forces of darkness are a much lesser thing which God is in the process of conquering. But Scripture also makes it clear that

evil is still exceedingly powerful. And it is this exceedingly powerful thing that has infected both man and nature.

Pain is a Grace

As far as the natural, physical order, I don't think pain and suffering are the main culprits. Pain and suffering may be unpleasant but they aren't evil things in and of themselves. They are indicators that something evil is happening. In fact, when you experience pain you are often experiencing a sort of gift. In *Where Is God When It Hurts?* Philip Yancey describes "The Gift Nobody Wants" first thing. He says, "pain gets bad press...we should see poems, statues and hymns to pain." He says, "Pain is not an afterthought, or God's great goof...it reveals a marvelous design that serves our bodies well." He tells how his close friend Paul Brand, a doctor at a leper clinic, observed firsthand that without being able to feel pain lepers are unable to detect when evil is happening to their bodies and therefore do not know to do something about it. This is the major reason for many of the injuries incurred by leprosy (*Where is God When It Hurts?* 26-31).

And Our Suffering is Not Divine Punishment

The imperfection in nature that instigates the pain is sometimes seen as a punishment from God. Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* while watching his own son die of a very rare disease. Many of the conclusions found in the book are probably wrong, but he does provide some good insights. For instance, Kushner relates going to the home of a couple who had just lost a child. When he arrived at their home the very first words out of their mouth were, "You know, Rabbi, we didn't fast last Yom Kippur" (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 8). In their opinion, they were only getting from God what they deserved. They believed that God was punishing them for doing what they were supposed to do.

The story of Job and his friends probably came to mind when I was talking about viewing suffering as a punishment for a sin, didn't it? They (the "friends") certainly said a lot of interesting, thought-provoking things, but they were just saying the same wrong things over and over again. They would have us believe that when we hurt, we really are being punished for some sin. That really has nothing to do with it as far as we are concerned. We feel pain at all because we live in an imperfect world. It's as simple as that.

Living Your Faith in This World That Hurts

The trick is not allowing the existence of imperfection of the natural order to play a decisive role in our personal level of faith. That is, our faith in and on God should not lower or become non-existent when something bad or even a bunch of bad somethings takes place in our lives. Job was faithful to God despite a bunch of really bad somethings coming into his life in an apparently brief amount of time. That is not to say he never expressed anger and frustration at what God was doing to him. He did. That is not to say he did not often demand an answer from God. He did that too. His level of faith on God simply did not depend on life being good. Throughout the book, Job makes it very clear that he wasn't a masochist who enjoyed the pain, but he also made it clear that he was fully willing to accept that both good and evil came into the lives of those who love God.

God, the one friend who knew what He was talking about, made a huge statement of His amazing knowledge and sovereignty in the last three chapters of Job. His words here reveal a God that is very opposite the weak God claimed by so many. One of these individuals is the aforementioned Kushner. I mentioned that Kushner comes to several wrong conclusions in his book. Here's one of them: Toward the end of his book he concludes that God "is limited in what he can do by laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom" (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 134). Yancey comments on this

statement by Kushner in *Where is God When It Hurts*: “God’s speech at the end of Job is one of the...reasons I cannot agree...Job 38–41 contains as impressive a description of God’s power as you’ll find anywhere in the Bible.” God is not limited by evil, by our free will, by anything. But we are. We are limited by many things. And in our limited understanding, we assume that He really is limited. In so doing we make the God of our hearts and minds a weak God.

The Unpleasant Providence

No, God does not punish us by inflicting disease and hardship upon us but uses these things to reveal His glory. Upon first seeing a blind man, the disciples asked Jesus, who sinned to make this man blind, the man himself or his parents? Jesus replied that neither had sinned but that the man had been born blind so that God’s glory could be displayed. He then proceeded to manifest the glory of God by miraculously healing the man. Other people who have experienced bitter providence come to mind.

I think of Carolyn Martin. Carolyn is a friend of my family who was born with severe Cerebral Palsy. Martin spent much of her early life seeking to find meaning out of her lot in life. Despite being a church-going person for most of her life, it was only as an adult she found the joy in God that gave her true meaning. In her words: “My pain was washed away by God’s deep and soothing sea of love for me” (*I Can’t Walk So I’ll Learn to Dance*, 239). She came to see that God was using her handicap for His glory. She was able to get a college education and to thereafter become a published writer, inspiring others with physical limitations through her story. Her story is a message of God’s grace.

I think of Richard Wurmbrand. It was as a religious prisoner under communist guard that pastor Wurmbrand saw the true face of evil. The tortures he endured and witnessed are too

horrible to contemplate. He recounted how he heard one of his torturers say, "I thank God, in whom I don't believe, that I have lived to this hour when I can express all the evil in my heart."³³ His story is a story of God's providence. After his final release, Wurmbrand spread his story throughout the world and started Voice of the Martyrs. His story has become an inspiration to millions of Christians throughout the world.

And these are just two examples. There are many of them. Many the best of these examples are in God's Word.

But although He is working His plan through, this imperfect world is not ideal to God. All of history is His working toward renewal. In the last part of this series, we will look at that.