

Katrina and Finger-Pointing

Talk about opportunists – they could not wait until the crisis subsided to start looting. I am not just referring to the looting of Wal-Mart. The looting for personal and political gain started with finger-pointing during the time of crisis. Those who did not heed the warning to evacuate with some food and water blamed the government for not getting them out and caring for them. The mayor let millions of dollars worth of buses submerge while blaming FEMA for not evacuating them. The governor, after blocking entrance of federal aid for a time, blamed the Feds for the tragic situation. All of us in front of the television screen could point to areas of blame for slowness of city, state, and federal response. The mayor and others diagnosed the problem as racial discrimination on the part of our President. Some even accused President Bush of breaching the levees to inundate the black community. Many were alert enough to evacuate with their firearms but not with a little food and water. Mothers took their infants but no food or them. Not real smart, but blame FEMA for it. The media gave biased coverage, showing the worst of scenes over and over and over to promote their anti-administration agenda, and politicians joined the chorus. So far, of the 25,000 body bags some predicted a need for, 24,000 are unused, for which we are thankful. And what of that tremendous number who would die of that terribly toxic water? Most all of us sitting in comfort before our televisions could smugly point to the stupidity, ineptitude, and evil motives of those who bore the responsibility of action in such a tragic disaster for which no man or group could have made adequate preparation. All who reacted with such evil spirit in blaming others, though not looting Wal-Mart for food, water, clothes, cameras, TVs, and general merchandise, were looting for political or personal gain. In this time of catastrophe, the focus was on the depravity of man. And, oh yes, your finger may be pointing at me as the chief finger-pointer!

Catastrophes reveal the nobility and depravity of man. What the media did not focus on was all the good, unselfish, heroic deeds done that show how people help one another even at great personal cost. While others screamed about lack of government help, individuals, churches, and charitable groups met needs. Some willingly endured thirst and hunger while others in more dangerous situations were being rescued.

But this is not really the topic for this article! Who is to blame for Katrina and Rita? Some are sure it was God punishing the wicked city of New Orleans. No doubt, there was long prevalent wickedness there. I recall, more than fifty years ago, being on Canal Street at closing time. I was amazed that merchants locked strong doors then additionally closed iron gates and padlocked them as derelicts wandered about. Several of us started sight-seeing down Bourbon Street in early evening, only to retreat to our hotel due to the threatening atmosphere there. But New Orleans has not cornered the market of evil. And if some kids are misbehaving in the classroom, why punish the whole class and those in adjoining rooms also? Why make the good people there suffer? Why punish Gulfport and Biloxi? If they, too, were evil, does that mean that Pensacola and Corpus Christi

were spared because they are free of vice? Our quick judgment against others may be a form of self-congratulation for being spared due to our righteousness.

I lived in Lake Charles and New Iberia for over thirteen years and in Beaumont and near Port Arthur for more than four years. From general observation, I can testify that there were as many God fearing people in those areas as in the other places where I have lived.

You and I are to blame for those hurricanes, the “global warming” people can assert with smugness. We are guilty because we drive automobiles, use products whose manufacture create pollution, and raise cattle that expel polluting gases. No complaint is raised about the great part of earth’s population that burns wood or coal for cooking and heating, that volcanoes have been belching inestimable amounts of pollution since the beginning of creation, and that forest and prairie fires started by lightning have always been around. Weather cycles are not new.

Who is to blame for the hurricanes? God is! Well, maybe we will not use the word “blame” but the Creator of all things allows them even as he allows evil. In his creation, he made most things to expand with heat and shrink when cold. That expansion and contraction causes circulation of water, vapor, and air. This brings seasons making the earth habitable and productive but it can also bring destruction. It is to our advantage to choose to live where these factors generally work more favorably and to be cautiously prepared for unpredictable changes.

You may point out that such an explanation is deistic leaving any current activity of God out of the picture. We are reminded, *“Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? And not one of them will fall to the ground without your Father’s will. But even the hairs of your head are numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows”* (Matt. 10:29-31). There are many passages that give us assurance that God watches over us with love and provision. Also we read, *“My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor lose courage when you are punished by him. For the Lord disciplines him whom he loves and chastises every son whom he receives”* (Read Heb. 12:3-11).

From these two passages which epitomize God’s care and his discipline, what conclusion may we reach? There are no simplistic answers. If it is the will of God to punish New Orleans for sin, then we are seeking to diminish that punishment by sending relief. By our good intentions we work against his will in relieving the effectiveness of his disciplinary action. If God is chastising the people of Sudan by drought and starvation, are we to send food when God could send them food, rain, and prosperous crops? If it is the will of God for your wife, mother, or grandmother to fall and break her hip, must you let her lie there unattended so as not to be working against God’s will?

That sounds fanatically radical, does it not? Consider this. The people of India are both intelligent and compassionate, but they have let poor, diseased people die on the street unattended. How could that be? They do not resist what they consider the work of deity in the lives of those miserable people. Mother Theresa, from a Christian perspective, saw it as an opportunity, not to thwart the will of God, but to do the will of God. So, I

propose no simplistic answer. God's interaction in our daily lives is interpreted subjectively rather than factually.

If God is at work and directing each detail of our lives, then there is no such thing as chance. If you were to buy a lottery ticket, it would not be a chance to win the money for God would be choosing the numbers. Your collision on the highway would not be an accident but a planned work of God even as your avoidance of a collision would be a work of God.

Being of less subjective mind and less imaginative, I have since youth been fascinated with Solomon's observation: *"Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all. For no one can anticipate the time of disaster. Like fish taken in a cruel net, and like birds caught in a snare, so mortals are snared at a time of calamity, when it suddenly falls upon them"* (Ecc. 9:11-12). That would have been a good setting for Solomon to have declared that all of those things were controlled by a sovereign God, but he did not.

In dealing with individuals we can gain from the record, *"As he passed by, he saw a man blind from birth. And his disciples asked him, 'Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?' Jesus answered, 'It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be made manifest in him'"* (John 9:1-30). The work of God was then revealed when Jesus gave him sight.

In dealing with groups we can gain from this record, *"There were some present at that very time who told him of the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And he answered them, 'Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other Galileans, because they suffered thus? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen upon whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse offenders than all others who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, No; but unless you repent you will likewise perish'"* (Luke 13:1-5).

Neither the individual nor the group suffered as punishment for their sins in those tragic situations, but Jesus called for repentance from each listener in order to escape the punishment which God would visit upon on their unbelieving nation which was to be destroyed in great tribulation about forty years later. God's presence in vengeance was made known in many specific instances while he was dealing with his chosen nation, Israel. He was partial to Israel until their rejection of Christ. Destroying that nation, he no longer judges nations but individuals. *"For he will render to every man according to his works: to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life; but for those who are factious and do not obey the truth, but obey wickedness, there will be wrath and fury. .. For God shows no partiality"* (Rom. 2:6-11).

As much as we might love our country, it is not replacing or duplicating Israel as God's favored country. Neither is the spiritual kingdom of the saved ones promised the same

earthly blessings as those bestowed on the nation of Israel through their history. It is wise to discern whether specific teachings of Jesus to Jews applied to them as a fleshly nation or to us as a spiritual kingdom. It is in that historical setting that Paul concluded, *“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose”* (Rom. 8:28 NIV). God had worked through a nation to bring Christ but was beginning his final disciplining of his son, Israel, as was mentioned above.

In failure to make proper distinction, many of our teachings and songs attempt to apply literal promises to fleshly Israel to us today. Look at the Psalms and consider how many of them were David’s expressions of thanksgiving for God’s giving them victory over their national enemies or were cries of distress due to the oppression of enemy countries about them. Even *“You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies”* in our favored Psalm 23 is about political enemies.

In all our finger-pointing judgments, Jesus would have us to cut each other some slack. *“But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust”* (Matt. 5:44-45). If God is so gracious and patient with all, who are we to be otherwise? Let him that is without sin cast the first stone! Our great Constitution permits us to work for reform instead of being complacent toward evils but bitter castigations are fighting fire with fire.

A thorough and extensive study of this subject, I feel sure, will not answer all your questions about the dealing of God in our lives. You may believe that God is working in every moment and movement, or you may believe in random chance with God’s intervention at special times. Whatever your belief, you give God credit in your life without congratulating yourself for being blessed because of your own goodness. That is what matters. As I affirmed in FR 281, the love of God is not revealed in nature but it was revealed in Christ. []

(Cecil Hook: October 2005)

Talkin’ Texas: Even by modern means, over two million people evacuated the Houston area yet it was not done in one night and without problems. In the exodus from Egypt more people than that, along with their cattle, were reported to have evacuated overnight. That poses some logistical problems for us, does it not?

“I believe; help my unbelief!” (Mark 9:24).