
KEYNOTE

THE EVENTS OF 9/11 – AN ACT OF GOD’S JUDGMENT?

by Douglas Sukhia

The terrible events of 9/11 have led many to ask the question, “Why did this happen?” Specifically, was it simply the evil acts of people full of deep hate for America, or was it also an act of God’s judgment on America for its many sins—a “wake up call” warning us to repent?

Jerry Falwell raised this issue on the “700 Club” on September 13, 2001. Falwell stated his belief that God had lifted His curtain of protection allowing this to happen because of His displeasure with the evil in our nation. He said, “The abortionists have got to bear some burden for this because God will not be mocked. And when we destroy 40 million little innocent babies, we make God mad. I really believe that the pagans, the abortionists, the feminists and the gays and lesbians who are actively trying to make that an alternative lifestyle, the ACLU, people for the American Way . . . all of them who have tried to secularize America . . . I point the finger in their face and say, ‘You helped this happen.’”

There was an immediate firestorm of criticism from the left. Many compared Falwell to the Taliban, and Islamic “fundamentalists.” Most critics made the point that “their” God was not a God of vengeance or judgment but instead a God of love. Their God would never allow, much less instigate, such a terrible thing as 9/11 just to send a message to America. Of course, most of the critics see nothing wrong with the behaviors denounced by Falwell and Pat Robertson. Their God is

tolerant, like them, not intolerant like Falwell. In addition to secular media critics many Christians considered the remarks unwise, ill timed and somewhat misguided. Subsequently Falwell apologized admitting the timing was bad and that the terrorists were primarily to blame for the events. He subsequently included typical, “common” sins in his revised sin list but he did not reject the idea of God’s temporal judgment.

A Doonesbury cartoon of October 6, 2001, sums up the attitude of most in the liberal media towards the idea of God’s judgments in connection with the 9/11 events. Clergyman Scot assures Boopsie that “God doesn’t condone suffering and loss any more than He causes it, as Falwell claimed.” In Trudeau’s opinion, Falwell was wrong. God doesn’t cause or condone suffering. In typical post-modern fashion, Clergyman Scot adds that God (who is as tolerant as Trudeau) will have no problem with Boopsie including the New Age nostrums of Oprah Winfrey and lots of specialty desserts in her circle of cosmic comfort.

As Christians, we have the obligation to carefully examine and test all ideas and explanations with the standard of Scripture (Isa. 8:20). I trust the following will help you think biblically as you ponder these events and share your views with others.

THE BIBLICAL CONCEPT OF TEMPORAL JUDGMENT

There is general acceptance among theists of all stripes that God will hold people accountable for their actions in this

life in some great day of ultimate judgment. But what about here and now as people live out their lives on earth? This concept of “temporal judgment,” i.e., judgments of God that befall people for their sins here at the present time, is what we are examining. In order for God to do this as a personal act of retribution for sin He, by necessity, must be sovereign over events as they unfold in this world. There is no sense in debating whether this is an act of God’s judgment if you do not believe God has control over events in history.

The Sovereignty of God

Not everyone who professes to be a Biblical Christian believes that God is absolutely sovereign. An anonymous Internet article entitled “Where was God?” presents the typical thinking of many Christians that God did what He could to minimize the damage of 9/11, but His control of these kind of things is very limited. According to the article “He was trying to discourage people from taking those flights.” The writer notes He was moderately successful because “Those four flights together held over 1,000 passengers but there were only 266 aboard.” The writer states further “He was busy trying to create obstacles for employees at the World Trade Center.” Again, He was moderately successful keeping 3,000 away from the building by traffic delays, etc. The premise of the writer is that God can only “try” to do what He would like to do. His hands are tied by the free will of man. He can only do so much to save people from disasters and evil. The world is out of His control. He’s a tear-filled observer of a world gone awry. He makes feeble, often fruitless, attempts to change

people’s minds with some “moral” persuasion but that’s all He can do. He’s just up against too much opposition, i.e., evil people, the Devil, fate, circumstances, etc.

The Bible portrays God differently. God is a personal being with plans and purposes. However, unlike us and other moral creatures, can always accomplish what He plans because He is infinite in His knowledge and power. The *Westminster Confession of Faith* summarizes the Biblical data on God’s sovereignty with these words: “God from all eternity did by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass” (*WCF* 3:1).

Nebuchadnezzar, the King of Babylon, describes the “King of Kings” in these words: “His dominion is an eternal dominion; his Kingdom endures from generation to generation. . . . He does as he pleases with the powers of heaven and the peoples of the earth” (Dan. 4:34-35). He’s the God who “works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Eph. 1:11). Therefore, all events are in some sense guided by His sovereign hand. That includes the positive and the negative. “I form the light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity, I the Lord, do all these things” (Isa. 45:7; cf. Lam. 3:38; 1 Sam. 2:6-8; Job 12:13ff; Dt. 32:39; Ps. 135:6; etc.).

Of course, if God is accomplishing His will in this world, He must have some kind of control over “free moral agents.” If His sovereignty only extends to the weather, plants and animals and not to people or angels then He’s not in control of much at all. The course of history is determined by the choices of men. If God can’t accomplish His will, in spite of the free moral choices of people, He can’t ac-

comply with His will. Then He's just a "feckless wonder" like the wizard of Oz. But the Scripture assures us that He does indeed have control over the decisions and actions of men. As the *Westminster Confession* states: "God, the great Creator of all things, doth uphold, direct, dispose and govern all creatures, actions, and things, from the greatest even to the least, by his most wise and holy providence, according to his infallible foreknowledge and the free and immutable counsel of his own will" (*WCF* 5:1).

This is clearly supported in Proverbs: "The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord." "A man's heart plans his way, but the LORD directs his steps." "There are many plans in a man's heart, nevertheless the LORD'S counsel—that will stand." "The king's heart is in the hand of the LORD; like the rivers of water, he turns it wherever He wishes."¹

But how could he have such sovereign control and still hold people accountable? This is a philosophical objection that Paul recognizes in Romans while presenting the doctrine of election. "You will say to me then, 'Why does He still find fault? For who has resisted His will?'" Paul bluntly rejects the objection with "But indeed, O man, who are you to reply against God?" (Rom. 9:13-20). In other words, God does what He sees fit with His creatures. He is perfectly just in all He does even if we can't figure out exactly how! The bottom line is God is sovereign yet not the author of sin and He holds accountable those who do sin (e.g., the murderers of Christ [Acts 2:23,38]), the destroyers of Jerusalem [Isa. 10:5-7]).

So God does control all things in order to accomplish His good pleasure in this world. He is powerful enough to do what He deems best and wise enough to

do it without "doing violence to the will of His creatures" (*WCF* 3:1) in the process.

Death and the Curse

Having established the concept of God's sovereignty we now get back to the original question, "Were the 9/11 events an act of God's judgment?" There is a sense in which every human death, violent or peaceful, timely or premature, is associated with God's judgment on human sin. Death is the result of sin; it is not "natural" to man. "The wages of sin is death," "The soul who sins shall die."² When man sinned not only was he then subject to death but God brought a curse on the earth (Gen. 3:14f). The entire world was "subjected to futility" as a result of man's sin (Rom. 8:20-23). The fall of man led to the fall of the creation. Therefore every pain, disease, problem, hassle, fear and disaster is, in a sense, connected to God's wrath for human sin. We are all "born to trouble, as the sparks fly upward" because we are born with a sinful nature in a "sin-cursed" world.³ So all of our trouble, affliction and pain is indirectly related to sin. Every day approximately 20,000 people die. Each death is the result of God's judgment on human sin.

Specific Judgment for particular sin

In addition to the general judgment of death for human rebellion there are many cases in Scripture where God brings temporal judgments on people for specific sin.

Individuals.—Cain faced the judgment of God (consisting of banishment

and undefined trouble, Gen. 4:11-14) for murdering Abel. Ham's disrespect for Noah led to Canaan being cursed by God (Gen. 9:22-25). All through redemptive history we see similar cases of individuals receiving punitive judgment from God for their sin. Miriam is smitten with leprosy for rebelling against Moses (Num. 12:10); Nadab and Abihu were consumed by "fire from the Lord" for desecrating the Levitical stipulations, etc. (cf. King Saul, 1 Sam. 13:13-14; Gehazi 2 Kings 5:27, *et al.*). In all these cases it is clear that God brought temporal punishment on the individual for their sin.

The New Testament also records cases of God's judgment of individuals for sin. Ananias and Saphira both died on the spot for lying to God (Acts 5:3-10). Jesus warns a man he just healed to "sin nor more, lest a worse thing come upon you" (Jn. 5:14). Paul tells the Corinthians that God has brought sickness and death on some of their number for misusing and abusing one another and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor. 11:27-34). James suggests that at times people are sick as a result of their sins (Ja. 5:15). It is clear from the Biblical data that God does bring judgment on individuals for their sin.

Groups.—There are also several cases of major cataclysmic judgments on groups of people recorded in Scripture. The most severe was the universal flood of Genesis (Gen. 6:5-7). God also destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah for their sins (1 Pet. 2:6). The "ites" of Canaan, who were dispossessed and mostly destroyed by the Israelites, were being judged by God for their sins, according to Genesis 15:16.

The prophets carefully catalogued the sins that led to the destruction of both

the Northern and Southern Kingdoms. Idolatry, religious formalism, sacrificing of children, drunkenness, oppression, etc., are the sins that brought God's wrath on the nations of Judah and Israel (Isa. 1:4; Jer. 11:18; Ezek. 22, etc.). God, not fate or luck, brings down these judgments. "Behold, I will surely bring calamity on them, which they will not be able to escape." "For the LORD of hosts, who planted you, has pronounced doom against you for the evil of the house of Israel and the house of Judah, which they have done against themselves to provoke Me to anger in offering incense to Baal" (Jer. 11:11, 17).⁴ Notice also that they were judgments from God even though He used wicked people to accomplish them (Isa. 10:15).

The God of the Bible is described as a God of "wrath" over 200 times and as a God of "vengeance" over 35 times.⁵ Since we believe His character has not changed, we should conclude that the 9/11 event, could indeed be a result of God's judgment.

CAUTION AGAINST RUSHING TO A CONCLUSION

Although there are negative events that are clearly identified as acts of God's judgment in Scripture, there are times when "bad things" happen as part of the general consequences of the fall and not due to specific sins. The book of Job, which many consider the oldest book in the Bible, deals with theodicy, i.e., the justice of God's actions in the world. The book shows that Job's counselors were wrong in their opinion that Job must have sinned to have experienced such a terrible disaster—i.e., the sudden loss of loved ones, property and health (Job 8:20; 18:5ff; 22:4-11, 21-25, etc.). Jesus corrected

that same kind of thinking on the part of the disciples in John 9:1-2. He tells them the man was not blind as a result of his sins. Jesus also makes clear that the tragic deaths of several in a tower collapse and others at the hands of Pilate were not because the victims were especially evil (Luke 13:1-5). Paul and the faithful saints of Hebrews 11 experienced unjust, cruel treatment due to their obedience and faithfulness to God not because they were being judged by God.⁶ God often lets the wicked prosper in this world (Ps. 73:2-12; Job 24) and He assigns special trouble to the righteous (2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 2:19-20). Without special revelation from God I think it is presumptuous to dogmatically conclude that any temporal tragedy is a judgment of God for specific sins. We should humbly admit with the “wise man” that “No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun” (Eccl. 8:17; Dt. 29:29).

CONCLUSION

However, in the light of the sovereignty of God, catastrophic events like 9/11 should be cause for personal and corporate soul searching. Jesus used the tower tragedy as a way to challenge people to search their hearts: “unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Lk. 13:5). James allows for the distinct possibility that life-threatening illnesses might be due to sin (Ja. 5:15). Should we not entertain the possibility that this disaster has been brought as a judgment of God for our collective sins as a nation? Abraham Lincoln concluded that the Civil War was God’s judgment on slavery and because America had “forgotten God” and was “too proud to pray to the God who made us.”

Although we are not a theocratic, covenant people like Israel, we are still

subject to the providence of God. Although special revelation has ceased, “he who is spiritual judges all things” (1 Cor. 2:15). We can still come to conclusions based on Scripture. Is there a connection between sexual immorality and sexually transmitted diseases? Is there a connection between smoking and premature death, or drug and alcohol abuse and the slavery of addiction?

Although no one can infallibly declare the events of 9/11 as an act of God’s judgment for the sins of our nation, in light of the gross immorality and growing disregard for God that we are collectively guilty of, it seems wise to me to give serious thought to the possibility.

Whether or not you conclude this event is an act of God’s judgment, the bottom line is, “It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). Jesus said, “Repent or perish” (Lk. 13:3). The evil we see in this world and in ourselves should lead us to turn from sin to the only Savior. We must “flee the wrath to come” by coming to Him as our Savior and Lord (1 Thess. 1:10; Mt. 11:28). He’s the only one who can rescue us from this fast collapsing evil world (Acts 16:31; Mk. 16:15-16). 

¹ Pro. 16:1,9; 19:21; 21:1. See also Gen. 50:20; 2 Sam. 24:1; Job 5:12-13; Isa. 19:13-14; Jer. 10:23; Acts 4:27-28.

² Rom. 6:23; Ezek. 18:4; Rom. 5:12; etc.

³ Job 5:7; Ps. 51:5; Jer. 17:9.

⁴ Jer. 15:2; Zeph. 1:17; Ezek. 21:2-5, etc.

⁵ Dt. 32:39-41; Ps. 76:6-10; Ezk. 7:8-9; Mic. 5:15 (also see the judgments of the “end times”: Mt. 24:27ff; 1 Pet. 3:7; Rev. 6:17ff).

⁶ 2 Cor. 11:21-29; Heb. 11:35-40.

EXEGESIS

WHAT DOES THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT MEAN?

by John A. Battle, Jr.

Whenever a war is on the horizon, people opposed to it invoke the sixth commandment, usually in the words of the King James Version, “Thou shalt not kill.” We see this commandment printed on picket signs and posters when a guilty murderer is scheduled to be executed. Invariably the news reporters will interview a church leader who claims that taking the life of a criminal is evil; it puts us on his level. Life is sacred, they say, and we have no right to take it, even in criminal justice. Pacifist groups, such as the Quakers, have for centuries endured scorn and abuse because they refused to fight in support of their country.

As Christians we must ask ourselves, do we or does the government have the right to take human life? We find our moral guidance in Scripture. We are to value human life. The Lord hates “hands that shed innocent blood.”¹ God holds us all responsible to respect and protect the lives of others. “From each man I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man.”²

A central pillar in the biblical teaching is the sixth commandment. We need to see exactly what this commandment means, as it is used in the Bible.

MEANING OF THE WORDS FOR “KILL”

First we should notice the exact words written in the original Hebrew and

Greek of the Bible, translated as “kill” in the sixth commandment. There are many Hebrew and Greek words translated “kill,” each with its own emphasis.³ The Old Testament records the sixth commandment twice, and the New Testament five times.⁴ In each case only a single word is used. In the Hebrew Old Testament it is *רָצַח* *ratsach*, and in the Greek New Testament it is *φονεύω* *phoneuo*. Forms of *ratsach* are used more than forty times in the Old Testament, and forms of *phoneuo* are used more than twenty times in the New Testament; so their meanings can be well established.

In the Bible these two terms have a very limited range of meaning. First, these words are never used to describe the killing of animals or plants. Several words are used to describe the killing of plants or animals in hunting, in warfare, for food, or for sacrifice—but the words in the commandment never are found in those contexts. The sixth commandment has nothing to do with killing animals or plants. It deals with the killing of human beings only.

Second, these terms never have God as their subject. The Bible tells how God struck many people with death. He killed individuals;⁵ he commanded the Israelites to annihilate whole populations of people in Canaan;⁶ and he himself wiped out nearly all the human race in the great flood.⁷ Yet, with all this killing at his hands, the Bible never uses this word to describe what God has done. Of course, God cannot be guilty of breaking his own commands; they are given to us as his creatures. God’s law comes from him to us; he is under no law; there is no higher authority than God himself. Because of the sin of Adam we all are subject to God’s

condemnation of death.⁸ God has determined that we all will die (unless we are alive when Christ returns); he has also determined how and when each of us will die. We have no right to determine the rules by which we live and by which we let others live. We are obligated to obey God's law as revealed in his Word. Not all killing is morally evil; God's isn't.

Third, the words used in the sixth commandment never are used in the Bible to describe killing in warfare or the killing of a guilty criminal. The Scriptures record many wars, with large-scale killing, yet these terms are never found in those passages. Similarly, there are many commands to execute justice, including capital punishment, and many examples are recorded; yet, again, these words are not used to describe this type of killing. The words of the sixth commandment do not forbid either just warfare or impartial justice.

Since all these types of killing are not included in the terms used in the sixth commandment, the question arises, "Then exactly what does this commandment forbid?" First, careful examination of every usage of these two words in the Bible shows killing by a private individual, not the government as such; in the few instances when the crime is committed by a king or other official, it is done for private gain or advantage, not to benefit the state. Second, biblical usage reveals that the commandment is speaking about the killing of human beings for one of four reasons: (1) hatred, (2) greed, (3) carelessness, and (4) revenge. Killing for the first two reasons, hatred or greed, is considered murder, a great crime meriting death. Killing for the third reason, carelessness, is also a crime, but is not as serious, and results in the equivalent of imprisonment. Killing for the fourth reason, revenge, is actually approved under certain condi-

tions. However, if the avenger were to kill someone without observing the regulations in the law, then that was considered an act of murder also. The Scripture shows that killing for revenge now has become an important responsibility of the state. These four types of killing are what the sixth commandment envisions. Each of these will be examined below.

Since the Hebrew and Greek words used in the sixth commandment have this particular meaning, it is better to translate the sixth commandment in a more exact way. This will avoid confusion. It traditionally has been translated into English as "You shall (or thou shalt) not kill." But many modern versions translate it "You shall not murder."⁹ This latter translation seems better, as it clarifies the force of the Hebrew and Greek words.

KILLING FOR HATRED OR GREED

The worst motives for killing are hatred and greed. Both motives led to murder. It might require premeditation, and lead to first-degree murder; if the intent is sudden, at the time of the killing, then we call it second-degree murder. The Bible does not distinguish between these two degrees in the passages dealing with murder. In Numbers 35:20-21 the Lord set down for the Israelites the worst cases of murder:

"If anyone with malice aforethought shoves another or throws something at him intentionally so that he dies or if in hostility he hits him with his fist so that he dies, that person shall be put to death; he is a murderer."

Even kings were not exempt from this rule. King Ahab through greed arrested

and executed Naboth, who owned a coveted vineyard. The Lord told the prophet Elijah that Ahab was a murderer who would die for his crime.¹⁰ When King David arranged to have Uriah the Hittite killed in action on the battlefield, so that David could cover his guilt of adultery with Bathsheba, the prophet Nathan declared that David was a murderer, who would suffer punishment from God.¹¹ While David fought many wars and killed many people, the Bible never condemns him, except in this one case: “For David had done what was right in the eyes of the LORD and had not failed to keep any of the LORD’s commands all the days of his life—except in the case of Uriah the Hittite.”¹²

By the Bible’s standards, to kill an innocent person because of hatred or greed is the worst form of killing, murder, and deserves the most severe penalty. Jesus referred to these same motives when he taught that hating someone or considering him of no value was a way in which we could break this commandment.¹³

ACCIDENTAL KILLING

In a few examples the terms of the sixth commandment are used to describe killing someone accidentally.¹⁴ This usually is called manslaughter. If we are careless, thoughtless, or negligent, and someone dies as a result, we have broken the sixth commandment. We have caused an innocent person to die, and are guilty. However, the Bible distinguishes this type of killing from that done because of hatred or greed. In this case it was unintentional, without malice or wish to harm. If the court found a person guilty of manslaughter, it ordered him to remain in one

of six designated cities for a period of time, ending with the death of the ruling high priest.¹⁵ This might be compared to a kind of house arrest or internal exile. Of course, this penalty was much less severe than the death penalty given for premeditated murder.

Because God values human life, he commands us to protect our own lives and the lives of others.¹⁶ For example, he commanded, “When you build a new house, make a parapet around your roof so that you may not bring the guilt of bloodshed on your house if someone falls from the roof.”¹⁷ We should keep this commandment in mind when we drive our cars or engage in any activity that may bring danger or ourselves or others.

SELF DEFENSE AND NATIONAL DEFENSE

Nowhere does the Bible forbid necessary killing in self-defense. Rather, such action is expected. For example, if a homeowner killed a thief breaking into his house in the daytime, when such a measure of self-defense was obviously unnecessary, the homeowner was considered guilty of murder. But if he killed the thief breaking into his house at night, when it could not be seen whether the thief had any intention to harm the occupants, the homeowner was innocent.¹⁸ Just before his arrest Jesus made sure that his disciples had swords to defend themselves if necessary.¹⁹

On a wider scale, self-defense may require several people, or even an entire community or nation, to arm themselves and to defend themselves, by killing their attackers. When Nehemiah, the governor of Jerusalem, saw the city threatened by enemies, he armed the citizens with swords, spears, and bows, and exhorted

the people: “Don’t be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes.”²⁰ Just as Nehemiah, people who believe and respect the Bible have for centuries fought alongside of those who were defending their lives and liberties against unscrupulous aggressors. For self-defense the Bible approves one person’s taking the life of another, or one nation’s going to war against another.

CAPITAL PUNISHMENT

Many Protestants have been happy that members of the Roman Catholic Church support our campaign to end abortion. On that point we are agreed. However, these same Roman Catholics often oppose capital punishment. They say that we are forbidden to take any human life—whether an innocent baby or a condemned murderer. Is there a difference? What is to be done to murderers? This issue began early in the Bible. When God brought Noah and his family out of the ark after the great flood, God told him,

“For your lifeblood I will surely demand an accounting. I will demand an accounting from every animal. And from each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”²¹

In the earliest days the task of executing this punishment was assumed by a relative of the victim, called the “avenger of blood.” He tracked down and killed the murderer. God approved of this ar-

range, provided that the legal assembly found the suspect guilty of premeditated murder. If found guilty, the court was to “hand him over to the avenger of blood to die.”²² The trial was to be fair, requiring at least two witnesses, whose testimony could be cross-examined.²³ The avenger of blood also was the designated enforcer of the required exile for cases of manslaughter; if the guilty person left the city too soon, the avenger was permitted to take his life.²⁴

As Israel advanced into a complex nation, the duty of executing capital offenders fell to the king, rather than to the avenger of blood. God commanded the various kings to judge righteously and to execute judgment on offenders, according to the laws prescribed in the Old Testament.²⁵ The various executions of criminals ordered by David and by Solomon illustrate this part of the king’s office.

This responsibility of the state did not change with the New Testament dispensation. When Jesus was asked what powers to believers should recognize, he replied, “Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”²⁶ Caesar’s authority, which Jesus confirmed, included the power of capital punishment. Of course, Jesus expected the rulers to exercise their authority with justice in God’s sight.²⁷

Likewise, the apostle Paul upheld the right of rulers to use the sword to avenge the innocent and execute the guilty:

“Rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. For he is God’s servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing.

He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer."²⁸

Notice that the magistrate, Paul says, "bears the sword," that is, he exercises capital punishment against those who "do wrong." Especially significant is the term translated here "an agent of wrath" acting as God's servant. The designation "agent of wrath" (KJV "a revenger to execute wrath") recalls the office of the avenger of blood in the Old Testament.²⁹ When Paul himself stood before Festus, Procurator of Judea, faced with grave charges, he said, "If I am guilty of doing anything deserving death, I do not refuse to die. But if the charges brought against me by these Jews are not true, no one has the right to hand me over to them. I appeal to Caesar!"³⁰ He trusted that justice would prevail and he would be acquitted; but he upheld the death penalty for crimes deserving it.

PACIFIST ARGUMENTS

How do we understand the command of Jesus to turn the other cheek? Are we not to do good to our enemies?³¹ The Christian must answer that these commands relate to personal insult and injury, not to attack or murder. Christians should not return insult for insult, slap for slap, but should demonstrate mercy and forbearance. Paul said it was better even to be defrauded than to bring disrepute to the Savior's name.³² These exalted teachings, if uniformly adopted, would transform all of society, and they should mark the Christian. But they were never intended to be principles of civil government in dealing with aggression or criminals. God has entrusted the state with

the responsibility as his servant to maintain the civil order and punish evildoers.

How can the Bible approve of war and capital punishment, and still claim to honor human life? The answer lies in the justice of God. God himself has established the value of the human being by making him in his image. All people—Christian and non-Christian alike—bear that image.³³ Actually, by executing the murderer for his crime, we recognize the value and dignity of even that criminal; his life is of such value that it alone can suffice to satisfy God's justice, as well as human justice. Human life is sacred, and should be in God's hands alone. When someone usurps God's authority and kills an innocent person, God's justice is offended, and the criminal's life is forfeited. Only the guilty person's death can satisfy God's justice.³⁴ In this dispensation the state has this responsibility. By himself executing the guilty, man is to learn with what wrath God views murder, and with what zeal we should protect the innocent.

THE VALUE OF LIFE

God holds human life as sacred, but not as absolute. Other things are even higher, as truth, liberty, justice, faith, and love. Sometimes we must sacrifice even our lives to defend and promote a higher good. The famous American patriot Nathan Hale said, "I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country." Jesus said, "Whoever loses his life for me will save it."³⁵

For the Christian "to live is Christ, and to die is gain."³⁶ He fears not physical death, but rather, spiritual death.³⁷ It is more important for us to obey God, even if that means killing others, or risking or

losing our own lives. When we are called upon to carry out the legitimate duties of our country or state to defend ourselves, our families, and our fellow citizens, and to punish evildoers, we must obey God. By so doing we will be honoring human life, and will be obeying the sixth commandment. ☞

¹ Pro. 6:17.

² Gen. 9:5.

³ These words can be conveniently found in Robert Young's *Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, under the word "kill." This reference shows the various Greek and Hebrew words translated by "kill" in the KJV. Hebrew words: גָּרַגַּר *harag*, חָבַח *zabach*, חָלַל *chalal*, חָבַח *tabach*, various stems of מָוַת *muth*, נָכַח *nakah*, נָקַף *naqaph*, נָקַט *qatal*, נָצַח *ratsach* (the word used in the commandment), שָׁחַת *shachat*; Greek words: ἀναιρέω *anaireo*, ἀποκτείνω *apokteino*, διαχειρίζομαι *diacheirizomai*, θύω *thuo*, σφάζω *sphazo*, φωνεύω *phoneuo* (the word used in the commandment).

⁴ Ex. 20:13; Dt. 5:17; Mt. 5:21; Mk. 10:19; Lk. 18:20; Rom. 13:9; Ja. 12:11

⁵ As Er and Onan in Gen. 38:7-10, and King Herod Agrippa I in Acts 12:23.

⁶ E.g., Dt. 7:1-2; 20:16-17.

⁷ Gen. 6:7, 13, 17; 7:4, 21-23; 8:21.

⁸ Gen. 2:17; Rom. 5:14.

⁹ "Kill" is used in the KJV, ASV, RSV; "murder" is used in the NASB, NIV, NRSV, NKJV, NLT.

¹⁰ 1 Kings 21:19.

¹¹ 2 Sam. 11-12.

¹² 1 Kings 15:5.

¹³ Mt. 5:21-22.

¹⁴ Num. 35:11; Dt. 19:3.

¹⁵ Num. 35:22-25.

¹⁶ Cf. *WSC* 68.

¹⁷ Dt. 22:8.

¹⁸ Ex. 22:2-3.

¹⁹ Lk. 22:36-38.

²⁰ Neh. 4:14.

²¹ Gen. 9:5-6.

²² Dt. 19:10-13.

²³ Dt. 19:15-19.

²⁴ Num. 35:26-27.

²⁵ 1 Sam. 12:13-15.

²⁶ Mk. 12:17.

²⁷ Jn. 19:11.

²⁸ Rom. 13:3-4.

²⁹ The expression in Greek is ἐκδικος εἰς ὀργήν *ekdikos eis orgen*, literally, "one who executes retribution unto wrath."

³⁰ Acts 25:11.

³¹ Mt. 5:39, 43-45; Lk. 6:27-31, 35.

³² 1 Cor. 6:7.

³³ Gen. 1:26-27; 9:6; 1 Cor. 11:7; Ja. 3:9.

³⁴ Gen. 9:5-6; Num. 35:33; compare the blood of Abel (Gen. 4:10; Heb. 12:24).

³⁵ Lk. 9:24.

³⁶ Php. 1:21.

³⁷ Mt. 10:28; Mk. 8:36.

“The right of self-defense belongs to nations as well as to individuals. Nations are bound to protect the lives and property of their citizens. If these are assailed by force, force may be rightfully used in their protection.”

--Charles Hodge
(*Systematic Theology* 3/365)

**WHAT IS THE GOVERNMENT
SUPPOSED TO DO?
AN EXEGESIS OF ROMANS 13:1-4**
by Tito de S. Lyro

One of the many questions that has come to the forefront of people's minds after the September 11th attacks concerns the role of government in society. What is the government supposed to do? This question was vividly present in the apostle Paul's mind as he writes to the church in Rome. Of course, Paul addresses this issue in other places. In 1 Timothy 2:1-2 he says, "Therefore I exhort first of all that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men, for kings and all who are in authority, that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence."¹ In Titus 3:1 he says, "Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work." However, no passage is more thorough in declaring the role of government under the New Covenant than Romans 13:1-7. Due to the allotted space for this article, it will concentrate on verses 1-4.

The first question that arises from this passage is the identity of the authorities in verse 1. Are they earthly or heavenly authorities? Some say that these are angelic authorities because of Paul's use of the word ἐξουσίαις (authorities) in different places.

Some say that these are angelic authority because of Paul's use of the word ἐξουσίαις in different places.²

1. ἐξουσίαις referring to good angelic beings

Ephesians 3:10 – to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church

to the principalities and **powers** in the heavenly *places*,

2. ἐξουσίαις referring to fallen angelic beings

Ephesians 6:12 – For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against **powers**, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual *hosts* of wickedness in the heavenly *places*.

Colossians 2:15 – Having disarmed principalities and **powers**, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

3. ἐξουσίαις referring to both good and fallen angelic beings

Colossians 1:16 – For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him.

The context surrounding verse 1 immediately discards the possibility of these authorities being demonic angels because it calls them "God's minister unto good."³ Regarding the authorities being good angelic beings, nowhere in the Bible we find that humans are to be in subjection to angels. As a matter of fact, good angels are "ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation."⁴ In addition, the word ὑπερχούσαις, translated "governing" in the New King James Version (NKJV), is often used in secular literature as a reference to the civil magistrate.⁵ Thus, Paul did direct the passage in consideration to the earthly (civil) authorities, rather than to angelic beings.

Paul outlines six basic duties of the civil magistrate. The first one is that he is

to govern. Ὑπερεχούσαις is translated as *governing* in the NKJV and mean “to have power over, be in authority over, be highly placed.”⁶ Thus, the first duty of the civil magistrate is to exercise this power that God has given him,⁷ which is accomplished by governing⁸ the people. The second duty is actually the practical outworking of the first. The civil magistrate is not to be a terror to good works.⁹ This is a difficult statement to understand. Paul is not writing about what the civil magistrate must do. Rather, he is writing about what the civil magistrate indeed does as evidenced by the use of the indicative mood. Common experience dictates that not all governments approve works that are biblically good. Of all the different views in the literature available to the writer of this article, the one summarized by the following quotation makes the most sense.

“Paul means that consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly, in one way or another, the power will praise the good work and punish the evil. . . . It may indeed intend to punish him, but its intended punishment will then turn out to be praise. It may take his life, but in so doing it will but confer a crown of glory.”¹⁰

Therefore, no matter what the intent of the civil magistrate is, his actions will ultimately reward good works.

Conversely, the civil magistrate is to be a terror to evil works.¹¹ Again, this statement goes against personal experience. From an earthly perspective, the civil government seems to reward evil. However, in the heavenly scheme of things the civil government will ultimately be a terror to evil works.¹² In a related thought, Paul says that the magistrate is to praise those that are practicing good works. The

idea here is not that the government is bound to reward good works, but to approve them. In other words the government is to recognize these good works and to publicize that recognition.

Paul also states that the civil magistrate is God’s minister. The word translated “minister” in verse 4 is also translated “servant” or “deacon” in other places. The civil magistrate is not supposed to be self-serving. Instead, he must be selfless much like Christ’s selfless government over His Church. Finally, the civil magistrate is to be the executor of God’s judgment and wrath. The popular understanding of this verse is that Paul is sanctioning the government’s exercising of capital punishment. While this understanding is true, there is more to the government’s execution of God’s wrath and judgment. The word φορεῖ, usually translated “bear” or “wield,” means “to wear.” The civil magistrate wears the sword as a symbol of the authority given to him by God to administer ALL forms of punishment, including capital punishment. 📖

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all quotations are from The Holy Bible, New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

² Karl Barth and Oscar Cullman among others.

³ Verse 4.

⁴ Hebrews 1:14

⁵ C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark), pp.659-660.

⁶ Walter Bauer, F.W. Gingrich, and Frederick Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*

(Chicago: The University of Chicago Press).

⁷ “For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God” (Rom. 13:1b).

⁸ Govern: “to make and administer public policy and affairs” (*The American Heritage Dictionary*).

⁹ Rom. 13:3-4a.

¹⁰ Cranfield, p. 665.

¹¹ Rom. 13:3, 4b.

¹² “If he does evil, it must needs punish him – though it may be by shameful honours or false security” (Cranfield, p. 665).

“When a king sits on his throne to judge, he winnows out all evil with his eyes.”

Proverbs 20:8

APPLICATION & PERSPECTIVE

IS THERE SUCH A THING AS A JUST WAR?

A CRITIQUE OF THE JUST WAR DEBATE

by Leonard Pine

In the quest to justify conflict through the course of man’s history, more than blood has been spilt. Countless gallons of ink have also been shed in the attempt to provide a rationale for going to war. Much of that ink, like the blood shed on the battlefield, has been shed in vain. I think it reasonable to say that in every account of war ever written or remembered, in every civilization of every epoch, reasons are given as to why the war was necessary (from the vantage point of the attacker) or unjust (from the standpoint of the attacked). The reasons may be given explicitly, or they be implicitly communicated through the manner in which the story is told.

The main question remains, though: is war ever truly *just*? Surely this question concerns every Christian, who must do all things “for the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Can I condone or participate in *any* act of war as a Christian?

I will not attempt to review the history of the just war doctrine itself as it has developed in the West through the centuries. There are plenty of other sources for that.¹ Nor will I systematically address the tenets of just warfare that are typically espoused.² My intent is to survey the ideas of men concerning war in general, and hold them under the light of reason and Scripture.

THE CONFUSION OF THE AGES

I think it helpful to survey opinions about war throughout history in more or less chronological order:

We have discovered war to be derived from causes which are also the causes of almost all the evils in States, private as well as public.³

We no longer take up the sword against any nation, nor do we learn the art of war anymore. Instead of following the traditions that made us “strangers to the covenant” (Eph. 2:12), we have become sons of peace through Jesus our founder.⁴

The Lord, in subsequently disarming Peter, disarmed every soldier. No uniform is lawful among us if it is designated for an unlawful action.⁵

Objection 3: “...War is contrary to peace. Therefore war is always sin.”
Reply to objection 3: Those who wage war justly aim at peace, and so they are not opposed to peace, except to the evil peace, which Our Lord “came not to send upon earth” (Mt. 10:34). Hence Augustine says (*Ep. ad Bonif. clxxxix*): “We do not seek peace in order to be at war, but we go to war that we may have peace. Be peaceful, therefore, in warring, so that you may vanquish those whom you war against, and bring them to the prosperity of peace.”⁶

Fight in the cause of Allah those who fight you but do not transgress limits ... And slay them wherever ye catch them. and turn them out from where they have turned you out; for persecution is worse than slaughter; but fight them not at the sacred Mosque unless they (first) fight you there; but if they fight you, slay them. Such is the reward of those who reject faith. But if they cease, Allah is oft-forgiving, Most Merciful. And

fight them on until there is no more persecution and the religion becomes Allah’s. But if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practice oppression.⁷

War is an ugly thing, but not the ugliest of things: the decayed and degraded state of moral and patriotic feeling which thinks nothing worth a war, is worse.... A war to protect other human beings against tyrannical injustice; a war to give victory to their own ideas of right and good, and which is their own war, carried on for an honest purpose by their own free choice is often the means of their regeneration.⁸

Anyone who has ever looked into the glazed eyes of a soldier dying on the battlefield will think hard before starting a war.⁹

We all know the dictum of Clausewitz, one of the most famous writers on the philosophy and history of war, which says: “War is a continuation of policy by other means.”¹⁰

We used to wonder where war lived, what it was that made it so vile. And now we realize that we know where it lives, that it is inside ourselves.¹¹

If a man would not put restrictions on himself, if he would not conform to the necessary limits that allow people to live together in peace, then he must not allowed to infringe on the liberties of those who wanted to live in peace. And that might lead to violence, even to killing. The trouble was that ... men had lived so long in a society that demanded order and conformity that they failed to under-

stand that there were societies where violence was the rule, and where there were men to whom only the fear of retribution placed a bridle on their license.¹²

The East did not seek to answer questions concerning the correct conditions for entering war and the correct conduct of war on the basis of the possibility of a “just war,” precisely because it did not hold to such a view. Its view of war ... was that it is a necessary evil. The peace ideal continued to be normative, and no theoretical efforts were made to make conduct of war into a positive norm.¹³

Although ... God is able to *use* something evil, like war, to do his will..., this does not give Christians license to *participate* in such evil.¹⁴

In the face of persisting evidence of war, and the countless grievous defeats of life, Christ, the conqueror of sin and death, urges us not to surrender. Peace is possible, peace is a duty, peace is a prime responsibility of everyone!¹⁵

There are many, many people in this country who see clearly that one killing of innocents will not be requited by another, that a radically different path is needed to assure our security and that of people in other parts of the world.¹⁶

THE DEBATE CONTINUES...

The conflicting opinions you have just read are a mere sampling of the plethora of ideas that are currently being bandied about in the public forum. They are, I believe, fairly representative of their

respective positions. Everyone brings his or her own ideas to the table about war, each defining terms and concepts as suits their assumptions, which may be categorized as follows:

- War causes such immense human suffering that it can never be right. (Secular pacifism)
- War is contrary to the nature of God, and is always sinful. (Religious pacifism)
- War is a fact of life, and should therefore be exploited when necessary to bring about desirable goals. (Secular pragmatism)
- War is permissible to force conversion to religious ideals. (Religious pragmatism)
- War creates greater problems than it solves, and is never necessary if people will simply act honorably and desire peace. (Secular/Religious idealism)
- War is a necessary evil, and should only be entered into as a last resort for as short a time as possible. (Secular/Religious realism)
- War is a glorious means to restore a nation or secure peace. (Secular/Religious romanticism)

In short, wars have ensued over the fundamental differences of the principles expressed here!

Two things, however, are characteristic of each position. First, each has an element of truth in it. War does cause immense suffering and senseless damage to property as well (does September 11, 2001, come to mind?). One of our Redeemer’s names is the “Prince of Peace.” Wars are an unpleasant but expected part of life in every epoch and society (the UN has suc-

cessfully used this tool to further the aims of totalitarian globalism since its inception). War is a useful tool to gain or keep “converts” to one’s religion (think of the Jesuits or the early Mormons, for example). War does cause problems that could be avoided if people would just sit down and treat others humanely. Not everyone is a saint out there, and sometimes force is required to get his attention. Finally, war can be the means of a nation’s rise to prominence, prosperity, and peace. So much for the truth.

Second, each position is also tainted with an element of error, to one degree or another. Thus, there are worse things than human suffering; not many, true, but wickedness stands high in the list and is to be opposed. Limiting God to only being interested in peace does not do justice to the Scriptural record of His character (Ex. 15:3, “The LORD is a man of war; the LORD is His name”). While war is effective, it should not be used to accomplish whatever goals the warmonger desires to achieve at the expense of others (Lk. 16:15, “You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God”). God’s work is not done with man’s strength (2 Cor. 10:4, “For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal”). While on the short term a temporary peace may be won through negotiation, it is naïve to think that fallen, sinful man can achieve any lasting solutions to anything (or, to pretend man isn’t fallen and sinful). War may not be a last resort: it may be required straightaway if the offense is grievous enough. Finally, glory may be possible in war, but wisdom is infinitely more desirable and glorious (Eccl. 9:18, “Wisdom is better than weapons of war; but one sinner destroys much good”).

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THE BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

I have already hinted at some of the Scripture’s perspectives on the typical arguments set forth in the just war debate. But I must go further. Hundreds of biblical passages speak to various aspects of warfare, and so we will have to be content here with only a small sampling. I will particularly focus upon passages that address the essence of war, and why it exists.¹⁷

Pacifists are fond of pointing to such passages as “You shall not kill” (Ex. 20:13), “Blessed are the peacemakers” (Mt. 5:9), and “Turn the other [cheek]” (Mt. 5:39) to justify their thinking that war is always evil and always to be avoided.¹⁸ Unfortunately, pacifists are equally fond of skipping the context and/or actual meaning of these passages. The sixth commandment is distinctly referring to murder, and the Scriptures make it abundantly clear that not all killing is murder. The peacemaker of the Beatitudes is a witness to the gospel unto others (cf. 2 Cor. 5). And, to turn the other cheek to one who strikes you is in the context of one’s stance for Christ.

The bottom line is, war is part of human existence because of sin. James 4:1-3 reads,

“What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

People who start wars most generally do so because they want something they can't get any other way, considering their own goals to be more important than the concerns of others. So it is true that war is a necessary evil, in the sense that as long as there is sin in the world, there will be war. Only by pretending that men are not really sinful can one hold the view that we can eliminate war entirely through our wisdom. It's time for such thinkers to wake up and smell the gunpowder.

But what about self-defense or coming to the aid of an oppressed neighbor? Are these acts to be considered as a product of sinful motivation, and always reprehensible? This is the area of the just war debate that engenders the most controversy. Consider the following:

Numbers 10:9, "When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be remembered before the LORD your God, and you will be saved from your enemies."

Deuteronomy 20:12, "Now if the city will not make peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it."

Luke 14:31, "Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand?"

The concept of self-defense is very strong in Scripture. One of the several clear examples is found in Genesis 14, where Abraham retrieves his nephew Lot from the marauding Chedorlaomerean alliance. Bleeding hearts (Christian or not)

that argue that there should never be war are simply refusing to deal with the fact of sin. Ecclesiastes 3:8 forcefully declares that there is "A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace." It is right and just to defend yourself, or others, from the wicked attacks of others. The sixth commandment is not simply a negative injunction against murder; it is also a positive injunction to preserve life.¹⁹ To preserve the lives of mankind on this earth, God has granted authority to society to put to death in his name those individuals and nations who oppress others in rebellion against God's law (Gen. 9:5-6; Rom. 13:1-7). The lack of will to defend oneself (or to arm oneself) is regarded as an demonstration of moral and spiritual decline in Deborah's song recorded in Judges 5:8, which reads, "They chose new gods; then there was war in the gates; not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel." There is need for readiness to defend ourselves. The Song of Solomon 3:8 notes that Solomon's soldiers "all hold swords, expert in war. Every man has his sword on his thigh because of fear in the night." When wickedness ceases in the earth by the direct act of God, then, and only then, will "swords be beaten into plowshares" (Isa. 2:4).

Jesus acknowledges that in God's plan, war is a tool in his hands. Matthew 24:6 reads, "And you will hear of wars and rumors of wars. See that you are not troubled; for all must come to pass, but the end is not yet." But war is not something that happens in God's presence apart from his will. Consider the following:

Deuteronomy 4:34, "Has any god ever tried to take for himself one nation out of another nation, by testings, by miraculous signs and wonders, by

war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, or by great and awesome deeds, like all the things the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your very eyes?” (NIV)

Joshua 11:20, “For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that He might utterly destroy them, *and* that they might receive no mercy, but that He might destroy them, as the LORD had commanded Moses.”

Job 38:22-23, “Have you entered the treasury of snow, or have you seen the treasury of hail, which I have reserved for the time of trouble, for the day of battle and war?”

God is called the “Lord of hosts” 245 times in Scripture of both the Old and New Testaments. He is the “King of glory ... mighty in battle” (Ps. 24:8). He uses war to bring about the rise and fall of nations according to his will, to judge the wicked (even his own people – Jer. 6:4), and to cause stubborn men to turn from idols unto him. Augustine is right when he says, “God commands war to drive out, to crush, or to subjugate the pride of mortals.”²⁰

I must hasten to agree with the statement, “Anyone who likes to fight has something wrong with him.”²¹ The Bible speaks clearly of the distress and anguish that war inevitably brings, even as God uses it to bring about his own holy purposes in creation. The point is, though, that war *is* because sin *is*, and there is no escaping that truth. However, we must not revel in the thought of the destruction of others, lest we be guilty of Jonah’s sin, or that of the Chaldeans in the book of Habakkuk. Vengeance truly is the Lord’s.

CONCLUSION

In the end, God will bring an end to the miseries that human sin causes, including war. We may confidently pray with the psalmist, “Scatter the peoples who delight in war” (Ps. 68:30). Hear what God has to say to those who place their confidence in the strength of arms: “... the mighty fallen of the uncircumcised, ... have gone down to hell with their weapons of war...” (Ezek. 32:27); “The horse is prepared for the day of battle, but deliverance is of the LORD” (Pro. 21:31); and, “Some trust in chariots, and some in horses, but we will remember the name of the LORD our God” (Isa. 20:7).

It is God who “makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; he burns the chariot in the fire” (Ps. 46:9). Until he does so, he calls upon society to exercise his authority to further righteousness and preserve the larger company of mankind. May we not shirk our duty, however reprehensible it may appear to us.

Can any war ever be just? Yes, when it is waged for reasons God approves. Let’s just be sure the reasons truly are God’s, and not our own. 

¹ Alex Moseley, “Just War Theory,” *The Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy* at <http://www.utm.edu/research/iep/j/justwar.htm>. Also: Roland H. Bainton, *Christian Attitudes Towards War and Peace* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1961); A. Beks, “The Just War in Historical Perspective,” *Catholics in Revolution*, ed. by Ormonde (London: Lansdowne Press, 1968); and M. Keen, *The Laws of War in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967). For a pacifist RC view, see Yuri Koszarycz, “War: Confronting the Ultimate Moral Problem,” at <http://www.mcauley.acu.edu.au/~yuri/ethics/war.html>.

² The general rules of just war are as follows: (1) War must be declared by a legitimate government; (2) there must be just cause; (3) there must be a right intention for going to war; (4) the war must be proportional in level of response and objectives; (5) there must be a reasonable probability of success; (6) there must be discrimination between combatants and noncombatants. Most theorists insist that all of these must be true for a given war to be just. See J. Budziszewski, "New War, Old Principles," *World* (Sep.29, 2001), pp. 28-29, as well as Moseley (endnote 1) for discussions of the implications and problems these rules present.

³ Plato, *The Republic*, Book II, at <http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Labyrinth/5080/rep.txt>.

⁴ Origen, *Against Celsus*, 5:33, quoted in Yuri Koszarycz, "War: Confronting the Ultimate Moral Problem," at <http://www.mcauley.acu.edu.au/~yuri/ethics/war.html>.

⁵ Tertullian, *Treatise on Idolatry* 19, *Ante-Nicene Fathers* 3:73, quoted in Yuri Koszarycz, "War: Confronting the Ultimate Moral Problem," at <http://www.mcauley.acu.edu.au/~yuri/ethics/war.html>.

⁶ Thomas Aquinas, "Of War," *The Summa Theologica*, Part II, question 40, at <http://ethics.acusd.edu/Texts/Aquinas/JustWar.html>. See also Augustine, *The City of God*, Book 19, Chapter 12.

⁷ *The Qur'an*, Surah 2:190-193. See also Surah 4:74-76; 9:38-39; 61:4, 10-12.

⁸ John Stuart Mill, "The Contest in America," *Dissertations and Discussions*, quoted in Yuri Koszarycz, "War: Confronting the Ultimate Moral Problem," at <http://www.mcauley.acu.edu.au/~yuri/ethics/war.html>.

⁹ Otto Von Bismark, Speech, August 1867, quoted in Yuri Koszarycz, "War: Confronting the Ultimate Moral Problem," at <http://www.mcauley.acu.edu.au/~yuri/ethics/war.html>.

¹⁰ Vladimir I. Lenin, "War and Revolution," *Pravda*, no. 93, April 23, 1929, at http://www.geocities.com/TimesSquare/Labyrinth/5080/war_rev.txt.

¹¹ Albert Camus, *Notebooks*, vol. 3, entry for Sept. 7, 1939, quoted in Yuri Koszarycz, "War: Confronting the Ultimate Moral Problem," at <http://www.mcauley.acu.edu.au/~yuri/ethics/war.html>.

¹² Louis L'Amour, *North to the Rails*, (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 59.

¹³ Stanley S. Harakas, "No Just War in the Fathers," at http://www.ourworld.com/compuserve.com/homepages/jim_forest/Justwar.htm. First published in *American Orthodoxy*, Winter 1992.

¹⁴ Stephen Palmquist, "Further Reflections on War, Violence, and the State," at <http://www.hkbu.edu.hk/~ppp/bth/bthB.html>.

¹⁵ John Paul II, Urbi et Orbi Message, April 4, 1999, at <http://www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/JP2URB99.HTM>.

¹⁶ Rahul Mahajan, "No, Mr. Bush, Not Everyone Wants Bloodshed," September 13, 2001, at <http://www.alternet.org/print.html?StoryID=11501>.

¹⁷ For rules governing warfare, see Deuteronomy 20 and 21. On spiritual warfare, start at Ephesians 6:1-10; 1 Timothy 6:12; and 2 Timothy 2:3, 4.

¹⁸ Other passages often cited include Mt. 5:43-48; 22:39; 26:52; Jn. 18:11; Rom. 12:17-18; Heb. 10:30 and any that speak of God as loving, forgiving, etc.

¹⁹ *Westminster Larger Catechism* questions 134-136 and *Shorter Catechism* questions 67-69. See also Thomas Watson's commentary *The Ten Commandments* (reprinted; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), pp. 137-152.

²⁰ Augustine, *Against Faustus* 22.75.

²¹ Bob Jones III, American Council of Christian Churches conference address, 1995.

HOW MOULTI-CULTURAL SHOULD
WE BE?
THE CHRISTIAN AND
“CULTURAL DIVERSITY”
by Christopher Lensch

INTRODUCTION

America was founded by religious immigrants. From the Pilgrims and Puritans in New England, to Swedish and German Lutherans in Delaware and Pennsylvania, to the French Huguenots and Scots-Irish Presbyterians in the Carolinas, America from the beginning has been a haven for the persecuted longing to breathe free.

These religious immigrants represented diverse ethnic groups, establishing North America as a rich, multi-cultural melting pot. While the English language and culture have been dominant, most other ethnic cultures of the world have been welcome on our shores. Multiculturalism has worked in North America unlike most other areas of the world.

MULTICULTURALISM VS. “CULTURAL RELATIVISM”

Part of the equation for the success of a diverse multiculturalism here has been the legal protections of minorities. More than that, the spirit of the First Amendment cultivates tolerance for others’ freedom of expression and freedom of religion. This has created a climate that allows a healthy exchange of ideas.

With the advent of “politically correct” elitism, multiculturalism is subtly being replaced by “cultural relativism.”

The latter is the denial that any culture can be said to be better or worse than another. Therefore, instead of cultural interactions within the melting pot, other cultures or value systems cannot be publicly criticized—not even those in foreign lands. This leads to the absurd conclusion that competing cultures have equal merit. But we have moved beyond questions of preserving dignity when we cannot criticize a culture that:

- executes its petty criminals so that it can harvest their body organs;
- practices infanticide to control its population growth;
- denies education opportunities to its women;
- arrests citizens and visiting westerners for mentioning Jesus in public.

Cultural relativism is just that—relativism. There are no absolute standards of judgment in determining normal behavior and superior values for any society. As such, cultural relativism is a child of the postmodern age of relativism. Therefore, modern humanists with rosy presuppositions have no trouble denigrating that with which they are most familiar while praising obscure societies. The fog of time or the opinions of a handful of anthropologists conveniently blur the full picture of obscure civilizations.

From this type of non-objective perspective, it is easy to pillory American pioneers of European descent who “spread disease and oppression” in the New World. Native American cultures, on the other hand, are lionized as free and noble civilizations. This mindset, however, belies the influence of the European philosopher of revolution, Jean Jacques Rousseau. Rousseau touted the nostrum

of the superiority of “the happy savage.”

Whether critics of western civilization compare the west to other past or present cultures, or whether they simply focus on the failings of their own culture, all these critics appear to be idealists who hold western culture up to a false, utopian ideal.

Rather than promote a healthy mix of co-existing cultures, cultural relativists attempt to impose a leveling of all cultures into one. To do this, of course, means minimizing Christian civilization while promoting pagan cultures. In this regard these pseudo-critics represent the cultural element of Marxism that has long sought to level the economic classes of society. On a comparable social plane, they say there can be no superiority of one culture over another.

This position, of course, is absurd. Had not the terrorist attack of September 11 been such a shock to an otherwise docile public, there undoubtedly would have been some brazen talking heads in the media calling upon Americans to consider the grievances of the Moslem extremists!

Consider these anti-cultural attacks of certain academic ideologues to overcome a tradition of western cultural superiority:

- revision of reading lists in schools to minimize the influence of “dead white males;”
- demands for monetary reparations to the descendents of slaves in the new world;
- verbal lashings of 19th century western colonialists for using their advanced technology to exploit primitive cultures.

This last sentiment has extreme exponents who condemn the “theological imperialism” of western Christian missions to third

world nations. They accuse Christians of audacity in foisting their values and beliefs on other cultures that have “equally significant values.” Sadly, even so-called Christian groups like the World Council of Churches promote this ideology.

When academic types are bashing the west for its colonial imperialism or its involvement in the slave trade, in their idealism they rarely address these developments within the flow of history. It seems as if they have not studied history. Nor do these critics offer any positive benefits from the advance of western civilization.

For starters, slavery is not unique to the west—it was an age-old institution. All of the “great” civilizations practiced slavery for eons: Greece, Rome, China. Slave raiding and slave holding was normal for Africans and native Americans also. But which of these cultures had pangs of conscience over enslaving aliens and neighbors? The Protestant West took the lead in banning slavery, first in Great Britain, and then, with an unimaginable expense of blood and treasure, in America. Slavery is as old as civilization. But the abolition of slavery began in the Protestant west. Meanwhile, modern Islamic cultures like the Sudanese government still sanction kidnapping and slave trading of non-Islamics.

Consider that western colonialism, now fallen away since World War II, has transformed primitive territories and backwater regions into flourishing countries that pride themselves in their economic and political independence. Prime examples are Singapore and Hong Kong, two former British colonies, that are the envy of the west Pacific. America’s well-intentioned efforts at nation-building have not been successful, largely because the social infrastructures (values and institu-

tions) of our target nations could not sustain a democracy. Still, many of America's allies, and even its former enemies, have been lifted from poverty and chaos by their association with one of the most generous societies in history. In its current prosecution of rooting out international terrorism, America is not only dropping bombs on its enemies, but is airlifting food for Afghanistan's refugees. This unprecedented policy may have pragmatic motivations; still, it is "...an expression of aggressive goodness to defy a heartless enemy."¹

Democracy, capitalism, and equality under the rule of law are the fruit of the West's quest for freedom. These social boons have grown out of the dynamic philosophy and the theology of western thinkers. With all its openness and individual freedoms, the marvel of western civilization is that it is sustained less by force of arms than by the power of its ideas and institutions.² This could not be possible without a responsible citizenry investing itself in the cohesive values of freedom.

TOLERANCE IN A FREE SOCIETY

One of the hallmarks of modern western freedom has been our willingness to "agree to disagree." Historically, despots have enforced a national religion and common cultural values to galvanize their nations against external foes. The Protestant West, however, has enshrined freedom of conscience as one of its highest common values.

Freedom of conscience without fear of reprisal from one's philosophical opponents, and the free exercise of religion has turned America into a sanctuary for the persecuted of the world. With so many disparate ethnic groups, as well as home-

grown free thinkers, the principle of mutual tolerance is essential for the preservation of a free society.

CHRISTIAN FORBEARANCE

Mutual tolerance is a pragmatic value that works. It also is an ideal that has its roots in Christian ethics. The Bible teaches that Christians must "in honor give preference to one another." This biblical charge (Rom. 12:10) comes in the historical context of Christians being persecuted for their faith (12:12, 14, 17). While exercising patience with their adversaries (12:12), they also show hospitality, offer blessing in the face of cursing, and, as much as possible, "live peaceably with all men" (12:18).

How can Christians do this? Because they know that ultimate justice for their cause rests with the Judge of all the earth (Rom. 12:19). Therefore they go the extra mile, and for Christ's sake, they heap hot coals upon the heads of their enemies (12:20) by returning good for evil.

Rather than coercing their foes, Christians seek to win them through goodness and truth bathed in prayer.

TOLERANCE VS. ACCEPTANCE

"Mutual preference" that Christians practice toward one other is stronger than western civilization's institution of "mutual tolerance." While Christians must show forbearance to non-Christians, they cannot demand tolerance for themselves as a "human right." Rather, their Master has taught them to expect tribulation in the world.³

On the other hand, Western humanists who have reaped the benefits of Christian civilization have viewed mutual tolerance as an inalienable right. The benefits

of mutual tolerance are patently clear, but the basis of this so-called right is nebulous. Society and its members can claim no ultimate authority beyond pragmatism or tradition to justify social tolerance. The Christian, however, looks to God as his higher Authority. While he may not demand social tolerance as a right, still he is free. In terms of “freedom of conscience,” the Christian insists that he “must obey God rather than men.”²⁴

The modern humanist who has no authority beyond historical or contemporary consensus will be subject to shifting values. From a position of mutual tolerance to mutual acceptance is a small, but radical, step. It is a modern mistake to confuse tolerance and acceptance. To allow others their freedom of conscience while disagreeing with their beliefs and behavior is one thing, while it is another matter to insist on the acceptance, and even the public promotion, of one’s beliefs. An illustration of this confusion is found in recent efforts surpassing mutual tolerance that legislate mandatory indoctrination in homosexuality issues. School boards, corporations, and state legislatures are succumbing to elitist pressures to promote acceptance of homosexuality (or abortion) in an effort to overcome perceived pockets of social intolerance.

What used to contribute to the strength of the American melting pot, a healthy competition and exchange of cultural ideas, now is being smothered by legislation, threat of law suits, and public policy directives. Recently, the county executive for the Seattle area directed county employees no longer to use religious phrases on the job like “Merry Christmas,” “Happy Hanukah,” or “have a wonderful Kwanza.” Rather, the politically correct statement of “Happy Holidays” would offer a potentially less of-

fensive statement of good wishes. Misguided measures like this illustrate that mutual respect and tolerance are no longer cultural ideals. Rather, intolerance of true diversity is subtly and silently becoming the norm. Over-sensitivity yields, not a rich, but a bland cultural fabric. Anything but diversity is promoted. Perversity and intolerance are the results.

RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

Because of the Christian graces of love and forbearance, biblical Christianity has always been tolerant of non-sinful expressions of individual personality or social custom. Christian leaders may work to change people(s) in bringing them to maturity in Christ, but a stifling, condemning spirit should not be behind the effort. This is because Christians do not merely tolerate one another—they accept one another as objects of God’s grace.

This cannot be said about Islam. Islam is a moralistic religion that teaches auto-salvation through obedience to Islamic customs. Islam is perpetuated and propagated through efforts of the flesh and even by means of the sword. For fear of the free exchange of religious ideas, Moslem nations are most intolerant.

THE CHURCH IS THE TRUE MELTING POT

While Christianity and Islam are both exclusivistic (both teach only one way to God) and both have a world mission, true Christianity would never use force to spread the gospel. Grace and freedom reflect the beauty and genius of God’s plan to redeem the nations. This plan is from eternity. It is given early expression in the words of the Abrahamic covenant (“in you shall all the nations of the earth be blessed”), and it culminates in Jesus’ Great

Commission to “go into all the world.”⁵

There is no surprise then to see a multi-racial membership in the early church. Grace and freedom in Christ drew the Ethiopian eunuch to the church. Jews and Gentiles of various races constituted the church at Antioch.⁶ From the age of the prophets to the coming kingdom they foresaw, the church would be made from all nations.⁷

CONCLUSION

Christians cannot demand tolerance as a right, but Christian teaching has created a climate where mutual tolerance can flourish. Christians deny that all value systems are equal and deserving of acceptance. Acceptance or even tolerance of wicked values is never acceptable.

Social tolerance as a generic principle is acceptable. Still, tolerance is not God’s ultimate ideal. What is? “Preferring one another,” at least in the society of the church, is preferred. 

¹ Gene Edward Veith in “When Nice is a Vice,” *World Magazine* (Nov. 10, 2001), p. 14.

² Summary of Dinesh D’Souza’s article in *Imprimis*, “Multiculturalism: Fact or Threat?” 30:9:2 (Sep. 2001).

³ John 16:33.

⁴ Acts 5:29.

⁵ Gen. 12:3; Mt. 28:20; Acts 1:8.

⁶ Acts 13:1; note especially Simeon who was nicknamed “The Black One.”

⁷ Acts 17:26-27 “And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, . . . that they should seek the Lord. . . .”

A LAMENT

by Robert W. Anderson

The world’s attention has been absorbed with the terrorist attacks against the twin towers of the World Trade Center, the Pentagon and all that has followed on the heels of those events of September 11. Among our nation’s citizens and friends there has been shock, sorrow, indignation, fear, sympathy. In our own house we had notes of support from Sweden, Africa and Australia.

We each feel dismay, anger, and grief on account of those attacks. But we have to have a concern that our response is not just the instinctive response of Americans, but that of Christians. It is our duty to see the things which happen around us as God would have us see them. As God brings things to pass in his sovereignty, a Christian has a responsibility to look at these in the light of his Word.

What happened in New York and Washington resembles what happened to Jerusalem and Judah in the destructions which the Babylonians brought about 600 years before Christ. The book of Lamentations is a God-inspired commentary on the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem. There are obviously dissimilarities between what happened in Judah and what happened in America. The destruction of Jerusalem was complete; that of the two cities attacked by the terrorists was not. Jerusalem lost her king; our nation did not. The princes of Judah were overcome, destroyed, or deported, but the leaders of America, thankfully, were not. Jerusalem suffered starvation in the Babylonian siege, so that mothers were driven to eat their own offspring; this was not the case with us. But there are sufficient likenesses between the two different times and places

for us to assess these events in the light of the book of Lamentations, a book which bewails the destruction of Jerusalem and Judah in 586 BC.

SIMILARITIES WITH OUR SITUATION

Devastation.—Lamentations is a poetic picture of devastation; so are the pictures which have come to us from the towers on Manhattan Island and the Pentagon. Listen to Lamentation's portrayal of Jerusalem in the light of what your eyes have seen and your ears have heard.

The ways of Zion mourn. All her gates are desolate (1:4). The Lord . . . hath thrown down in his wrath the strong holds of the daughter of Judah; he has brought them down to the ground (2:2). The Lord was an enemy; he hath swallowed up Israel; he hath swallowed up all her palaces; he hath destroyed his strong holds (2:5). He hath not withdrawn his hand from destroying; therefore he made the rampart to lament [to grieve over their destruction]. Her gates are sunk into the ground; he hath destroyed and broken her bars (2:9). The young and old lie on the ground in the streets; my virgins and my young men are fallen by the sword (2:21). The stones of the sanctuary are poured out in the top of the street. The Lord hath accomplished his fury; he hath poured out his fierce anger, and hath kindled a fire in Zion, and hath discovered the foundations thereof (4:11). Because of the mountain of Zion, which is desolate, the foxes walk upon it (4:19).

The trade towers were strongholds of business; the Pentagon is a military stronghold. They have been cast down,

their gates (or doors) left desolate and devastated, the flames have devoured, they have been swallowed up, the wound is deep and terrible. The young and old lie, not in the streets, but in the ruins. Concrete and steel beams have been poured out; buildings have been devoured down to their foundations. And instead of the sight of foxes walking on the ruins, we have seen search dogs walking among the ruins for signs of either the living or the dead.

Sorrow.—Along with the devastation has come deep, bitter, and widespread sorrow. Listen to the lament of long-ago Jerusalem:

How doth the city sit solitary, that was full of people! She weepeth sore in the night, and her tears are on her cheeks: among all her lovers she hath none to comfort her (1:1-2). Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? Behold, and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, which is done unto me (1:12). For these things I weep; mine eye runneth down with water (1:16). The elders have ceased from the gate, the young men from their music. The joy of our heart is ceased; our dance is turned into mourning (5:14-15).

Tears in abundance flow from these pages; Jerusalem and Judah were a city, a nation sunk in bitterest sorrow. They had lost everything—king and princes and men of war, her temple, her walls, her wealth, her independence and liberty. Comparatively speaking, our reason for sorrow is less than hers of long years ago. But the acts of our enemies have given us reason for sorrow as well. That we should feel it is not wrong. God made us with the ability to enjoy the blessings of good on

one hand and to suffer the sorrows of evil on the other. When we saw President Bush fighting back tears, heard Senator Gephardt acknowledge his weeping, and when we saw it on untold faces of people unknown to us, we have seen what people have done through all of time when they have suffered loss. When we weep and sorrow, we have done nothing wrong or shameful. We have done what God made us to do when we experience the evils of this world.

Evil planning.—For our enemies, it has been the day of planning and inflicting destruction and a day of rejoicing. Jeremiah talks to the Lord about the plot of the enemy against his country:

O Lord, thou hast seen my wrong [the wrong they have done unto me]; judge thou my cause. Thou hast seen all their vengeance and all their imaginations against me. Thou hast heard their reproach, O Lord, and all their imaginations against me (3:59-61).

There is a recognition of all the planning and scheming which had gone on among the Babylonians. Their plan was to hurt Judah wherever they could, and they carried out their plan, be it one place or another, mountain or wilderness. So there was the plan, the execution of the plan, and there was a display of elation.

All mine enemies have heard of my trouble; they are glad that thou hast done it (1:21). All that pass by clap their hands at thee; they hiss and wag the head at the daughter of Jerusalem, saying, Is this the city that men call the perfection of beauty, the joy of the whole earth? All thine enemies have opened their mouth against thee; they hiss and gnash the teeth; they say, we have swallowed her up;

certainly this is the day that we looked for; we have found, we have seen it.

The Lord . . . hath caused thine enemy to rejoice over thee (1:15-17).

Men have not changed. We heard about men in sight of the twin towers in New York who gave evidence of joy, and we saw people on the streets of foreign cities raising their hands and shouting and laughing for what was done against us in September.

Anger.—Another point of likeness is the anger that has been felt in this nation.

Let all their wickedness come before thee; and do unto them as thou hast done unto me for all my transgressions (1:21). Render unto them a recompense, O Lord, according to the work of their hands. Give them sorrow of heart, thy curse unto them. Persecute and destroy them in anger from under the heavens of the Lord (3:64-66).

In both these passages the anger is expressed in prayer to God. Judah and Jerusalem had no power for a righteous response to their neighbor, no ability to mount a war against them. But they could take their case to God, and they did.

There is a legitimate, righteous and dutiful anger. Placid acceptance or submission to evil is no virtue. Anger against sin is not a vice. God is angry with sin and he would have his people indignant against sin also. “Be ye angry and sin not. Ye that love the Lord hate evil.” There is indeed such a thing as righteous indignation, but the corruption of our nature is such that more often than not a good deal of unrighteousness gets mixed into our righteous indignation. We must guard against masking sinful hatred and vengeance with declarations of anger against

sin. But to desire a just punishment on our enemies for the evil they have done is not an evil passion, but a righteous sentiment.

God has armed the civil magistrate, the government, with the authority to seek out and punish those who do evil.

Rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. He is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain; for he is a minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil (Rom. 13:3-4).

Whoever planned the attacks upon the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were evil doers and the sense of justice which God has written into our beings calls for retaliation, not for personal gratification either of citizens or rulers, but as the outworking of justice according to the law of God.

THE DIFFERENCE IN OUR SITUATION

We have seen similarities between what was experienced in Jerusalem in the sixth century BC and what happened in America in the twenty-first century AD. While there are evident similarities, there is also one obvious difference. That dissimilarity has to do with SIN. The writer of the Book of Lamentations ACKNOWLEDGED THE NATION'S SIN AND GOD'S JUDGEMENT AS THE CAUSE FOR THE DESTRUCTION AND SORROWS which had come on them. We have not heard a public voice giving expression to such a conviction today. Listen once again to Lamentations:

The Lord hath afflicted her for the multitude of her transgressions (1:5).

Jerusalem hath grievously sinned; therefore she is removed (1:8). We have transgressed and have rebelled; thou hast not pardoned. Thou hast covered with anger, and persecuted us; thou hast slain; thou hast not pitied. Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud, that our prayer should not pass through (3:42-44). For the sins of her prophets, and the iniquities of her priests, that have shed the blood of the just in the midst of her (4:13).

And who, according to the author of this book, bore a large share of responsibility for the destruction and sorrow which came upon the nation? Let me give you an answer from another translation:

Your prophets have seen for you false and deceptive visions; they have not uncovered your iniquity, to bring back your captives, but have envisioned for you false prophecies and delusions (2:14).

Is our nation guilty of rebellion against the Lord, or transgressions against his law? We wish not, but how can we hold to the Bible as our rule of faith and practice and think our nation is a God-fearing people? Both tables of God's law, duties both to man and to God, are openly, flagrantly, constantly and widely violated. Among all the voices we have been hearing, who is saying, "We have rebelled, we have transgressed"? Because our nation is not being confronted with its sin, we are making ourselves more guilty and more deserving of God's wrath and punishment. And who bears the great responsibility for our insensitivity to and silence concerning our sin? The present day prophets—the clergy. In the memorial services of these recent days, have we heard voices lead

the nation to acknowledge these sufferings to be inflicted not merely by human enemies, but by a righteous God who has used these enemies as instruments of his wrath? We have not heard it, and I think that many in this nation would be indignant to think that anybody sees this as judgement for sin.

What do you think will be the mind of God when we go on self-righteously in our rebellion? We deserve more and greater displays of God's displeasure. When God entered into a covenant with Israel, promising blessing if they obeyed his law and punishment if they disobeyed, he told them that the more they sinned, the more severe would be his judgments. In Leviticus 26:14 he told them the terrible things he would do if they did not obey. Then in verse 18 he said, "If ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins." In verses 23 and 24 he declared, "If ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins." What took place in New York City and Washington, D.C., should make us thoughtful of our national sins, but repentant for our own sins. If there is no repentance, our present sorrows could be only the beginning of sorrows.

SUPPLICATION AND SUBMISSION TO GOD

We have looked at the similarities and the dissimilarities between Lamentations and what we are hearing and seeing today. Let me close with an "ought to be" similarity, which is supplication and submission to God. Let me end with the verses which end the book:

Thou O Lord, remainest forever; thy

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throne from generation to generation. Wherefore dost thou forget us for ever, and forsake us for so long time? Turn thou us unto Thee, O Lord, and we shall be turned; renew our days as of old. But thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth against us (5:19-22).

With desolation and suffering around us and anger within us and unrighteous ways behind us as a nation, and with enemies' jubilation around us, what shall we do? Look to God in repentance. Look to Christ Jesus in faith and hope and humility. Let us acknowledge that God is the everlasting God and that his throne, his rule is forever. If at this time in history it seems He might forget us and give us up to more of what we saw, then let our prayer be that he should mercifully turn to us who have turned from him, and so turn us to him and renew the days of old when he was acknowledged in this land. If we in future days should have reason to say "thou hast utterly rejected us; thou art very wroth with us," our duty would be to submit to the hand of God with the acknowledgment, "even so, Father, for so it seems good in thy sight."

It might seem that this is a bleak note upon which to end a sermon, but on such a bleak note ends one of the books of God, one of his sermons to us. That should not weaken our faith, but make us more importuning to God, "whose mercies are new every morning, whose faithfulness is great." God deals with this nation and with each of us as he sees fit in his infinite wisdom and truth, in his goodness, righteousness and holiness. 

A sermon preached on Sunday morning, September 16, 2001

BELIEVING THE UNBELIEVABLE
by Dr. Samuel L. Blumenfeld

The reason why Americans were so psychologically unprepared for the horrors of September 11th is because they simply could not conceive of normal human beings carrying out a plan of such diabolical destruction. We've been led by progressive education, liberal theology, and our left-leaning media to believe that human beings are basically good—and that when they do terrible things like hijacking planes, they are simply responding, justifiably, to American or Israeli aggression.

Ordinary Americans could not understand that there were human beings who would live among us, enjoy the hospitality of our free society and yet painstakingly plan to murder thousands of innocent people in the name of religion. A good many Americans are indifferent to religion. They enjoy Christmas and Easter, but mainly as cultural events of the yearly calendar. Religious fanaticism is something they cannot even begin to deal with.

Nor could Americans understand how anyone, particularly those who profess to believe in God, could be driven by such consummate hatred that they would gladly inflict on fellow human beings such extreme pain and cruelty. Nothing in our American idea of religion, toleration, sense of decency and love for one's neighbor prepared us for this kind of suicidal insanity, this startling encounter with evil.

And we are now being told that it could have been worse, and that these Islamic fanatics are planning bigger and better attacks against us. How does one understand such evil? Back in the days

after World War II, our family in New York made contact with the family's sole survivor of the holocaust in Europe. My parents' extended families, living in Poland, had all been killed. That sole survivor, my parents' niece, had migrated to Canada with her husband whom she had met in a displaced persons camp in Germany. My mother and I took the train to Montreal where we had a very emotional meeting with my cousin. In the course of our conversations, I asked my cousin what went through their minds when the Germans invaded Poland. She said they all knew that things would be bad, "but we didn't know it would be that bad."

They had assumed that the Germans were a civilized, cultivated people, incapable of doing what they eventually did. In fact, the Germans had been very friendly to the Jews of Poland in World War I. What that—in time—taught me is that the most civilized people in the world were capable of the worst barbarism if the circumstances made it possible. The pagan Hitlerian regime is what made it all possible.

It wasn't until most of the Jews of Warsaw had been taken to the death camps that the remaining remnant decided to stage an uprising. They felt it was better to die by fighting a last-ditch battle and taking some of the enemy with them, than merely dying as victims. In that regard, I thought of those passengers in the hijacked plane over Pennsylvania who decided it was better dying preventing the hijackers from killing more Americans than to die as passive victims smashing into the Capitol or White House.

It wasn't until I became a Calvinist that I began to understand how the Germans could do what they did. John Calvin had no illusions about human nature, and he found more than enough in the Bible

to characterize man as “innately depraved.” And it is this innate depravity that is the cause of evil in man. The only way that innate depravity can be controlled is by belief in the God of the Bible and his laws that tell us how to live. Since America was founded for the most part by Calvinists who believed in man’s innate depravity, they conceived of a form of government that would prevent any one man from gaining so much power as to become a dictator. They believed that it wasn’t power that corrupts man, but man who corrupts power.

That Calvinist distrust of man is at the basis of our Constitutional system. But it is the liberals who have tried to convince us otherwise. “Trust us,” they keep saying. “Give us your guns. Give us your children to educate. Give us your earnings. Trust us.” But there is enough of a residual distrust of government among Americans that make them resist the liberal siren song of seduction.

Back in colonial days, children were taught to read with the New England Primer. Each letter of the alphabet was taught in reference to a lesson from the Bible. In teaching the letter A, the lesson was: “In Adam’s fall, we sinned all.” Powerful stuff for the children of early America. Today they are taught, “See Spot run,” or its Mickey Mouse equivalent. We must do better than that if we are to survive as the nation our founding fathers gave us.



This article is reprinted from Dr. Blumenfeld’s World Net Daily commentary of September 27, 2001, and is used by permission from the author.

“It may be a reflection on human nature that such devices [consitutional checks and balances] should be necessary to control the abuses of government. But what is government itself but the greatest of all reflections on human nature? If men were angels, no government would be necessary. If angels were to govern men, neither external nor internal controls on government would be necessary. In framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”

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