

## GOD'S LOVE AND OUR CIRCUMSTANCES

- A. Introduction: We are discussing how to respond to the challenges of life rather than react. When you respond to the difficulties of life, God's word determines what you think, what you say, and what you do.
1. We must learn to answer the trials life with praise to God. To praise God means to acknowledge God or talk about who He is and what He has done, is doing, and will do. Acknowledging God opens the way for Him to show you His help. James 1:2,3; Ps 50:23
    - a. When hard times hit you must be able to answer the "why" question: "Why is this happening?" And, you must be able to answer the "What is God doing?" question.
    - b. If you don't have accurate answers to those questions it is easy to blame God for the problem and then react with complaints, anger, or bitterness against God. You must know God's goodness and His wonderful works. Ps 107:8,15,21,31
      1. His goodness: God is never the source or cause of your troubles. God is good and good means good. Jesus shows us and tells us that. John 14:9,10; 5:19; 8:28; 10:32; Matt 7:9-11
      2. His works: Troubles and trials are part of life in a sin cursed earth, a world that has been radically altered by sin, beginning with Adam. But, God can use them cause them to serve His purposes: maximum glory to Himself and maximum good to as many people as possible.
  2. One reason Christians have trouble responding rather than reacting to the hardships of life is that they misunderstand some things about their circumstances and God's love for them.
    - a. If things are going well we think: God must be pleased with me. When bad happens we think: God must be unhappy or upset with me and is punishing me.
    - b. We mistakenly believe that circumstances are an expression of His love for us. If all is well, I am assured that God loves me. If things are going wrong, it must mean that God loves me less.
  3. If you are going to respond rather than react, you must know that troubles and trials are not indicators of how God feels or thinks about you. Circumstances are not a barometer of your standing with God or of His love for you. In this lesson we want to deal with this issue.
- B. We struggle with God's love for us because we don't understand that God's love for us is unconditional.
1. We have the mistaken idea that God's love is a response to something in us. If we are good, He loves us. If we are bad, he loves us less. But, God does not love you because you are good. He does not not love you because you are bad. God loves you because He is love. I John 4:8,16
    - a. God's love for man, God's love for you and me, is not a response to something in us. It is an expression of something in him, something in His makeup. I have His love because He is love.
      1. God does not withhold His love from you because there are flaws in you. He loves you with the flaws. He loves you despite the flaws.
      2. Unconditional love means that there is no condition you must meet to have His love.
    - b. Perhaps the best way to understand unconditional love is to think of a fragrant flower. It exudes a fragrance to all -- good and bad.
      1. When a good person and a bad person approach the flower to smell it, both experience the same fragrance. The flower can no more withhold its fragrance from one than the other.
      2. In the same way God cannot withhold His love. God is love. Everything He does is an expression of love. I have His love, not because I deserve it, but because He is love.
      3. In saying this, we are not implying that it does not matter what we do or how we live. We are called to live holy lives (I Pet 1:15,16). But the purpose of a life of holiness is not to earn God's love. It can't be earned. The purpose of living a holy life is to bring glory to God and to fulfill your created purpose -- to be a son who expresses His Father.
    - c. We misunderstand the unconditional love of God and the fact that it cannot be earned or lost because we don't understand where value and worth come from.
      1. We connect value and worth with achievement, accomplishments, talents, etc. and when we

fail to measure up, when we fall short, we are certain that God's love for us has waned.

2. But value and worth come from what one is willing to pay for an item. God was willing to pay the price of the blood of Christ for us. I Cor 6:19,20; I Pet 1:18,19
2. The Cross of Christ is the supreme expression of the unconditional love of God for us. I John 4:9,10
  - a. The Cross was not inspired by something in us -- our goodness, our deservingness. Jesus died for us while we were sinners, enemies of God, in full rebellion to Him. Rom 5:8-10; Eph 2:1-9
  - b. The Cross is God's expression of His love for you at your worst. If He loved you on your worst day (which was any day before you were saved) and His love motivated Him to meet your greatest need (salvation from you sins), why would He not love you or love you less now that you are His son or daughter? Why would His love now become conditional?
    1. The Father loves His sons and daughters because they are His. God has the same love for His sons and daughters that he has for Jesus, the Perfect Son.
    2. Jesus prayed in John 17:23, "So that the world will know you sent me and will understand that you love them as much as you love me. (Living Bible)
  - c. The Cross is an objective (outside of ourselves) display of God's love for us with which to silence the objections our performance, our mind, our emotions, and our circumstances can raise.
3. Paul the Apostle experienced extremely difficult circumstances in his life as a Christian -- tribulation, persecution, hunger, danger, the constant threat of death, harassment from the devil, worries about the churches, etc., etc. II Cor 11:23-29
  - a. If circumstances are indicators of God's attitude toward or love for us, then it would seem that God couldn't stand Paul. But, if you read Paul's writings, there is no hint of: Why is God doing this to me? I wonder what I've done wrong? God must not love me, must not be pleased with me.
  - b. Paul knew the love of God for him. He knew that the Cross of Christ was an expression of the love of God for him. Gal 2:20--I am living by faith, the faith of the Son of God, who in love for me, gave himself up for me. (Basic). God proved His love for Paul through the Cross.
4. Paul knew his trials didn't come from God and couldn't separate him from God's love (Rom 8:35-39, Living Bible). Paul isn't simply writing words. This was his view of reality. Consider these points:
  - a. Paul knew there is a curse of death in the earth (Rom 5:12; Rom 8:19-21). He knew men are born sinners and that the devil works in and through unbelievers (Rom 5:19; Eph 2:2,3). He knew the devil harasses Christians (II Cor 12:7; Eph 6:11,12). Paul knew life in a sin cursed earth is hard.
  - b. But, Paul also knew that God is working everything together for good for those who love Him as He carries out His plan to redeem men from sin. Rom 8:28-30
    1. Paul understood that God's purpose right now is not to make life easy for men. His purpose is to bring all men to salvation from their sins and make them His sons through faith in Christ.
    2. And Paul knew that God is able to use the trials of life and cause them to serve His purposes for good as He gathers His family.
  - c. Paul knew that, in light of God's plan for man (sonship and conformity to the image of Christ) and the lengths to which He went to accomplish that plan through the Cross, God was for him, and that if God was for him, nothing could be permanently against him. Rom 8:31,32
    1. Because Paul understood the big picture, he knew that God had met his greatest need and would take care of everything else. Rom 8:37--No, in all these things we win an overwhelming victory through him who has proved his loved for us. (Phillips)
    2. The fact that God is for us doesn't mean things won't come against us; in a sin cursed earth, they will. But God can bring genuine good out of genuine bad. How did Paul know that? He knew Joseph's story. Gen 50:20
5. The good and bad circumstances of life are not expressions of God's greater and lesser love for you. God does not express His love for you by orchestrating circumstances.
  - a. God expressed His love for you at and through the Cross. God, who is love, is perfectly present with you in all circumstances, good and bad, loving you in the midst of those circumstance.

- b. Jesus said in John 16:33, “In the world you have tribulation and trials and distress and frustration: but be of good cheer -- take courage, be confident, certain, undaunted -- for I have deprived it of power to harm, have conquered it [for your].” (Amp)
  - 1. Things will come against you in this life, but nothing can be permanently against you because of the love of God expressed at the Cross. And, in comparison to eternity, everything in this life is temporary and subject to change by the power of God.
  - 2. If we’ll learn to respond, not react we’ll be lifted up above, even in difficult circumstances.
- C. Many of us have the idea that everything that happens has a direct and immediate cause behind it. Either God did it or the devil did it.
  - 1. But, you must understand that a lot of things “just happen”. By that we mean certain processes were set in motion at the fall of man in the garden which are still being played out today.
    - a. When Adam disobeyed God, sin and death entered the world and the human race. A sin nature developed in men who now demonstrate traits of the devil. God did not rescind free will because of the changes in man. Rom 5:12-19; Gen 4:1-9
    - b. When God made the earth he set numerous natural laws and processes into motion. But, they were corrupted by sin. There is now a curse of death in the earth which results in killer storms, famine, droughts, earthquakes, and other natural disasters. Rom 8:20,21; Gen 3:17-19
      - 1. The free wills of generations of corrupt men and the corrupted natural processes are at work in the earth with resulting consequences.
      - 2. Satan, as the first rebel in the universe who enticed Adam and Eve, is ultimately behind the hardships of life, but he does not “cause” them directly. He works on the minds of men to influence their behavior (another lesson for another day).
    - c. Consider an example: A tree blows over during a horrific storm and crushes a car. Why did that happen? Because a destructive storm (a product of corrupted natural processes) blew over a tree weakened by disease and/or age (products of the curse of death in the earth).
      - 1. God didn’t do it. The devil didn’t do it. It happened because that’s life in a sin cursed earth.
      - 2. Couldn’t God have stopped the storm? That is not His purpose right now. Could I have stopped the storm? If you have the faith, Go For It!! Why didn’t God warn me not to park there? He may have, but most of us are “dull of hearing”. Why didn’t the angels stop it? They are not here to stop all trouble. Do you expect angels to protect you and your property?
  - 2. We have this built in idea that bad happens to people because God is upset with them for their sin and good happens to people because God is pleased with them.
    - a. It is true that you reap what you sow, but it isn’t necessarily a direct cause and effect; I sin and something bad happens. I do a good deed and I receive a blessing. It doesn’t work like that.
    - b. In John 9:2 the disciples expressed a common idea: This guy or his parents must have done something wrong and that’s why he was born blind.
      - 1. Sin indirectly caused the man’s blindness -- the sin of Adam which unleashed the curse of death in the world and in the human race.
      - 2. But, Jesus said neither the sin of the parents or the sin of the man caused his blindness. Jesus did not say why the man was born blind. Instead, He directs the disciples away from “why” to “what to do”. I must work the works of God and heal him. v3
  - 3. In Luke 13:1-5, although this was not Jesus’ point, we get some insight into our subject. People assume that bad stuff happens to people because they did something wrong. In this passage, Jesus referred to people killed because of persecution and because of an accident.
    - a. Jesus had a running “battle” with the Pharisees. They rejected Him and His ministry and tried to discredit Him by trapping Him in His word (Luke 11:53,54). In Luke 12 a huge crowd gathered to hear Jesus speak. Jesus warned the crowd to beware of the doctrine of the Pharisees.
    - b. Luke 12:37-57--He chastises them for not recognizing that He is the Messiah and that if they reject

him, there will be severe consequences.

1. While Jesus was speaking, word was brought to him that Pilate had killed some Galilean Jews while they made their sacrifices at the Temple in Jerusalem.
2. Then Jesus referred to eighteen Gentiles who were killed when a tower in Siloam fell on them. Siloam was a pool in Jerusalem with porticoes (covered walkways with columns).

c. In His conversation with the Pharisees and those who were not receiving His message, Jesus said: You think this happened to those people because they were big sinners. However, these acts (Romans killing Jews and people buried under collapsing buildings) are a hint of what is ahead for you if you do not repent and turn to God.

1. In 70 A.D. the Romans destroyed the city of Jerusalem and over one million Jews were killed. When Rome took the city, multitudes were killed while they sacrificed and multitudes were buried beneath the ruins of the walls, houses, and Temple.
2. Not a single person who had received Jesus as Messiah was killed because they had heeded a warning sign Jesus gave them to get out of the city prior to the destruction. Luke 21:20,21

4. You hear Christians say: "There are not accidents or coincidences in life. Everything happens for a reason." Who says? Not the Bible.

a. Those are meaningless clichés that undermine our confidence in God's goodness. Implicit in those statement is the idea that, because God didn't stop a circumstance, He is for it in some way.

1. Accidents happen all the time in a sin cursed earth. An accident is an undesirable or unfortunate happening that occurs unintentionally and usually results in injury, damage, or loss. An accident is an incident that results in injury, in no way the fault of the victim. An accident is any event that happens unexpectedly, without a deliberate plan or cause.

(Webster's Dictionary)

2. If I run over a nail and it wrecks my tire -- that's an accident. If my car won't start because the battery is dead, that's life in a sin cursed earth where things wear out and break. Matt 6:19

b. I could purposefully or recklessly drive a car too fast resulting in a crash and, we could say "God allowed it", because, as the greatest power in the universe, He could potentially stop it.

1. God made the ore that was eventually turned into a car. God gave men the creative ability to design and produce the car. God made the laws of motion, physics, and gravity, etc., that affect how the car functions.
2. But I made the choice of when and how to drive the car. I drove too fast and I worked against the laws of physics and gravity.

D. Conclusion: We are so focused on "why did this happen" and "what is God trying to say to me" that we miss the obvious answer: That's life in a sin cursed earth! And, we miss the wonderful fact that God, who loves us unconditionally, is able to take the hardships of life in a sin cursed earth and bring good out of them if we will learn to respond rather than react.