



May 12, 2023

Has God Left Us?

Warm hellos friends, brethren, co-workers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

We've just returned from a blessed trip and visit to scattered brethren and family in Texas and Mississippi. It's always encouraging to see God's children grow in grace where they live.

Part of my job is that sometimes I answer questions and comments sent in to our office of Church of God Ministries by individuals who comment on articles, sermon messages, or access information on our web site.

Not long ago a question was submitted that questioned "How could a loving God allow so much suffering in the world, especially affecting little children in places such as some of the areas of Africa?" I immediately remembered years ago hearing of the abduction of 300 Nigerian girls and the likely evil outcome of selling them into slavery or forced marriages. My heart was burdened and anguished and went out to them and to their families. Even now, we hear of more and more senseless violence of mass killings on almost a daily basis. There simply is a lot of suffering.

Understanding why God allows evil and so much suffering in the world involves understanding the purpose of human life as revealed in the Scriptures. God created mankind in His image, with a mind far above that of animals. God is preparing those whom He chooses to eventually enter His divine family.

There are several steps in this great undertaking. Man was made of the dust of the ground, was made vulnerable to temptation, and was allowed to sin. Sin is the

transgression or disobedience of God's instructions given to mankind for his good. Adam was equipped with an intelligent mind and was instructed very early on by His Creator about what God expected of him. It is likely that the instructions found in Genesis 2:16-17 (and others that were not recorded) were given very soon to Adam and Eve. Implied in these verses is the freedom of choice to choose to obey or disobey Gods' instructions and laws.

To accomplish the development of beings who would desire to think and be like God, mankind was given free moral agency. Man is given a choice in how he will live, but he also must live with the consequences of those decisions for good or for bad. God has also allowed an evil powerful spirit being, Satan the Devil, to have access to influencing mankind. (2 Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2) In addition we have a nature that is naturally rebellious, lawless, and resistant to obeying God's laws. (Romans 8:7)

Because we have freedom of choice and free moral agency, none of us can put an exact percentage on what God, Satan, or ourselves, are responsible for in the events of our lives. If we yield to certain attitudes and actions, the Adversary is able to influence to a greater degree. That being said, there is still the overall principle that there are consequences for our individual choices.

God has consistently worked with His chosen people down through the ages. God instructed Israel, urging them to make right choices with that knowledge and then held them accountable for the choices that they made. Deuteronomy 30:19 illustrates how God works. He told Israel, *"I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live."* He didn't predetermine the outcome; they each had a choice.

God could forcibly prevent people from sinning, but that would not enable us to achieve the potential that He would like us to realize. God desires the best for mankind, a future greater than we could possibly imagine! God is working with our mind, spirit and character. His will is that we learn right from wrong, and that we choose to do right without pressure from Him. We must have free will to make those choices; otherwise, we would not develop the character and mind

that God desires. Sadly, mankind is writing a painful lesson in his history. If he rejects God and His revealed way, he will reap untold anguish, pain, suffering and curses.

Working with us in this way requires an infinite amount of patience on God's part. Like a loving parent, He doesn't want anyone to be hurt. However, like a wise parent, He realizes that we need the freedom to make mistakes. Humanly we might conclude that God "keeps hands off" more than I or you would choose or like. But Gods' ways and thoughts are far above ours (Isaiah 55:9). He is the great equalizer having the power to resurrect the dead and to heal any hurts that one has suffered.

Sin brings consequences that are painful and unpleasant. Additionally, one person's sin also has an unwelcome effect on others, possibly hurting them greatly. God also allows Satan to be active in this present world, playing upon the weaknesses of human nature and tempting people to make wrong choices.

Humans try to place responsibility for their wrong choices on God and claim that "He is unfair!" Let's read Ezekiel 18. In this chapter God states, "*Do I have any pleasure at all that the wicked should die?*" says the Lord GOD, "*and not that he should turn from his ways and live?*" (v.23) God tells Israel to repent and to turn from transgressions and evil. (v.30-32) A few chapters later, God repeats this appeal, "*Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.'*" (Ezekiel 33:11)

Has God left and permanently abandoned us to suffer the consequences of sin? No, of course He hasn't.

He provided us with a way to obtain forgiveness for sin, through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. His plan enables us to develop genuine character at the same time as it provides us with a way to escape the death penalty that sin brings. Notice the encouragement from the prophet Isaiah. "*Let the wicked forsake His way, and the unrighteous man His thoughts; and let him return to the LORD, and*

He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." (Isaiah 55:7)

Jesus was asked about the untimely deaths of several groups of people - victims of time and chance. His instruction applies to all those who are willing to trust Him and participate in the process of salvation. ". . .do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:4-5) As I mentioned last Sabbath on our webcast, may you and I treasure God's mercy and forgiveness upon repentance. Let us value our special calling at this time as we are being prepared to rule with Christ and bring peace and offer wellbeing to all. There is a time coming where the suffering of this world will cease. God speed that day!

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



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