

The Devil is Having a Heyday

Author: Larry W. Wilson

Read the following verse three times: "**The wicked freely strut about when what is vile is honored among men.**" (Psalm 12:8) I am stunned by the boldness of some people these days. They appear to have no shame, no respect and evidently, no conscience. Without a second thought, they say and do things that God abhors.

They have no regard for God, their family, their nation or anyone! God's patience and long suffering make the wicked even more bold in their vile behavior. Day and night, the media spews out a steady stream of moral garbage. Both young and old spend countless hours watching, listening or reading about repugnant behavior.

Networks have discovered their ratings are higher if debasing behavior is put before viewers in prime time. Of course, higher ratings mean more advertising dollars, but this money comes at a very high price. Example: A twelve year old boy recently killed a six year old girl in Florida. The boy was practicing some of the martial arts he had learned from TV wrestling.

Of course, a great responsibility rests upon media producers and programmers, but whether we recognize it or not, God imposes accountability on each of us for the welfare of our fellow human beings. (Genesis 9:5,6) Cain tried to avoid this accountability, but God would not let him escape. (Genesis 4:9) The responsibility that rests upon the people who work in media is as great as the power that goes with the media.

Consider this illustration for a moment: Suppose a baby boy is born in Kentucky, but is immediately sent to a Chinese couple living in Beijing, China. Within a few years that child would speak fluent Chinese and think and behave as though it were Chinese.

However, if that *same child* was adopted by Palestinian parents in Jerusalem, that child would grow up speaking Arabic and think and behave as though it were Arab. Within twelve years, a child is imprinted with most of the data that he or she will use to form adult life. Within twelve years, one child could be two very different people! This illustrates an important fact. Attitudes and behaviors in children are formed very early in life.

Allowing for genetics, disposition and temperament within each child, human beings cannot escape the first rule of life: "By beholding we become changed." Children imitate and digest what they see. If evil behavior is exalted and honored before youth, a high percentage of youth will become vile. The devil knows this and is having a heyday in the United States with the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

He has twisted the right of free speech and is using it in an evil way. The Bible teaches, however, that speech always has consequences. Words are powerful and free speech extracts a high price when it protects the wholesale promotion of violence, sex, indulgent and degenerate behavior.

Diligent parents struggle constantly with the pernicious presence of evil. Evil is everywhere and in everything. Our nation [USA] is drowning in moral quicksand with no apparent bottom (absolutes). We should not be surprised at the rash behavior of youth when they learn how to do these same behaviors as they watch TV. Today's TV programs not only promote violence, they emphasize it as a means to resolve problems.

TV rarely emphasizes the suffering that results from sin, nor does it faithfully represent the consequences that follow sinful acts. The media glorifies sin in thousands of ways, and unfortunately, we now have a generation of parents in America who dimly understand the properties of sin. If this is true of parents, what can be said of their offspring?

Most Bible students would agree that there appears to be a rapidly growing segment in the United States that mirrors a startling resemblance to ancient Israel.

King David made the following observation: **"In his arrogance the wicked man hunts down the weak, who are caught in the schemes he devises. He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord. In his pride the wicked does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God. His ways are always prosperous; he is haughty and your laws are far from him; he sneers at all his enemies. He says to himself, 'Nothing will shake me; I'll always be happy and never have trouble.' His mouth is full of curses and lies and threats; trouble and evil are under his tongue . . . He says to himself, 'God has forgotten; he covers his face and never sees' . . . The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God . . . ' "** (Psalms 10:2-7,11; 14:1)

David asked a very sobering question: **"When the foundations [of society] are being destroyed, what can the righteous do?"** (Psalm 11:3, insertion mine) I do not believe a shrinking number of righteous people can stop an accelerating avalanche of wicked behavior – it is too pervasive and widespread.

The Bible does reveal that a city like Nineveh may repent for a season, but it is only a matter of time until total destruction becomes necessary. This has always been the case with all societies! Recorded history indicates that 21 civilizations have come and gone.

Why did they disappear? God destroyed them for their wickedness, just like He destroyed the world in Noah's day. God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah because these cities had come to a point where extended mercy no longer had a redeeming effect.

True, God's wrath against Nineveh was stayed for a few years, but He eventually destroyed the pompous capital of the Assyrian empire about 160 years after Jonah warned the nation of coming wrath. It is sad, but true – until sin is fully eliminated from the universe, evil cannot be quarantined. God allows cities and nations to fill up their cup before He suddenly acts. Then, He steps in with destructive judgments.

It is necessary for Him to cauterize the growth of sin from time to time so that civilizations can continue on Earth. If it were not for God's timely intervention, man would have been extinct long before now.

Hoof and Mouth Disease

Sin is a lot like hoof and mouth disease that has been in the news recently. The disease is highly contagious and the plague cannot be stopped without overwhelming destruction. Sadly, many non-infected animals have also been destroyed to stop the spread of the plague.

In a similar way, the Bible confirms that God sometimes allows the innocent to perish along with the wicked in order to arrest the growth of sin. Many people may disagree with the previous sentence, but it is true. God sends the sunshine and rain upon the wicked and the righteous (Matthew 5:45), just as God's judgments fall upon the wicked as well as the righteous.

This view of God's love may run contrary to the "prosperity doctrine" that so many Christians have embraced. But, and this is an emphatic "but," God's grace spares every righteous person from the death that ultimately counts – the second [eternal] death.

The prosperity doctrine uses a number of Bible texts to defend concepts that predispose people for spiritual bankruptcy. People believe that God is anxious to prosper them if only they will turn their lives over to Him. Moses told the Children of Israel, **"Walk in all the way that the Lord your God has commanded you, so that you may live and prosper and prolong your days in the land that you will possess."** (Deuteronomy 5:33)

On the surface, the prosperity doctrine has biblical support, but most lies have some truth in them. It is true that if we live in harmony with God's laws, we will be blessed. But do not overlook an important aspect of God's administrative ways. God manages a universe.

He is also The Sovereign of Earth. In times past, he has had to destroy large numbers of people for the benefit of generations to come. He does this to stop the growth of sin when a city or nation passes the point of no return. Sometimes, God spares the righteous from His judgments and sometimes He does not.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah gives an example of God sparing the righteous, but sometimes He also allows the righteous to be put to death.

Nine of the twelve disciples were martyrs for their faith and the Bible predicts that millions of the saints will perish during the Great Tribulation: **"If anyone is to go into captivity, into captivity he will go. If anyone is to be killed with the sword, with the sword he will be killed. This calls for patient endurance and faithfulness on the part of the saints."** (Revelation 13:10)

The Bible speaks plainly about this. Sometimes God allows the saints to be martyrs. (Hebrews 11 and 12; Revelation 6:9-11; 16:4-7)

Faith in God, a non-negotiable faith – regardless of circumstances, is a must! We may not always understand God's actions, but we can be sure that He knows what He is doing. It is only a matter of time until we will have the privilege of understanding God's ways on any given matter.

Remember this: Faith is an experience that makes sense when viewed in reverse.

What Do You Think?

Troublesome times are increasing. In the United States, tens of thousands of job cuts have been announced in various sectors of our economy – automobile manufacturers are closing assembly plants, airline carriers are preparing for crippling summer strikes, the Dow-Jones has been sinking like a rock and the NASDAQ needs CPR.

California citizens have suddenly discovered that they cannot meet or pay for their energy needs. Individual state utilities are 14 billion dollars in the red for electricity *already* used and Vice President Cheney recently reported that the United States has a deficit of over 400 electrical generating stations at the current time! Natural gas prices are near an all time record high. OPEC has announced plans to reduce oil production this summer and analysts predict soaring gasoline prices for automobiles.

The United States is not the only country having problems. Japan's economy is teetering. Once the most robust economy in Asia, the Japanese economy has been in a steady decline for ten years. Japan's prime interest rate is less than one-quarter of one percent at this writing!

The European Union is hurting, too. Not only have thousands of farmers been financially ruined, but tourists have cancelled plans to go there because of an outbreak of hoof and mouth disease. Elsewhere in the world, ethnic and religious tensions have escalated into war. Russia is hobbled in poverty with a bankrupt economy.

The Middle East is a cauldron of violence and hatred. Deadly earthquakes have been frequent and the weather balance is extreme in some places. With this brief summary of world news in mind, how should Christians interpret these events? Are these man-made problems, freakish coincidence, the wrath of God or an attack by the devil? While you are weighing these matters in your mind, consider this question.

A Tough Question

Using Europe as an example: What does the slaughter of over a million animals and the economic ruin of thousands of families in Europe say to you? Who is to blame for this suffering? Here are four possible answers:

- A. This suffering is the creation of man. Man caused this terrible epidemic and subsequent loss.
- B. This suffering is "a freak of nature." This epidemic has no known cause.
- C. This suffering is a manifestation of the power of the devil.
- D. This suffering is a manifestation of God's wrath on Europe.

The Need For Understanding

The loss of anything of value is painful whether it be health or wealth, tangible or intangible. Few circumstances on Earth demand a response like intense suffering. Human beings can withstand some pain without seriously questioning it, but when suffering becomes overwhelming, persistent, intense and life changing, the need for understanding becomes important. If our pain is anatomical or physiological and it is great enough, we seek medical treatment.

If our pain is caused by a failed relationship, a counselor may be necessary. If our pain is spiritual, a member of the clergy may be needed. But to whom does a person turn when he or she has lost everything?

The four answers listed above necessitate some discussion. For example, there are situations when answer "A" fits the incident. A negligent captain can run his oil barge ashore and spill a million barrels of oil. In this case, the direct relationship between "cause and effect" is obvious.

But let us put a twist on this incident that reaches beyond man's power. Let's say that high winds push the oil tanker into a hidden sandbar spilling millions of barrels of oil. This event could be explained with answer "B" which says, ". . . a set of random conditions "just happened" and an oil spill resulted." Much of the world relies on answers "A" and "B" to explain the course of human history.

Christians will sometimes select answer "C" to explain suffering and loss, but they usually restrict the use of "D" for large, overwhelming events. A few Christians may think (but not out loud) the fourth answer is the best answer because sometimes God does inflict suffering and loss upon humanity because of our sinful ways.

So, how do you explain the destruction of more than a million animals in Europe?

It seems evident that each of the four answers is appropriate at different times and in different ways because life is full of events. Sometimes there are clear-cut cases of "cause and effect." Sometimes, there are random collisions of freakish events. Sometimes God sends discipline and sometimes the devil pounds on us.

Given these four options and the fact that God is Sovereign, it becomes quite clear that our existence is dependent upon God's daily mercy. So, how should we understand the outbreak of hoof and mouth and its dire consequences?

I bring this question to the forefront because the misery index is rapidly increasing in many parts of the world. In my estimation, it is only a matter of time until the misery hits home and when it does, people will want an explanation.

Are you ready with some answers?