

### sermonnotes

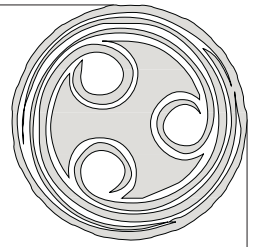
#### Introduction

#### From The Head...

*"Dear God, whom I hate with all my being precisely because you hate and threaten me with hell, I hate this punishment perhaps even more than I hate you. Or, maybe I should say that I love my comfort even more than I hate you. For that reason I am asking a favor of you. I want you to make me love you, whom I hate even when I ask this and even more because I have to ask this. I am being frank with you because I know it is no use to be otherwise. You know even better than I how much I hate you and that I love only myself. It is no use for me to pretend to be sincere. I most certainly do not love you and do not want to love you. I hate the thought of loving you but that is what I'm asking because I love myself. If you can answer this 'prayer' I guess the gift of gratitude will come with it and then I will be able to do what I would not think of doing now—thank you for making me love you whom I hate. Amen."*  
**The Seekers Prayer, John Gerstner**

Here we are in a scripture that could be both one of the most important passages in scripture and the most controversial. We are looking at the fall of mankind and subsequently a key part in the "problem of evil" (also known in theological circles as a theodicy, which examines God in light of His supposed righteousness and lack of moral evil). In 2001 we watched in horror as two planes led by terrorists flew into World Trade center in New York killing thousands of innocent people and destroying both of the towers. It was a terrible evil, and we knew exactly who to blame, and began to exact out "righteous" judgment on the perpetrators. Today I write in the aftermath of one of the worse natural disasters in the modern world, killing 40 times more people and causing far more physical damage. Whereas the 9/11 ambush had a clear enemy, we are left confused with who to blame for our most recent calamity. These types of calamities are often referred to as acts of God. Is that an accurate assessment? Many Christians try to recoil and hide from this reality, but what does the bible teach us? When we develop a theology that eradicates the doctrine of sin and atonement from our teachings, then we mightily struggle with any real answer to these questions. If God is a God of love devoid of justice and righteousness, we can only begin to question His goodness or His omnipotence. A God without justice is nothing but a God that exists for the comfort of the people and is irrelevant in times like these. I hope to balance our understanding of who God is from a biblical position. He is both loving and just, and everything that occurs on this earth is done with the sovereign hand of God exercising both His judgment and mercy at the same time.

Maybe now we can begin to understand verses that we have looked at many times. According to **Isaiah 45:7** (See too **Job 42:11**) it is GOD who brings forth both good and calamity, and He does so to accomplish His purposes. It is in these calamities that we begin to understand both elements of this righteous and loving God. When we fail to look at these truths because we don't like them, we begin to construct a god made after our own image, which cannot bring forth hope in these times because He is human, neutered, and flaccid. In this fallen world, God has never promised us comfort, only peace—which is internal and carries on beyond this life. If you hold a worldview that doesn't allow an afterlife, then calamity is far worse than can be imagined. If you hold to a worldview that doesn't believe in any form of truth or absolutes then it is hard to make any kind of judgment regarding evil, human or otherwise. In the book of Job we see that the natural calamity that came upon Job may have been proximately caused by Satan, but was ultimately caused by God for the purposes He wanted to accomplish in Job's life and the life of those around Him. Calamity either brings forth a purifying effect or a judgment to those it affects. Pastor/theologian John Piper writes that, *"This is true of all calamities.*



*They mingle judgment and mercy. They are both punishment and purification. Suffering, and even death, can be both judgment and mercy at the same time. The clearest illustration of this is the death of Jesus. It was both judgment and mercy. It was judgment on Jesus because he bore our sins (not his own), and it was mercy toward us who trust him to bear our punishment (Galatians 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24) and be our righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21). Another example is the curse that lies on this fallen earth. Those who do not believe in Christ experience it as judgment, but believers experience it as merciful, though painful, preparation for glory. 'The creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope' (Romans 8:20). This is God's subjection."* According to the bible this world is fallen and evil surrounds us (**2 Samuel 22: 5, 31; Romans 8:23**).

When we reveal half of who God is, we reveal a God that cannot bring forth relief in the midst of calamity. And subsequently cannot bring forth hope in a world that is grossly tainted with evil all around us. **2 Corinthians 4:17,18** reminds us that our hope lies in the fact that our *"Momentarily light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while look not at the things which are seen, for the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal."* Calamity is truly God's wakeup call to a deaf world. If this is all there is, then disaster has no plus. But if there is another reality, then maybe this God who is from there can reveal to us what that reality is like. If we believe a theism that cannot accept a God who has rights over His own creation and who has made claims that we are truly sinful in His sight and in need of salvation, then we have constructed our own feel good god made out of wood and iron, a god made with our own human hands. It is clear that God takes no pleasure in the destruction of the wicked, but it is equally clear that He is just and will judge and purify the wicked on His terms not our own (see **Ezekiel 18:23; 33:11**).

Our passage today reminds us of this reality. It reminds us of the fact that we are incapable of seeing things from God's perspective. God had created everything for the sustenance and protection of His creation. He created everything to bring forth life and indicated that it was good (**Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 21, 25, 31**), aesthetically beautiful, and "Good for food" (**Genesis 2:9**). Adam and Eve was given every need to live and flourish in the garden. They knew God and understood who He was (as much as was revealed to them), but it was not enough to trust God for His providential care. They turned what was good into evil and took the very thing that God had created and made it evil (**Genesis 3:6**). Instead of trusting the words of God, they decided to let their reason move outside of its own capacity and build a worldview based on their own perspective, choosing to disobey the one command God had given them. The issue here is not the eating of fruit; the issue is cosmic chaos that results from humanity's desire to be God. We reason in our warped self-centered bias and hold God culpable for our wretched decisions. We make God evil and humanity good, and wonder why this "absentee landlord" can't get it right. We stand in judgment when Tsunami's hit (even though we don't usually care unless they make it on the 6:00 news), while rejecting God's loving call to lay down our burdens before Him and trust that He is sovereign in the midst of calamity. We ignore that He is preparing His people to love others, and don't respond in His grace and compassion during these times of calamity. Sin keeps us from caring and acting on His behalf because sin turns us inward and allows us to bury our heads in comfortable sand while the world goes to hell both physically and spiritually.

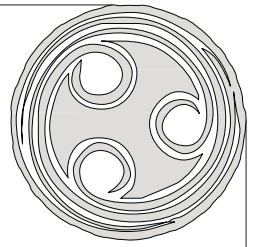
What do we do with sin and calamity? First we are called to repent and believe in Christ (**Acts 2:38; 3:19; 5:31; 17:30; Mark 1:15**). We need to repent from what we do and from what we don't do. We need to take an honest look at our hearts and realize that we are so self-centered that we really don't care for anyone else but ourselves. We need to repent from a Consumeristic, opulent life and take some of the blame for a world that can live in such abject poverty--where natural disasters kill every day--while we wallow in our own self-pity as victims of our own devices.

... To The Heart

Secondly we are called during these calamities to “*Weep with those who weep*” (**Romans 12:15**) realizing that no matter what the cause of suffering is we are to be compassionate and loving in our response. We are all sinners and need to identify with the world’s pain because empathy and compassion flows from our proximity to pain. If we continue to anesthetize ourselves from sin and the world’s pain, we become numb and apathetic to the needs both spiritual and physical that surround us, concerned only with the issues that directly affect us. It is in calamity that the church can truly reflect God’s love and compassion for His creation. It is here that we can be the church.

Lastly, we need to repent from our hatred of God and our quickness to not trust in His sovereignty during times of stress. Lord help us love you, we are fallen people!

## sermonnotes



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