

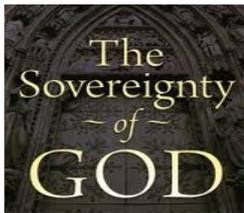
American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

December 2010

Wisdom Through Suffering



“It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart.”
Ecclesiastes 7:2

No evangelical Christian disagrees with the proposition that “God is sovereign.” Certainly, not every believer has a biblical understanding of sovereignty ... but no Christian would say that God is not Lord over all, for the Lord’s sovereignty is declared throughout Scripture.

When we meet intense suffering, however, there is a strong temptation for us to deny either God’s goodness or His sovereignty. This is because pain can lead us to forget the Lord’s purposes for us while we suffer. The truth of the matter is that God uses pain to discipline us, sanctify us,

and give us wisdom (Heb. 12:3-17). Paradoxically, trouble should make us affirm even more strongly that our Creator is sovereign and good, that while bad things are not good in themselves, God nevertheless has a good purpose for letting them into our lives. Pain, when we respond to it in the power of the Holy Spirit, conforms us to Christ, and the “school of hard knocks” gives us wisdom that we could never enjoy if we lived a life free of difficulty.

Ecclesiastes presents the truth well, encapsulating it in the statement that “it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting” (Eccl. 7:2) Parties and feasts are good and fun, providing the rest, recreation, and fellowship that all humans need. Yet they are not, in the main, useful for contemplating eternity. While there is an appropriate time to celebrate and make merry, we too easily enjoy such occasions without reference to the Lord our God. Grieving with a sober heart, however, orients us to the things of God in a way that celebration cannot. Tragedy and

death remind us that life is fleeting, that this world has not yet been renewed, and that we need to put our hope in the Lord and not in the fleeting pleasures of this world (I John 2:15-17).

Christians are not to be dour people; indeed, we are to be filled with joy (Phil. 4:4). Still this is not a frivolous happiness but a joy rooted in what our Father has done for us in sending His Son and sealing us with His Holy Spirit. It is in our mourning that we gain a greater taste of the grief and sorrow that was required to purchase our redemption when Jesus went to the cross for us. If even He “learned obedience through what He suffered” (Heb. 5:8), we should not think that less will be required of us.

...Though Scripture is clear that suffering in itself is painful, it is also plain that the Lord has a good purpose in our pain, using it for our good and His glory (Rom. 8:28). ...

[Taken from *Tabletalk*, Ligonier Ministries, November 2010]

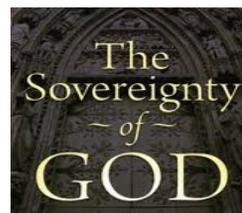
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Fearing God



“Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

Our brief study of Ecclesiastes has looked at the contrast the book draws between “life under the sun” and “life under heaven.” Life under the sun is life that ignores the transcendent and forgets that there is a sovereign Creator and Judge who evaluates all things and will reward or punish all people based on how they have responded to Him. For those who look at things through the prism of life under the sun, everything is vanity (Eccl. 1:2-3) – fleeting and meaningless. Life under heaven, on the other hand, examines life with the knowledge that the Lord is watching all and will render a final verdict. Consequently, those who live life under heaven understand that there is an appointed

time for everything and that no suffering is meaningless but rather is used of God for their good and His glory (Eccl. 3:1-8; 7:1-13).

Understanding life in this way – living life under heaven – requires us to take the long view, for it is undeniable that we do not always understand the divine purposes behind what happens to us. We have limited perspective on events, unable to see how everything is fitting together for our good and the Lord’s glory (Rom. 8:28). Though we understand that God is working in all things for our good, we often do not understand how He is doing so or why pain is necessary to make us holy. Much of what has happened to us will perplex us until we die, and only in eternity will the purposes behind what has made us suffer be clearer to us.

Ecclesiastes often encourages us to take the long view of life. Ecclesiastes 11:1 calls us to cast our bread upon the waters that we might find it again after several days. This is a metaphor for long-term investment of time, money, and other resources. Putting what is ours to wise use may not bring an immediate return,

but in time there will be a handsome profit on our effort. The same principle applies to serving the Lord. In many cases, there is no immediate gain for doing the will of God, but we know that in eternity those deeds done in faith will be rewarded in a manner that is far greater than what we can receive in the here and now (Rom. 2:6-11).

Ultimately, life under heaven says that our purpose is to fear God and keep His commandments (Eccl. 12:13-14). As we do this, keeping in mind that our ultimate reward is in the age to come, we are assured that life has an ultimate purpose.

Patience is a key virtue in the Christian life because of our need to take a long view of things. It can be difficult to remain faithful in suffering or to spend hours ministering with little visible return. When we take the long view of things, however, we find the strength to press forward even in the context of great difficulty. ...

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