

Bite Size Bible Study

Salvation #153 By Pastor Lee

I was reading a book by John H. Walton and J. Harvey Walton (father and son) titled "The Lost World of the Israelite Conquest" and ran across four items that I would like to share with you.

1. "God doesn't tell us how to produce our own salvation: instead he tells us how we can participate in the salvation that he has produced."

There is a lot of deep truth in that statement. We can try to be righteous and follow all of God's teaching and produce our own salvation; but we will ultimately fail at some point (or points). We can follow Jesus' Great Commission and teach others about the true God, but if we are truthful with ourselves we will not be the example to them that we should be.

Isaiah tells us that we are not succeeding.

All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.
Isaiah 64:6 NIV

Paul tells us that it is Jesus that produces righteousness in us by our believing in Him and following Him.

This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.
Romans 3:22-24 NIV

Our salvation doesn't come as a result of the things we do or don't do, it comes from Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. We can only participate in the salvation that Jesus has already provided.

2. A Righteous God dispenses grace, An Unrighteous God dispenses suffering.

God sees a wrong and decides to punish them for the wrongdoing. This is the Retribution Principle and it is not how God operates. This is not how God sees the wrongdoing. Yes there is an action that is wrong but the person needs grace to understand that it is wrong. Yes there may be repercussions for that wrongdoing but it is not God's punishment that they are experiencing. It is God's training that they are experiencing.

Does God cause bad things to happen? Yes! Sometimes! Which leads to the next section.

3. God can strike without cause, but He never strikes without purpose.

We see this in the case of Job. Job was not sinning or doing anything wrong, yet God chose to strike both Job and his family.

"And the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, who fears God and turns away from evil?"" Job 1:8

There was no cause for God to strike as He did. Then what was His purpose?

There were probably many reasons but one was to show Job's friends that suffering is not necessarily an indication of sin. But one reason akin to this is that Job learned that he was able, even under great distress, to continue to trust God.

When we suffer or see a loved one suffering, what is our response? Is it "well they must deserve it" or "what lesson is God teaching"?

God is a good father. He wants each person to achieve the potential that He has designed for him or her. It may be different for each person. That generally means some stressing to build the character. Just like a coach makes his team practice until they are exhausted and then asks for more, God does the same. When you feel that you can't be successful you need more practice, until you know that you can be successful in all circumstances.

4. The fourth item is from Deuteronomy 5:9 NIV:

*You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, **punishing the children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me,***

This seems contradictory to Deuteronomy 24:16 NIV:

Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin.

It turns out that this (bolded part) is part of an idiomatic phrase and doesn't mean what it appears to mean, just as our idioms don't mean what they say.

A better understanding is that the parents will largely determine the destiny of the children; both in the training and examples they show their children. "Like Father, Like Son" is the phrase we use a lot. It is not always the case but does often fit the situation.

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