



Two (very similar) Questions this month

“Does God ‘cause’ [bad] things to happen - or does He just ‘allow’ them as consequence for sin?”

“Does God bring *punishments* on people - or does He simply allow natural *consequences* of sin?”

It seems to me that our society has trained us to think in terms of “either-or.” It’s “either” this way “or” it’s that way, but it can’t be “both.” And there are some things that definitely fall into the “either/or” category. For example, the Bible tells us that all people will EITHER spend eternity in total happiness in the presence of God (heaven) OR will spend eternity in total pain separated from him (hell). There is no middle ground. We can’t have both. We can’t have some of heaven and some of hell. Eternity is truly “either-or.”

Both of the questions above assume a similar “either-or” answer. But the best Bible-based answer to each of the questions is “Yes.”

Yes, God does sometimes *CAUSE* things to happen that we would describe as “bad.” See Genesis chapter 6-9 (The Flood). And, yes, God does sometimes *ALLOW* things that Satan has dreamed up - or things that simply are the result of the presence of sin in the world. See Job 1-2.

In both cases we need to keep in mind this one thing: God always sees the whole picture - the eternal picture. God’s purpose in the things He causes or allows is always with that eternal picture in mind. Whether He pro-actively caused it or simply allows to happen something Satan initiated, we can be 100% certain that God (as He says in Romans 8:28) has some eternally positive result in mind - *and* has the power to bring about that result.

It’s kind of like a parent who dislocated his child’s arm. When you see a picture of the kid with his arm in a sling and are told his dad did this to him, you are likely going to think the worst of the dad. Then you are told this happened when the father grabbed his son’s hand and pulled him out of the way of an oncoming car. Why did you initially assume the worst? *Because you didn’t have all the information.* Like that father, God sometimes will inflict (or allow) a lesser pain in order to prevent a greater (eternal) one. Our problem is that we don’t have all the information. We don’t see the same “big picture” that God does. We only see a small part of the picture, and so we often don’t understand.

As for the second question... Yes, God does bring *PUNISHMENT* on people. See Mark 12:38-40. And yes, sometimes bad things that happen are simply the natural *CONSEQUENCES* of our sin. That two hundred dollar fine is that natural consequence of doing 70 in a 55 zone.. (And sometimes the consequence also serves as the punishment.)

Parents again are great examples of how punishment and consequences are not necessarily either/or. Let’s say a parent tells a teenage son to “Be home by midnight, because we have to start work in the field at six tomorrow morning in order to get everything done.” The son drags in at 3 a.m. The father

gets him up at six anyway. Putting in a hard days work in the fields on just three hours sleep is natural "consequence" of his disobedience. And when the father 'grounds' the son for a week, he has also added "punishment" to the natural consequence. God may do the same with us.

In both cases the folks asking the questions pointed to friends who thought that God 'allows' bad things, but does not 'cause' them, and who thought that God allows consequences but does initiate punishment on people. Those ideas likely came from focusing on the fact that "God is a God of love." But we also must remember that God is also a God of Justice. Again, it's not an "either-or" thing. He can be both loving and just *at the same time*. In fact, being "un-just" like a judge who constantly *looked the other way* every time someone was convicted of a crime, would not be loving. Punishment of crime is both just and loving.

But this "*loving and just at the same time*" thing provided a great problem for God:

He loves us and wants us to spend eternity with Him (that's what we were created for).

But He is 'just' and so must punish sin (and the punishment He had set was to die and be separated from Him for eternity).

God solved that love/justice problem by taking the punishment for our sin *on Himself* as He died and suffered hell on the cross *in our place*.

We like to think about the "Love" part of God. But the "Justice" part? Not so much. That's why *Awesome God*, one of the songs we sung in worship last Sunday, is a good reminder for us. It reminds us that God's "awesomeness" is found not only in the act of creating everything that exists (and doing it simply by speaking). His "awesomeness" is found not only in the act of "mercy and grace He gave us at the cross." But His "awesomeness" is also found in His judgment and wrath like "He poured out on Sodom." He truly is an Awesome God.

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net