

A Compassionate and Loving God

By Archie Proctor

(What follows is the last article written by brother Archie Proctor. It is followed by a letter from sister Anita Proctor - prb)

Steve Jobs reportedly left his boyhood church when he noticed the vast number of starving children in the world. He stated that he could not serve a God which allowed such inequality. Many look at this world, and see suffering, and ask, "How can a compassionate and loving God allow this to happen?"

So what would we have God do? Should He rain bread from heaven on all starving people worldwide as He did when providing manna for the nation of Israel in the wilderness? (Ex. 16:15) Jesus faced that very question in John 6:26:

"Jesus answered them and said, 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled. Labor not for the meat which perishes, but for that meat which endures unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed.'

Christ made the point that although He could continue to feed the masses by use of His power, nothing would be accomplished to save men's souls, the reason He came to earth. When the majority of the people understood this:

"From that time many of his disciples went back and walked no more with him. Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:66ff).

Paul spoke of the disciples who went back in Phil. 3:18, *"For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."*

We see then that making the work of God the feeding the physical body does not promote His will and makes us "enemies of the cross." By minding earthly things and serving our physical appetites, we ignore the spiritual nature of the work God has given us. "Glory in shame" is a reference to the works of the flesh as outlined in Gal. 5:19ff. In other words, most men prefer sin and finding a free lunch to serving the God of heaven in "truth and spirit" (John 4:23).

Does this mean God make no provision to feed the hungry? Consider Eph. 4:28: *"Let him that stole steal no more: but rather let him labor, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needs."* God gave us the work of helping those we can when they cannot help themselves. Yet He does not expect us to exhaust our resources helping those who will not work for the things of life. (2Thes. 3:10)

This principle is also shown in the relief work many nations do in areas when famine threatens large-scale starvation of adults and children. Often the starvation continues because the leaders of these starving people withhold or divert such aid for personal or political reasons. Should God intervene in the minds of these leaders, and prevent them from such evil deeds? While He is at it, shall God prevent the murderer or rapist from sin by direct mental intervention? Imagine the frustration of the would-be sinner who plans and purposes such actions, yet is rendered unable to carry them out.

But if *"all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God"* (Rom.3:23), why not have God intervene in all men's minds and prevent any man from sinning? Many people might agree with the first two interventions, but would balk at the third. They are willing to have others prevented from sin, yet are not willing to give up their personal sins. They still want to serve the god of their belly; they have no interest in spiritual things. Their concern for starving children thus becomes an excuse to serve sin rather than God.

God did not create man to be robots controlled by His righteous will; on the contrary, He created man to be a free moral agent, able to choose between good and evil. *"Now therefore fear the Lord and serve him in sincerity and in truth: and put away the gods which forefathers served on the other side of the flood, and in Egypt; and serve ye the Lord. And fit seem evil unto you to serve*

the Lord, choose you this day whom ye will serve; whether the gods which forefathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land ye dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:14ff).

He remains a God who *"is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance"* (2Pet. 3.:9). God's gift of free will is not the source of evil deeds in this world, but the actions of men who choose to follow evil thoughts and deeds. Such evil comes not from God, but the Devil.

Dear Brethren,

Thanks for the wonderful outpouring of love you have shown our family with the cards, phone calls and words of support. We have many fond memories of our special time spent with you.

Even in his failing health of the last several years, Archie retained a love for the Lord and continued working. I have enclosed a copy of his last article written in November. He also had a sermon outline and charts on his computer, in the event the Lord would grant him health to preach one more time.

Your sweet expressions of sympathy have helped us through this difficult time. God bless all of you as we all continue in His service. Until we meet again!

Love, Anita, D'Ann, Doug, and Families

Only Seeing the Black Marks

"We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers, remembering without ceasing your work of faith, labor of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ in the sight of our God and Father..." (1Thes. 1:2-3).

A preacher tried to help a young man who was constantly disturbed and upset about the weakness and faults of the other members of the congregation. He caused a small black mark to show on a large white screen, and asked, "What do you see?" The young man said, "A black mark." The preacher asked, "Is that all you see?" He said, "Yes." The preacher said, "This is your problem. You only see the black marks (the faults) of the other members. You do not see the large white screen (the enormous good) of those members." It is wrong to focus only on the faults of others. Let us appreciate, commend, praise, and pray for those who continue to do well. Praise often; correct when necessary.

A Moments Wisdom

- Some people want to live like a goat and die like a sheep.
- Nebuchadnezzar's furnace will seem like a spring breeze compared to hell fire.
- Anyone who is satisfied to stand still should not complain when others pass him.
- It is useless to put your best foot forward if you are going to drag the other.
- Indecision is the graveyard of good intentions.
- Cast no dirt into the well from which you draw water.
- He who asks a question is a fool for a few minutes; he who does not ask remains a fool forever.