

Don't Equate Difficulty with Evil

When you were a child, there were times when you faced some difficulty or perhaps discipline and it felt like something bad. You may have even perceived it as evil. I certainly had plenty of those moments. As we grow older, we begin to see reality in a brighter light. I speed, I get a ticket. I stay in the parking space too long and I get a parking ticket. Some *cause and effect* events are fairly clear and obvious.

Some events in life are not so obvious. Often things in the spiritual realm are not so easily sorted out, particularly if we are not soaking daily life in God's word. When that happens and life seems to get sideways, we are unsure of what is happening. Job is a perfect example of confusing the struggles of normal life on earth with discipline from God. Job was suffering, indeed, but the sources of his suffering were first, Satan's bringing actual maladies and second, the verbal attacks from his friends who had misconstrued what was happening (Job 42:7).

We, like Job's friends, can easily mistake normal life challenges for discipline from God, *and vice versa!* Americans today are fairly insulated from second and third world problems *if we live a proper disciplined life*. For instance, very few who work hard with a good attitude will become homeless, etc.), but it's still easy to mistake God's loving discipline for evil... Satan loves to deceive us in this earthly realm (Rev. 12:9).

We see a principle at work in Jeremiah 29:11:

For I know the plans have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.

People love to appeal to that verse in troubled times, ***but it was not written to us!*** The verse was written to people whom God, Himself, had driven from their homes and their nation because of abject sin. God's own people had allowed violence, immorality and idolatry to flood into their nation and their own lives. Verse 11 is given to speak of their future ***70 years later!*** Notice the previous verse:

"For thus says the Lord: When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place.

And verse 12:

Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you.

They are in the midst of God's discipline, and it isn't going to end anytime soon! The ***principle*** of verse 11 still applies: after God has disciplined a sinner, he can seek God in prayer and God will listen. The principle is just as clear in Hebrews 12:3-11, which ends with this wisdom:

All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness.

When we allow God's discipline to train us, we then enter the "*peaceful fruit of righteousness*" stage we love.

POINT: be gravely careful that you do not misinterpret the loving discipline of God to be evil. AND be gravely careful not to misinterpret actual evil as if it were an expression of God's love. How do know the difference? My only answer is to soak life's sores in the wisdom and healing of God's word. "*Thy word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.*" (Ps. 119:105).

Ray Wallace