

#243 “Job and the Mistaken Notion of Karma”

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Karma is a core doctrine of eastern belief such as in Hinduism or Buddhism. It is the idea that good moral efforts have a cause and effect relationship with benefit and welfare in this life or in the next. For example, should someone love his neighbor, perhaps he could be reincarnated as a king rather than a cow. Or, should somebody lie, steal, and murder, they would suffer ill fate in this life as the universe metes out justice. The core thinking is that there is a sense in which man’s behavior dictates or even controls his destiny. A person might think that if he only does well that all will go well for him. If he doesn’t, then things won’t go well. Thus, if a person is well off in life, they are probably good. If a person is doing poorly in life, they are probably doing more evil than good. Interestingly, this belief can actually be traced back at least in part to the time of Job. We know that Job’s friends believed in karma, although they wouldn’t have used that word. They were convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that Job had done something wrong because all of the calamities that he suffered proved his guilt, or so they believed. Yet Job was innocent (Ezekiel 14:12-14, Job 1:1), and even Job himself had great trouble reconciling the fact that he had suffered the effects of bad karma when he was a good person. Yes, Job needed to learn some things about God, for God is not bound by karma. Karma isn’t even a Biblical concept.

Job was so convinced of his flawless, righteous performance in life that he actually accused God of being unrighteous given his tribulations. This led to him receiving a vehement rebuke from God (Job 40:8). God spoke at great length explaining to Job how He will do what He will do because He is God. It is He Who is stronger than leviathan, and it is He Who can bring low the wicked. It is He Who has taught the creation how to behave, and it is He Who alone deserves majesty and glory. Indeed, there is none like our God Who has created all things and is in control of all things. When God allows difficulties into our lives, it can be a struggle to reconcile God’s power with the ordained trial. However, God allowing Satan to do evil in our lives does not mean that God is evil or that He has violated His good nature. Nor does it mean that He is being unjust or unfair to us, especially if we have been living faithfully and obediently. Faithfulness will be rewarded (Hebrews 11:6, Galatians 6:9), but there is a purpose and place for trials in this life. In fact, when trials come, we are instructed to count them to be a blessing and a joy (James 1:2-4) not because they are pleasant but because of what God will do in our hearts through the trials. We must not think that we can use a checklist of righteous deeds to earn our way to earthly prosperity (we cannot even earn our own salvation, after all), for this is dangerous, pagan thinking that elevates man to a position that is too high and mighty (Job 41:34). We dare not rebuke or accuse God of being unfair or unfaithful, for He is always good and always in total control.

The tension of a good God allowing Satan to afflict righteous people can be difficult to weather, but interestingly God actually uses weather to paint us a picture of how He sometimes works. In His rebuke to Job, He chose to speak from out of a storm (Job 38:1, 40:6). This should encourage us that, even when life is a tornado and all we can view of God is cloudy, God is still there, still in control, and still on

the throne. God is good in the sunny days of life and during the hurricanes. One day He will set all things right, but in this time, He chooses for reasons we cannot fully understand in this life, to allow the devil to do evil. Job was a good man, very righteous, and it is because of this that Satan wanted to attack him (Job 1:9-11). So our good behavior doesn't mean that sunny weather is guaranteed, but it might mean that God will allow storms into our lives as a proving ground for our faith. *Trials are a chance for Him to receive glory as we learn more about Him, as we grow in perseverance, as our character is increasingly conformed to His, and as we worship even when all that was earthly gain is lost.* God still is good and still deserves worship even in life's greatest trials which He ordains for us. In them we will see what we really believe, as Job did, and we have a chance to grow and change. Yes, a trial can be a blessing, even a good and perfect gift. Let us not be afraid when God speaks through the storm, for there is a high likelihood that we need to learn something.

Job was also rebuked by God in Job 40:14 for believing that his own right hand could save him. Even when things were going well for Job, we learn from Job 1:10 that his prosperity had been due not to his own ability to protect himself but rather to God hedging Job in and not allowing Satan to touch him. Yet part of him actually believed that he could merit the protection of God (Job 31:1-4). The reality is that God's love, mercy, and care for us stems from His love for His children, a free gift of grace. We don't earn God's protection via good karma, but rather God's protects His own because that is Who He is. Even when we are faithless, He is still faithful to us because He cannot deny His own nature (2 Timothy 2:13). We are dependent beings who ought to thankfully bask in the goodness and mercy of our God Who will always be faithful to us, even when we don't deserve it. The challenge for us is that we must endure, and we will do this best when we keep believing in a compassionate God Whose right hand is powerful and faithful to watch over His own (Isaiah 41:10).

James 5:13 says, "We count those blessed who endured. You have heard of the endurance of Job and have seen the outcome of the Lord's dealings, that the Lord is full of compassion and is merciful." Following Job's trial, God did restore to Job double what he had lost, for God does care about our earthly needs. However, let us not forget our spiritual needs, too, and times of trial are needed to forge the spiritual blessing of holiness in our hearts. Whether we are in a situation of ease or difficulty, we must count God faithful and compassionate. We must not infer wrong things about God's character just because we don't understand. God knew that Job needed to learn about God's compassion and grace, and, indeed, through the trial, he did come to see God in a new and more correct light (Job 42:1-6). Though the process was painful, the legacy of God in Job's life is not that of injustice but of compassion and blessedness. God is just to reward those who endure.

Karma is dependent upon our own ability to perform, whereas compassion is defined by the unchangeable nature of God. Surely, the latter is far more desirable, for it is far more reliable. Indeed, it is inviolable, and therefore we can have hope (Romans 5:3-5).