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*"The Churches of God Outreach Ministries provides leadership, information, and biblical teaching in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20"*

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# Natural Consequences

**'It's the end of the world'. 'God is wreaking His punishment on sinning mankind'.  
'Where was God'? 'What was He thinking?' 'Be warned!' True?**

by James McBride

The awesome catastrophe around the Indian Ocean in December 2004 has given many who profess belief in a deity pause for thought. Would a loving God allow this? Unbelievers scoff at Christian attempts to justify Him.

Some church leaders insist this terrible calamity—perhaps 300,000 deaths—is divine punishment on those nations which are unbelievers. (But what of disasters in 'Christian areas?') Or that it is a warning of worse to come. That we are now in the 'end-time' and will soon see the end of civilisation as we know it.

## A Great Beginning

We have, of course, throughout the centuries been here before—*many* times. (Though that doesn't negate the absolute fact that there *will* come an end. And an end that will be even more horrific as human evil soars to a crescendo.)

In recent history the rise in the 30s of the pagan Hitlerian murder squads and their worldwide effect was seen as the beginning of 'the Great Tribulation'. The 60's 'silent spring' warnings, race riots etc stoked the same response, with expectations of mayhem between 1972 and 1975. Past centuries, too, have witnessed dire predictions of the world's end.

In His understanding of fallen human nature and the depths to which it can descend, the Creator slapped a time limit on our occupation of His beautiful planet—a nominal 'six thousand years'. Some historians will say that 'civilisation' began around then.

At that beginning the record states: "*God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good*". Earth was 'at rest'. Perfect harmony in a gentle atmosphere. No grinding, unstable tectonic plates. All was in balance. Humanity was in harmony with the divine, and could live endlessly in his perfect body. Then—*disaster*.

The Creator has "*...made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host [stars, planets], the earth and all things that are therein, and you preserve them all*" (Nehemiah

9:6). He "*...upholds all things by the word of his power*" (Hebrews 1:3). The material universe, that is, has to be sustained by the active intervention of our Creator. *Our sin interferes with that.*

## Consequences

Few understand the shocking effects of our rejection of God's original guidance—our sin, that is. Our sin spills over into the physical realm affecting the very core and depths of the physical Earth and its atmosphere as well as us personally.

Both mankind's sin and God's purpose allow into life the intervention of man's implacable Adversary. Job experienced this. Satan knew that God had, because of Job's righteousness, '*made a hedge [of protection] about him*' (Job 1:10). To demonstrate to Satan Job's faithfulness God allowed him to stir up adversity—including 'a great wind. Isaiah also had this perception, concerning his own nation, Israel, His 'vineyard': "*I will take away the hedge thereof and it shall be eaten up; and break down the wall thereof and it [the nation] shall be trodden down*" (ch 5:5). Plagues, catastrophic earthquakes, extreme weather and finally invasion followed.

## Sin Hurts

The physical effect of sin is very clear in our daily lives, for 'sin' expresses all that is contrary to revealed knowledge, and to knowledge acquired through human, if fallible, ingenuity. That knowledge guards us from mental and physical injury.

Every transgression has an effect. Sin has consequences. On the personal level seemingly minor transgression hurts us. *Lie*, for example, and it leaves a physical mark on the neural system and if repeated builds a negative pattern of behaviour. Indulge in *drugs*—eg alcohol, tobacco, heroin—and you can die. Allow *crime* to flourish in an area and it takes root and leads to social decay, to murder and ultimately to national downfall. Disregard *adultery* and *sexual perversion*—explicitly forbidden by the Creator—and we have soaring dysfunctional families, divorce, ravaging sexually transmitted disease including

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the worldwide scourge of AIDS.

### Instruction Manual

Sometimes there's a small consequence, sometimes it is personally catastrophic. We all have to go. There's no way out but by death—for everyone. And that, too, results from sin. Because all of us have *'fallen short of the glory of God'*. All of us. In the beginning God said in effect: *'If you go your own way you and all your progeny will no longer live for ever'*. We have gone our own way, and as a consequence we die—all of us. But when national sin, world sin, escalates a point is reached at which there is a violent random physical response in the material world around us.

We are built to flourish when we follow the instruction manual—God's guidance in His revelation, His Word. Is it a surprise, then, that 'the machinery' breaks down when we don't 'follow the manual'?

### Divine Wrath?

These consequences, however, are not inflicted on us by a vindictive and angry deity but are allowed by a God who loves His creation and whose purpose is to restore to humanity his original glory. That purpose is to shape us—as many as so desire—into His image. It's the work of a lifetime.

God is protective of His world—the *kosmos*. He loves and cherishes it. But He does *not* love 'the wicked' or the evil in His *kosmos*. When the latter seriously interfere with the divine purpose the sovereign God is not averse to removing them! And sometimes a localized (*eg* Sodom), national (the Amorites) or world-embracing disaster strikes. We need to get real in the image we hold of the Creator!

The Flood of some five thousand years ago is an example. Civilisation had, for over sixteen centuries, slowly disintegrated: Then *"God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually"* (Genesis 6:5). The result? The very crust of Earth was ripped apart (did the 'plates' move?), the atmosphere disturbed. The direct consequence of—*sin*.

The effects, the 'violence of nature', are with us to this day in the present configuration of Earth's physical geography. The inspired historian writes: *"The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence"* (v.11).

And yes—the innocent and the ignorant suffer. Wrote that ancient sage, Solomon: *"All things come alike to all; there*

*is one event to the righteous and to the wicked"* (Ecclesiastes 9:2). Jesus had the same message: *"...those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell, do you think they were sinners above all men that dwell in Jerusalem? I tell you No, but except you repent you will suffer likewise"* (Luke 13:4-5).

For we are all of one. We who survive weep with them and for them. God is there, here, in the storm, the earthquake, the floods, the cancer—for those who desire Him. In Christ He comes alongside to comfort and support, even till death. But we *all* still experience the terrible effect of universal human sin.

All of us eventually die—from disease, accident, old age, or by a natural disaster. And no *Christian* has immunity.

### Time to Change

It doesn't always have to be like this. Personally, nationally, worldwide we can *turn from* our sin. God doesn't want anyone to perish. As computer geeks will say when advice is sought for another PC crash: *'RTM—read the manual!'* Read, and *follow*, the 'Scriptures of truth'. The door is still open.

Those terrible destructive waves back in December may indeed be a warning to everyone. But the world's overwhelming generous charitable response says there is still hope, still a glimmer of compassion.

### It Won't Last

Sadly, the sure prophetic voice of Scripture has foreseen that mankind in general will, by the 'time of the end', have *'hardened his heart'*. The world has set its course to destruction. For six thousand uncivilized years we have experienced the groping in darkness of politicians and religious mis-leadership And have yet to learn the lesson that 'God's way is the only way'.

The world at large may be 'going to hell in a hand-cart'. But individuals—you—have still time to change. When you do, whether you live or suffer or die, you will be on course to enter a civilisation at peace with itself. And a physical globe that is stable and at rest.

Alongside other churches of God the *Outreach Ministries* wants to reach out to as many as possible, within the limits of our resources, to encourage individuals to grasp the opportunity to trust Jesus Christ to see them through whatever personal challenges may lie ahead.

You are invited to add your efforts to ours.

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