

Left-handed God

Why does God leave this world in such a terrible mess?

A question that frequently puzzles Christians and non-Christians alike is, “If God is so almighty and powerful, why doesn’t he come down and sort this wretched world out right now and bring the promised Kingdom of God?”

It’s a valid question.

Why doesn’t God, who claims to be in charge of everything and for whom “nothing is impossible,” get down here, bang a few heads together, fling all the baddies into a bottomless pit and get the job done? Why have over 2,000 years gone by since Jesus claimed he’d brought the Kingdom and there’s no sign of this world being anything else other than a place where nation fights nation and we continue to sweep up the debris and various body parts and pass on to the next atrocity? Man’s “inhumanity to man” reaches unimaginable extremes, especially to children; God is the subject of ridicule and his name is used as a curse word; families disintegrate, and people suffer from all kinds of previously unheard of disabilities. The list goes on.

“Some God!” explodes the atheist along with the evolutionist and the misinformed - and can you blame them? And the tragedy is that the modern-day church splutters its platitudes but offers no coherent answer.

So why doesn’t God use his power to fix this world, and use a bit of straight up, right-handed, strong arm intervention to put things right? In the sixteenth century, Martin Luther realized God is not like this at all, however, he’s completely the opposite, and that this use or, better said, misuse of power, does not achieve God’s objective. God uses his power in a paradoxical way: Luther called it “left-handed power.”

The attraction of direct, straight-line interventionist power is that it works! You can shove people out of your way if you are stronger than they are and you can efficiently dispose of your enemy with an AK 47, but if your purpose is to form personal loving relationships, then this use of power has a gigantic disadvantage. Try using it on a teenage son who uses your car without permission. You tell him not to, but he does anyway. So you raise your voice, with no effect. You get to shouting at him, but he not only continues to use the car but dents it on the gate post. If you are bigger than he is you might try physical punishment and if that has no effect what then? Tie him to a fence? - or... but you get the point. And what would be the resulting relationship with your son?

There is only one recorded time when God used this kind of intervention. The creation was moving swiftly toward disintegration and final extinction, so God selected a family to continue working with and he destroyed the rest. When Noah emerged from the ark God set a rainbow in the sky as a sign that he would never use this kind of power again – it is an everlasting

covenant with mankind. Since then it would appear that God is entirely absent from this life on earth, which is what raises the questions that we are now trying to answer.

The impression that God was absent from this world was challenged when he became a human being in Jesus Christ and lived alongside us. The Jews of that time, who were expecting this to occur according to their Scriptures, looked for a powerful “right-handed” Messiah who would re-establish Israel and sort out the oppressive Roman Empire. But, as we know, Jesus did no such thing. Quite the opposite: he surrendered himself to false condemnation and ignominious death as a common criminal without once upholding the Pharisaic religion of Israel. He made no attempt to intervene in the world’s way of life or to punish those who killed him. He could have called on legions of angels to rescue him, but he didn’t, and he ignored the challenge to come down from the cross though he had the power to do so. In his non-interventionist life he appeared to be weak and seemed to make no difference whatever to the way this world lives. Even though he was resurrected from death and lived among a few disciples, it was only for a few weeks, after which he disappeared, apparently into a cloud and has not been seen since. The world continued as before deteriorating into ever more squalor and destruction.

So, has the “left-handed” power of God failed? You can be forgiven for thinking so if you live in this modern society without the knowledge of what God has already achieved and what he has done with the human race in the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ.

God the Father came to us in Jesus Christ to reveal himself as the God of love, as the God with a Father’s heart who longed to share his life with us and relate to us as his sons and daughters – his “offspring” as Paul describes us. God sent Jesus to remove everything that stood in the way of this purpose. The way was not to strong arm it to bend people to his will, but to come in unconditional love which inevitably can do nothing else than to bring a response of love in return. “We love him because he first loved us.”

It takes time! And it takes experience!

And Jesus told us that he is “The way, the truth and the life” – not that he came to *demonstrate* the way, or *tell* us the truth and *about* the life, but that he actually *is* the way and the truth and the life! John McLeod Campbell, writing some 150 years ago, wrote that “we come to God as sons or not come at all.” We are to *experience* and share Christ’s relationship of sonship to the Father even now!

This is what God has done by non-intervention, by the “left-handed” power of love. He has changed forever the human condition. In Jesus Christ he has re-created the human race and lifted us up into the “heavenly realms” to sit with Jesus at the right hand of the Father, Ephesians 2:4-6. The Holy Spirit bears witness with our spirit that “we are the sons of God,” Romans 8:16.

Why doesn’t God intervene in this world? Because he’s already done all the intervening necessary to save us from ourselves, and he now allows us time to experience our own way if we want to, or to experience his way instead. Then we can make a choice to live his way and respond in love, not be right-armed into it against our will.