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AIDS:

IS IT GOD'S JUDGEMENT?

A Christian View
of Faith, Hope and Love
from
Metropolitan
Community Church

IS AIDS GOD'S JUDGEMENT?

Is aids, acquired immune deficiency syndrome, a punishment or scourge from God? Some would say yes. Indeed, some members of what the media calls the religious right would probably praise God for the tragic epidemic which is claiming the lives of thousands of gay men and others. The idea that aids is a punishment from God is based on three false assumptions: That homosexual acts are sinful, that God causes suffering, and that God punishes sin with disease. These false assumptions result from a particular way of looking at society, sexuality, and how God works in the world. These assumptions and the worldview they reflect are based on the fear called homophobia, and in tragic misunderstanding of the meaning of Christ. It is the responsibility of Christians to overcome this fear and misunderstanding, and witness to God's love and grace.

ARE HOMOSEXUAL ACTS SINFUL?

There are a few passages in the Bible that have been said to condemn gay sexual acts. Currently there is much debate about these passages. Some Christians believe these passages condemn *all* homosexual behavior. But a growing number of Bible experts are convinced *these passages condemn only certain sexual acts that are idolatrous or abusive.*

For example, *Sodom and Gomorrah* (Gen. 19), probably deals with rape, which is a violent act and irrelevant to same sex loving relationships. Other passages in the Bible, such as Ezekiel 16:49-50, identify the sin of these cities as injustice and idolatry. Likewise, some religious authorities now point out that New Testament passages like I Corinthians 6:9 and Romans 1:24-27 deal with sexual behavior that is unloving and exploitive (such as prostitution). But even then, the Christian message is one of forgiveness and healing. Jesus said nothing about homosexuality, but he said a great deal about faith, hope and love.

Certain passages of the Bible, around which there is no debate, assure us that everyone has access to God by faith. John 3:16 teaches that **whosoever** believes in Christ will have eternal life. Gay persons who believe in Christ are part of the "whosoever," mentioned in John.

DOES GOD CAUSE SUFFERING?

Why do people suffer? All religions have had to address this question. Our world is full of human suffering caused by hunger, disease, poverty and multiple forms of oppression and injustice. If these things are happening, does this mean they are God's will and, therefore, God wills us to suffer?

Evil is a very real force in this world, a force *not* of God's making. (Mark 1:32-34) And AIDS is certainly a devastating evil not of God's will. It is not "just deserts" for gay men sent them as punishment. Jesus never punished people with sickness. He healed. *AIDS is a tragedy, and God suffers with all who are victimized by it or lose loved ones because of it.*

Bad things do happen to good people! We suffer many times through no fault of our own, because the world is many times an unfair, unjust place. God's created order exists among chaos that is not of God.

God does not cause the tragedy but God does respond to suffering with healing. God heals sometimes through physical restoration, at other times with grace sufficient to grow in the midst of suffering. (I Corinthians 12:9)

God's healing is described by a woman with a friend who died of AIDS: "He was an abused child, abandoned by his mother. But in his last months, his mother came to live with him, nursing him around the clock. In their times together old wounds were healed, forgiveness was shared and faith grew. My friend received a healing gift of family and love he had never known."

Even when the injustice of tragedy invades our lives, God's passionate love can bring good in the form of healing and growth. We can find God's healing touch in our tears of sadness and our screams of anger. We can find God's healing touch in the words of love and comfort shared by others. More than anything, we can find God's healing touch through that inner peace that comes from God's presence and promises. We know that in everything God works for good with those who love God. (Romans 8:28)

IS SIN PUNISHED WITH DISEASE?

"Is God punishing Gays with aids?" This is the kind of question that has been asked for centuries, substituting many other names for aids and many other communities for gay. Each time some mysterious malady befalls a nation or an identified community there is the rush to see if God did it and if so, why. If indeed aids is a plague sent by God into the gay community, there are some flaws in the plan. Lesbians are not likely to contract the illness, so then God would not seem to be giving the same sentence to lesbians as to gay men. And, there is the matter of all the other people who are not gay that are affected. What do we do with all the people in the country of Zaire where there is the highest case rate in the world for aids and it has nothing to do with IV drug use or sexual orientation? Clearly there is no justification for suggesting that God has found disfavor with the gay community (males only), and has created aids as punishment. Are all women with toxic shock syndrome victims of God's wrath? Or Blacks with sickle cell anemia? Or Jews with Tay-Sachs disease?

People had similar questions during the time of Jesus Christ. Then, as now, many assumed that suffering is a direct result of sin. But Christ challenged that assumption.

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, was it his sin or that of his parents that caused him to be blind?" "Neither," answered Jesus, "it was no sin, either of this man or of his parents. Rather it was to let God's work show forth in him." (Jn 9:1-3)

Jesus then reached out to heal the blind man. We too, must reject the idea that aids, or any other illness, is punishment for sin. We, like Jesus Christ, must reach out with a healing touch. Rather than God's retribution, suffering becomes an occasion for God's love to be demonstrated. *When Christians reach out and touch those with aids, they can transform suffering into a living example of God's love.*

WHAT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY?

While our culture often focuses on sin and evil as an individual matter, the Bible speaks frequently of sin as something we are involved in together. Evil comes in groups, in structures, in forces beyond the individual, just as aids is beyond the individual. And our response to aids must be a group response as well as an individual one.

If loving homosexual acts are not evil and God does not cause suffering or punish gays with aids, then what keeps our community from responding? One answer is homophobia. Homophobia is an unrealistic fear of and rejection of lesbians and gay men.

Homophobia affects *us* when we believe that there is something wrong with our sexuality. We question the validity of who we are and give in to self-hatred. This is not surprising, since we are taught homophobia from a young age through such things as queer jokes, and a lack of positive role models. Facing that fear is the first step toward ending the paralysis which effects much of our community. As we become more free of homophobia, we can work toward the elimination of this tragic disease.

"The Truth shall set us free," and yet we too often deny the truth or avoid learning about aids because of fear. It is our community responsibility to educate ourselves and all we can reach. Many in our community have fears about the risks of contracting aids; we must overcome our fear with facts.

Like Jesus with the lepers, as a community we are called to **eat** with people with aids and **share** their home with them (Matthew 26:6); **touch** people with aids and **give** them our intimacy (Matthew 8:2-4); and to **heal** people with aids (Luke 17:11-19.) *Our faithful, intimate presence in the lives of those with aids, witnessing to them of Jesus' healing touch, is one of the most important responsibilities we have.*

FOR FURTHER READING

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FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Contact your local aids project, Shanti Foundation, Metropolitan Community Church or:

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