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Is AIDS God's Judgment against Homosexuality?
An Argument from Natural Law
Rondi Noden

Westboro Baptist Church in Topeka, Kansas is renowned for, among other things, its anti-homosexual “ministry” and its doctrine of hatred. On the FAQ page of their website, www.godhatesfags.com, the question “Why do you say thank God for AIDS?” has the following response:

Because God is a sovereign God, and should be thanked for all of His righteous judgments, whether you like them or not. Everyone who gets AIDS gets it as a direct result of God's will (including babies and people who get it from blood transfusions), and He should be blessed for it . . . As far as innocent people who get AIDS, God isn't bound by your humanistic standards of justice. Throughout history, He has killed innocent people to punish those people who are still living (e.g., the innocent first born of Egypt). And He's doing it today. God's wrath is being poured out on this world in many forms, including AIDS, and part of that wrath is the destruction of innocent people (including babies).”
(Westboro Baptist Church, 2007)

Despite its extremism, the thoughts of Westboro Baptist Church reflect much of the public opinion generated since 1981, when the HIV virus was first isolated among a group of gay men (CDC, 2007). The disease went on to become an epidemic that locked the 1980s in fear. Even today it has become a dominant feature of many people groups and countries. So the question remains: Is AIDS God's judgment against homosexuality?

Many, like the members of Westboro Baptist Church, would like to claim that it is. While Protestant and Catholic groups alike have been working in AIDS relief since its outbreak, many evangelical Christians have remained silent or even scathingly critical (Epstein, 2005). Such prominent voices as Jerry Falwell and former Senator Jesse Helms claim to represent evangelicals by labeling AIDS as a judgment from God. They have even argued for a reduction in AIDS funding “because homosexuals contract the disease through their ‘deliberate, disgusting, revolting conduct’” (Epstein, 2005).

To claim that AIDS is a divine judgment from God against homosexuals (or those who are promiscuous, drug addicted, etc.) is to make an assumption with serious implications. If AIDS is God's specific righteous punishment against those who engage in homosexuality, then Christians are morally justified in withholding aid

from such persons. On the other hand, if AIDS is not God's judgment against homosexuality, then the attitudes and actions of those who have been sitting behind the judgment seat for the past twenty years must seriously change.

In order to better understand this question, one must examine the way God often judges His people. First of all, all persons born onto this earth are under the general judgment of sin. We are all guilty in God's eyes and we all deserve the death penalty simply because of our inherent sinful nature (Gen. 3:15ff). Secondly, God has in the past exercised specific divine judgments against certain people groups in certain times. The plagues upon Egypt and the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah are all examples of God specifically judging a group of people in a specific time frame. Yet even in the Scriptures the examples where God chooses to punish or judge people in this way are few and far between.

In deciding whether or not AIDS is a modern-day version of God invoking judgment on a specific people in a specific time, one should consider the statistics that show that HIV/AIDS extends far beyond the realm of homosexuality. In the past year, the number of persons infected with HIV worldwide rose to nearly 40 million and, compared to the various other forms of transmissions, the numbers of homosexuals infected were relatively few (AIDS Epidemic Update, 2006). As global awareness brings to light such atrocities as the slave sex trade, international refugees, poverty, and other human injustices, the world will realize that not all the transmission of HIV are simply the gross result of promiscuity or other sins (Epstein, 2005). In fact, of the 2.3 million children under the age of fifteen infected with HIV, about ninety percent are the result of mother-to-child transmissions (AIDS Epidemic Update, 2006; UNA-USA, 2001).

If God were seeking to specifically judge homosexuality, or even drug use and promiscuity, through this disease, more homosexuals would have the disease and it would be strictly limited to the people group being judged. For God to intentionally allow the deaths of millions of innocent people in order to mark one group of people goes against His very nature; though just, He is also loving, merciful, and sovereign.

From a natural law perspective, however, there may be a plausible way in which humanity is judged, and it is a way backed by Scripture. Natural law theory claims that the end goal of an object is built into that very object along with a set of laws governing conduct. The end, guided by its internal laws, dictates how that thing must act and any deviation otherwise leads to unintended consequences (Feinberg and Feinberg, 1993).

Humanly speaking, we were all created with the internal end of glorifying God (Psalm 115) but our sinful nature is in a constant battle with our created purpose. Though we often have the intuitive knowledge to know what we should do, we often give in to our sinful nature. "For I do not do what I want," Paul says in Romans 7:19, "but I do the very thing I hate." The entire first chapter of the book of Romans addresses this very theme: outlining God's revelation of truth and man's blatant disobedience. Romans 1 describes how, because of his refusal to worship God, man was given up to his sinful desires (v. 24). From a natural law perspective, man has deviated from that which he was created to do, and the consequences of that disobedience have fallen upon him. In other words, this is a third way in which God often judges people: through the consequences of actions that go against His intended order.

I personally believe that in the question of AIDS and God's judgment, the natural law argument is a powerful one. Because homosexuality and many of the other risky behaviors that contribute to the spread of HIV/AIDS go against God's intended plan for man's life, there are consequences that man was not prepared to deal with. Because the natural order is not limited to isolated individuals, these consequences unfortunately have an impact on society at large.

It is crucial, though, that Christians remember two things: the sovereignty of God and His decrees. God works all things, including man's mistakes, together for His will and His glory (Ephesians 1:11). We are commanded to love, not judge (John 13:34, Luke 10:27). Following his description of the state of mankind in Romans 1, Paul warns other Christians to be careful in passing judgment on others, for all are guilty of sin, or

breaking the natural order in some form (Romans 2:1). Jesus Himself would only grant permission to a man “without sin” for the casting of stones (John 8:7).

The message that many Christians have been sending those lost in sin, whether they are afflicted with AIDS or not, has been one judgment and contempt, and this denies the message of Christ's forgiveness. As the horrible consequences of sin continue to spread, even in the form of AIDS, Christians must take this opportunity to demonstrate what they were created to do in the first place: show forth the glory of God in their lives. To refuse to do this in favor of judgment and hatred would be an act of hypocrisy. Such Christians are denying the natural order in favor of their own way.

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