

AIDS as Divine Judgment PART II

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Part 1, an examination of God's *judgment* in both the Old and New Testaments and scriptural teaching on homosexuality, appeared in the previous issue.

MEDICAL ASPECTS OF AIDS

AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome) is an advanced disease manifestation of HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) infection. AIDS has clearly reached epidemic proportion in the United States. By the end of 1987, 47,793 cases of AIDS had been reported to the Center for Disease Control, and 27,909 (56%) were reported to have died. In some cities, like San Francisco, the death toll even as early as 1986 had already proportionately exceeded the numbers of combatant deaths from WWI, WWII, the Korean War and the Vietnam conflict combined.⁶⁷ If AIDS has reached epidemic proportions, HIV infections has even more so, for the current estimates of the prevalence of HIV infection in the U.S. ranges from approximately 250,000 to 1,750,000⁶⁸ with one million being a reasonable figure. Up to 99 percent of people infected with the virus will die from AIDS, barring new treatments, and the average time from exposure until life-threatening disease is 7.8 years in homosexual men.⁶⁹ While AZT (the antiviral nucleoside zidovudine azidothymidine) improves both the quality and duration of life in some affected with AIDS it is not curative.⁷⁰

It is now well established that AIDS is contracted by various highrisk behaviors and high-risk exposures to the HIV. That the disease is almost exclusively limited to high-risk groups is due to the fact that the virus is virtually only transmitted through blood, semen and vaginal secretions." The groups at significant risk include:

- (1) homosexual and bisexual men,
- (2) IV drug abusers,
- (3) prostitutes,
- (4) heterosexual partners of persons at recognized risk or with known HIV infection,
- (5) the newborn offspring of those at recognized risk or with known HIV infection, and
- (6) recipients of multiple blood transfusions or blood products, especially hemophiliacs, prior to 1985 when highly sensitive (though not 100%) testing became available.⁷¹

However 90% of the adult patients with AIDS (with pediatric patients making up only 1 % of the total number with AIDS) are either homosexual or bisexual males (65%) IV drug abusers (17%), or both (8%).⁷³ It is now estimated that 20-25% of exclusively homosexual and 5-10% of bisexual men are infected with HIV. On the other hand, in heterosexual adults who are without the identifiable risk factors mentioned above the prevalence is estimated at 0.021%.⁷⁴ **Thus there is a one thousand fold difference in prevalence of HIV infection between exclusively homosexual male and heterosexual adults without identifiable risk factors.**

Because receptive anal intercourse appears to be the means of transmission of HIV among homosexual and bisexual men and because of the high prevalence of HIV infection among homosexual and bisexual men, unprotected receptive anal intercourse carries a very

high risk of infection." Thus medical authorities recommend "protective sex" which includes the use of condom. They, however, acknowledge that condoms, even when used with spermicides are known to fail in pregnancy prevention; thus "failures can be expected" in the prevention of HIV infection. Therefore, they differentiate "protective sex" with condoms which they suggest is "very safe" from a mutually monogamous relationship which they affirm is "absolutely safe" barring other non-sexual risk factors.⁷⁶ Of course, given the risk of condom failure and the high prevalence of HIV infection among homosexual and bisexual men, protected homosexual receptive anal intercourse is much more dangerous than protected heterosexual intercourse. Further, the more partners any sexually active person has, especially homosexual and bisexual partners, the greater the risk.

AIDS AS GOD'S JUDGEMENT

In the initial section of this paper a number of concerns and objections to the suggestion that AIDS is a manifestation of divine judgement were raised by evangelical Christians. Implicitly each concern has already been addressed and each objection refuted. But there comes a time after the issues have been discussed when the evidence demands a verdict. In this author's opinion it is beyond reasonable doubt that AIDS is a manifestation of divine judgement and that practicing homosexual men are, among others, the present objects of God's wrath. Further, the failure to recognize God's disposition of judgement in this major event in the history of the world is to fail to recognize a significant aspect of its meaning.

The large number of people in the United States with AIDS and even larger number with HIV infection are of a "staggering proportion." The majority contract the illness through ungodly "high-risk" behaviors, especially homosexual intercourse (as well as IV drug abuse). While homosexual behavior is itself a present manifestation of divine wrath through God's judicial abandonment to shameful lusts, AIDS is a further manifestation of divine retributive judgement resulting in suffering, disease and death. Though anal intercourse (as well as IV drug abuse) is the direct cause of HIV

infection among practicing homosexuals, AIDS is not simply the inevitable consequence of sin. Rather, in AIDS even the means of God's punishment is retributive, i.e., the instrument of sin becoming the instrument of punishment. In this way God has clearly revealed through General revelation the wickedness of homosexual behavior. Of course, He has even more clearly revealed the sinfulness, of that behavior through special revelation in Scripture.

The AIDS judgement, however, is not only retributive judgement. It is also revelatory judgement in that God reveals Himself as the One who is not mocked; for He orders the universe according to moral, as well as natural, laws. As frightening as it is to suggest, AIDS is probably also a purificatory judgement through which God partially cleanses His fallen creation. Before the fall He ordained, in the context of monogamous marriage, heterosexual intercourse as the only legitimate expression of a union which meets, at the most intimate level, our need for human companionship. Further divine judgement is not limited to this present age, for those practicing homosexuals who remain unrepentant will face the even more terrifying eschatological wrath of God at the last judgement.

But, hopefully, God's judgement through AIDS will also be corrective judgement. The long latent period between HIV infection and death will give many an opportunity to repent and through faith to experience God's mercy. That mercy can be experienced in this life as an assurance of forgiveness and a divine love and faithfulness. No person has ever encountered such love and faithfulness in any homosexual relationship, or for that matter, in any heterosexual relationship, even in monogamous marriage. Further, the repentant homosexual person can have real hope for the future. For he knows that, having been justified by Christ's blood, he will be saved from the eschatological wrath of God. Tragically, some homosexual persons may refuse God's offer of mercy. But even though they may try to suppress God's clearly revealed truth and fail to worship and serve the Creator, their ungodly behaviors will be restrained by social pressure directed against them if, while infected with HIV, they continue to engage in high risk behaviors. Beyond that, the psychologically and physically devastating effects of the

AIDS illness itself will restrain many.

The AIDS judgement will also be corrective judgement on uninfected individuals and our nation as a whole through fear of infection. But, hopefully, AIDS will also be the instrument of corrective judgement in the moral and spiritual sphere. For the prophetic voice of the church can enable men and women to see "the hand of the Lord" in the AIDS epidemic calling us back through repentance to godly sexuality. For God wants His creation to meet their need for intimate human companionship His way, and He is both able and willing to meet their needs for their good. However, when people sinfully turn away from God toward the idolatrous self, seeking and "finding" ungodly ways to meet their needs, God's wrath is aroused and frequently that wrath is expressed as divine judgement in this present day, as well as in the final day of wrath.

The suffering of the innocent is one of the most troubling aspects of the AIDS judgement. It certainly must be very distressing to those bisexual men who have infected their female sexual partners (possibly wives) and their offspring. Even the good that some homosexual men may have sought to do through donating blood has brought disease and death to those who are only corporately related by nationality and common humanity, e.g., hemophiliacs. Hopefully, the suffering that homosexual and bisexual men have caused the innocent will deter them from further homosexual behavior. But we, as a nation, must also certainly see in this innocent suffering our corporate responsibility and divine judgement on this society.

This leads us to another troubling aspect of the AIDS judgement, namely the way many who appear to deserve judgement are seemingly escaping it. We are not here so much concerned with the uninfected lesbians and much less frequently infected fornicating and adulterous heterosexuals, who certainly deserve judgement no less than practicing male homosexual persons. Instead, what is at least as disconcerting is the way many of those who share some of the guilt appear to be escaping severe judgement. Their guilt is in fostering some homosexual persons' distorted sexual identity and, passively or actively by omission or by commission, in contributing to the temptation to

homosexual sin. We are not referring to the parents of AIDS victims, for the judgement of their offspring is a severe punishment indeed. Rather we, as the homosexual person's ostracizing peers, those who have exploited his weakness or sexually assaulted him, this permissive or even encouraging society, and the silent and uncaring church seem to be escaping with little more than economic deprivations. This author will not speculate as to why, in the mysterious providence of God, He has not yet chosen to punish us more severely. But he shudders to think of the judgement that awaits us if we fail to repent and make amends.

A WORD OF CAUTION

"It is mine to avenge, I will repay," says the Lord (Deut. 32:35). Thus Dabney cautions, "The visiting of due retribution upon guilt is the exclusive prerogative of God; because of His sovereignty, His power, His purity, His infallible wisdom and justice qualify Him for the task." And Paul brackets his command, "Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath" (Rom. 12:19) with his command not to "repay anyone evil for evil" (vs. 17) but "overcome evil with good" (vs. 21). It is true that God has delegated some of this retribution to the state, but only a small fraction of it.⁷⁸ It may be, however, that when the state, as the agent of divine retribution, fails in its limited task to restrain evil-doers, God judges the nation as a whole. It is also true that God has ordained spiritual discipline in the church including the discipline of the sexually immoral for the purpose that their spirit be saved at the last judgement (I Cor. 5:1-5). Indeed Paul, after pointing to the many weak, sick and dead at Corinth (I Cor. 11:30) says "if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgement" (vs. 13). Thus the church can prevent some divine judgements by appropriate church discipline. But this discipline must be exercised in the spirit of gentleness (Gal. 6:1) which recognizes that "we all stand before God's judgement seat" (Rom. 14:10).

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH

One very important responsibility of the church in the AIDS epidemic is to prophetically declare that AIDS is a manifestation of divine judgment. For by identifying it

as God's judgement the meaning of this calamity can be more clearly understood. This should not, however, be done without clear teaching regarding the nature and function of divine judgement (see above). For, unlike ancient Israel and the early church, many today, Christians and non-Christians alike, know little about God's judgement.

Another responsibility of the church, or at least of individual Christians and parachurch organizations, is to care for those who are experiencing God's judgement through AIDS, for the wrath of God is a terrible thing to endure. We must leave it to God to avenge while we feed the hungry and give something to drink to those who thirst (Rom. 12:19,20). A ministry to AIDS victims possibly modeled after Hospice with a distinct spiritual emphasis is needed. Similar ministries to plague victims in the history of the church have had a tremendous evangelistic impact, in addition to meeting psychological and physical needs.⁷⁹ Of course, individual Christians in the healthcare professions have a unique opportunity to minister in the context of their vocation (see the 1988 Christian Medical and Dental Society Statement on AIDS).

Thirdly, the church must openly address the issue of homosexuality. This must, of course, be done with a sensitivity that takes into account various levels of sexual maturity. Assistance from experts, like Christian psychiatrists and reformed homosexuals, would certainly be helpful. Further, the church must open wide its arms to those struggling against a distorted sexual identity and the temptation to homosexual sin. The church, however, must take disciplinary action (e.g., barring from the Lord's table and even excommunication) against those who, while professing to be Christians, either refuse to repent or who, after "repentance" continue to practice homosexuality.⁸⁰ And we certainly shouldn't tolerate in the church the teaching of anyone who, like Jezebel, is misleading God's servants into sexual immorality (Rev. 2:20).

Finally, Christians should seek to influence the state to enact laws which support, even encourage, monogamous heterosexual marriage, on the one hand, while it discourages, even prohibits, homosexual

behavior (particularly any public expression of it), on the other. I am by no means suggesting any sort of influence on the state which theologians hope for. For any theory of politics which has as its ideal for the church age a theocratic state like Israel, is seriously flawed both in its principle doctrines⁸¹ and in the practical application of those doctrines. Failure to recognize the unique status and function of theocratic Israel in the history of redemption, leads theologians like Bahnsen to the inevitable conclusion that practicing homosexuals should be executed by the state.⁸² This is not to question the duty of the state to look to the church for moral guidance or the role of the state to restrain evil including homosexuality. But many of the sanctions imposed by God on the covenant nation of Israel should not be imposed by the church on the state.

In concluding our discussion on AIDS as divine judgement, Cornelius Plantinga's comment is certainly in order. He says, "If there is divine judgement on unrighteousness, we may take God's word for it that there is also, perhaps more severe judgement on self-righteousness 'for God has justification for the ungodly who cling to Christ' but 'He has none for the selfrighteous'."⁸³

References

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67. Francis, Donald P., et. al., "The Prevention of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome in the United States," Journal of the American Medical Association, 3/13/87, p. 1357.
68. Morbidity and Morality Weekly Report Supplement (MMWR), Massachusetts Medical Society, 12/18/87, Vol. 36, No. S6.
- 69 Beverly Times, June 3, 1987. The June Z, 1988, issue of the Boston Globe reported that the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Science concluded on June 1, 1988, that infection with HIV, apart from treatment, appears to "inexorably" lead to AIDS.
70. Craven, Donald, "AIDS Up-Date: Diagnosis, Treatment and Epidemiology," lecture given at Beverly Hospital, 4/4/88.
71. Francis, op cite., p. 1358.

72. MMWR, op. cite, pp. 2-9. The MMWR differentiates some groups at "recognized risk" from other groups which are also clearly at significant risk, but this differentiation is superficial.

73. Curran, op cite, p. 610.

74. MMWR, op. cite, p. 14.

75. Francis, op. cite, p. 1360.

76. *Ibid.*, p. 1360.

77. Dabney, op. cite, p. 56.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

79. Dodds, E.R., *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety*, 1965, pp. 133,137.

80. David Chilton has provided some excellent insights and helpful suggestions regarding the role of the church in response to AIDS, and homosexuality. See Chilton's **Power in the Blood: A Christian Response to AIDS**, 1987.

81. For an excellent review of the criticisms of theonomy see Lightner, Robert P., "Theological Perspectives on Theonomy: Part 1-3", Bibliotheca Sacra, 1986. In this author's opinion the arguments of Meredith Kline gainst theonomy are the most damaging. See "Comments on an Old-New Error," Westminster Theoloical Journal, 1978, pp. 172-189.

82. See for example Greg Bahnsen's section on Penology in **Theonomy in Christian Ethics**, 1984, pp. 435-472.

83. Plantings, Cornelius, "The Justification of Rock Hudson," Christianity Today, 10/18/85, p. 17.

Acknowledgements

John Jefferson Davis PhD., Franklin E. Payee, M.D., and Gordon Hugenberger for their critical review of this paper. The conclusions, however, are mine. All Scripture is quoted from the New International Version.