

Regaining a Moral Compass

(Response Paper-Theology of Disability)

By John Holmes

The age of the “enlightenment” began to separate creation from the Creator. Science began to abandon the idea of discovering the wonders of God’s creation and began to see the wonders of the multiverse as the result of the formula: time plus nothing plus random chance equals everything. Paralleling the description of intellectual blindness in Romans chapter 1, many arrogant scientists and philosophers began to worship and serve the “*creation rather than the Creator.*” The Apostle Paul describes the danger of such absurdity when he says “*claiming to be wise, they became fools.*” The resulting post-Christian/post-modern mindset that characterizes our age is quite willing to ask, “Can we?” without also asking, “Should we?” The end of such thinking deeply diminishes the value of human life.

In How to be a Christian in a Brave New World Joni Eareckson Tada and Nigel Cameron point out that Dr. Peter Singer, an ethics professor at Princeton University advocates killing unwanted people. “Infants born with severe disabilities are ‘*pre-persons,*’ in his judgment, and grandmothers with Alzheimer’s are ‘*post-persons.*’ Dr. Singer believes that personhood is defined by an individual’s ability to make decisions, to be ‘*self-aware*’ or have *self-consciousness.*” (page 43) Only humans have human rights. Thus, those who are severely-abnormal physically or mentally can receive what Nazi leaders called the “final solution,” extermination, because they are less than human. Dr. Bart Ehrman, an agnostic who formerly claimed to be an evangelical Christian, who is a professor at the University of North Carolina argues in his book, God’s Problem, that because there is evil and suffering in the world, a good God cannot exist. He stupidly reasons as if good and evil are somehow mutually exclusive. They are not. Both exist. Denying God does not help explain evil anymore than denying darkness can help explain light.

The easy extension of reckless, God-denying thought sees human lives as just cosmic accidents with no design or purpose. Thus there is no logical reason to value any human life. Human rights become irrational ideas, unless they are based on the innate value of the living individuals. Dr. Singer and other God-excluders are rational bedfellows with gang-bangers who reason that those who are of no use to us, or are in our way can and should be eliminated. There is no logical basis for Dr. Singer, et al to object to suicide bomb murderers. After all human life is nothing more than a cosmic accident. If however people are the result of the intentional creation of a good, loving, holy and just Creator, and

bear the image of God (even if that image is marred), then human value comes from outside themselves and each individual has intrinsic value. Is human value subject to the whims of other self-appointed human arbiters like Dr. Singer, gang-bangers, Stalin, or Hitler? This absurdity makes life futile, valueless, and meaningless.

The way people are viewed eventually affects the way people are treated. Stephanie O. Hubach's Same Lake Different Boat points out the three basic approaches to disability.

First: the Historic Modern View says disability is an **“abnormal part of a normal world.”** This view historically has diminished the value and dignity of people affected by disabilities and provided justification for abusing people with handicaps. “People with physical and mental disabilities have been abandoned at birth, banished from society, used as court jesters, drowned and burned during the Inquisition, gassed in Nazi Germany, and still continue to be segregated, institutionalized, tortured in the name of behavior management, abused, raped, euthanized, and murdered.” (Norm Kune and Zach Rosetti, Credo for Support, <http://normemma.com/credoppos.htm>, [January 24, 2004]).

Second: the Postmodern View says that disability is a **“normal part of life in a normal world.”** People with disabilities are different from others in the same way blue-eyed people are different from brown-eyed people. There is an attempt to “make nice” and “make normal” by changing the language society uses to categorize the disabling issues that affect people. Postmodern thinking avoids all judgment because everything is relative and there are no absolutes. There is no good or bad, life just is. An autistic man, who recently keynoted a seminar on autism at Southminster Presbyterian Church in Pittsburgh, consistently spoke of autism as just “a different way of being.” Surprisingly, many affected by disabilities buy into this mentality unaware of the ultimate consequences. In the attempt to take away the stigma attached to people with disabilities, Postmoderns denying the realities and struggles of people with disabilities. Their tendency to celebrate disabilities is absurd. Such a view makes light of human brokenness and becomes indifferent to human hurts. We should instead celebrate the value of people affected by disabilities with love, help and caring, while grieving the tragic effects on their lives. What good does it do to elevate the dignity of people at the expense of compassion for their very real needs and issues? Pascal’s quote is pertinent: *“Truly it is an evil to be full of faults; but it is a still greater evil to be full of them and to be unwilling to recognize them, since that is to add the further fault of voluntary illusion.”* (from the Joni and friends, Foundations notes Module 2, on Self-love).

Third: the Biblical view of disability is that disability is a *“normal part of life in an abnormal world.”* The Bible (Genesis 1) teaches that God created a mankind in His own likeness and teaches that

everything God created He called “good” except mankind. He called them “very good.” Adam and Eve perfectly reflected God’s character, perfection and goodness in every aspect of their being. Further, The world into which God placed them was only good all the time. Life on earth was, in a word, perfect. That life in that kind of world was “normal.” There was nothing else. The Bible teaches that now because of human rebellion against God’s design and instruction, something God did not create or design messed up that perfect creation and brought all sorts of abnormalities into it. Now we live in that abnormal world where nothing works quite the way God designed it to work. Today every aspect of life in the world is abnormal. It is now a normal part to exhibit abnormalities and aberrations that corrupt God’s original, good and “normal” design. Now we are all broken, we just exhibit our brokenness differently. Some of us display that brokenness more obviously than others. All are broken spiritually, physically, mentally, emotionally, and relationally to some degree. Some of us are more broken in some of these areas than others. Most of us just live in denial because we can still function fairly well compared to other broken people. Our brokenness is normal in a broken world because everyone is affected. Thus the Bible says that we all fall short of the Glory of God, or the way God created man (Romans 3:23). Death is normal, pain is normal, injury, difficulty, and evil are the normal experiences of all people in an abnormal world, a world that has broken away from the creator’s good design. Our brokenness extends from our genetics to our thinking, from our bodies to our spirits, and from our interpersonal relationships to our relationships with God.

The Bible teaches that God is not indifferent toward His flawed creation or His flawed creatures nor is He unconcerned about our plight in our normally broken world. He is not powerless to interrupt this corruption and change it. He knows that more than a few Band-Aids on a flawed creation are necessary. He decided to make all things new (Isaiah 65:17, Revelation 21:5). He is in process of bringing about a new creation (1 Corinthians 5:17-19), the restoration of all things (Romans 8:21, Acts 3:21). In order for this to happen something needed to be done about our moral brokenness called sin. Jesus came to “*preach good news to the afflicted*” and “*bind up the broken*” (“*hearted*” is not in the Hebrew). The word שָׁבַר (shaw-baf) which Jesus read from Isaiah 61 in the synagogue in Nazareth in Luke 4 means crushed, destroyed, torn, hurt, broken, and wrecked. Most English translations fail to capture the full meaning of עָנָו (aw-naw’v) which means weak poor and afflicted in verse 1. When Jesus announced why the Holy Spirit of God was upon Him, He said it had to do with bringing good news to hurting and broken humanity. Then He spent ninety percent of His time ministering and healing people with disabilities who most obviously reflected the broken condition of life in a broken world. But the main reason He came to earth and took on human flesh in time was so He could deal with the root problem, not just its

consequences. He came to live the perfect life of obedience to God His Father's will, something no one before Him ever accomplished. He then took that holy, and flawless life and offered it on the cross as a perfect sacrifice for unholy and flawed people. The Bible puts it this way *"God made Him (Jesus) who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."* (2 Corinthians 2:21, NIV). Those who believe in Him as their Lord and Savior are forgiven and are reborn by the Spirit of God so that they become new creatures in Christ. God is restoring the creation one believer at a time. One day the work of making all things new will be complete and those who are part of that new creation will be fully restored to wholeness in all areas of their lives. These new lives which are in process toward total and perfect restoration are the abnormal people in this abnormal world. In this case it is because they are the ones who are being conformed to God's very good and really normal design. One day we will reflect our good God in all aspects of our lives.

How does the hope of complete restoration affect how we deal with the limitations and imperfections which stick to us in this present broken world? We know that our current plight is not permanent. Through God's Word written and living, we know that we still have innate value so no matter how marred, hurting and broken we are now, our Creator still loves us and is at work within believers restoring us to His design. Our very neediness now should draw our hearts toward God. He says that He wants to make His strength known in our weakness as we rely more on His love, grace and power. We were designed to be dependent on God, not independent from God. In Christ God is at work restoring our broken fellowship with Him. Brokenness may diminish our sense of dignity but does not destroy our value and worth as human beings. God loves us just the way we are but is not content to leave us as we are.

God is the ultimate advocate for people affected by disabilities. Teachings in the law and the prophets demonstrate God's caring love for poor, needy and disabled people (Leviticus 19:14, Deuteronomy 27:18, Isaiah 35:3-6, Micah 4:6, Zephaniah 3:19). In the New Testament Jesus transformed the lives of thousands of disabled people and commands us to reach out unselfishly to bring disabled people into full participation in the Kingdom of God using the analogy of bringing honored guests to a party (Luke 14:12ff). 1 Corinthians 12 teaches that the weaker parts of the body are indispensable and are to be given greater honor.

From the White House in 2002 A.D. President George W. Bush said in his speech on cloning:

"Science has set before us decisions of immense consequence. We can pursue medical research with a clear sense of moral purpose or we can travel without

an ethical compass into a world we could live to regret.” (from How to Be a Christian in a Brave New World, Page 61).

By embracing a Biblical view of human life and disability, society can restore its moral compass. People will be loved cared for and given both help and hope. The Church as the visible representation of the Kingdom of God has both a prophetic and illustrative role in the world that often treats people with disabilities sub-humanly, as just in the way, or even worse, as expendable. Instead we have the privilege of helping restore lives and better reflect who God is.