

Question: Are birth defects in children caused by the sins of the parents?

“Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was born blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, saying, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” Jesus answered, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but that the works of God should be revealed in him...” (Jn 9:1-3).

People will sometimes use the occasion of physical sickness, disease and birth defects to accuse someone of sin. The Lord’s disciples were ready to make such a charge before Jesus set them straight. Their Rabbi’s had always taught them that all disease and suffering are the direct result of sin. They seemed to miss the point of the Book of Job, which was NOT — “Why do people suffer?” BUT — “Will you be true to God when you do not know the reasons for your suffering?” The disciples wanted to know how this case fit into what they already believed to be true. Sadly, the disciples did not look upon the man as an object of mercy or a sufferer to be relieved, but as a kind of riddle to be solved.

While it is true that human suffering is linked to sin, it is not true that one can tie every experience of human suffering to a specific sin. Adam and Eve were driven out of a garden paradise for their sin and thus set in motion a course of events that would involve much suffering and disappointment for mankind. I’m sorry to say, but many of us are going to catch colds and the flu “bug” this winter. When and if we do, are we going to blame our mothers for that? Will we curse Eve for her sin in the garden? Of course not, we recognize that sickness is simply part of life as we prepare to meet our Maker one-day.

We cannot argue the point that some suffering is the direct result of sin. Sexual promiscuity, the use of alcohol, tobacco and illegal drugs, etc., have a direct and harmful effect upon the human body and even upon children yet to be born to those who do such things. This goes without saying. The body of evidence is too great to deny it. However, Jesus teaches us that the issue is NOT — “Whose sin caused this sickness, disease or birth defect?” BUT — “How can we help to lessen the pain of those who struggle with it.”

In the passage above, Jesus both answers their question and helps them to see a broader issue. First, He very plainly stated that no one’s sin caused that man’s blindness. Second, His words do not explain the *cause* of the blindness, but the *purpose*. He saw in the blind man an opportunity to display the works of God.

When you or I see suffering, do we see it as a problem or a possibility? If someone in our family suffers from a physical or mental handicap, what do we see in that person, a sinner responsible for their terrible suffering or an opportunity to display the works of God? We’ll not be able to miraculously restore sight, raise the dead, heal a person lame from birth as Jesus did, but we can and must love our neighbor as ourselves (*Mt 22:37-40*). These are the “*works of God*” that we can do. Paul said, “*And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful*” (*Ti 3:14*).

“Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord.” Isaiah 1:18

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