

Why ask why?

By Dean Merrill

Whenever something goes wrong in our world — which is about every 12 seconds, it seems — the standard reaction is amazement, surprise, even shock.

A husband walks out on a good and faithful wife. We wonder, *How could he be so cruel?*

Two boys shoot up Columbine High School, killing a dozen classmates plus a teacher. The cover of the next *U.S. News* shows two girls sobbing and asks in giant letters, "Why?"

A young mother loses her composure after two hours of an infant's crying and shakes him violently; putting him into a coma. "How terrible!" we exclaim.

A dictator sacrifices 10,000 innocent lives to make a point against his political enemies. "I don't understand such madness," we respond, shaking our heads.

With passionate eloquence, we decry the evil in the world and begin looking for scapegoats. We blame the Hollywood media or the NRA or

both. We scold parents for not paying attention to their kids. We attack permissiveness in the schools. The underlying tone is that if only this or that specific problem were adjusted, these

tragedies wouldn't happen.

While I am all for trying to improve the present quality of American life, I also keep hearing in the background the hard facts of Scripture: "The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?" (Jeremiah 17:9, NIV).

Isaiah insists, "We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way" (53:6). Not just a few misfits or psychotics, but "we all." Paul's quotation in Romans 3:15-18 sounds like it was written yesterday: "Their feet are swift to shed blood; ruin and misery mark their ways, and the way of peace they do not know. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

Let's be realistic: What kind of newspaper headlines do we expect in a fallen world? When a presidential candidate a few years ago exuded that he wanted to provide "a government as good as the American people," whom was he kidding? As I recall, the man was even a churchgoer — but he had clearly forgotten his theology. We "the American people" are not at core a benign, loving, sweet, harmless group of folks, and a government that reflects us won't be either.

Maybe we don't like to admit that Fundamental Truth No. 4 in the Assemblies of God Constitution is entitled "Fall of Man" and bluntly states that human beings "by voluntary transgression fell and thereby incurred physical and spiritual death, which is separation from God." That line doesn't exactly make us shout hallelujah — but it's true.

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the world is a pleasant, decent place. It's not. Some people came to Jesus once and told Him the latest horror story in the news: that a group of Galilean pilgrims has been suddenly attacked by Roman soldiers and slaughtered right in the temple courts as they were preparing their sacrifices to God. (So much for Governor Pilate being weak-willed; apparently the man had a vicious side, too.)

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Jesus did not wring His hands and say, "Oh, why? I just can't believe that Pilate would order such an awful thing." No, instead His reply in Luke 13 was to tell another dreadful story about a tower in Siloam that fell and killed 18 innocent folks. Then He said that

in a messed-up world such as ours, this is par for the course and in fact, "Unless you repent, you too will all perish" (v.5). Jesus was not being cold-hearted; He was simply being realistic about life on a fallen planet. We are all doomed sooner or later, and eternal life is our only hope.

In Bruce Larson's commentary on this passage, he writes, "Life is not fair. Nobody ever said it was. If you understand that, you don't whine when hard things come and you're not smug if it's all going your way."

In the face of ugly news, it may be human nature in the first few moments to exclaim "Why?" But we must quickly move ahead to tell ourselves that amid today's pervasive nastiness, we are called to be God's light and hope. ■

Dean Merrill is a deacon at Living Springs Worship Centre (Assemblies of God), Colorado Springs, Colorado, and is the author of *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry Church* (Zondervan).

