



"I have lived a long time, sir, and the longer I live the more convincing proofs I see of this truth—that God governs in the affairs of men."

—Benjamin Franklin

**14-Sep-01**

## **Innocent Victims?**

The Bible reminds us of a particular truth frequently, even relentlessly. Despite this, it is a truth that is easily forgotten in a time of disaster such as the United States is now experiencing. English poet John Donne first penned the phrase, "No man is an island," to which the hymn of that name adds, "No man stands alone." We Americans like to think of ourselves and act as though we are supremely independent. But the truth is that all of us are also single parts in relationships within larger groups such as family, city, county, state, nation, and even mankind itself. As such, we bear responsibilities toward those others to such a degree that the second of the great commandments states that we are to [love](#) our neighbor as ourselves ( [Matthew 22:39](#)).

[God](#) instructs us in this by showing us that He considers all of Israel as His firstborn son. In other places, He depicts Israel as a beautiful bride within a marriage and sometimes as a harlot who had left the marriage through her adulterous idolatries. In the New Testament, the church is likened to a singular body of which [Jesus Christ](#) is the Head.

Paul writes in [1 Corinthians 12:12](#), 25-26:

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body being many, are one body, so also is Christ. . . . [T] here should be no schism in the body, but . . . the members should have the same care for one another. And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.

The principle is clear: individuals are blessed, rejoice, suffer, endure, experience, rise or fall with a group. No man stands alone.

In the aftermath of World Trade Center disaster, we have heard a great deal about innocents suffering. But is anybody truly innocent? Has God not been very patient when He could honestly and fairly exact the death penalty on anyone at any time? Hardly a person affected by these events did any direct harm to the perpetrators, yet each of them is not only guilty of his own sins against God, but also part of a larger group that has done direct harm to the perpetrators.

For example, according to Muslim sources, American sanctions against Iraq to "get" Saddam Hussein are responsible for the deaths of around 500,000 Iraqi children. Many Americans perceive themselves as [innocent victims](#) of a cowardly attack, but when perceived from a "group" perspective, these Americans are just as guilty as the ones who actually imposed the sanctions. One part of the "body" imposed the sanctions, and now another part of it is directly receiving the pain of retaliation. Just as surely as the Iraqi children suffered from the sins of their leadership, so also Americans are now suffering from the sins of their leaders.

We Americans are living in a dream world if we think we are innocent victims, for we are innocent only within narrow parameters. We murder babies on a regular basis through abortion. We permit sodomites to become perhaps the most powerful minority in America. We allow violence to rage in our streets. We let the entertainment industry feed our minds swill. We give in to addictions of all sorts, which destroy relationships wholesale. How innocent are we really? Should we be able to dictate to the sovereign God how He chooses to punish and correct?

A point we can extract from Jesus' teaching in [Luke 13:1-5](#) is that we all are just as guilty as those upon whom the tower in Siloam fell. We desperately need to take advantage of this [merciful](#) warning by abandoning our pride and turning our minds and life toward God and loving our neighbor.

- John W. Ritenbaugh

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## **From the Archives: Featured Sermon**

### **[Justice and Grace](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Some of us may have been disturbed, maybe angered, because our sense of fairness is disrupted by what God did in the past. We have difficulty with this because we do not understand holiness, justice, sin, and grace. All four of these interact, and it is important that we understand the relationship between them. However, one thing is certain. None of us has ever received the slightest injustice from the hand of God. As we grow in understanding and humility, we begin to see that we have received an overwhelming abundance of grace.

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## **From the Archives: Featured Article**

### **[The Sovereignty of God: Part Five](#)**

by John W. Ritenbaugh

Is God sovereign over angels? mankind? John Ritenbaugh explains that God's sovereignty is absolute as He directs events toward the culmination of His plan.

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## CGG Weekly: Innocent Victims? (14-Sep-01)

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