

Brief Reflections on Abuser's Good Fortunes and the Justice of God

How can the believer reconcile knowledge of the good fortune of their abuser with an understanding of God as Good, Just and Righteous? We know that the Christian is merely a .saved sinner' and that a sexual abuser's sin is not necessarily any 'worse', in the sense of offending God, than sins committed by the victim of abuse. And yet the question is raised: why is it that in light of no known repentance on the part of the abuser, they sometimes seem, not only to avoid negative repercussions of their actions, but to be '*blessed*'? Perhaps this apparent blessing is seen in their continued freedom from criminal prosecution. Perhaps they are 'playing happy families', being the dutiful spouse and/or parent, experiencing the blessings of stable relationships whilst those they abused now struggle with social relationships and/or whose family life has now been shattered. Possibly they are known as respected members of the community, amongst people who do not know or will not accept the evil they stand accused off. Perhaps their good fortune is symbolised in economic stability, affluence and good health. Where is God's justice in this? Why might they experience blessing after blessing when their victims experience trial after trial? In light of this, is it not understandable that the victim might choose to seek their own revenge in order to at least mitigate the apparent blessings experienced, doubting the reality of God's claim that revenge is best left to Him with those who refuse to repent (Deuteronomy 32:35)? *With such thoughts, our souls are drawn into sin.*

In 1652 the Puritan Thomas Brooks wrote *Precious remedies against Satan's devices*. Listing twenty-three devices that Satan uses to '*...deceive, entangle and undo the souls of men*', Brooks presents the reader with many remedies to effectively stall the devil. Twelve devices are identified which Satan uses to '*draw souls to sin*'. One of these is particularly relevant given the possible anguish of victims if they perceive their abuser to be experiencing much good fortune: '*By representing to the soul the outward mercies enjoyed by men walking in sin, and their freedom from outward miseries*'. Mimicking the thoughts of Satan concerning men who seem to prosper despite their evil deeds, Brooks declares that given '*...the many crosses that they are delivered from...if ever thou wouldst be freed from the dark night of adversity, and enjoy the sunshine of prosperity, thou must walk in their ways*'. What is the point of seeking conformity to Christ when those who have so severely sinned against you seem to prosper? 'Walk in their ways' and challenge the Lord's command to not seek revenge. You have every right to seek vengeance. God is obviously letting them be. So whispers Satan to the victim of abuse. Once we recognise that it is the voice of Satan encouraging us to sin, Brooks presents eight remedies which the believer can engage with.

Two, which I believe are particularly useful given the object of these reflections, are summarised below.

The first remedy is to consider '*that no man knows how the heart of God stands by his hand*'. We simply cannot assume God's perspective on the abuser by the worldly graces he/she may be allowed to experience, just as we cannot assume God's perspective on those who suffer trial after trial. Remember Job. Remember that the sun shines and rain falls on the righteous *and* unrighteous (Matthew 5:45).

Secondly, '*that the wants of wicked men, under all their outward mercy and freedom from adversity, is far greater than all their outward enjoyments*'. Brooks reminds us that ultimately a person may enjoy much in this world and yet their greatest need is to make peace with God. If they are unsaved, they are destined for hell. Should we be happy to think that an abuser who is an unbeliever is bound for hell? No. But reminding ourselves that they have such a great need of God's forgiveness, as we too had, may help mitigate thoughts of revenge in light of worldly blessings they experience. The latter simply *do not matter* in relation to eternity.

Back to the original question: How can the believer reconcile knowledge of the good fortune of their abuser with an understanding of God as Good, Just and Righteous? There is no conflict here. As part of this world which God in His mercy provides common grace to, abusers may or may not experience worldly good fortune. The point is that we cannot and must not judge God on the basis of it for to do so is indeed, as Brooks put it, allowing the devil to '*draw the soul to sin*'. What should our response be? Frustration with and even anger at God for not allowing us to *see* His anger directed at abusers in this world must be confessed as sin. We need to pray for a Christ-like response to the knowledge of good fortune experienced by abusers. This will surely include a heart that feels genuine sorrow at the fate of those who, without accepting the gift of faith (Ephesians 2:8), whatever their good fortunes now, will face eternal damnation.

All quotations taken from:

Brooks, T (1993, first published 1652) *Precious remedies against Satan's devices*, The Banner of Truth Trust: Edinburgh.

