

Karma and Christ by Jeff Strite

Galatians 6:7-6:10

OPEN: This month we're exploring "stupid things even Christians believe", and this morning we're going to be examining a theology that is seemingly common to every religion on earth.

So many people, in so many religions, believe this particular theology because it seems to make so much sense to them. And it seemingly makes so much sense, that even many faithful Christians can be drawn into it.

This false theology can be summed up by the proverb:

"What goes around comes around".

Or another way of saying it is: "You get what you deserve."

One of the common manifestations of this false thinking is the Buddhist concept of "Karma".

Karma essentially teaches that all people do bad things. Those bad deeds cause suffering and no one wants to suffer. So, in order to undo the damage from those bad deeds, people need to do "good deeds" to balance out the damage of the bad deeds in their lives.

Visualize it like a scales.

On one side of the scales are your bad deeds and on the other side are your good deeds. If your good deeds outweigh your bad deeds, you have good Karma and you will be blessed. If your bad deeds outweigh the good you'll have bad Karma... and you will be cursed.

Now the thing about "Karma" is that it actually sounds Biblical.

In Galatians 6:7 we're told

"Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows."

Yeah. What goes around... come around.

Sounds like Karma to me!

But there is a difference in mindset between Karma and Christ, and that's what we're going to explore this morning.

To the Karma mindset, one can usually tell when another person's karma is good.

If life is treating them right, if they have good health, if they have a good job and lot so of money: they've got "good karma". With good karma they avoid suffering and experience blessings.

However if life is gone south on someone... if their relationships and in the tank, their finances are a mess, and they are depressed all the time, ... that's because they have bad Karma. They've done bad things and now they are suffering.

In either case – you deserve what you get.

ILLUS: Ravi Zacharias once told of a group of missionaries and their families who had been

killed in a bus accident near a village in a Buddhist country. Within minutes, the bus was ransacked and the bodies pillaged for loot.

The reason? Those who died were only receiving their karma, and there is nothing wrong in taking what is left from one who is paying his or her dues.

("Jesus Among Other Gods: The Absolute Claims of the Christian Message", p. 122)

Now, before you think – "Well, that's just dumb", you need to realize, a lot of religious people tend to think like that. They think: it makes sense. After all, good people deserve blessings and bad people don't. Ergo, if you're in trouble, the fault is probably yours.

God knew how appealing this would be to folks... and so He shared the story of man named Job. If you remember the story, the first chapter of Job introduces us to a righteous man, a good husband and father. A holy man who could be counted on to do the right things. And he is exceedingly blessed by God.

But before long everything starts going wrong for him.

- His riches disappeared.
- His children died.
- His health deteriorated.
- And his wife turned into a bitter shrew of a woman.

As if that weren't bad enough... his friends came over to "comfort him".

Well... they weren't really there to comfort him.

They were there to correct him, and to condemn him.

In the book of Job, these three friends observe Job's suffering... and tell him that:

1. All suffering is a result of sin.
2. The greater the suffering the greater the sin.
3. Thus Job, you deserve what you're getting, and you need to repent.

This can all be summed up by his "friend" Zophar's comment: "IF you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, THEN you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear." Job 11:14-15

In other words: it's YOUR fault, Job.

You've sinned, and that's the reason you're suffering.

BUT... if you'd just put away that sin, if you'd just allow no evil in your tent, THEN, you'd be OK!

Now, of course, from the beginning of the story WE know that's not true.

That's NOT why Job is suffering.

But these 3 friends don't know THAT part of the story so they're allowing their Karma kind of theory to guide them in their advice:

You got what you deserved Job.

You've got suffering... because you have sinned.

What goes around, comes around.

So, they judge Job and condemn him without ever knowing the REAL reason he is suffering. And by the end of the book God restores all that Job had lost and then commands the 3 friends to go to Job and ask him to offer sacrifices so that God won't punish them for their foolish statements.

The moral of the story: you don't always know why people suffer... so cut them some slack. And find ways of ministering to people, helping them in their time of sorrow. Because neither you (nor I) have a full understanding of why anyone is suffering. So God calls us to reach out.

We all make these kinds of judgments. We see a man on the street with a sign that says "will work for food" and we just know he won't work and the money won't go for food. We see a person living out under a bridge and presume to know how they got there – bad choices. We see a man pushing a shopping cart down the street and we know how he got there.

Now, we may be right, and we would be advised to be cautious on how we help out folks like these, but we need to remember that God places a high priority on our helping the poor and destitute. When we give to them – God notices.

That's one of the major contrasts between Karma and Christ.

Karma says: you're getting what you deserve... and so I'm not obligated to help you.

Christ says – do unto others as you'd have them do unto you.

Now, the flip-side of this Karma kind of thinking is: people who are "successful" and lead a "charmed life" are blessed by God. I mean, God wouldn't allow bad people to be blessed, that just doesn't make any sense!

So... if bad people should not be blessed and good people should be blessed, THEN all successful people MUST BE... blessed!

Sounds kind of reasonable doesn't it?

That kind of reasoning was rampant during the days Jesus.

We're told the story of a rich young ruler who comes to Jesus and asks Him what he must do to inherit eternal life. And Jesus ultimately tells him to sell all that he has and come follow Him. But the rich man loved his riches and went away sorrowing.

Then Jesus turned to His disciples and said: "I tell you the truth, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God."

When the disciples heard this, they were greatly ASTONISHED and asked, "Who then can be saved?" Matthew 19:23-25

Now, why would they ask that question?

Why would they have been ASTONISHED that the rich would have a hard time getting into heaven?

Well, they asked the question (and they were astonished) because, to their minds, the rich were blessed people. Obviously God had already judged them worthy of His blessings. So IF anybody is going to make into heaven it ought to be them.

Successful people are blessed people. And if we want to be successful as well... we need them on our side.

ILLUS: From childhood, we learned this kind of thinking. Remember when you were kids and you'd be with your friends and they'd want to play a game? You'd have two captains, and everyone else would line up waiting to be picked.

And who were the first kids to be picked?

That's right - the attractive, athletic, intelligent.

If you were a geek or a gangly loser, you were always last.

But why were those other kids picked first?

Because they were winners!!!

You always want the winners on your side!

By some perverse sense of logic, successful people are even seen as winners by some Christians.

The early church had that problem. James wrote:

"My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism.

Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?

Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? But you have insulted the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court?" James 2:1-6

The temptation was to honor the rich.

They were successful, they were blessed.

They were winners... and many in the early church wanted to be winners too.

ILLUS: A few years back we had a Doctor and his family visit the church. They were looking for a new church, and they were a good looking, friendly family. And they really WERE a nice, godly family and would have been a GREAT addition to this congregation.

But they eventually chose to attend another congregation they felt was a better fit for their family.

But the day they visited here, one of the members of the church sidled up to me and smiled and said: "Hey, we have a doctor in to church today."

And I just looked at him for a moment and didn't say anything

Then he said: "Oh, we're not supposed to be impressed by that are we"

But for a few moments... he was.
He WAS IMPRESSED.
This Doctor represented success... the blessings of God.

James tells us – that’s not how God thinks.
James 2:5 “Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?”

The moral of the story: Just because people come from the nice side of town and wear nice clothes and drive nice cars... doesn't mean they're nice people.
The Bible is clear that “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.”
And some people are really good at sinning.
Being rich oddly gives them the ability to sin a lot... and to cover their sin more efficiently.

(Pause)
Now, I've just spent the better part of this sermon telling you that Karma is NOT good doctrine. But now we're going to reread our text for this morning:

“Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows. The one who sows to please his sinful nature, from that nature will reap destruction; the one who sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.
Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.” Galatians 6:7-10

You reap what you sow.
If you sow sinful behavior, you'll reap destruction.
BUT if you don't grow weary in doing good... in proper time... you will reap a harvest

What goes around comes around
Sounds almost like Karma... doesn't it?

But here's the difference:
Karma-kind of thinking believes the judgment has already been made.
You've either been judged and found WANTING... that's why you suffer.
OR you've been judged and found WORTHY... and that's why you're blessed.
But the judgment has (pretty much) already been made.

The only way (Karma teaches) to stop suffering is to work off our bad deeds... with good ones. IF you do enough good, you can pay for your sins... and THEN you'll be blessed.

By contrast, the Bible tells us... none of us are worthy.
We've all sinned.
We've all been found wanting.
You remember this thing kids used to do (form an “L” with thumb and first finger and put it on your forehead)? What it mean? Loser

We've all been losers!
None of us is worthy of blessings from God.

Unlike in the Karma thinking –we can't do enough good to offset the evil we've done in our lives. We can't do enough good to be worthy of God's blessings.

Karma is all about tallying up enough brownie points so that you just MIGHT get blessings. Bad deeds can only be offset by doing enough good deeds to balance things out. BUT no matter how many good deeds you do you can never be sure you've done enough to undo the damage of your past.

Thus, there's no confidence that you've "made it".

There's no joy, no real hope, no sense of freedom... just a continuous sense of doubt... and fear.

And you can tell when a Christian has bought into the Karma mindset.

You ask a believer if they are sure they're going to heaven.

Most will reply: "I hope I've been good enough..."

What they're saying is Karma. I hope my good deed have outweighed my bad. That way I can go into the presence of God and DESERVE heaven.

Now, the Bible DOES teach that we have done bad... and that bad in our lives has to be paid for. It has to be taken away for us to be acceptable. But neither you nor I can pay for our bad deeds with good deeds. Neither you nor I can make our lives acceptable by how many good things we do.

What is the ONLY way you can get into heaven?

That's right – by the blood of Jesus Christ.

Your good deeds will not buy you a place in God's presence.

So if you someone asks you if you are going to heaven... you need to say "YES"

But not because I deserve to be there.

I'm going to heaven because of the blood of Jesus.

As Galatians 3:27 says "all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ."

It isn't by MY righteous garments that I'm saved. It's because I've put on Christ.

It's critical that we understand this. Because if we don't... we'll never really understand why other people reject Jesus.

You see, the problem for most people is that they really still believe in Karma. They sense the rightness of doing enough good to offset the bad they've done.

They'd rather do it themselves, and they think they can... given enough time and enough chances to do good things.

The very idea that Jesus would have to do it for them, offends them and offends their sensibilities. They feel THEY have to do the good things to deserve God's attention.

But in their heart of hearts, they sense they're not quite doing enough. They're often unsure and uncertain. They understand that what goes around comes around... but they're not quite sure what's coming around
And they're never quite sure they've been good enough... to be good enough.

CLOSE: There's the story of a man who lived by that standard. He had no place in his life for God or His rules. He had a deep contempt for Christians and this Jesus they said they believed in.
He figured he was good enough on his own.

Of course... his standards were kind of low
He was a womanizer.
A heavy drinker.
And a dedicated partier.

And he was a fairly popular singer and song-writer - one of his bigger hits at the time was "I won't go hunting with you Jake, but I'll go chasing women."

This man was also a prominent radio personality and would interview important people on his program. When a young preacher named Billy Graham came to town to hold a revival, this man invited Graham to be a guest on his show.

In order to gather more material for his show - where he intended to poke fun at this young preacher, he decided he would show up at one of the revival meetings. Early in the service the Graham announced, "There is one man in this audience who is a big fake."

Now, Graham would have been right no matter who was in the audience. There was bound to be at least one person in the audience who was a big fake. But this man was convinced that he was the one the preacher was talking about.

After the Revival had ended, the words continued to haunt him until a couple of nights later he showed up drunk at the preacher's Hotel door around 2AM demanding that the preacher pray for him!

But Graham refused, saying, "This is between you and God and I'm not going to get in the middle of it."

But the preacher did invite him in and they talked until about 5 AM in the morning
And shortly afterwards, this hard bitten, doubting man gave himself over to Christ.

His name was Stuart Hamblin and he changed his life almost immediately.

He quit drinking, quit chasing women, and quit everything that was 'fun.'

Soon he began to lose favor with the Hollywood crowd.

And he was ultimately fired by the radio station when he refused to accept a beer company as a sponsor.

Sometime later, a long time friend named John Wayne took him aside and told him, "All

your troubles started when you 'got religion,' was it worth it all?"

And Stuart answered simply, "Yes."

Then Wayne asked, "You liked your booze so much, don't you ever miss it?"

Stuart smiled and said, "No."

John Wayne then said, "I don't understand how you could give it up so easily."

And Stuart's response was, "It's no big secret. All things are possible with God."

To this John said, "That's a catchy phrase. You should write a song about it."

And this was the song that he wrote:

"The chimes of time ring out the news, another day is through
Someone slipped and fell, was that someone you?
You may have longed for added strength, your courage to renew
Do not be disheartened, I have news for you."

Sing it with me:

"It is no secret what God can do.

What He's done for others, He'll do for you.

With arms wide open, He'll welcome you.

It is no secret, what God can do...."

That's the difference between Karma and Christ.

Karma says: "you're getting what you deserve. You've slipped and fell and now there's a price you have to pay."

Christ says: "You've gotten what you deserve... let me pay the price. You can't do it on your own. Let me help you."