

“I felt as if God were waiting to strike me down!”

BY ALAN CARNRIKE



The church where my mother, sister and I first learned about God was a strict denomination. I grew up not going to movies, dances and other activities in which most of my friends were allowed to engage.

The majority of the pastor's sermons were hellfire and brimstone. He seemed to make it his purpose in life to be sure we understood that just about anything we did which was enjoyable now would be paid for later at 1,000+ degrees Fahrenheit.

As time passed, I felt as if God were standing above me with a lightning bolt, waiting to strike me down at even the first sinful thought. As I grew up, the lie grew

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up with me. The confusion that this lie was creating within me came to a head during my early twenties.

“You’ve played right into the devil’s hand” another minister told me one day as I relayed my current traumatic dilemma to him over the phone.

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“You must not be living right, for all these trials to be hitting you like this” he said.

We had met only a few months

prior and he was the same man who complimented my parents and me on the “tremendous work” we were doing for the Lord. He worked for a big T.V. ministry and referred people who needed food, shelter and clothing to our homeless mission.

“I just don’t understand what I could have done,” I said, choking back tears from the hurt I felt inside. “I have given up my apartment and job to step out in faith for this ministry. I have done everything I know to show God that I am serious about his calling. Now I have lost my car, the shelter is closing and my wife is leaving me. I have felt the Lord’s presence so close to me lately. Why is he punishing me?”

“I don’t know,” he replied, “but you’d better get your heart right. When you do, things will get better. I have to go for now, give me a call and keep me posted.”

“Okay, thanks” I replied. Then, I just listened to the dial tone in despair after he hung up the phone.

There are times in our lives when we may cause our own troubles. If a person steals they might end up in jail, or if caught speeding they may wind up with a ticket. But during my traumatic dilemma, the Lord showed me that I was not being punished at all. He was shaking up *my* little world to loosen and remove some things so I could gain more of *his* world.

As we break free from the lie that God is always punishing us for past sins, we need to let go and be thankful for the Lord’s forgiveness. We may need to go to

others and get right with them, too. Just as importantly, our following step must be to let go of the guilt, forgive ourselves and move on. If God isn’t keeping a scorecard, then we shouldn’t either. When we hold on to our guilt we open ourselves up to condemnation from the enemy. This condemnation will lead us to

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believe that we still owe payment for our sin.

Next, we must allow ourselves to accept God’s forgiveness, believing that Jesus loves us more than we can fathom and truly wants the best for us, even if it involves “tough love” to bring it about. Bishop Desmond Tutu said: “God could never love us more than He does right now.” These words have stuck with me for years. We are not earning points (or more importantly, losing points) on God’s love scale for our conduct. He bases it all on grace! When we begin to understand this, we begin to see God without the lightning bolt in his hand. □

Alan and his wife, Teresa, have four children; all of which came to them as foster kids. Over the past 19 years together, they have been involved in several homeless ministries, children’s ministries and helped start a church.