

Was Sin Decreed by God?

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God does not have two wills: "But he is in one mind, and who can turn him? and what his soul desireth, even that he doeth" (Job 23:13). There is, in that one will, a revealed and a concealed hemisphere: "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). God has seen fit not to reveal His complete will to men. He reveals only what is needed by men while they are pilgrims on the earth.

God keeps many things partially secret, but He has no intention of keeping them secret forever. When Christians stand before the Lord, they shall learn more about the mysteries associated with the Godhead. They will understand predestination, imputation, and every Biblical doctrine. Throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity, the Lord will continue to reveal to His own the exceeding riches of His grace.

The will of God can be compared to a sphere. One can see only part of a sphere at a time. We can see only one side of the moon; the same is true with the sun and the earth. The whole sphere of a planet cannot be seen at one time. Truth is like a sphere. No one sees or knows all truth. Men are responsible to know and obey the revealed part of truth, but they are not responsible for that which is concealed.

God is omniscient; His understanding is infinite: "Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (Ps. 147:5). God's will or purpose or decree is one sphere.

God's decree to permit sin was included in the secret part of His will. But man's sin was, in a sense, necessary to God's purpose in Christ. God did allow sin, but that does not designate Him the author of sin. One cannot believe that God is sovereign without also believing that He allowed sin. If

God had not allowed Adam's fall, it could not have occurred. He also purposed that Jesus Christ should come and die for sin—the Son of God is the Lamb that was slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8). Jesus Christ died for the sins of the elect according to the purpose of God.

God created Adam upright. Adam had no sin within, but he was capable of sinning. That is, his uprightness was finite. Sin began among mankind after Adam's creation.

The apparent inconsistency of God decreeing sin, yet not being the author of sin, is explained when one realizes that God's purpose is not the originating cause of man's sin. These things are inexplicable to an unsaved person. He can, however, recognize that sin exists. And when he recognizes sin's actuality, he will also recognize that he is guilty of sin.

Since God created man in His own image and after His likeness, sin could not have been part of Adam's nature. If sin had been a part, we would have to conclude that either Adam was a being that did not have God as his author, or that God is the author of sin.

Sin exists, but no one can explain its origin. We do know, however, that since sin came into the world it has become the motive for all thoughts and actions of men.

The Bible describes man's sin as personal—each individual is the cause of his own sin. Throughout the Scriptures, sin is represented as one's own. Men are admonished not to make any neutral or objective investigation of sin's origin (Gen. 3), because no person will confess sin so long as he seeks to know its origin. There is no excuse: "...their own doings have beset them about..." (Hos. 7:2). Sin is personal, and blame for it cannot be shifted to parents, environment, or anything but oneself. Sin proceeds from within individual hearts (Mark 7:21-23).

Reconciliation is the act of God: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation" (II Cor. 5:19). The necessity

for reconciliation attests man's guilt before God. Jesus Christ became the Surety for the elect. The elect become reconciled to God through His Son, and God in His grace forgives them for their sins.

The Lord controls every move and heartbeat on earth ("For in him we live, and move, and have our being..."—Acts 17:28), and He allows man to commit sin. However, He does not cooperate in the evil committed by any person; He only allows it. All things work according to God's plan; providence is God's plan in execution. The Lord is working out His own purpose in time for the Christian's good and His own glory.

The fact that all things work according to God's pleasure is frequently misunderstood. We see many who appear to be masters of their own conduct, acting by their knowledge and choice and possessing boundless liberty and capricious dispositions. They are governed sometimes by principle, sometimes by example, sometimes by pride, and sometimes by peer pressure. Since men are unable to distinguish the first cause from the subordinate issue, the chief agent from the instrument, the Creator's perfection from the creature's weakness, they attribute man's action to himself, without acknowledging that God presides over all.

Wicked governments and rulers have risen—and shall rise; nevertheless, God is on the throne governing everything (Rev. 17:17). Although sin is very real, God is actively governing the world. God did not just create the heavens and the earth and then step back to watch the world run by the laws of nature that He instituted. God is not a balcony observer, sitting on the sidelines, waiting to see what will happen. Rather, God continues to actively and sovereignly govern the world: "The king's heart is in the hand of the Lord, as the rivers of water: he turneth it whithersoever he will" (Prov. 21:1). Kings are ruled and overruled by Him (Eccl. 5:8).

God uses creatures as second causes to fulfill His will; He accomplishes His purpose through men and demons. He used the Egyptians to cause His people Israel to cry to Him for deliverance (Ex. 2-3). After being delivered

from Egyptian bondage, Israel became disobedient. Then the Lord raised up the Assyrians to scourge the nation for its shortcomings (Is. 10:5, 6). God used wicked Shimei to chasten David to accomplish His purpose (II Sam. 16:5-13).

Satan and unbelievers are instruments used by God, but not to the extent that they are devoid of power to act for themselves. Men are motivated by their own plans. But their affections are wretchedly misplaced, and their actions manifest their inward conditions (Rom. 1:18-32). God enters into every second cause, but He does not cooperate in sin. God gives life (Acts 17:24-31), and sinners misuse the ability He gives them. This does not insinuate cooperation. A believer could never say, "I did that sinful act because God worked in me to will and to do that which is sinful."

Sustenance and government are two aspects of the one almighty and omnipresent God. All things are of, through, and to Him (Rom. 11:36). "For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him" (Col. 1:16). "A man's heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps" (Prov. 16:9). "The Lord shall reign for ever..." (Ps. 146:10).

How can the two aspects of providence—God's sustenance and His government—leave room for human responsibility? In the Word of God, both God's sovereignty and man's responsibility are taught. But divine revelation does not allow us to penetrate the mystery of the harmony between God's sovereignty and man's responsibility. Scripture always presents providence, the invincible power of God, and man's continual responsibility. The enemies of God are portrayed as enterprisers unable to escape God's supremacy. Although the enemies of the Lord Jesus Christ nailed Him to the cross, they did what God's disposing power had predetermined (Acts 2:23).

When we say, "God permits sin," we must be careful to clarify this. God does not allow the sinner to decide, free from His command. If He did,

God would be merely an observer of a contest whose outcome is never certain. To sin or not to sin would ultimately lie in man's power of decision, and God could only react accordingly.

God's nonintervention is always a positive action, not helpless or frustrated inaction. However, positive providence does not make God the author of sin. Every act of sin is committed by a man whose life God sustains (Acts 17:28). Ananias and Sapphira were being sustained by God while they lied to Him (Acts 5:4). God restrained Abimelech from sinning against Sarah (Gen. 20:6), but He did not restrain David from sinning against Bathsheba and Uriah (II Sam. 11). Adam and many others were unrestrained, but God did restrain Laban from harming Jacob (Gen. 31:7) and prevented Balaam from cursing Israel (Num. 23).

God suffers (allows) sin to be committed. However, suffering is not connivance with, approbation of, or mere permission of sin. God not only allows men to walk in their own ways, He gives them up to uncleanness and vile affection and gives them over to a reprobate mind. He sends them strong delusions that they might believe a lie (II Thess. 2:11). God punishes sin with sin.

God may put things that are good in themselves in the way of persons. For instance, the law and the gospel become occasions for drawing out the corruptions of men's hearts. Paul said he would not have known sin but by the law (Rom. 7:7). The law and the gospel themselves are good. However, the law draws corruption out of the heart, and the gospel becomes the savor of death to those who disbelieve (II Cor. 2:14-16).

God allows sin, but He sometimes overrules sin for good. He overruled Adam's sin for his perfection in grace. He overruled the sin of Joseph's brothers "...to save much people alive..." (Gen. 50:20). He overruled the sin of the wicked men who crucified the Lord Jesus Christ and made His soul an offering for sin for the good of His elect (Is. 53:10).

God is not responsible for man's sin (Is. 45:7). He did not originate moral evil. Darkness did not proceed from God who is light, nor the evil of sin from God who is holy. Two contrasts appear in Isaiah 45:7—"I form the light, and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." Light is contrasted with darkness, and peace is contrasted with evil. Darkness is the privation of light, and the evil of punishment is the privation of peace.

God forms light and creates darkness. He forms the light of nature and rational understanding. Every man who comes into the world possesses this light and understanding (John 1:9). Darkness is also God's creature. Natural darkness results from the absence of the sun. Deprivation of divine light causes spiritual darkness.

The Lord makes peace and creates evil (Is. 45:7). He now makes peace among His saints. When Jesus Christ comes as King of kings and Lord of lords, He will make universal peace. The Lord announced through Isaiah that He would remove the peace the Israelites were enjoying and send them the evil of punishment for their sins.

The evil that God creates is the evil of punishment for sin, not the evil of sin itself. Sin is not found among God's creatures in Genesis 1. Sin did not begin with God's original creation. The Lord does not infuse any evil into men. Rather, He subjects depraved men to various providential dealings; He allows sin and overrules it for the good of His people.

Sin began among the angelic host with Lucifer; and with mankind, it began in Adam. God purposed the fall of both. If He had not, neither could have fallen. The Lord also purposed to prepare redemption for His elect through the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ. Although evil hands were associated with the preparation of that redemptive work, those wicked hands were only instruments that God used to fulfill His purpose. God made Christ's soul an offering for sin: "Yet it pleased the Lord to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he

shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand" (Is. 53:10).

We must distinguish between the words purpose and author. God purposed sin; otherwise, it could not exist. According to God's determinate counsel and foreknowledge, the sins of wicked men nailed the Lord Jesus Christ to the cross (Acts 2:23). God purposed to order events so that evil should come to pass to fulfill His eternal purpose. Nevertheless, He hates evil. To say that God is the author of sin—that is, the agent, actor, or doer of a wicked thing—would be blasphemy. Sin had no actual existence before it was committed by creatures whom God pronounced good after His act of creating them. Therefore, sin's beginning cannot be attributed to God.

God's foreknowledge of sin does not make Him the author of sin; anticipated sin and actual sin are entirely different. Just as divine election or foreordination does not cause one's actual redemption, so foreknowledge of sin's occurrence does not cause that sin.

Sin became a reality only as God's creatures perverted His will. It has no original substance in itself. Sin has no thesis. It has only antithesis. Since sin came by God's creatures, it is a secondary and not a primary consideration.

People seek to excuse their own sin by asking, "Why did God make Adam capable of falling?" They refuse to admit a personal sinful condition. For that reason, considering the origin of sin is not as innocent as it may appear.

God created man capable of falling because He could make him in no other condition. God cannot create God. Whatever He creates must be inferior to Himself. Man was created upright (Eccl. 7:29), but he was created with two principles: inferior and superior. The inferior principle was related to man's flesh, and the superior principle was related to his fellowship with God. When Adam fell, he lost the superior principle and retained the inferior (which had become corrupted). Adam could no longer fellowship with God;

so he fled to the wilderness, seeking to hide himself from God. The inferior principle became the reigning principle in the lives of Adam and his descendants. When the superior principle was forfeited through sin, man was alienated from the life of God. Every person since Adam comes into the world dead in trespasses and sins.

Adam's trial was ordained of God because probation is an essential part of self-determination. However, God's ordination of Adam's trial was benevolent, not unjust. And God provided hope for Adam and all His elect ones.

The Lord Jesus Christ could never be tempted the same way as Adam was. He had no inferior principle, no weakness within, to yield to temptation. He had only the divine principle—He could not yield to external temptation. Temptation itself cannot pervert the soul. Only an evil will, self-determined against God, can turn temptation into an occasion for ruin.

Satan was the first actor in sin and the first tempter to sin. When he approached Eve, he concealed the fact of his own fall and his enmity against God. Sin began with Lucifer. God pronounced it evil (Ezek. 28:15).

If Adam, who possessed the strength of uprightness, yielded to temptation, how can Adam's descendants, who possess only an inferior principle, resist it? All men react in only one way until God's grace intervenes. None can overcome temptation apart from the grace of God.

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