

The Permissive Will of God

Bible Study - Lecture IX – Part 3

Brookland Baptist Church

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We have completed our study on the circumstantial will of God. God's Circumstantial Will - that is, how evil circumstances may momentarily counter God's ideal purposes; and God's Ultimate Will that is, how God's ideal purposes may finally be realized though temporarily derailed. We understand that human folly and sin often delay or prevent God's intentional will from coming to fruition in our lives. Thus in the circumstances created by evil or neglect, there is a "will within the will of God." This means that God will make provision to help us overcome and bring good out of current circumstances.

As we continue our study, we are veering away from the book and our initial outline, to focus on an aspect of the will God that is perhaps the most difficult, to understand because it introduces the why question. "The Permissive Will of God." When we speak of the Permissive will of God that there are somethings that God allows and permits for an indirect fulfillment of God's plan and purposes. In other words, because God is sovereign, He must at least "permit" all events and happenings. Within God's sovereign will, He chooses to permit many things to happen that He takes no pleasure in. The question of why God permits some evil and the suffering that comes from it, even the suffering of innocents, is an extremely hard question to answer, because only God knows the purpose or the reasoning of it all.

The questions around why God allows and permits somethings is not new. Human beings have grappled with question since the beginning of time and that question becomes more personal when tragedy, suffering, or difficult times hit close to home. In fact they have been asked by men and women of all ages of history. How would you answer these two questions?

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1.) Why does God allow pain and suffering? -----

2.) Why did God allow _____?

Let's consider a few terms:

THEODICY:

Theodicy may be defined as a branch of theology that studies how the existence of a good or benevolent God is reconciled with the existence of evil. An attempt to reconcile the co-existence of evil is called theodicy. The term theodicy comes from the Greek word Theos (meaning God) and dike' (meaning "right" or "just"), literally meaning "the justice of God" The problem of evil and human suffering is a problem that has baffled the minds of men from the ancient times to the present. People from ancient times and today have struggled with the dilemma of an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnibenevolent God who allows evil. The quest for answers to the problem of evil and suffering gave birth to the classic dilemma of Theodicy: "If God is benevolent and all powerful, then why does he not prevent evil? If evil exists, so the arguments run, either God's love or his power must be limited.

So from where does evil originate?

Evil manifests itself in nature (tsunamis, earthquakes, tornadoes, hurricanes, cancer cells) and in human behavior (offenses against one another and against God). Together, natural and moral evil test the human spirit and cause unbearable suffering. There is simply no explanation for the suffering of children, but people nevertheless seek answers.

There are varying answers some have given to explain the question of theodicy:

- 1.) The first explanation is the retributive view that suffering is punishment for sin.**
- 2.) The second explanation is called the Parental discipline view.** As a loving parent punishes an errant child. The goal of correction is educative, that is bring

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enlightenment to the sufferer. In fact, God is said to discipline favored ones (**Prov. 3:11-12**).

- 3.) **The third explanation is the use of Testing.** According to this explanation, God needs to know whether an individual's devotion is genuine. That search underlies the harrowing tests of Abraham, whom God commands to sacrifice his son Isaac (**Gen. 22**). Other examples are: **Job 23:10, Dan. 3: 8-26; 6:4-26, and Jer. 20:12.**
- 4.) **The fourth explanation is that suffering draws one closer to God** as in **Ps. 73.**
- 5.) **The fifth explanation is that some individuals suffer to save others from an awful fate.** An example of this is Jesus' vicarious death on our behalf on the cross. He was the substitutionary sacrifice. (**Isa. 53:5**) The chastisement of our peace was on his head. Also, suffering is considered said to be transgenerational, offspring paying for the sins of their parents (**Exod. 34:7**).

ANTHROPODICY: has to do with or is concerned with man's inhumanity to man; the evil we do to each other. Examples: Joseph's brothers, David's children i.e. Absalom.

ACTS OF GOD: an act of God is generally considered an act attributed to nature without human interference. For an example, damage from a tornado or a lightning strike would be considered an act of God. However, damage caused by the property owner would not be considered an act of God. (Insurance company definition) unlike disasters caused by human hands, such as tragic bombings or shocking school shootings, these occurrences would not be considered acts of God. Only disasters like those mentioned above is most likely to be referred to as an "act of God".

When we hear words "act of God," and think about those words the implication seems to be that God is the source or cause of the disaster. Some may even offer their opinion as to exactly why God would send or cause the natural disaster. Some of the opinions maybe that the disaster was sent as punishment for some sin or to teach a lesson.

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It is understandable that Christians and others who believe in an all-powerful God would either think that a disaster is something God has actually caused to happen, literally an “act of God,” or be confused as to how such a disaster could happen.

However, we must be careful here because thinking of God as the cause of the disaster may affirm the almighty power of God, but also lead some believers to another question that is whether God is really a loving God. The reasoning seem to be that if God is almighty, then God has both the power to cause a disaster and the power to keep the disaster way. How could a loving God not keep the disaster from happening?

There are others who reason that if God is truly a loving God who would not cause such a disaster, then God must not be all-powerful or at least not powerful enough to keep the disaster from happening. There are also those for whom the experience of a disaster shakes their faith that they conclude that such a devastating event can only mean that there must be no God at all.

Few believers can experience a disaster and not have it raise at least some faith-questions.

Now, our prescientific ancestors believed that thunderstorms, and natural disasters were works of God. They would tell us to turn off everything in the house tell us to go somewhere be still and be quiet because God was at work. My Lord he calls me by the thunder.

However, today we know that there are scientific causes of natural disasters and realize that destructive natural forces of nature are natural occurrences. However, on the other hand what about man’s role in the environment and the ecology? Climatologist having been warning us for years about the gas house effects of omissions from cars the effects smoke factories are having on the ozone layer. They have found that some oil companies were warned about the effects over 30+ years.

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We polluted our water supply polluted the oceans which supplies us with food resources.

WIGIAT = Where is God in All This? Or where was God in all that?

As we probe further in this aspect of God's will there are two things we need to consider as it relates to our disappointment with God in the face of suffering, tragedy, or injustice. The first has to do with our assumptions about how God is supposed to work in our world. Namely, when God does not meet our expectations, we are disappointed, disillusioned, and confused.

Second, the way we have interpreted the message of the Bible. That is to say, we must remember that the message of the Bible is not a promise that those who believe and do good will not suffer, but the Bible shares the testimonies of those who refused to let go of their faith in the face of suffering.

This week your homework assignment was to look at the characters in the scriptures below and based on your understanding, explain how God's permissive will is involved:

- **Genesis 37:12-36**
- **1 Samuel 8: 1-6**
- **Job 1:1-12**
- **Habakkuk 1:1-11**
- **Psalms 49**
- **Psalms 73**