

The Permissive Will of God

Bible Study - Lecture IX – Part 4

Brookland Baptist Church

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Presenter: James A. Jamison, D. Min.

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.

Up until this point, we have been focusing on Theodicy and God's permissive will. That is, there are somethings that God's permits and somethings God allows. Our focus will now shift to problem of Anthropodicy, man's inhumanity to man. By Definition: Man's inhumanity to man is humanity's ability to do horrible things to fellow humans. Our areas of focus will be Inhumanity against men/and women by use of biblical examples. Inhumanity In the name of Religion such as the crusades, slavery, Scriptures used to justify slavery treatment of women.

In regards to biblical example, we will begin with the story of Joseph and the betrayal, by his brothers. Second will explore biblical texts called texts of terror to highlight the abuse and inhumane of women in the Bible and during slavery; to include the unethical

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experiments on Black women by the so-called father of gynecology James Marion Sims. Finally, we will examine examples of the violent nature of police brutality.

The story of Joseph shows how God allowed Joseph's brothers to betray him, and to deceive their father, so that He might bring the Israelites to Egypt, where God would spare them, and they would greatly multiply, and consequently save the land from starvation. This is a sad story because it was his own flesh and blood and not outsiders. That says to us that inhumanity does not always occur at the hand of outsiders, but from within as well. In fact, Samuel von Pufendorf who in 1673 wrote, "More inhumanity has been done by man himself than any other of nature's causes."

In regards to man's Inhumanity against women let's look at the Texts of Terror. According to Phyllis Tribble in her book Texts of Terror are those texts that illustrate the failure of systems of power to prevent violence against women or to provide victims of violence with justice. Examples, In the Bible Hagar Genesis 16:1-16;21:8-21 is exploited and abused Tamar is the victim of sexual violence –at the hands of her brother 2nd Samuel 13:1-31 23-38 ; The Levite Concubine, was abused raped until she died Judges 19:1-21. How do we rectify this treatment of women in history? Also, when we think of Emmet Till, the rosewood incident and the current Central park situation what about women's inhumanity to man.

Inhumanity in the name of Religion

"More of man's inhumanity to man has been done in the name of religion than any other cause." Author unknown, circa 1929. Never has a truer statement been made about how religion has been used to subjugate and oppress the marginalized. Throughout religious history, we have seen many instances where nefarious acts have been carried out in the name of religion. For example the crusades for under the guise of a righteous cause to root the Muslim invasion. Barrack Obama reminds of us of our sacrilegious history where he asserts "And lest we get on our high horse and think this is unique to some other place, remember that during the Crusades and the Inquisition, people committed terrible deeds in the name of Christ. In our home country, slavery and Jim Crow all too often was justified in the name of Christ."

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Another example is slavery and the distortion of the Scriptures. It is no question that one of the greatest miscarriages of Scripture was its use to justify the inhumane treatment and enslavement of human beings in American history. The biblical justification of slavery was a Christian heresy. One of the clearest ways this was evidenced was in the religious life in the slave community. In the slave community religious instruction was used as means of suppression and control.

There were many pet Scriptures used by White slave holder used to justify the institution of slavery they are the following: Exod. 21:20-21, Genesis 9:25, Leviticus 25:44-46, Luke 7:1-10, Tim. 6:1-5, Titus 2:9-10, 1 Pet. 2:18-29, 1 Cor. 7:20, 24.

In regards to the treatment of women in slavery remember the southern slaveholder James Marion Sims and the unethical experiments he performed on slave women.

Sims cared more about the experiments than in providing therapeutic treatment, and that he caused untold suffering by operating under the racist notion that black people did not feel pain. They say his use of enslaved black bodies as medical test subjects falls into a long, ethically bereft history of medical apartheid that includes the Tuskegee syphilis experiment and Henrietta Lacks.

Writer and medical ethicist Harriet Washington says Sims's racist beliefs affected more than his gynecological experiments. Before and after his gynecological experiments, he also tested surgical treatments on enslaved black children in an effort to treat "trismus nascentium" (neonatal tetanus)—with little to no success. Sims also believed that African Americans were less intelligent than white people, and thought it was because their skulls grew too quickly around their brain. He would operate on African-American children using a shoemaker's tool to pry their bones apart and loosen their skulls.

We will end this session on antropodicy with a video and a collage showing examples of police brutality

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

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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.

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

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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.

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**

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- **Job 1:1-12**
- **Habakkuk 1:1-11**
- **Psalm 49**
- **Psalm 73**