

The Permissive Will of God

Bible Study - Lecture IX – Part 5

Brookland Baptist Church

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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.

In light of the current events that is gripping our nation, I felt the need to further expand our conversation on anthropodicy. According to Dr. Jeremiah Wright, who expands on the concepts of the late Dr. William Augustus Jones from his book "God in the Ghetto" asserts that to understand White Supremacy there are three important concepts one must be aware Theology, Anthropology and Sociology. Theology maybe defined as – the study of God and his nature and his relationship with humanity.

Theological Anthropology is concerned with what it means to be a person, made in God's image, is to be made to love: it is to be created to be in relation to other human beings. Human beings are uniquely related to God, other human beings, and to the rest of the created order in a way that other creatures are not. Sociology is the study of societies and how humans act in groups. Preference is given to the second definition society is the community of people living in a particular country or region and having shared customs, laws, and organizations. Dr. Wright expounds on these concepts in a speech that he gave at the National Press club.

Dr. William Augustus Jones, in his book, *God in the Ghetto*, argues quite accurately that one's theology, how I see God, determines one's anthropology, how I see humans, and one's anthropology then determines one's sociology, how I order my society.

Now, the implications from the outside are obvious. If I see God as male, if I see God as white male, if I see God as superior, as God over us and not Immanuel, which means "*God with us*," if I see God as mean, vengeful, authoritarian, sexist, or misogynist, then I see humans through that lens.

Example: My experience at Lutheran in the Apocalypse of John class.

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My theological lens shapes my anthropological lens. And as a result, white males are superior; all others are inferior.

Therefore, I order my society where I can worship God on Sunday morning wearing a black clergy robe and kill others on Sunday evening wearing a white Klan robe. I can have laws which favor whites over blacks in America or South Africa. I can construct a theology of apartheid in the Africana church and a theology of white supremacy in the North American church.

The implications from the outset are obvious, but then the complicated work is left to be done, as you dig deeper into the constructs which tradition habit and hermeneutics put on your plate.

To say "*I am a Christian*" is not enough. Why? Because the Christianity of the slaveholder is not the Christianity of the slave. The God to whom the slaveholders pray as they ride on the decks of the slave ship is not the God to whom the enslaved are praying as they ride beneath the decks on that slave ship.

How we are seeing God, through our theology, is not the same. And what we both mean when we say "*I am a Christian*" is not the same thing. The prophetic theology of the black church has always seen and still sees all of God's children as sisters and brothers, equals who need reconciliation, who need to be reconciled as equals in order for us to walk together into the future which God has prepared for us.

Howard Thurman in his book *Jesus and The Disinherited* enters this conversation by engaging in a dialogue with Mahatma Gandhi about what it means for African Americans to be Christian and what it means for white supremacist to be Christian.

Gandhi makes the following observations: "More than three hundred years ago your forefathers were taken from the western coast of Africa as slaves. The people, who dealt in the slave traffic were Christians. One of your famous Christian hymn writers, Sir John Newton, made his money from the sale of slaves to the New World. He is the man who wrote '*How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds*' and '*Amazing Grace*' - there may be others, but these are the only ones I know. The name of one of the famous British slave vessels was '*Jesus*'."

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Gandhi goes on to say, "The men who bought the slaves were Christians. Christian ministers, quoting the Christian apostle Paul, gave the sanction of religion to the system of slavery. Some seventy years or more ago you were freed by a man who was not a professing Christian, but was rather the spearhead of certain political, social, and economic forces, the significance of which he himself did not understand. During all the period since then you have lived in a Christian nation in which you are segregated, lynched, and burned. Even in the church, I understand, there is segregation. One of my students who went to your country sent me a clipping telling about a Christian church in which the regular Sunday worship was interrupted so that many could join a mob against one of your fellows. When he had been caught and done to death, they came back to resume their worship of their Christian God."

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 are 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 seems to be that if God is almighty, then God has both the power to cause a disaster and the power to keep the disaster away. How could a loving God not keep the disaster from happening?

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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.

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:

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