

The Problem of Evil Part 2

The Correct Hermeneutical (Interpretive) Approach to Scripture

- The information from which the doctrine is constructed comes from Scripture and is to be interpreted in the light of what it teaches
 - not what *we want* it to teach
 - not what *we impose* on the text
 - but by comparing Scripture with Scripture
- Faith / reason / and experience must all be kept in check and in their proper places
- Human reason comes after faith
 - Human reason first submits to what God says in the text
 - Then it attempts to put it all together in humility and reverence
 - Never exalting reason / philosophy above it
 - Allow the text to speak for itself
 - Use reason passively
 - Recognize the voice of God behind the text
 - Never actively impose your reason upon the text
 - Human reason *deduces* from the text whatever the text is saying in its context
 - According to its original language, grammar, syntax, and context
 - Reason *draws out* the communicated doctrine from Scripture
 - We to avoid imposing, muffling, and silencing Scripture by deciding in advance what Scripture must and must not say
- Theological doctrines cannot be proven by the scientific method
- What God has said cannot be tested by science because science can only test that which is tangible and observable to the human senses
- Autonomous human reason is insufficient because it is limited to sense perception

Calvinism - The Compatibility of Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility

Presupposition: God Decrees All Things

- God is Most Absolute –
 - He is infinitely sovereign over all
 - Every human thought, word, and action
 - Everything that exists in both the physical and spiritual realm
 - But never in a way where human responsibility is diminished, minimized, abolished, overridden, or forced
- Human beings are fully responsible for their own actions
 - We choose to do what we do
 - We do what we do because we want what we want
 - Our will is influenced by our desires
 - God never forces or tempts us to do what we do (James 1:13-16)
- God stands behind every evil action
- God is pure actuality with no potentiality

- **Malachi 3:6** - *For I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed*
- God is “A Se” / “Auto Theos”
 - **Exodus 3:2** - ² *And the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of the midst of a bush. He looked, and behold, **the bush was burning, yet it was not consumed***
- Nothing can take place outside of His decree
 - And yet He is not morally responsible for the event
 - The secondary agent He uses is responsible and culpable for the evil they do
 - The moral responsibility falls on the individual who sins from their own will
 - God brings it about through the will of the individual

Freedom or Bondage of the Will?

- Libertarian Free Will
 - Free agency, or the freedom to choose, is the ability to choose contrary to a choice that is made
 - Choices are sufficiently determined by a person’s power of willing and nothing else, including God
 - God can influence choices, but he cannot determine choices without violating one’s free will
 - One can always resist God’s influence
 - A person can always choose to act against their desires and motives

John 8:31-36 - ³¹ *So Jesus said to the Jews who had believed him, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, ³² and you will know the truth, and the truth will **set you free.**” ³³ They answered him, “We are offspring of Abraham and have never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that you say, ‘You will become free’?” ³⁴ Jesus answered them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who practices sin is **a slave to sin.** ³⁵ The slave does not remain in the house forever; the son remains forever. ³⁶ **So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***

1 Corinthians 2:14 - *The natural person **does not accept** the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is **not able** to understand them because they are spiritually discerned*

Romans 8:8 - *Those who are in the flesh **cannot** please God.*

1 John 5:1 - *Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ **has been** born of God*

- “Free will is a downright lie; and that, like the woman in the Gospel, the more it is taken in hand by physicians, the worse it is made.” – (Martin Luther)

Understanding the Will of God

1 - Can God’s will be resisted or overturned by humanity?

- **Job 42:1-2** – ¹ *Then Job answered the Lord and said, ² “I know that you can do all things, and that **no purpose of yours can be thwarted.***

- **Daniel 4:35** - ³⁵ *all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, and he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth*
- Answer – No, nothing God purposes can be resisted or overturned by us

2 - Can God's will be resisted or overturned by humanity?

- **Proverbs 1:24-26, 29** - ²⁴ *Because I have called and you refused to listen, have stretched out my hand and no one has heeded,* ²⁵ *because you have ignored all my counsel and would have none of my reproof,* ²⁶ *I also will laugh at your calamity; I will mock when terror strikes you,* ²⁹ *Because they hated knowledge and did not choose the fear of the Lord*
- **Matthew 23:37** - ³⁷ *“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often would I have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing!”*
- Answer – Yes, God can be resisted and His will is rejected by us all the time
 - Is the Bible in error?
 - Does this mean God contradicts Himself and is illogical and irrational?
 - Is God speaking out of both sides of His mouth?
 - How do you make sense / reconcile this?

Question – Does God desire evil to take place?

- Revealed (moral will)
 - God's moral will
 - God commands all people everywhere to obey Him perfectly
 - God does not want people to do evil, only good
- Decretive will (secret will)
 - Everything God has decreed to take place before the foundation of the world
 - This includes everything
 - The evil things as well as all the good things

Question – Does God desire evil to take place?

- **1 John 2:17** – *And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever*
- **Genesis 50:20** – *As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today*
- **Isaiah 53:4** – *Surely he has borne our griefs and carried out sorrows; yet we esteem him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted*
- **Matthew 7:21** – *Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*
- **Revelation 17:17** - *for God has put it into their hearts to carry out his purpose by being of one mind and handing over their royal power to the beast, until the words of God are fulfilled*

- **Matthew 12:50** – *For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother*
- **Isa 55:10-11** – ¹⁰ *For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, ¹¹ so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it*
- **2 Peter 3:9** - *The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance*
- Does the prescriptive will of God and the decretive will of God contradict each other?
- In other words:
 - Can God command something from His prescriptive will that is contrary to His decretive will?
 - How would you justify this?
- The Bible affirms the responsibility of human beings as moral agents
 - Human beings break God’s prescriptive will every time we sin
 - **Acts 7:51** - *You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you*
- While at the same time affirms God’s sovereignty over all human actions
 - God’s decretive will can never be broken
 - **John 10:35** - *... and Scripture cannot be broken*
 - **Isaiah 55:11** - ¹¹ *so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it*
- **Acts 4:27-28 - 27** ²⁷ *“For, in fact, in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, assembled together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your will had predestined to take place*
- **Acts 2:23 - 23** *Though he was delivered up according to God’s determined plan and foreknowledge, you used lawless people to nail him to a cross and kill him*
- **Romans 11:36** - *For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever. Amen*
- **Isaiah 45:7** – *I form light and create darkness, I make success and create disaster; I am the Lord, who does all these things*
- **Prov 19:21** - *Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand*
- **Prov 21:1** – *The king’s heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes*
- **Amos 3:6** - *Is a trumpet blown in a city, and the people are not afraid? Does disaster come to a city, unless the Lord has done it?*

- **Eph 1:11** - *also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will*

The Two Most Common Objections to Calvinism

Objection #1 – God is unrighteous because He ordained the person to do what they did?

Norman Geisler – “Not only does extreme Calvinism tend to undermine personal responsibility, it also logically lays the blame squarely on God for the origin of evil”

Clark Pinnock – “eliminate human freedom and take away human responsibility; they make God the author of sin”

- **Romans 9:14** - *What should we say then? Is there injustice with God? By no means!*
 - Therefore - Calvinism makes God the author of sin
 - Response – *By no means!*

Objection #2 - How can human beings be held responsible for their sin when God ordains them to do it?

Roger Olson – “First, if sinners cannot do otherwise, how are they responsible? Second, if God renders sin certain, how is he not stained by it?”

William Lane Craig – “seems to lead inescapably to making god the author of sin and to a denial of human freedom and responsibility in general”

- **Romans 9:19** - *You will say to me, therefore, “Why then does he still find fault? For who resists his will?”*
 - Therefore - Calvinism destroys moral responsibility and freedom of choice
 - Response – Who are you, human being, to talk back to God? The potter has the right over the clay.
- Therefore: the objections made against Calvinism serve as one more piece of evidence in its favor
 - There is much we cannot answer from our perspective
 - The burden of proof is on the non-Calvinist who is using the same arguments that Paul is refuting to in Romans 9
 - People get hung up on *why* God brings evil about and *how* He can do it compatibly with human choice
- Paul answers the question, “Is there injustice with God” (Romans 9:14)?
 - **Romans 9:19** Paul responds: “*Why does God blame us? For who resists His will?*”
 - In other words - if this is how God has decreed things to be, how can He blame me for my actions?
 - **In verses 20-21** Paul states: “*But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, why did you make me like this? Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?*”

- Theologians and philosophers have taken a great interest over the past two thousand years in trying to understand the “problem” of how divine sovereignty and human responsibility can coexist simultaneously
- Academic philosopher’s number 1 problem with Calvinism is how it answers and describes the problem of evil
 - Many theologians view it as violating human free will and making God the author of sin
 - They believe Calvinism makes the problem of evil even worse
 - They view it as underdeveloped
- This was not a main concern for the writers of Scripture
 - They were aware of it and taught both divine sovereignty and human responsibility being true at the same time
 - They openly described compatibility / concurrence
 - Once we get away from Scripture and start to affirm human free will and human choice as ultimate over God’s sovereignty
 - We are denying Scripture
 - **1 Cor 4:6** - *I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, **that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another***
 - 1 – If one is objecting that God is to be blamed for sin
 - 2 – If one is objecting that humans are not responsible for our actions because we are just puppets on a string
 - We are making the same objections against God’s sovereignty that Paul is refuting in Romans 9
 - Verse 14 - *Is there injustice with God?*
 - Verse 19 - *Why does God blame us? For who resists His will?*
- “From which it follows unalterably, that all things which we do, although they may appear to us to be done mutably and contingently, and even may be done thus contingently by us, are yet, in reality, done necessarily and immutably, with respect to the will of God.” (Martin Luther)
- Natural Determinism
 - All events come to pass by created causes and the laws of nature
- Theological Determinism
 - All events come to pass by way of God
 - The creature operates in a completely different manner than the Creator
- Causal Determinism
 - God is the sufficient cause of sin which makes Him a sinner
 - God is the author of sin which makes Him morally responsible
- Soft Determinism
 - In one sense God is the author of sin because He decrees all things to come to pass
 - All things must come to pass the way God has ordained them

- In another sense God is not to be blamed for the sin because he brings it about through the will of the person
 - God in no way forces or coerces a person to do what they do
 - They choose to do what they do according to the desires of their heart
 - God works through this in bringing about evil
- WCF 3:1
 - God from all eternity did, by the most wise and holy counsel of his own will, freely and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass: yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin. nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures, nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established