

God the Author

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Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

To Timothy, my dear son:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (2 Timothy 1:1-2)

God is sovereign – the will of God is supreme. This does not mean only that he can control something if he wishes to, but it means that nothing can happen unless he decides that it should happen and then causes it to happen by an active and unstoppable power. The distinction is crucial. The failure to acknowledge it has resulted in absurdity and inconsistency even in those who consider themselves the champions of God's sovereignty. God not only *can* actively and directly decide and control everything – as if it is possible for him to *metaphysically* leave some things to regulate themselves – but God *does* actively and directly decide and control everything, including all human thoughts and actions, whether good or evil. This is true by necessity because God is the sole and the pervasive metaphysical power in existence.

Of course, this would mean that God is the *metaphysical* author of sin and evil. He was the one who created Satan good and perfect, and then turned his heart to evil. He was the one who created Adam good and perfect, and then caused Satan to tempt him (the Scripture says that God *himself* tempts no one, since to tempt is to persuade to do wrong, and for God to directly persuade someone to do something by definition renders that a righteous act; therefore, it is logically impossible for God to directly tempt anyone), caused Adam to succumb, and caused his heart to turn to sin. Theologians are horrified by this idea, and almost always attempt to distance God from evil. However, if we *metaphysically* distance God from evil, this means that there is another metaphysical power that causes evil. And this means that God is not in control of everything, which in turn means that this "God" is not God at all. In other words, contrary to the popular notion that it is blasphemy to suggest that God is the author of sin and evil, it is blasphemy to say that he is not. God must be the author of evil, or evil could never have come about. God must be the author of sin, or sin could never have happened.

This is very different from saying that God *is* evil. One does not imply the other. Rather, God is the one who defines good and evil, and evil is that which violates his moral precepts. Although evil has come about, the Bible still calls God good. This necessarily means that God has never imposed a moral precept upon himself stating that he must never cause his creatures to violate his moral precepts. Therefore, it is not evil for God to cause his creatures to violate his moral precepts, but it is evil for the creatures, caused by God, to violate these moral precepts.

As to why God would create evil, and to cause his creatures to violate his precepts, and then redeem some of them, it is surprising that even those theologians who are so fond of referring to the biblical story as the "drama" of redemption cannot see the answer to this. Ask a writer why there is opposition to the hero in his own story. Is the writer not in complete control of what happens in his world? If we follow the absurd theories of almost all the theologians, we would have to say that the villains spontaneously appear and write their own lines in his manuscript, and the writer has to direct his hero to conquer them. Or, perhaps the writer somehow "permits" the villains to appear and wreck havoc, but they come about without the writer's direct involvement in writing them into the story. The villains within the story take control of the pen to write themselves into the story, even before they exist in the story! Or, righteous characters within the story take control of the pen and write evil into themselves, even before there is any evil within them to move them to do this! One wonders if the characters are infinitely more powerful than the writer. So much for God's "passive" decree and "permission" of evil. In any case, if the Bible records the "drama" of redemption, and if God is the writer and director, then the reason, purpose, and meaningfulness of the existence of evil in a world where God possesses direct and complete control is automatically addressed, except for those who have no grasp of drama. Romans 9 says that God wishes "to make the riches of his glory known."

Suppose a writer thinks that it is time for Richard, a character in his story, to die. There are many ways he can make this happen. He can write, without any explanation, "Richard died." And Richard would be dead. He can drop a boulder from the sky and crush Richard into the ground. He can simply stop mentioning Richard, and although the readers and the other characters in the story might not be aware of it, he would be dead in the writer's mind. But we are here for drama, so let us make it more interesting. The writer can introduce Tom into the story. He covets Richard's wife, and in the course of a complicated and unlikely plot, Tom shoots Richard in the head and kills him.

It would be absurd to "metaphysically" distance the writer from the evil in this story by using Tom to explain the whole thing. The writer is the one who conceives Tom in his own mind and introduces him into the story. The writer is the one who makes him covet Richard's wife and then shoots Richard in the head. Moreover, the writer is the one who makes Richard die. This is the part that many theologians and philosophers forget when dealing with metaphysics. It is not really Tom who kills Richard. It is not really the bullet that kills Richard. In a story where the writer wields omnipotent power, Richard does not have to die just because someone shoots him in the head. And if Richard dies, the writer can raise him from the dead. In fact, the writer can raise Richard from the dead and have him kill Tom just by giving him a disapproving look.

This is why, as metaphysical explanations, so-called secondary causes are meaningless. When the discussion is limited to the relationships within the story, then it is acceptable to say that Tom kills Richard. But when a metaphysical explanation is needed, we must say that the writer causes Tom to pull the trigger, causes the bullet to launch from the gun, and causes Richard to die. These events are metaphysically independent, and are related only in the context of the story. That is, the relationship between these persons

and events exist only in the writer's mind, and is then written into the story. Any event occurs only by the direct cause of the writer. An object within the story cannot write its own lines and produce an effect on another object within the story.

It is true that the writer kills Richard by using Tom, and it is true that Tom voluntarily shoots Richard. Tom acts on the strongest desire of the moment, and is not coerced by any other factor *within* the story. In fact, he is not even coerced by the writer, but this does not mean that he has free will, and it would be silly to mention that his desire and action are "compatible" with the writer's control, because the writer is the one who writes in the desire and action in the first place. Compatibilism is not so much false as it is irrelevant, because it misses the point. He is not coerced by the writer because coercion requires resistance in the one coerced, but Tom does not even have the freedom to exhibit any resistance to the writer's will. His desire is written into his mind by the writer, and then an action that is consistent with this desire is written into the story. To say that Tom's desire, choice, and action are compatible with the writer's authorship is to say nothing more than that the writer is compatible with himself, or that the exercise of his control is compatible with his possession of this control. This is irrelevant and unhelpful to the compatibilist's agenda.

Unless Tom is free *from the writer*, Tom is not free in any meaningful sense of the word. He might be free from other characters in the story, but even this is so only because the writer makes it so. Within the story, there is indeed an apparent relationship between Tom's action, the physics of the gun and the bullet, and Richard's death. But again, this is so only because the writer makes it so in that particular instance. In other words, there is no *necessary* relationship between Tom's action or the bullet, and Richard's death. The relationship is established, in appearance if you will, for the purpose of the story, or drama. In reality, the will of the writer is the sole explanation for any condition or event in the novel.

Tom possesses a relative freedom – he is free from the control or interference of other objects and characters in the story to the extent that the writer decides that he should be free from them. This relative freedom has nothing to do with Tom's moral responsibility toward the writer. If Tom is held accountable for anything, it is because the writer decides to hold him accountable, not because Tom possesses some kind of freedom. The writer is able to hold him accountable precisely because Tom is not free. If Tom is entirely free, even from the writer, then Tom would be accountable to no one. Tom's moral responsibility rests entirely on the writer's sovereignty and decision. As it is, the writer can express his disapproval of adultery and murder by arranging an especially gory fate for Tom. If he wishes to introduce a spiritual dimension, the writer can even send Tom straight to hell in the story.

Although the writer is the active and direct cause of Tom's adultery and murder, it would hardly be right to accuse the writer of these crimes, since the writer himself has not committed adultery and murder, and there is no law in the writer's world (outside of the story) stating that a writer may not write adultery and murder into his novel. Tom,

however, committed both, since the world of the story disapproves of both and enforces laws against both.

You may complain that all this rings true when it comes to writing a novel, but we are not mere characters in a story. Well, God is not a man, and when he writes a story, he is not limited to ink and paper. Nevertheless, if you resist my analogy, you can deal with the one Paul uses in Romans 9 where we are just a lump of clay. Does this help you at all, or does it commit us to my view even more? He says that God introduces sin, evil, and conflict against himself and his people (v. 17-18), because he wishes "to show" (v. 22-23). You say, "What, then, all this for a show? Why does he still blame us? How can a character resist the writer?" But who are you to complain? Shall a character say to the writer, "Why did you make me like this?" (v. 20). The writer has the right and the power to display his values and talents any way he wishes (v. 21).

I am telling you what happened to Paul. He writes that he was an apostle of Christ Jesus "by the will of God." The phrase itself can refer to God's decree or precept. That is, it can refer to either God's eternal decision that Paul would be an apostle, or to God's temporal command that Paul should be an apostle. It seems that the phrase in our passage refers to God's decree. God has decreed all things before the creation of the world, and he conceived of Paul and foreordained that he would become an apostle. He writes that he was set apart at birth (Galatians 1:15), but he was not born a Christian. John the Baptist was filled with the Spirit while he was still in his mother's womb, but Paul lived the life of a murderer up until the Lord Jesus confronted him. Both were ordained by will of God, but God decreed different lives for them.

It was not that God "allowed" Paul to roam free until Acts 9. He was just as much in control of Saul the Pharisee as he was John the Baptist. His plan demanded that Paul was the way he was before his conversion. And Paul tells us at least part of the reason: "But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might *display* his unlimited patience *as an example* for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:16). Paul's drama of conversion serves God's broader drama of redemption. God had foreordained that Paul would become an example of a great sinner who would receive mercy, so that "Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience." Again, it is for the sake of the "show," the drama. But for that to happen – for Paul to become a great sinner who receives mercy – he must first live as "the worst of sinners." It was not an accident that Paul became a display of divine mercy, nor can we explain this by some ridiculous theory of concurrence or compatibilism. No, it was his foreordained destiny. God planned it, and God made it happen – all of it.

At the appointed time, the Lord Jesus appeared to Paul and confronted him. Paul finally realized that he was wrong all along, and that Jesus was in fact the Christ foretold by all the prophets. Now Christ commanded him to change the whole course of his life, and commissioned him to become an apostle. The will of God was that he would become the most effective and prolific representative of the faith in the early church. Now, the writer has no need for Tom if he wishes to kill Richard, but it is his story and he can write it any way he wishes. In the same way, God has no need for men to accomplish his wishes, but

it suits his plan, his "show" if you will, to employ human instruments and arrange human relationships in this drama of redemption. And when something is said to be "the will of God" in the sense that it is the decree of God, then it will be done, because his will cannot be frustrated in the story that he himself writes. Therefore, although Paul was criticized, abandoned, and imprisoned, God's purposes in his life were carried out. He was to be the key instrument in establishing the presence of the gospel of Christ on the earth, to ensure its perpetuity through clear and extensive written explanations of the faith. This he accomplished, and we still have his writings today, because the will of God never fails.