

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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Trusting God to be Faithful to His Character

For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve, Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. (Acts 27:23-25)

This passage narrates a fascinating episode in the life of the Apostle Paul. Not only did God want Paul to preach in Rome, He also arranged for Rome to buy the ticket for his journey to its capital city! In the midst of storm and shipwreck Paul assured the crew and passengers that, though the ship and its cargo would be lost, there would be no loss of life.

We need not elevate the subjective human experience so as to allow it to compete with Scripture in authority by the weight of this passage. Nor should we allegorize or spiritualize the lesson so as to miss the obvious natural deliverance that God sent that day. Additionally, in acknowledging the truthfulness of Scripture that here affirms God's mighty deliverance of the crew in the face of immense threat, we need not draw the false conclusion that God personally causes every shipwreck and every calamity or sinful event that occurs. This conclusion exemplifies the logical fallacy of the "part to the whole." The idea of this logical fallacy imposes onto the whole of something a truth that is known to apply only to a part. The only safe and clear conclusion that we can rightly draw from the event is that God was involved in preserving the crew and passengers in this particular shipwreck.

As we examine God's trustworthiness in this series of lessons, it seems appropriate to go to the heart of the matter. Without any excessive allegorical burden, it is notable that Paul fully believed in the trustworthiness of God whose angel told him that the people on board this ship would be spared. Paul felt no need to wrestle with God's "secret will" or with any other idea that implies that God possesses or acts from a dualistic and distinctly Eastern mystical moral ambivalence. The idea of God's "secret will" as being in direct conflict with His "revealed will" imposes non-Christian, Eastern mystical dualism onto God, and cannot stand the scrutiny of

Scripture. In fact it directly conflicts with the consistent pattern of Scripture's assertion of God's consistent, holy, and unified morally perfect character.

I have been both amused and frustrated over the years at the rationalization demonstrated by those who use the "secret will" of God argument to explain the disasters, calamities, and sins of humanity. If God causes all of these things to occur through His secret will, advocates of this idea must claim to have discovered the secret! Thus God's "secret will" is no longer a secret! Multiple passages contradict the Eastern mystical idea that God causes both good and sin, but at its heart this idea faces two insurmountable hurdles. First, it distinctly violates the consistent moral character and holiness of God. However convoluted the arguments to evade this problem, at the end of the day adherents must face the reality that their "secret will" idea imposes the ultimate cause of sin, evil, and calamity onto God. They hopelessly compromise the moral character of God. Secondly, this idea exemplifies the logical error of the "part to the whole." That one man was born blind to, later in his life, glorify God (John 9) or that God intervened in one storm to preserve human life speaks to God's selective involvement in the world of real human life and experience, but it does not force—nor even imply—that God necessarily must therefore in some way cause all events that occur, either directly or indirectly.

The theological issue in place, we now examine Paul's practical conclusion. He does not give us great details regarding the angelic visit, but he clearly felt comfortable that God had sent this messenger, and his message, for the assurance of the people and for the affirmation of His unwavering presence with Paul. As human error tends to draw universal conclusions from specific and unique events in terms of God's causing sin and evil, so human error at times

equally errs in trying to elevate the subjective human experience as equal with—or at times even superior to—Scripture. This common error of the charismatic element of the Christian community serves as another example of the logical fallacy of the “part to the whole.” The ultimate test of every human thought lies, not in the human’s sincerity or subjective experience, but in Scripture alone. When anyone’s subjective experience or personal conclusions contradict Scripture, we may safely conclude that they are in error, and Scripture is right.

Why could Paul so comfortably state “*I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me.*” I offer that Paul’s comfortable conclusion relied on his conviction that God’s faithfulness to His “revealed” will and character is never in any way compromised. In his first letter to the Corinthian church Paul twice affirmed this conviction (1 Corinthians 1:9; 10:13).

I do not offer subjective “feelings” as the basis for my conviction of God’s faithfulness. I rather offer the consistent and clear testimony of Scripture. Regardless of the trials that you face, the disappointments of life, the sins that overtake you, or the calamities that our fallen human natures reject as “unfair,” we may uncompromisingly live with the Biblical truth that God is eternally—without a single exception—and wholly faithful to His holy and moral character as set forth in Scripture. Nothing in Scripture, and nothing that will occur in your personal experience, can shatter that resounding Biblical truth.

We need not over-extend God’s sovereignty to imply that He, either directly or indirectly, is causative in all things in order to rely on Him and on His faithfulness to His holy nature. Divine sovereignty does not mean that God absolutely causes and controls every thought, act, and deed of every human who ever lived. It means that, where He chooses to inject His power and will into the human experience, He has a right to do so, He does so effectively, and, when He does so, He shall accomplish His will. If God’s will were absolutely performed in every event, thought, word, and deed, the model prayer’s petition, “Thy will be done,” would be senseless. We pray for His will to be done in our lives so that we may see His glory, and live exclusively to His glory. Isn’t that the point of this petition in the model prayer?

We need not impose moral contradictions onto God’s holy character to rationalize life’s confusing and contradictory events. On the contrary, we may safely live in unreserved trust

in God, and in His consistently holy character, because He has revealed Himself with unqualified consistency throughout Scripture. He does not cause all events in history, either directly or indirectly, but He consistently promises to be with His children throughout their lives as a faithful and merciful Father, High Priest, and Helper. When you hear dreaded news from your doctor, disappointing reports from your retirement plan, heartbreaking desertion from a trusted friend, or think of inexplicable calamities that occur, you may safely and consistently trust God to be and to do exactly as He reveals His holy self in Scripture. He will never leave nor forsake you. He will never play the diabolical role of the Eastern mystical god by heaping calamity and sin upon you and then hypocritically delivering you from the very calamity that He created.

When you read of God’s gracious faithfulness to His people in Scripture (Try reading Psalm 23 the next time you face a life-shattering trial.), you may “believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me” in Scripture. You may claim Isaiah 43:1-7 in your deepest valley, in your most heart-breaking disappointment, and in your greatest temptation. “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called *thee* by thy name; thou *art* mine. When thou passest through the waters, I *will be* with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee. For I *am* the LORD thy God, the Holy One of Israel, thy Saviour: I gave Egypt *for* thy ransom, Ethiopia and Seba for thee. Since thou wast precious in my sight, thou hast been honourable, and I have loved thee: therefore will I give men for thee, and people for thy life. Fear not: for I *am* with thee: I will bring thy seed from the east, and gather thee from the west; I will say to the north, Give up; and to the south, Keep not back: bring my sons from far, and my daughters from the ends of the earth; *Even* every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him.”

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Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
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