

THE GOSPEL STUDY (PART 2: ANTHROPOLOGY - WHO IS MAN?)

“Sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel.” (1Tim1:10-11) by Steven Rodrigue

Section 2 - The Origin of Evil and God's Relationship to It

- **The Problem:** Consider these statements: God is holy - God is omnipotent - Sin exists
Any two of these statements work together, but all three of them appear contradictory:
 - If God is holy, and sin exists, then He must not be omnipotent; but He is omnipotent.
 - If God is omnipotent, and evil exist, then He must not be holy; but He is holy.
 - If God is holy, and omnipotent, then sin must not exist; but sin does exist.
- **Understanding what evil is:** “*They have made Me jealous with what is not [lo] God.*” (Deut 32:21) The word *lo* always negates the word immediately following it.²⁰ Thus, idolatry is the *absence* of worship, or *negative* worship. The fool says, “*There is no God,*” (Ps14:1) when there is. Evil is not the *presence* of something, but rather the *absence* of something. Sin is not a desire for *naturally* evil things, but an *abandonment* of better things.⁵ Evil is like the negative of a photo; a negative image is a total inversion of a positive image, in which light areas appear dark and vice versa.⁶ Evil became a reality only when creatures *chose* to disobey, where obedience *should* have been.⁷ Evil is a departure from goodness: “*Return, every one from his evil way.*” (Jer18:11) Evil is a negative thing.
- **God is the passive creator and passive cause of evil:** “*All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.*” (Jn1:3) Whatever things God does or permits, are right, just, and good, simply *because* God does or permits them.¹⁹ He did not will such and such things because they were right, and was then bound to will them; but they are equitable and right *because* He wills them.¹³ Were it not good that evil things should also exist, the Omnipotent Good would certainly not allow evil to be... therefore He deemed it better to bring good out of evil than not to permit any evil to exist at all.⁵
 - **Passive creation:** “*You created all things, and by your will they existed and were created.*” (Rev4:11) This includes evil. The *idea* of sin was first conceived in His mind; God eternally conceived sin as his *absolute polar opposite* and thus, in that sense, included it in his decree, or else it would never have been able to arise and exist in reality.¹⁰ “*I form light and create darkness; I make well-being and create calamity [ra’-evil].*” (Isa45:7) God creates light and peace, but this verse ascribes a *special* type of creation to those things which are *not* of His nature, darkness and calamity. Did God *create* evil? Evil did not exist as an *entity* at the end of the creation process, for it was a *non-entity*, which is why God could say everything “*was very good,*” because He was only speaking of things that *are*. Light cannot of itself produce darkness; the darkness only arises when the light is withdrawn. God, therefore, is at most the negative or incidental cause of sin; its real and positive cause is located in human beings.¹⁰
 - **Passive causation:** “*God causes all things to work together for good.*” (Rom8:28^{NASB}) This includes evil. Whatever was the first cause or occasion of sin, it must be entirely *free* from the fault or blame; for, if fault of blame was *in* the cause, sin also must be in it, and thus a flagrant contradiction would follow, that sin was before it was. But this was impossible. Therefore, God may be the *first* cause or occasion of sin, and yet be absolutely free from the fault or blame.¹⁸ If the sun were the *proper* cause of cold and darkness, it would be the fountain of these things, as it is the fountain of light and heat: and then something might be argued from the nature of cold and darkness, to a likeness of nature in the sun... Sin is not the fruit of any positive agency or influence of the most High, but on the contrary, arises from the withholding of his action and

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energy, and under certain circumstances, necessarily follows on the lack of his influence.¹⁶ Evil is like a cooktop that has been turned on, and set before a child has who has been warned not to touch it. The father bought it, and even turned it on, but only the child can be blamed for being burned if he touches it. “*Though he cause grief... he does not afflict from his heart.*” (Lam3:32-33) Note the passivity in which God is the cause: is not *from His heart*.

- **God is not the author or approver of evil:** If by ‘the author of sin,’ be meant the sinner, the agent, or the actor of sin, or the *doer* of a wicked thing... it would be a reproach and blasphemy, to suppose God to be the author of sin.¹⁶ God Himself does not sin, for He is “*without iniquity,*” (Deut32:4) nor to be blamed for man’s sin, for “*he himself tempts no one.*” (Jas1:13) God punishes most severely all sin, which he could not consistently do if it had its origin in Him.⁴ “*God is not the author of confusion but of peace.*” (1Cor14:33_{NKJV}) When peace is lacking, confusion emerges, which He did not author. God actively creates light as its Author, but passively creates darkness by the absence of that light. Likewise, He actively creates good as its Author, but passively creates evil by the absence of that goodness. “*Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!” (Mt18:7) As the passive creator and passive cause of evil, such things *must come*, but as He is not the author or approver of evil, woe to them *through whom they come*.*
- **Evil originated from angels and humans:** Evil *originates* not from God but from the fallen creature.⁷ Only God can say, “*I the LORD do not change.*” (Mal3:6) God is the only nature that exists in which there is no possibility of evil. He is unchangeably good.²¹ All that has been created *can change*.¹⁰ God placed angels and mankind at the very *pinnacle* of goodness, on the very *top* step of the *moral* ladder. With an ability to change, creatures could only change from “very good” to worse, incapable of improving upon God’s creation. Thus all creatures “*fall short of the glory of God.*” (Rom3:23) Wherever there is the *possibility* for change, there is a *potential* to fall short of the highest standard. Given that a creature would never be utterly the same as the rule by which it is to be directed, otherwise it would be God, it follows that by its nature it can be deflected from that rule.⁸ All natures below him were created subject to change, and any diminishing of the good of any nature is evil.²¹ The only cause of evil is falling away from the *unchangeable good*, by a being *made good but changeable*: first in the case of an angel, and afterwards in the case of man.⁵
 - **The heavenly fall:** Angels were created without evil. “*You were blameless in your ways... till unrighteousness was found in you.*” (Eze28:15) Satan was the chief of all the angels, of the greatest natural capacity, strength and wisdom, and highest in honor and dignity, the brightest of all those stars.¹⁶ “*You were the signet of perfection, full of wisdom and perfect in beauty...every precious stone was your covering... You were an anointed guardian cherub. I placed you; you were on the holy mountain of God; in the midst of the stones of fire you walked.*” (Eze28:12-14) But because Satan was changeable, he was only temporarily holy, until sin emerged. “*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*” (Pro16:18) An elder “*must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.*” (1Tim3:6) The cause of the apostasy of Satan was pride... produced by some new honor which was conferred on him in heaven, and that his virtue was not found sufficient for the untried circumstances in which he was placed.¹⁷ “*The angels who did not stay within their own position of authority, but left their proper*

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dwelling.” (Jude1:6) They were not satisfied with their lot, with the government and power entrusted to them.¹⁴ Having been given such *exalted* roles in heaven, some angels took *great offense* when God determined that they should be “*ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation.*” (Heb1:14) Lucifer, being the archangel, one of the highest of the angels, could not bear it, thought it below him and a great debasing of him.¹⁶ “*They are conceited and understand nothing.*” (1Tim6:4^{NIV}) Thinking his glory his own, and that such service was beneath him, he says, “*I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high...I will make myself like the Most High.*” (Isa14:13-14) So he conceived rebellion against the Almighty and drew away a vast company of the heavenly hosts with him.¹⁶ “*So I cast you as a profane thing from the mountain of God, and I destroyed you, O guardian cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire.*” (Eze28:16) “*How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!*” (Isa14:12^{NKJV})

- **The earthly fall:** Man was created without evil. “*God made man upright, but they have sought out many schemes.*” (Eccl7:29) God commanded Adam, “*You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” (Gen2:17) Eve adds the words, “*neither shall you touch it.*” (Gen3:3) She evidently wanted to stress the fact that the command had been rather unreasonable.¹⁴ Adam and Eve entertained Satan’s idea of being “*like God, knowing good and evil.*” (Gen3:5) To “know good and evil” is to become the determiner of good and evil; it is to decide for oneself what is right and wrong and not submit to any external law.¹⁰ Thus, Eve “*took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.*” (Gen3:6) Unforeseen to them, the event proved to give Adam and Eve an experimental knowledge of good by the *loss of it*, and of evil by the *sense of it*.¹ Ironically, in wanting to be like God, they immediately became as much unlike God as it is possible to be.⁷
- **God decreed that evil would exist:** The origin of [evil] is a mystery; it is not from God, and at the same time it is not excluded from His counsel.¹⁰ Every event in history is “*predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.*” (Eph1:11) This includes evil. God *must* have decreed evil, or else, it being outside of His sovereign control, it would render Him subservient. Therefore, whatsoever God wills to happen, happens, and nothing can happen that He has not willed, for “*he does according to his will.*” (Dan4:35) “*My counsel shall stand, and I will accomplish all my purpose.*” (Isa46:10) As God’s operations are all according to his counsels, so his counsels shall all be fulfilled in his operations, and none of his measures shall be broken, none of his designs shall miscarry.² Those who speak of God’s permission with respect to sin rightly seek to avoid making him the author of sin. However... the word “permission” conceived in a negative sense offers no solution whatsoever to the problem of God’s relation to sin, fails utterly to answer the objection that God is the author of sin, and in fact withdraws the whole reality of sin from the context of God’s providential government. After all, one who can prevent an evil but, while quietly looking on, and yet lets it happen, is as guilty as one who commits that evil.¹⁰ Rather, God decreed to happen whatsoever he wished. What else, I pray, is the permission of the one who has the right to prevent and indeed in whose hand the whole matter is placed, but His will?³ Christ knew Judas would betray Him, but He never disagreed or reasoned with him, but said, “*What you are going to do, do quickly.*” (Jn13:27)

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- **God restrains evil:** *"His sovereignty rules over all,"* (Ps103:19^{NASB}) including evil. Many more evils would be committed than there are, were it not that men are restrained from them by the power and providence of God.¹² God does this *indirectly*, through conscience and governments - as well as *directly*, through His providence and sovereignty:
 - **By Conscience:** *"Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint."* (Pro 29:18^{NKJV}) Without instruction in God's word, men are deprived of moral restraints. The Holy Spirit was sent to *"convict the world concerning sin,"* (Jn16:8) by which *"the law is written on their hearts."* (Rom2:15) Conscience acts as a restraining agent against evil by placing the fear of guilt and humiliation into the heart.
 - **By Government:** *"There is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God."* (Rom13:1) Such a government *"does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer."* (Rom13:4) Governments act as restraining agents against evil by placing the fear of justice and punishment into the heart.
 - **By Providence:** Providence is God's orchestration of all events *"according to the counsel of His will."* (Eph1:11) When Abigail intercepts David's path to revenge, she says, *"The LORD has restrained you from bloodguilt."* (1Sam25:26) David responds, *"Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!"* (vs32) God's providence acts as a restraining agent against evil by orchestrating external events.
 - **By Sovereignty:** Abimelech took Abraham's wife, but did not sleep with her. God says, *"It was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her."* (Gen20:6) God's sovereignty acts as a restraining agent against evil by restraining internal actions.
- **God uses evil:** God *indirectly* uses evil to fulfill His purposes. The Lord said, *"Who will entice Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead?"* A spirit said, *"I will go out, and will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets."* God said, *"You are to entice him, and you shall succeed; go out and do so."* The story concludes: *"The LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets."* (1Kg22:20-23) How can God command us to avoid evil, yet He Himself use it for His own purposes? As a father forbids his child to touch a sharp knife, though he himself uses it without injury or damage; so God forbids us to sin, though He himself is able to use and does use sin as a means of self-glorification.¹⁰ *"With him are strength and sound wisdom; the deceived and the deceiver are his."* (Job12:16) God would not suffer the sin of the deceiver, nor the misery of the deceived, if he knew not how to set bounds to both and bring glory to himself out of both.²
- **God orchestrates evil:** To orchestrate means to arrange or direct the elements of a situation, in order to produce a desired effect. Fire burns no matter where it is blown, so evil sins no matter where it is expressed; as fire is responsible for burning, not the wind, so evil men are responsible for sinning, not the Lord, though he directs and orchestrates it. *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."* (Pro 21:1) In sin, King Rehoboam *"rejected the advice of the elders,"* (2Chron10:13) yet we read, *"the king did not listen to the people, for it was a turn of affairs brought about by God that the LORD might fulfill his word."* (vs15) A few examples:
 - **Joseph:** Referring to the many sins Joseph's brothers committed against him, he says, *"As for you, you meant [chashab] evil against me, but God meant it [chashab] for good."* (Gen50:20) Many want it to read, "what men *intended* for evil, God used for

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good,” but the same verb is attributed to both parties. While the brothers had previously orchestrated their actions in order to bring about evil, God had previously orchestrated the brother’s same evil actions in order to bring about good.

- **Pharaoh:** God hardened Pharaoh's heart (2x: Ex4:21; 7:3) and Pharaoh's heart was passively hardened (3x: Ex7:13; 7:14; 7:22) long before we ever read that Pharaoh hardened His own heart (Ex8:15). When, “*Pharaoh.. hardened his heart, he and his servants,*” (Ex9:34) God says of that hardening, “*I have hardened his heart and the heart of his servants.*” (Ex10:1) This demonstrates that when a man is said to harden his own heart, it is God who is initiating the hardening of it. The psalmist writes: “*He turned their hearts to hate his people, to conspire against His servants.*” (Ps105:25)
- **Jesus:** The most spectacular sin that has ever been committed in the history of the world is the brutal murder of Jesus Christ, the morally perfect, infinitely worthy, divine Son of God.⁹ “*This Man, delivered over by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.*” (Acts2:23^{NASB}) Though God planned it, men were accountable for doing it. “*Truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place.*” (Acts 4:27-28) The *hand* of God ordinarily stands for God's exerted power... combining it with “*plan*” is to say that it is not just a *theoretical* plan; it is a plan that *will be executed* by God's own hand.⁹
- **God is sovereign over Satan and his demons:** Even in the original angelic fall, God sovereignty reigned, for only “*the devil and his angels*” (Mt25:41) rebelled, whereas God's “*elect angels*” (1Tim5:21) did not. “*He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.*” (Mark1:27) “*Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!*” (Lk10:17) God's sovereignty is so expansive, that even Satan fulfills His purposes: The devil is God's devil.¹³
 - **Job:** God speaks of Job as upright. Satan says, “*Stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.*” (Job1:11) The Lord says, “*All that he has is in your hand. Only against him do not stretch out your hand.*” (vs12) Satan was simply an instrument in God's hand, like a knight swinging a sword. In verses 14-19, Job's livestock are stolen and burned, his servants killed and burned, and his sons and daughters are crushed in a house. Job attributes all that happened, *not* to men, *not* to natural disasters, *not* even to Satan, but to *God Himself*: “*The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*” (Job1:21) Does God need us to make excuses for His actions? Job declares that God orchestrated it all, and then praises Him. Was Job right? “*In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.*” (vs22) It happens again, but this time with boils all over His body. Job does not attribute this to Satan, but says, “*Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?*” (vs10a) Was Job right? “*In all this Job did not sin with his lips.*” (vs10b)
 - **David:** “*The anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, ‘Go, number Israel and Judah.’*” (2Sam24:1) Of the same event we read, “*Satan stood against Israel and incited David to number Israel.*” (1Chron21:1) Yet, David said, “*I have sinned greatly in what I have done.*” (2Sam24:10) God worked through Satan to incite David to sin, but David was held responsible for that sin.

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• **Gospel implications:** The greatest connection of these truths to the gospel, is that God's sovereignty over all evil is for the purpose of His own glory through our salvation. The saved, are those *"whose names are in the book of life."* (Phil4:3) Their names were *"written before the foundation of the world."* (Rev13:8) The book has a name: *"The book of life of the Lamb who was slain."* Jesus is this lamb: *"Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!"* (Jn1:29) Paul *"decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified... a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages."* (1Cor2:2,7) God predestined, or decreed, that Christ would be crucified for sinners, which means God decreed sin, for all things happen *"according to the eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Eph3:11) He did not fear its existence and power. He willed it so that in it and against it He might bring to light His divine attributes. If He had not allowed it to exist, there would always have been a rationale for the idea that He was not in all His attributes superior to a power whose possibility was inherent in creation itself.¹⁰ God *"saved us... because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began."* (2Tim1:9) *"The law came in to increase the trespass..."* Pause there. If it's going to increase sin, then don't give it. But God, having calculated all the ways He would be glorified though sin, He decreed it should exist, for *"where sin increased, grace abounded all the more."* (Rom5:20) Therefore, *"He predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace."* (Eph1:5-6) Likewise, *"surely your wrath against mankind brings you praise."* (Ps76:10^{NIV}) Had sin never been permitted, how could the justice of God have been displayed in punishing it, how could the wisdom of God have been manifested in so wondrously over-ruling it, how could the grace of God have been exhibited in pardoning it, and how could the power of God have been exercised in subduing it?¹⁹ The elect angels have never experienced God's grace and mercy, which is why it is something *"into which angels long to look."* (1Pet1:12) Consider this: *"For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him."* (Col1:16) The things visible, correspond to the *thrones and dominions*, which are earthly governments. The things invisible, correspond to the *rulers and authorities*, which Paul calls *"spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."* (Eph6:12) Before creating them, considering that evil would emerge through them, He made them. Why not overthrow Satan now? Christ gets greater glory as He overthrows Satan's purposes again and again, rather than once. *"Simon, behold, Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat, but I have prayed for you that your faith may not fail. And when you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."* (Lk22:31) That is why the message of the cross is called *"the power of God and the wisdom of God,"* (1Cor 1:24) which would not be glorified, if God overthrew Satan now. *"There was given me a thorn in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me - to keep me from exalting myself!"* (2Cor 12:7^{NASB}) And so Jesus says, *"my power is made perfect in weakness."* (2Cor12:9) God decreed evil, so that He would be glorified in His Son, through His judgment of those who reject Christ, and His grace displayed to those who trust Him.

• **References:** ¹John Wesley; ²Matthew Henry; ³John Calvin; ⁴Zacharias Ursinus; ⁵Saint Augustine; ⁶Wikipedia; ⁷John MacArthur; ⁸Peter Martyr Vermigli; ⁹John Piper; ¹⁰Herman Bavinck; ¹¹Wayne Grudem; ¹²John Gill; ¹³Martin Luther; ¹⁴Louis Berkhof; ¹⁵Heinrich Heppe; ¹⁶Jonathan Edwards; ¹⁷Albert Barnes; ¹⁸William Tucker; ¹⁹A.W. Pink; ²⁰Brown-Driver-Briggs; ²¹Faris Daniel Whitesell