

## Pastoral Theology of Suffering (Dr. Derek W.H. Thomas)

I begin with a story. For over a year, a young lady of twenty-seven was dying of incurable cancer. Her mother kept a daily on-line blog detailing the ups and downs of the struggle with faith and courage, hope and despair. The blogs were read far and wide, and the godliness and honesty of the entries were deeply moving and God-honoring. At the funeral service, I preached on Romans 8:28: "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose." The family was Presbyterian, deeply entrenched in the Westminster Confession and a robust form of experiential Calvinism.

I sometimes say we ought to have a moratorium on the use of Romans 8:28. Too often, it is trotted out with insufficient care for the ravaged emotions of the one we are attempting to comfort. But, in this instance, it seemed entirely appropriate. What this family needed to hear was a word about divine sovereignty – events happen because God wills them to happen; wills them to happen before they happen; wills them to happen in the way that they happen.

It was, I suppose, a no-holds-barred Presbyterian predestinarian sermon reflecting on the issue of suffering and providence. And the family seemed deeply appreciative, writing the sweetest note to me a few days later (which I still have). And then I discovered that an editor of the local newspaper (who had been present at the funeral) had written an article entitled, "Is Suffering Part of God's Doing or Not?" in which for a couple of pages or so he specifically mentioned the funeral sermon. The editor noted that I had spoken of God's providence as certain, without randomness. He correctly cited my words: "God weaves, not only the fabric that produces joy and righteousness, but also that which produces agony and evil. Both strands in the tapestry eventually will lead us to glorify God even if we don't quite understand how or why He sometimes chooses a path that involves so much pain." Then, the editor added a significant comment: "*Maybe a person has to believe in predestination to fully grasp the concept, but I cannot quite get my mind around the idea that God's hand is in everything I do or that is done to me. If I choose to order catfish instead of chicken for lunch one Sunday at the Crystal Grill, is that God's will at work? I would think He is too busy to worry or intervene with such inconsequential matters.*"<sup>[1]</sup>

According to the editor, God takes care of the big things but not the trivial. God's will is one thing; his ability to perform it is something else. His providence while general is not specific and detailed.

### The Problem of Evil

The philosophical and ethical dilemma posed in the circumstance described above is famously expressed by David Hume: "*If God is willing to prevent evil, is He willing to prevent evil but not able? Then He is impotent. Is He able but not willing? Then He is malevolent. Is He both able and willing? Whence then is evil?*"<sup>[2]</sup> According to this view, God is either weak or evil, and the editor in question had chosen the former.

Suffering in one way or another abounds in fallen creation. Take mental and/or emotional health, for example. Without getting into the issues that divide nouthetic counselors and integrationists, all concerned will agree that the Scriptures have something to say about emotional and psychological health.

Consider, for example, the following statements in Scripture:

- "You have caused my beloved and my friend to shun me; my companions have become darkness" (Psa. 88:18; or "darkness is my only friend" in the ESV footnote as a possible translation).
- The extended lament of Job in chapter 3 where, among other things, he says, "Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire?" (3:11); "why was I not as a hidden stillborn child, as infants who never see the light? There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest" (3:16-17).
- In similar fashion, Jeremiah (citing Job 3), following a night in the stocks, complains: "Why did I come out from the womb to see toil and sorrow, and spend my days in shame?" (Jer. 20:18).

In these examples, the troubling issue before them is taken to the Lord, either in complaint or regret, but in such a manner as suggests that the reason for and solution to their predicament lies (or did at some time lie) within God's ability to change.

Poor health (physical and emotional) has been a part of humanity's experience from the beginning, though our expectation of a sickness-free existence exponentially increases as medical science continues to expand its borders. Limiting ourselves to physical sickness, we note that the Bible records a surprising amount: atrophy (Lk. 6:6), dermatological diseases (see, Lev. 13), dysentery (2 Chron. 21:18; Acts 28:8), epilepsy (Matt. 4:24; 17:5), hemorrhage (Lk. 8:42-48), indigestion (1 Tim. 5:23), infirmity (Jn. 5:5), leprosy (Matt. 8:2; Mk. 1:40; 14:3), tapeworm (Acts 12:23).

In addition to human physical suffering, there is animal suffering, animal suffering brought about by human cruelty – a point eloquently (and perhaps, surprisingly) made in C. S. Lewis' *The Problem of Pain*.<sup>[3]</sup> The appearance of reckless animal cruelty poses questions for humanity to be sure; but it also, questions the goodness of God. How can God permit such a thing? It is not mere sentimentalism that poses such a question. In the new heavens and earth, with creation restored (including animals, surely) shalom banishes all such cruelty (Isa. 65:16; 66:22; 2 Pet. 3:13; cf. Rom. 8:21-22). Why, then, does it exist now?

### **Solutions to the Problem of Evil**

Evil is a problem, no matter what view of it we take. Typically, philosophers and theologians recognize two types of evil – natural and moral.<sup>[4]</sup> By natural evil we mean evil that is not of particular human volition or action. So we can think of hurricanes or floods or tornadoes or cancer (although sometimes cancer is a consequence of human action). Moral evil is evil in which there is a particular human volition or human action involved – as in sexual violence, war, all forms of cruelty (to animals and human beings) and discrimination, slavery and injustice.

What possible responses do we have to the problem of natural and moral evil in the world? One response would simply be to reject the very notion of evil – as did Christian Science and to some extent, Spinoza (1632-1677). Mary Baker Eddy seems to suggest that evil and suffering are merely states of mind: *“All reality is in God and His creation. That which He creates is good, and He makes all that is made. Therefore the only reality of sin, sickness, or death is the awful fact that unrealities seem real to human, erring belief, until God strips off their disguise.”*<sup>[5]</sup> Such denial is, of course, just that: a will-o'-the-wisp flight of fancy that offers no help to those whose experience of pain and evil is all too tangible.

Another response to the problem of evil is to adopt the view known as Philosophical Compatibilism.<sup>[6]</sup> Compatibilism is the view that human freedom is compatible with one's choices being predetermined. Soft determinists argue that the way God orders good events and evil events is asymmetrical. He is “responsible” for the former, but not the latter.<sup>[7]</sup> Paul K. Helseth seems to take it further when he argues that God orders events, including evil, without himself being the “author of it,” yet in such a way that “evil must be regarded as something that is not contrary to, but an essential component of, God's will.”<sup>[8]</sup>

If compatibilism is philosophically sound, the problem of evil is most certainly answered to some degree. But there are some further possibilities that we should consider:

#### **(1) We could abandon the concept of justice.**

C. S. Lewis describes how he rejected Christianity because of the horrendous cruelty he observed in the world around him. He discovered, however, that evil posed an even bigger problem for his atheism. *“My argument against God was that the universe seemed so cruel and unjust. But how had I got this idea of “cruel” and “unjust”? ... What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust? ... Of course I could have given up my idea of justice by saying that it was nothing but a private idea of my own. But if I did this, my argument against God collapsed too—for the argument depended upon saying that the world was really unjust, not simply that it did not happen to please my private fancies... Consequently, atheism turns out to be too simple.”*<sup>[9]</sup>

Evil is a problem simply because we have a sense of moral rightness; morality isn't merely the choice of an individual ("what's right for you isn't right for me"). Paul makes the point when arguing for Gentile sin. Though they do not have the moral law in the form of the Ten Commandments, they still possess a moral compass: "They show that the work of the law is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness, and their conflicting thoughts accuse or even excuse them" (Rom. 2:15).

## (2) We could abandon the concept of omnipotence

Another way to solve the problem of evil is to relinquish the idea of control, either totally or partially. God's power is relative to other powers in the universe – evil powers in particular. In the thought of the newspaper editor earlier, God isn't in control of the details, the trivial matters. The cosmos is thus viewed as dualistic: evil and good are equally ultimate and must fight it out for ultimate supremacy. Both Zoroastrianism and Manichaeism entertain some such viewpoint.

## (3) We could abandon omniscience (specifically, knowledge of the future)

To an important degree, advocates of free-will theism adopt this point of view. If man possesses free-will in an absolute sense – he or she is capable of choosing X or Y in any given circumstance – God cannot know the outcome in advance. Molinism – perhaps the dominant view currently among philosophical theologians – suggests that God knows what each person freely chooses to do in any set of circumstances (so-called, middle knowledge). According to this view, God can "put" people in times and places where God's ultimate goal is achieved without violating creaturely freedom and creaturely responsibility.<sup>[10]</sup> If an individual chooses this outcome in this circumstance, the creation of the circumstance guarantees the outcome.

Calvinists respond by insisting that God cannot know in advance (even in controlled circumstances) whether a person chooses X or Y if they act from an absolute sense of freedom. Humanity is always capable of choosing irrationally, or on a whim.<sup>[11]</sup> The premise of Molinism is faulty. Middle knowledge is a "now you see it, now you don't" point of view. On the one hand, it advocates that God's omnipotence is capable of reproducing the circumstances in which Joe or Jill will always choose "X" rather than "Y" – a freely-made choice. The premise is wrong, in my view, but even if it were true, it does not remove the issue of sovereignty (the intrusion of Calvinism, if you will) as to why God chooses that particular circumstance in which Joe or Jill makes that free-choice. In so doing, the event remains controlled by God's choice of the circumstance.

## (4) We could abandon the goodness of God

Another way to solve the problem of evil is to downplay the problem: why should evil be considered ethically unacceptable? To some extent, Islam with its fundamental emphasis upon Divine transcendence, downplays the goodness of God, thereby making evil less problematic.<sup>[12]</sup> More importantly for our purposes here, an absolutist (hard) idea of determinism does the same thing. The Westminster Confession, for example, goes out of its way to avoid this form of hard determinism, advocating a "soft" determinism, which on the one hand insists that God "upholds, directs, disposes and govern all creatures and their actions," and on the other hand, in such a way that "in relation to foreknowledge and the decree" God is the "first Cause" but in relation to the way in which these "fall out" they do so in accord with "second causes" (WCF 5:1-2)<sup>[13]</sup> Whatever this means, and it is not at all clear what it does mean, the aim of these statements is to prevent the attribution of blame for sin and evil being made against God. To make things absolutely clear, the Confession insists, God is not "the author sin" (3:1).

Whatever else is being asserted here, the Divines wish to distance themselves from any notion that compromises the goodness of God in the face of the reality of evil. The cause of evil is not immediately attributable to God, even though nothing happens without his express will and superintendence. One might be tempted to suggest that this is a notion in which God "permits" evil, but as Calvin insists again and again, the language of "bare permission" is no better an explanation, veering too much in the "softer" direction than Scripture warrants.<sup>[14]</sup>

##### (5) We could regard suffering as (invariably) divine punishment

If suffering is always just punishment for wrongdoing, the problem of pain is removed. We need to be clear here. Sometimes, this is indeed the explanation for pain. Consider the incident of the boy born blind in John 9. Given the boy's blindness, the disciples ask Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2), suggesting that God's involvement in the malady was direct and judgmental.

The Bible does indicate a doctrine of divine punishment for sin and covenant unfaithfulness. Perhaps, nowhere is this clearer than in Paul's statement to the Corinthians that their lack of reverence at the Lord's Supper brought instant retribution: "That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died" (1 Cor. 11:30). Whatever the precise nature of their conduct,<sup>[15]</sup> Paul could not be clearer as to the cause of their troubles. Suffering is the result of divine punishment.

Some, like Eliphaz in Job's suffering, suggest that punishment is invariably the cause of suffering. Thus he pontificates in his initial foray into divine theodicy: "As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same" (Job 4:8). In the same speech he adds the following insight: "Can mortal man be in the right before God? Can a man be pure before his Maker?" (Job 4:17). His point is brutally honest: the reason for Job's tragic circumstances (including the loss of his ten children) is his fault. A man reaps what he sows. It is as simple as that. Suffering is invariably retribution. There are no exceptions. In fact, all three of the counselors (and possibly Elihu along with them<sup>[16]</sup>) sing this song interminably.

This viewpoint – the instant retribution formula – allows for no exceptions. Suffering is due to sin. It was the instinct of the disciples in John 9 to ask of the incident of the boy born blind as to the cause, but the question showed all too clearly that only one answer was possible: someone had sinned. But in this instance, as in the Book of Job, we are expressly told that the reason for suffering and evil lay in another direction. Of course, sin is always involved in some capacity. Without a fallen world, there would be no suffering and evil to endure. But the solution is trite and simplistic, even if it does expose a robust doctrine of sovereignty.

It is all too possible to descend into a form of skepticism as to God's involvement in healing. The memory of one incident still lingers, though it is over two decades ago. A young mother of three, dying of cancer, is less than a day before her death. I made a final visit only to find her in tears. I had bumped into someone leaving as I entered – someone with a message from God that "if she only believed, she would be healed." The message contained a grain of truth but in this context, it was savage and without mercy. Lack of faith is a sin and delivered this way, it is only a partially disguised form of the "suffering is punishment" viewpoint.

Detached from this particular context, it is important for us to catch the biblical emphasis on the role of faith in healing. There are Jesus words: "Have faith in God. Truly, I say to you, whoever says to this mountain, 'Be taken up and thrown into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart, but believes that what he says will come to pass, it will be done for him" (Mk. 11:22-23). And in similar vein, the words of James 5: "Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven" (Jam. 5:14-15).

Several passages of Scripture seriously distort the view that healing is available to anyone who has sufficient faith. Timothy is advised, for example, to take some wine for his stomach and his "frequent ailments" (1 Tim. 5:23), suggesting that recourse to healing through increased faith on Timothy or Paul's part was not the solution. Similarly, Paul leaves a sick Trophimus behind at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20), though no suggestion is made here of any lack of faith. And the apostle's own thorn in the flesh, despite three solemn seasons of prayer, was not taken from him. Paul lived with pain.<sup>[17]</sup>

##### (6) We could equate suffering with Satanic oppression

Mark 7 records the daughter of the Syrophenician woman who is said to have "an unclean spirit" (Mk 7:25) that subsequently is cast out and referred to as a "demon" (v. 26). Similarly, in Mark 9, a man brings his son to Jesus (the disciples having failed to cure him) suffering from a condition that resembles epilepsy (Mk.

9:17-29). As the narrative progresses, the “unclean spirit” (v.25) is “rebuked” and throws the boy to the ground in a condition that suggested at first that he was dead (v.26).

Similarly, Paul’s experience of a “thorn” is described as “a messenger of Satan” (2 Cor. 12:7), suggesting that perhaps the solution to the problem of evil lies in some form of dualism – Satan did it in this case. (This is wholly inadequate as a solution, of course, in the face of soft-determinism).

From one point of view, bad things happen because Satan does them (instigates, coordinates, manipulates). Jesus is specific about this: behind Peter’s suggestion that Jesus had no need to endure the cross lay Satan’s voice – “Get behind me, Satan!” (Matt. 16:23). And later, anticipating Peter’s denial, Jesus attributed it directly to Satan “demand” – “Satan demanded to have you, that he might sift you like wheat” (Lk. 22:31). More especially, the opening two chapters of the book of Job are explicit in recording Satan’s involvement in Job’s suffering – though the manner of account highlights God’s sovereignty – Satan must give account of himself to God (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7).<sup>[18]</sup>

However, as a complete explanation for suffering, “Satan did it” is inadequate, for in the last analysis, even the forces of darkness and chaos are thrown into a confinement whose boundaries are kept secure by a sovereign God: “Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:14). No usurper, even one of Satan’s power, can ultimately threaten to undo the ultimate purposes of God.

### **Suffering is incomprehensible**

The nature of God’s involvement in all that occurs in the world of men and angels, though we may employ terms such as “concurrent,” or “confluent,” or “compatibilist” (and each have nuanced distinctions), remains incomprehensible – that is to say, it is beyond our grasp. However, this should not be read as a justification of irrationality. Several features need reaffirmation:

- God is totally sovereign in all his will and acts (his ensures that his “will of events” comes to pass)
- Things happen which contradict God’s “will of command” – men lie, cheat, rebel, all of which violates his moral will for us – but at the same time, the end as much as the beginning is exactly as God purposes, for we are “predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will” (Eph. 1:11).
- Men may do dastardly things and with purposeful intention, and yet God “overrules” to bring about exactly what he had planned all along – thus Joseph spoke to his brothers: “you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20).
- Evil on the part of human beings causes suffering for which it’s perpetrators are held morally responsible and liable to judgment; nevertheless, as James makes all too clear, the cause of evil cannot be laid at God’s feet: “Let no one say when he is tempted, ‘I am being tempted by God,’ for God cannot be tempted with evil, and he himself tempts no one” (Jam. 1:13-17).<sup>[19]</sup>

### **Responses to Suffering**

As this article is entitled, “A Pastoral Theology of Suffering,” I wish to suggest how Christians – specifically, Christians who hold to an inerrant view of Scripture and a compatibilist understanding of providence – respond to evil and suffering. Here, I merely outline some appropriate responses.

#### **(1) Suffering is announced by Jesus as central to the understanding of Christian discipleship.**

Few things are clearer in the New Testament than the fact that Christians are called to a life that involves suffering. Specifically, cross-bearing and self-denial: “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24). Getting what we do not want and not getting what we do want, is at the heart of a consecrated life in tune with the Lord Jesus Christ. Mistaken rhapsodic views of Christian discipleship as a life free of pain are just that – fanciful and fairytale. The reality is that Paul’s first lesson in missionary endeavor was this: “through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God” (Acts

14:22). Those who fail to see this are doomed to misunderstand the role of hardship and setback in the Christian pilgrimage. A triptych of simple truth addresses the issue:

- The Christian life is lived in the amphitheater of opposition and warfare. Satan prowls about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8).
- The reality of our fallen world, with its attendant messiness and disorder, inevitably means pain here and now. It groans in its current disorder, tripping us as it does so (Rom. 8:21-22).
- And we find ourselves in a “now – not-yet” tension: “For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing” (Rom. 7:19, taking the classic, Augustinian sense of these words).

### (2) There is no safe alternative to trust.

We must trust in God, his ways, his purpose, his means, through thick and thin, no matter what occurs or threatens to occur. Christianity is an invitation to trust God’s love and covenant at all times and in all situations. The guarantee that the Lord’s purposes are always designed for good lies in the cross. Having not spared his Son, he is determined to grant “all things” (Rom. 8:32). The cross is an instrument of sheer brutality and physical torture; it does not in itself convey the love of God. Some viewed the crucifixion folly and others found it a stumbling block (1 Cor. 1:23). The cross only signals a loving and gracious God because (to employ Anselm’s terms) it was an act of satisfaction and substitution. Jesus endured the cross and thereby “fully satisfied the justice of His Father ... for those whom the Father has given unto Him” (WCF 8:5). He died for me, enduring the wrath that my sins deserved (Gal. 2:20; 2 Cor. 5:21).

Cross-borne love beckons our trust in every other aspect of our lives, no matter how difficult it is. Pastorally, we should speak, not of the problem of evil, but the problem of faith. In the end, it is what Job faced. Unable to reconcile epistemologically the problem of suffering in his life, he asks for a “fight” – an epistemological engagement with the Almighty over the issue of justice. “Dress for action like a man,” God says to him (Job 38:3) – employing military language of preparation for battle. “Yahweh’s call to gird up his loins is a call to combat, to the combat between warriors, to the combat of heroes.”<sup>[20]</sup> And to what end? That Job might give a reason for the existence of giant land and sea creatures, Behemoth and Leviathan (Job 40:15; 41:1)? Hardly! What have these to do with existential suffering? Nothing. Except that his inability to answer is similar to the problem he has raised about his own suffering. No explanation is given him and he must learn to live with the ignorance and trust the kindness of his Heavenly Father (Job 42:6). If all Job can do is to say with the man in Mark 9, “I believe, help my unbelief!” (Mk. 9:24), it will be a stepping stone to pastoral healing and peace of mind in the midst of darkness.

Suffering in itself does not necessarily produce blessing; it only does so to the one who has faith. It has been pointed out many times, with evident accuracy, that of the two crosses on either side of Jesus, only one was sanctifying. The other was just as surely hardening. Chastening, as Hebrews 12 informs us, can be met with disdain and contempt.

### (3) The pathway to trust and rest may not always be a smooth one.

It is an important pastoral lesson that even Paul did not immediately respond to pain with sublime acquiescence. In the “thorn in the flesh” incident recorded in 2 Corinthians 12, the apostle is very clear that his initial response was to ask the Lord to take it away! We may, falsely, assume that a sign of spiritual maturity is never to question anything. But that would be a false conclusion. Paul prayed three times that the thorn in the flesh be removed (2 Cor. 12:8). But even more pertinently, Jesus responded in similar fashion in the Garden of Gethsemane. As the horror of what lay before him seemed to overwhelm him, he prayed, “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will” (Matt. 26:39). We might have expected that Jesus, having known of his impending cataclysm from the beginning, to have complied with the unfolding of providence in a manner that would relay his submission and trust without recoil. But on the contrary, his hesitation is indicative, on the one hand, of the reality of his incarnation, and on the other that hesitation and maturity are not mutually exclusive. To cite Donald MacLeod:

At a very basic level, Jesus does not want this 'cup'. His whole nature shrinks from it, and as he speaks to his Father he becomes acutely aware that there are two wills (and two ways): there is "my will" and there is "thy will." Nor did Jesus find it easy to be reconciled to the Father's will. It literally terrified him, because here was the concentrated essence of the *mysterium tremendum*. It was eerie. It was overwhelming. It was uncanny. Jesus' victory consisted not in merging his will with that of the Father or even in wanting specifically what the Father wanted. It came from choosing his Father's will rather than, and even over against, his own. He willed what he did not want, embarking on an astonishing course of altruism.<sup>[21]</sup>

#### (4) We must learn to glory in tribulation.

It is not enough simply to acquiesce, to grin-and-bear the trials; we must learn to see suffering for what it accomplishes to the one who has faith. It is the perspective to which Paul turns in Romans 5: "we rejoice in our sufferings" (verse 3). And why rejoice? Because "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us" (vv. 4-5).

There is no hint of masochism in this statement, simply a resolve to view suffering as the vehicle through which God brings us to the purest form of our existence – conformity to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29). And it is in looking to Jesus in our suffering that resolution comes. Jesus, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame" (Heb. 12:2). There is no circumstance or set of contingencies through which our Savior has not passed, as our forerunner blazing a way for us to follow (Heb. 6:20; 12:2).

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#### Footnotes:

1. The article no longer appears online.<sup>↑</sup>
2. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. with an Introduction by Norman Kemp Smith (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1980), Part X, p. 198.<sup>↑</sup>
3. C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (London & Glasgow: Fontana Books, 1972). See chapter 11, pp. 117-31.<sup>↑</sup>
4. See, for example, Ronald H. Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1988), p. 178.<sup>↑</sup>
5. Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health* (Boston, 1889), p. 489.<sup>↑</sup>
6. Theistic compatibilists include, Jonathan Edwards, *Freedom of the Will* (New York: Cosimo, 2007); Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1994); P. Helm, "Classical Calvinist Doctrine of God," in *Perspectives on the Doctrine of God: 4 Views*, ed. Bruce Ware (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, pp. 5-75; D. A. Carson, *How Long, O Lord? Reflections on Suffering and Evil* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1990).<sup>↑</sup>
7. For the language of asymmetry, see Paul Helm, "God, Compatibilism, and the Authorship of Sin," *Religious Studies: An International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 46, no. 1 (March 2010): 119; D.A Carson, *Divine Sovereignty and Human Responsibility* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2002), p. 212.<sup>↑</sup>
8. Paul Kjoss Helseth, "God Causes All Things," in *Divine Providence: Four Views*, ed. Gundry, Stanely, N. and Dennis W. Jowers (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), pp. 18, 51.<sup>↑</sup>
9. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: MacMillan, 1960), 31.<sup>↑</sup>
10. Representative samples of this point of view would include, John Sanders, *The God who Risks: A Theology of Providence* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1998); Gregory Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); Christopher Hall & John Sanders, *Does God Have a Future: A Debate on Divine Providence* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2003); William Lane Craig, *The Only Wise God* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987); Clark Pinnock, et. al. *The Openness of God: A Biblical Challenge to the Traditional Understanding of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994).<sup>↑</sup>

11. John Frame, *No Other God, A Response to Open Theism*, (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2001); Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory: The Diminished God of Open Theism*, (Wheaton: Crossway Books), 2001; Paul Helm, *The Providence of God* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press Academic, 1994). [↑](#)
12. See, Pierre Berthoud, "The Compassion of God," in *Engaging the Doctrine of God: Contemporary Protestant Perspectives*, ed. Bruce L. McCormack (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. 144-46. [↑](#)
13. The distinction between first and second causes was not new to the seventeenth century Puritans. It was made, for example, by Thomas Aquinas (See *Summa Theologiae*, First part, a, Question 2, Article 3). [↑](#)
14. On Calvin and "bare permission," see the following quote: "These instances may refer, also to divine permission...But since the Spirit clearly expresses the fact that blindness and insanity are inflicted by God's just judgment [Romans 1.20-24], such a solution is too absurd. It is said that he hardened Pharaoh's heart [Ex.9.12], also that he made it heavy [ch.10.1] and stiffened it [chs. 10.20,27; 11.10; 14.8]...for if "to harden" denotes bare permission, the very prompting to obstinacy will not properly exist in Pharaoh. Indeed how weak and foolish it would be to interpret this as if Pharaoh only suffered himself to be hardened!...from this it appears that they had been impelled by God's sure determination." John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), [1.18.2], 1:231-32. [↑](#)
15. Evidently, it was a lack of discernment (δοκιμάζω, v.28) that lay at the root of the problem, for it brought "judgment" (κρίμα, v.29) upon them. An inability to distinguish the Supper from other fellowship meals seems to be the issue rather than "self-examination," the latter too easily suggesting that worthiness to partake of the Supper should be sought after (an impossibility!). See, Leon Morris, *1 Corinthians: An Introduction and Commentary* (London: Tyndale Press, 1969), p. 164. [↑](#)
16. Some commentators have viewed Elihu's contribution more positively, including to some extent Calvin. See, Susan Schreiner, "Calvin as an Interpreter of Job," in *Calvin and the Bible*, ed. Donald K. McKim (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp. 53-84. Others have viewed him less favorably. See, for example, Francis I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (London: The Tyndale Press, 1976). See also my *Calvin's Teaching on Job: Proclaiming the Incomprehensibility of God* (Geanies: Mentor, 2004). [↑](#)
17. A helpful summary of the place of sickness and a Christian's response to it can be found in J. I. Packer's, *God's Plans for You* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2001), pp. 149-55. [↑](#)
18. Some commentators wonder why Satan does not reappear in the conclusion of the book of Job. Consequently, some have conjectured that the references to Leviathan and Behemoth are, in fact, demonic in nature. [↑](#)
19. For a brief summary of this analysis, see the chapter on "Providence" in J. I. Packer, *Concise Theology* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1993), pp. 54-56. [↑](#)
20. David J. A. Clines, *Job 38-42* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2011), p. 1097. [↑](#)
21. Donald MacLeod, *The Person of Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1998), p. 79-80. [↑](#)