

Questioning God's Ways

Brownlow North, the grand-nephew of Lord North, George III's Prime Minister, was conducting services in Edinburgh. At the close of a meeting, a young man asked if he might speak with him. "I have heard your sermon sir," he said, "and I neither care for you nor your preaching unless you can tell me, why did God permit sin?" "Then I'll tell you," the preacher at once replied; "God permitted sin because *He chose to*.

The man was taken aback by the ready retort referring this mysterious subject to God's good pleasure, which permitted sin for reasons altogether wise, but not fully revealed to us.

The preacher repeated, "Because He chose to," and as the objector stood speechless, he added, "If you continue to question and cavil at God's dealings, and, vainly puffed up by your carnal mind, strive to be wise above what is written, I will tell you something more that God will choose to do. He will, one day, choose to put you in hell. There were such questioners as you in Paul's time, and what the apostle said to them, I say to you. "Nay, but O man, who art thou that repliest against God?"

There is something inherently wrong with a neat systematic theology that answers all the questions and gives man the smug complacency of having, by his puny intellect, "known the mind of God." How shall the pot reason with the potter or the clay chide its creator? Yet it is so, both in the realm of the professed believers and that of the confessed unbelievers. No essential difference in this respect is seen between the liberal and the conservative, the modernist and the fundamentalist. Both have devised a creed about God, set God aside and worshiped the creed.

The liberal or modernist interprets God in the light of contemporary circumstances or the light of present day "knowledge." God, to him, is circumstances or the light of present day "knowledge." God, to him, is obliged to adjust Himself every time the scientific world makes a "new discovery" or the sociological institutions adopt a new textbook. Man is at the center of this activity. When man changes, God has to accommodate Himself to the current idea of what God must be, to be wise and just. All the mystery, all the supernatural, all the awe and respect due to an inscrutable God is gone. He is a product of simpering humanitarians.

The conservative or fundamentalist interprets God in the light of the "tradition of the elders." He is not nearly so biblical as he would like to have us believe. Indeed, in many places, the Bible so flagrantly contradicts and denies his sacred convictions that he is obliged to divide God into "dispensations" and seasons in which He behaves one way at times and other ways at other times. This provides a right handy device whereby he can wisely explain God in any kind of circumstance. He is relieved of the embarrassing alternative of saying, "I don't know." He thinks that, as a man of God, he is obligated to justify and defend God's actions by a theological system about God. This, he calls "defending the faith." A more likely term would be, "making faith unnecessary." We are told the "system" is right; therefore, we need not trouble ourselves about God's being right. We are not trusting Him anyway. We are trusting our trust in the system about God.

The confessed unbeliever makes no attempt to justify God. He is an unbeliever because, according to his sovereign reason, God, if there were one, would be unworthy of his worship. If He created the world, He made a mess of it.

The agnostic makes the mistake of imputing man's fallen characteristics to a Holy God. He makes God like unto "corruptible man, and to birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." He would demand that God's reason be confined to a fleeting moment in time which comprises man's life-span. Yet God is eternal and everlasting to everlasting. A short glimpse of any movement of a work of art can never make known the message and purpose of tragedy or comedy described in the entire production. How much less should a worm under a pebble comprehend the scope of the great Rocky Mountain Range?

If God could be explained, He could not be God. If there is no supernatural, then all is superficial and not of God. Man's duty is to fall down before Him; worship and adore Him; seek to know Him. Perchance, He might be merciful enough to reveal His glory in salvation.

Back to our story:

"Is there such a text, sir, as that in the Bible?" asked Brownlow North's questioner. "Yes, there is, in the ninth chapter of Romans. I recommend that you go home and read that chapter, and after you have read it, and learned from it that God claims for Himself that right to do whatever He pleases, then remember that there is another thing that God has chosen to do . . . *He has chosen to send Jesus.*" Then in a few words Mr. North set before him the way of salvation from sin and wrath prepared by God in sovereign mercy.

The following Friday the young man returned . . . so transformed that Mr. North scarcely knew him. He told Mr. North that after reading the ninth of Romans, he pled for pardon in the name of Jesus and was enabled to believe he had been heard. "God, for Christ's sake, chose to pardon me," he said.

Do you question God's ways? Read the ninth of Romans and see that He is sovereign. Read also the tenth of Romans and see that "whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved."