

**The Book of Acts (#8);
The Day of Pentecost (3)**

Let us return to our study of the book of Acts. We are presently working through this very important passage of Acts 2, in which we read of the events of the Day of Pentecost, when the risen and enthroned Lord Jesus baptized His people in the Holy Spirit. This resulted in the great blessing of the Lord on the preaching of the gospel. Thousands were converted to the Christian faith in a single day, as they repented of their sins, believed on Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, and confessed their faith in their baptism of Christian profession.

We could not overstate the importance of understanding rightly what had transpired on this day. We might mention several matters of great significance. First, this passage has great relevance for us in our understanding of eschatology, which is the biblical doctrine of last things, or end times. It is the revelation and declaration that God, in fulfillment of His Word and purpose set forth in the Holy Scriptures, had exalted His Son, who is the promised Son of David, to become the King of Israel. The Word of God declares that the events of the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ resulted in the enthronement and exaltation of Jesus Christ as Lord over history, who had commenced His reign over the kingdom of God.¹ Second, this passage gives insight on the godly and Christological interpretation of Old Testament Scripture. Peter will later declare in Acts, “Yes, and all the prophets, from Samuel and those who follow, as many as have spoken, have also foretold these days” (Acts 3:24); that is, all of the Old Testament Scriptures foretold this event of Jesus Christ living and dying, then being raised and exalted, to be enthroned on the throne of God over the kingdom of God, over all of creation. Thirdly, this passage sets forth the sovereignty of God over all of history, which extends even to the sinful actions of fallen men. It speaks of both God’s sovereign nature but also of fallen man’s willful, sinful, and culpable actions. And fourth,, this passage serves to instruct Christians how to regard and react to God’s dark providences to which all of His people are subject in their Christian lives during this church age. We will attempt to explain and expound on these matters as we study this chapter before us.

As we turn once again to Acts 2, let us be reminded of the historical context. The 120 disciples of Jesus had been gathering and meeting together with one accord in one place. The day arrived when our Lord Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on His disciples. The event had been accompanied by the sound of a mighty wind. This resulted in the Jewish people dwelling in Jerusalem to gather to the place to which the great sound of wind had drawn them. It was then that these Jewish people heard the disciples of Jesus, who had been filled with the Holy Spirit, speaking to them in their own languages, “as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Many of these Jews were from other lands, but were in Jerusalem for the Passover and the feast of Pentecost. Through the speech of these uneducated and unsophisticated disciples of Galilee, they heard and understood in their own languages “the wonderful works of God.” The result was that “they were “amazed and marveled”, for although they had no initial understanding of what was occurring, it was apparent to everybody that God was doing a great work among them. But the local Palestinian Jews hearing the foreign languages that they did not understand, were perplexed and confused, not attributing the speaking of the disciples to the work of God in their midst, but rather, they attributed the speech of the disciples to be the gibberish of drunken men. This is what prompted Peter’s sermonic response to the gathered Jews, which is recorded before us. Let us read again Peter’s sermon in Acts 2:14-36:

¹ Acts 2 rightly interpreted and understood, dispels the teaching of many regarding the promised kingdom (millennium) that is set forth in the Scriptures. Acts 2 declares and reinforces the amillennial interpretation of the Messianic kingdom. The promised kingdom of God has been inaugurated. The promised messianic kingdom is not a future earthly Jewish millennium of 1,000 years on earth, which dispensationalists and historic premillennialists espouse. Neither is the messianic kingdom a future conversion of the world to Christendom, which is view of the kingdom that is advocated by postmillennialists. Acts 2 declares that Jesus Christ is presently enthroned as Lord and Christ over the promised kingdom of the Scriptures.

But Peter, standing up with the eleven, raised his voice and said to them, “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and heed my words. ¹⁵For these are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. ¹⁶But this is what was said by the prophet Joel:

¹⁷And it shall come to pass in the last days, says God,
That I will pour out of My Spirit on all flesh;
Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,
Your young men shall see visions,
Your old men shall dream dreams.

¹⁸And on My menservants and on My maidservants
I will pour out My Spirit in those days;
And they shall prophesy.

¹⁹I will show wonders in heaven above
And signs in the earth beneath:
Blood and fire and vapor of smoke.

²⁰The sun shall be turned into darkness,
And the moon into blood,
Before the coming of the great and awesome day of the Lord.

²¹And it shall come to pass
That whoever calls on the name of the Lord
Shall be saved.’

²²“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know— ²³Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it. ²⁵For David says concerning Him:

‘I foresaw the Lord always before my face,
For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.
²⁶Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;
Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.
²⁷For You will not leave my soul in Hades,
Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.
²⁸You have made known to me the ways of life;
You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’

²⁹“Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ³⁰Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, ³¹he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. ³²This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. ³³Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear.

³⁴“For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself:

‘The Lord said to my Lord,
“Sit at My right hand,
³⁵Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.”’

³⁶“Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.”

Previously we pointed out that we could examine Peter's sermon in three sections. First, Peter declared that Pentecost was the fulfillment of Joel's prophecy (vs. 14-21). We addressed this last time.² Second, the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ were the design and purpose of God from eternity (vs. 22-24). And third, King David had foretold the death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ (vs. 25-36). Today we will consider the second of these three sections of Peter's sermon on the Day of Pentecost.

II. Peter declared that the crucifixion and resurrection of Christ were the design and purpose of God from eternity (vs. 22-24).

Again, we read Peter's words:

²²“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—²³Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.

These few verses are very telling regarding the nature of God and His work in history in this fallen world. First, it speaks of God's sovereign control over history and of His attestation of Jesus of Nazareth through the miracles that God had performed through Him. Secondly, God's sovereignty is displayed in that He had purposed through the culpable actions of wicked men to crucify Jesus. Thirdly, it declares the guilt and accountability of those who maltreated and crucified Jesus. And fourthly, it speaks of God the Father having raised and enthroned Jesus of Nazareth in order for Him to reign forever over the promised kingdom of God. Let us consider each of these matters.

A. God showed forth His sovereign control over history through His Son Jesus Christ.

One of the foundational biblical teachings that Christians should embrace and espouse is the absolute sovereign rule of God over all of His creation. It is taught everywhere in Holy Scripture, both in the Old and the New Testaments. Consider 1 Chronicles 29:11 which records,

“Thine, O LORD, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O LORD, and Thou art exalted as Head above all.

We read in Psalm 115:3, the affirmation of God's sovereignty: “But our God is in heaven; He does whatever He pleases.”

Arthur Pink (1887-1952) introduced this subject in his classic book, *The Sovereignty of God*. He wrote,

The Sovereignty of God is an expression that once was generally understood. It was a phrase commonly used in religious literature. It was a theme frequently expounded in the pulpit. It was a truth which brought comfort to many hearts, and gave virility and stability to Christian character. But, today, to make mention of God's Sovereignty is, in many quarters, to speak in an unknown tongue. Were we to announce from the average pulpit that the subject of our discourse would be the Sovereignty of God, it would sound very much as though we had borrowed a phrase from one of the dead languages. Alas! that it should be so. Alas! that the doctrine which is the key to history, the interpreter of Providence, the warp and woof of Scripture, and the foundation of Christian theology should be so sadly neglected and so little understood.

The Sovereignty of God. What do we mean by this expression? We mean the supremacy of God, the kingship of God, the god-hood of God. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that God is God. To say

² See FBC1247, November 30, 2025, “The Book of Acts (7): The Day of Pentecost (2)” on Acts 2:14-21.

that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Most High, doing according to His will in the army of Heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth, so that none can stay His hand or say unto Him what doest Thou? (Dan. 4:35). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the Almighty, the Possessor of all power in Heaven and earth, so that none can defeat His counsels, thwart His purpose, or resist His will (Psa. 115:3). To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is “The Governor among the nations” (Psa. 22:28), setting up kingdoms, overthrowing empires, and determining the course of dynasties as pleaseth Him best. To say that God is Sovereign is to declare that He is the “Only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords” (1 Tim. 6:15). Such is the God of the Bible.³

Now when we speak of God’s reign over the history of His creation we are referring to the *sovereignty of God*. But when we ask the question as to what purpose or end is He overruling history, we speak of His eternal design or purpose. The word we commonly use is that of God’s *decree*. The works of God in history that He had decreed in eternity are referred to as God’s acts of *providence*. Let us consider the meaning of God’s decree and His providence.

B. God’s purposes in history are in accordance with His divine decree from eternity.

Our understanding of God’s eternal decree and the working out of that decree in all things in history asserts that God has decreed *all* that transpires in history, both good and evil. And so, the mystery of God’s providence should be seen in this manner, not only are we unable to understand what it is God is doing specifically, we acknowledge this mystery: that although God is the sovereign Planner and Ruler of all that occurs from the least to the greatest event in history, He is not the chargeable author of sin or evil.

This brings into focus the reality and nature of *secondary causes*. God has so decreed the existence and works of secondary causes that God is able to remove Himself as the chargeable author of sin and all evil and yet be the Sovereign Ruler over all evil people and spirits. We may affirm, therefore, that although evil is present and manifest in the world God created and controls, God is a good God and He only gives good gifts; every good gift that we experience and enjoy comes from His hand.

This aspect of God’s providence is stated in **The Baptist Confession of 1689**, Article 5, paragraphs 1 through 4:

1. God the good Creator of all things, in His infinite power and wisdom doth uphold, direct, dispose, and govern all creatures and things, from the greatest even to the least, by His most wise and holy providence, to the end for the which they were created, according unto His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His own will; to the praise of the glory of His wisdom, power, justice, infinite goodness, and mercy.⁴
2. Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without His providence; yet by the same providence He ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently.⁵
3. God, in His ordinary providence maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them at His pleasure.⁶
4. The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God, so far manifest themselves in His providence, that His determinate counsel extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sinful actions both of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, which also He most wisely and

³ Arthur Pink, **The Sovereignty of God** (Baker, 1975), 23f.

⁴ The confession cites these verses to substantiate this statement: Hebrews 1:3; Job 38:11; Isaiah 46:10f; Psalm 135:6; Matthew 10:29-31; Ephesians 1:11.

⁵ See Acts 2:23; Proverbs 16:33; Genesis 8:22.

⁶ See Acts 27:31, 44; Isaiah 55:10, 11; Hosea 1:7; Romans 4:19-21; Daniel 3:27.

powerfully boundeth, and otherwise ordereth and governeth, in a manifold dispensation to his most holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness of their acts proceedeth only from the creatures, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is nor can be the author or approver of sin.⁷

Let us attempt to understand clearly what is stated here about our God and examine the biblical evidence that substantiates these assertions. First, let us consider the biblical doctrine of...

1. God's decree in eternity regarding all that takes place in history

Paragraph 1 stated above speaks of God's providence, the working out of God's decree. Paragraph 2 speaks directly to the fact that providence is the working out of God's decree. Again it reads, "Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly..."

"The decree of God is His purpose or determination with respect to future things."⁸ Although we tend to think in terms of the "decrees" (plural) of God, since there is an innumerable number of events in history, nevertheless the singular word, "decree" is often used to describe God's one eternal purpose of all that would transpire as a singular event in the mind of God. This is in accordance with the Word of God. In Psalm 2:7 the Lord Jesus prophetically declared, "I will tell of *the decree*: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you.'" This was prophetic of the resurrection and exaltation of the Lord Jesus to be seated on the throne of David in heaven.⁹ Here the single decree of God's purpose is referenced.

We may also consider the singular decree of God in the words, "eternal purpose", that Paul used in Ephesians 3:8-11.

⁸To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things, ¹⁰so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹This was according to *the eternal purpose* that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord..."

The "eternal purpose" refers to the singular decree of God in which He determined in eternity all that would come to pass in history.

Before us in Acts 2:23 Peter spoke of the crucifixion in terms of God's decree:

²²"Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know-- ²³"Him, being delivered by *the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God*, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death..."

The ESV translates the phrase as "the definite plan and foreknowledge of God." God knew all and planned all and purposed all that would come to pass in one singular act, the decree of God.

In Ephesians 1:5 we read of God's decree respecting the salvation of God's elect.

²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly *places* in Christ, ⁴just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, ⁵having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, *according*

⁷ See Romans 11:32-34; 2 Samuel 24:1; 1 Chronicles 21:1; 2 Kings 19:28; Psalms 76:10; Genesis 1:20; Isaiah 10:6, 7, 12; Psalms 1:21; 1 John 2:16.

⁸ This is the definition of Arthur Pink in *Gleanings in the Godhead* (Moody Press, 1975), p. 15.

⁹ Although dispensationalists teach that the Lord Jesus will only be seated upon the throne of David upon His second coming, on a literal physical throne in an earthly Jerusalem, the Bible declares this event was at the resurrection and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Cf. Acts 2:7, Acts 13:33; Heb. 1:5; 5:5.

to the good pleasure of His will,⁶ to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He has made us accepted in the Beloved. (Eph. 1:2-6)

And we read in the following verses several other expressions that could only refer to God's eternal decree.

⁷In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace ⁸which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, ⁹having made known to us *the mystery of His will*, according to *His good pleasure* which He purposed in Himself, ¹⁰that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth-- in Him. ¹¹In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined *according to the purpose of Him* who works all things according to *the counsel of His will*, ¹²that we who first trusted in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. (Eph 1:7-11)

Here we see four more phrases or terms that refer to God's decree in which He determined before creation what would come to pass in history.

Again, we affirm that God's decree should be understood to encompass all that takes place in history.

The decrees of God relate to all future things without exception; whatever is done in time, was foreordained before time began. God's purpose was concerned with everything, whether great or small, whether good or evil...

God did not merely decree to make man, place him upon the earth, then leave him to his own uncontrolled guidance. Instead, He fixed all the circumstances in the lot of individuals, and all the particulars which comprise the history of the human race from commencement to close. He did not merely decree that general laws should be established for the government of the world, but He settled the application of those laws to all particular cases. Our days are numbered, and so are the hairs of our head.¹⁰

God's Word knows only the complete sovereignty of God over all the works of His hands through all of history. We read in 1 Chronicles 29:11 and 12:

Yours, O LORD, is the greatness,
The power and the glory,
The victory and the majesty;
For all that is in heaven and in earth is Yours;
Yours is the kingdom, O LORD,
And You are exalted as head over all.

¹²Both riches and honor come from You,
And You reign over all.
In Your hand is power and might;
In Your hand it is to make great
And to give strength to all.

God's authority is absolute; His sovereign control is complete. "O LORD God of our fathers, are You not God in heaven, and do You not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations, and in Your hand is there not power and might, so that no one is able to withstand You?" (2 Chron. 20:6). God's purposes are never frustrated nor is He ever defeated. "Whatever the LORD pleases, He does, in heaven and on earth, in the seas and all deeps" (Psa. 135:6).

But this knowledge of God is not acceptable to fallen human beings. They want to be the determiners of their own destiny. They insist for themselves the authority that the devil offered Adam and Eve, "You will be your own gods, determining for yourselves what is good and evil." Fallen man refashions the God of the Bible into a "god" that he can manage, manipulate, and deny, without consequences. Here is Arthur Pink's apt description of the "god" of fallen men both in and out of the church:

¹⁰ Pink, pp. 15f.

Of old, God complained to an apostate Israel, “Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself” (Psa. 50:21). Such must now be His indictment against apostate Christendom. Men imagine the Most High is moved by sentiment, rather than by principle. They suppose His omnipotency is such an idle fiction that satan can thwart His designs on every side. They think that if He has formed any plan or purpose at all, then it must be like theirs, constantly subject to change. They openly declare that whatever power He possesses must be restricted, lest He invade the citadel of man’s free will and reduce him to a machine. They lower the all-efficacious atonement, which redeems everyone for whom it was made, to a mere remedy, which sin-sick souls may use if they feel so disposed. They lessen the strength of the invincible work of the Holy Spirit to an offer of the Gospel which sinners can accept or reject as they please.

The god of this century no more resembles the Sovereign of Holy Writ than does the dim flickering of a candle the glory of the midday sun. The god who is talked about in the average pulpit, spoken of in the ordinary Sunday school, mentioned in much of the religious literature of the day, and preached in most of the so-called Bible conferences, is a figment of human imagination, an invention of maudlin sentimentality. The heathen outside the pale of Christendom form gods of wood and stone, while millions of heathen inside Christendom manufacture a god out of their carnal minds. In reality, they are atheists, but there is no other possible alternative between an absolutely supreme God, and no God at all. A God whose will is resisted, whose designs are frustrated, whose purpose is checkmated, possesses no title to deity, and far from being a fit object of worship, merits nothing but contempt.¹¹

That is direct, but true.

However, here is the problem that must be addressed. How is it that God has decreed everything that would take place in history and in His providence is realizing His full purpose in history, how can He not be accused of being the source or responsible for the evil that exists? Or another problem also arises, if given this understanding of God, how are we to regard human beings as anything but programmed robots doing the bidding of God? The answer is in God’s use of secondary causes. We have this set forth in our passage before us. Again, Acts 2:23ff reads:

— ²³Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; ²⁴whom God raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it.

Both the sovereignty of God and the wicked culpable actions of sinful men are set side by side. The men who had arrested, tortured, and crucified in putting Jesus to death were guilty and responsible before God for their sinful actions. But even in their sinful actions born from their wicked intentions and abusive authority, they were fulfilling the sovereign purpose of God.

II. God’s decree in eternity regarding all that takes place in history included secondary causes, removes God from the charge of being the author or approver of sin.

Again, our confession states the biblical truth clearly:

Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without his providence; yet by the same providence he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently. [**The Baptist Confession of 1689**, Article 5, paragraph 2.]

There are those who reject the Reformed understanding of the sovereignty of God because they wrongly believe it makes God the author and promoter of sin. But we affirm over against those who would argue against this biblical teaching, that fallen man is responsible and accountable for his own actions. Those who reject the biblical teaching of our sovereign God assume that man cannot be free to act according to his will if what we

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 28f.

say about God's providence is true. But this is errant thinking. Sinful man devises and chooses out of a principle of evil to act, but God overrules his actions in that they fulfill what God has decreed from eternity. The evil designed and carried out by a sinner came forth from his fallen heart and mind, and acted out according to his own will. The Bible speaks of the free agency of fallen mankind. They are ones who determine for themselves to do evil, in that they are not forced or coerced by God to commit acts of evil. Evil comes forth from them. Nevertheless, we affirm that the Lord had decreed from eternity the whole of all events in history, both good and evil.

Two stories in the Holy Scriptures are commonly cited to substantiate this truth. The first is the actions of Joseph's brothers who intended to bring evil upon their brother Joseph by selling him into Egypt. But God had decreed their actions in order to eventually empower Joseph to save his family from famine and death. After Jacob, their father, had died, the brothers were fearful of Joseph's retaliation. But Joseph said to them these words:

¹⁸Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we are your servants."

¹⁹Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for am I in the place of God? ²⁰***But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as it is this day, to save many people alive.*** ²¹Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them. (Gen. 50:18ff)

Of course the event that displays best this truth that God in His sovereignty has decreed even the evil that men do, but that He is not the chargeable author of their sin, may be seen in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Peter declared this truth in our passage before us.

²²Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know-- ²³Him, ***being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death.*** (Acts 2:22ff.)

These men were guilty of their egregious crime against an innocent Man, but what they did was according to God's eternal decree.

We acknowledge the difficulty, we would say the "mystery" of this whole matter. But it is an issue that every honest theologian or philosopher, or thinking person must address. Consider the words of **Herman Bavinck (1854-1921)** about this matter:

Now Reformed theologians all agree that sin and its punishment are willed and determined by God. It is also perfectly true that words like "permission" and "foreknowledge" in fact no way contribute to the solution of the difficulties. The questions, after all, remain precisely the same: Why did God, knowing everything in advance, create human beings with the capacity to fall, and why did He not prevent the fall? Why did He allow all humans to fall in the fall of one person? Why does He not have the gospel preached to all humans, and why does He not bestow faith on all? In short, if God foreknows a thing and permits it, He does that either willingly or unwillingly. The latter is impossible. Accordingly, only the former is a real option: God's permission is efficacious, an act of His will. Nor should it be supposed that the notion of permission is of any value or force against the charge that God is the author of sin, for one who permits someone to sin and hence to perish, although He is in a position to prevent it from happening, is as guilty as he who incites someone to sin. On the other hand, all agree also that sin, though not outside the power of God's will, is and remains contrary to His will, that it is not a means to the ultimate goal, but a serious disruption of God's creation, and therefore that Adam's fall [into sin] was not a forward step but most certainly a fall. It also has to be granted that, though we can with good reason take exception to such terms as "permission," "foreknowledge," "preterition," and "dereliction," no one is able to come up with better ones. Even the most rigorous supralapsarian cannot dispense with these words, either from the pulpit or from behind an academic theological lectern. For though one may assume that there is a "predestination to death," no Reformed theologian has ventured to speak of a "predestination to sin." Every one of them (Zwingli, Calvin, Beza, Zanchius, Gomarus, Comrie, et al.) has maintained that God is not the author of sin,

that humans were not created for perdition, that in reprobation also the severity of God's justice is manifested, that reprobation is not the "primary cause" but only the "accidental cause" of sin, that sin is not the "efficient but the "sufficient" cause of reprobation, and so forth.¹²

We affirm that man is a free and responsible agent of his own evil thoughts and actions, and is culpable for his actions before a holy God who has created him and has decreed all that comes to pass in his life. And so, God's decree in eternity regarding all that takes place in history included secondary causes, removing God from the charge of being the author or approver of sin. Again, our confession states the biblical truth clearly:

Although in relation to the foreknowledge and decree of God, the first cause, all things come to pass immutably and infallibly; so that there is not anything befalls any by chance, or without his providence; yet by the same providence he ordereth them to fall out according to the nature of second causes, either necessarily, freely, or contingently. [Article 5, paragraph 2, The Baptist Confession of 1689]

Consider the teaching of Proverbs 16:33 that teaches there is no such thing as random chance in God's creation: "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." The Lord orders all things, even those things that seem to be "random" to us. And consider Proverbs 16:1:

The plans of the heart belong to the man,
But the answer of the tongue is from the Lord.

We affirm that man is a free and responsible agent of his own evil thoughts and actions, and is culpable for his actions before a holy God who has created him and has decreed all that comes to pass in his life.

Now this understanding of the sovereignty of God over all, even over the sinful actions of fallen men and women, leads us to ask the question,

How are we as Christians to regard, respond, and react to dark providences that take place in our lives?

1. First, we should humbly submit to God who is ordering our lives according to His good purposes in Christ. Nothing transpires in the lives of the Lord's people that is not ordained by God for His glory and with His purpose to teach us, sanctify us, and to glorify Him through us in the manner that we act and react to His acts of providence. We are not to murmur against God when we experience evil in our lives. The Lord Jesus declared, "Do not murmur among yourselves" (John 6:43). Consider Peter and John when they were maltreated by the Jewish leaders for their witness for Christ.

and when they had called for the apostles and beaten *them*, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. ⁴¹So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. (Acts 5:40-41)

And later in Acts we read about Paul and Silas and the maltreatment they received from the Roman authorities:

And they brought them to the magistrates, and said, "These men, being Jews, exceedingly trouble our city; ²¹and they teach customs which are not lawful for us, being Romans, to receive or observe." ²²Then the multitude rose up together against them; and the magistrates tore off their clothes and commanded them to be beaten with rods. ²³And when they had laid many stripes on them, they threw them into prison, commanding the jailer to keep them securely. ²⁴Having received such a charge, he put them into the inner prison and fastened their feet in the stocks.

²⁵But at midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the prisoners were listening to them (Acts 16:20-25)

¹² Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, Vol. 2: God and Creation (Baker Academic, 2004), pp. 387f.

What has the sovereign Lord been bringing you to experience in life, perhaps even due to the unjust wickedness of sinful men who have nothing but contempt and animosity toward you? Can you say before the Lord that He has counted you worthy to encounter such dark providences in your life through which you can manifest your faith, your reliance and submission unto Him who is ordering all events in your life? Or rather, are you murmuring against the Lord in His dealings with you, because you think that you are receiving a raw deal. By your murmuring you are charging God with mismanaging your life. This is sinful.

2. You are to see and believe that the Lord is ordering your life rightly and that He has the best of intentions and loving designs for you, that the dark providences you are experiencing will be used by Him to accomplish His good purposes in Christ concerning you. If this is how you act and react to what befalls you, you will become unflappable before others in the world that observe you. Every event is ordained by God and He will bring good out of even that which is evil.

3. We are to follow our Lord's own example in the manner that He reacted and responded to His evil tormentors. We read of direct instruction in God's Word that we are to mimic the manner that He responded to His tormentors.

Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. ¹⁹For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully. ²⁰For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. ²¹For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps:

²²“Who committed no sin,
Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;

²³who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; ²⁴who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. ²⁵For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls. (1 Pet. 2:18-25)

4. We are to desire the mercy of God to be shown forth by God unto them that afflict us. How did the Lord Jesus react and respond to the very ones that crucified Him? We read in Luke 23:34, “Then Jesus said, ‘Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.’” (Luke 23:34).

There are some who refuse to desire or extend mercy to those who have deeply offended or harmed them. This is not good. It is very detrimental to one living as a Christians. If we fail or refuse to desire or extend mercy to another, we deny mercy to ourselves. Perhaps what attitude or desire is harbored is for that one who has hurt or harmed you “does not warrant (deserve) mercy. You harbor a hard spirit toward that one, desiring that he or she receive justice, not mercy. But the Scriptures war against harboring this desire or attitude toward another. James 2:13, reads, “For judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment” (James 2:13).” If you desire the Lord to show you mercy, you should desire and pray that He will have mercy on the one who has offended or harmed you.
