

## **"The Significance of the Spirit's Coming–Pt. 3"**

I. The Spirit's Work is Manifestly Obvious–vv.1-13

II. The Spirit's Work is Salvifically Driven–vv.14-21

### **III. The Spirit's Work is Divinely Commissioned–vv.22-36**

*In vv.22-24, there are 3 undeniable truths that God accomplished in Christ:*

**1. God empowered Jesus to perform supernatural signs–v.22**

**2. God handed Jesus over according to his plan–v.23**

**3. God raised Jesus up from the grave–v.24**

Mk 8:31-33; Rom. 8:28; James 1:13-15; Lk 23:18-25; Acts 4:27-28, 3:18; Eph. 1:11; Ps. 135:5-6, 33:6-11; Gen. 45:5-8, 50:19-20

A natural objection that arises to the doctrine of exhaustive sovereignty is that it seems to make God morally culpable for sin. However, while God is properly said to ordain—and thus to be the Ultimate Cause of—all things, he is never the proper chargeable cause of evil. Scripture distinguishes between the (1) Ultimate Cause of an action and (2) the proximate and efficient causes of an action, indicating that only the proximate and efficient causes are blameworthy for an evil action. In addition, Scripture also takes into account the motive for an evil action. While God ordains the evil choices of free moral agents, he does not coerce them; rather, they act according to their own freedom of inclination. Because God is never the efficient cause of evil and because he always ordains evil for good, he incurs no guilt.

It may be observed first, that God is the Ultimate Cause of the crucifixion, having predestined every circumstance that led to its occurrence and thus rendering it certain. Second, the Jews were a proximate cause, having incited the Romans to crucify Christ. Third, Herod, Pilate, and other godless men were the efficient cause, because the crucifixion was carried out by Roman authority. The Jews were thus held accountable as a proximate cause, as Peter said to them, "You crucified and killed [Jesus] by the hands of lawless men" (Acts 2:23). That it was the Romans who actually nailed Jesus to a cross made the Jews no less culpable for that crime. And yet God, by whose hand all these things ultimately came about, is not the chargeable cause of any evil, because, while the perpetrators meant it for evil, God meant it for good... Thus, Herod, Pilate, Judas, and the Jews conspired to bring about the crucifixion because they wanted to be rid of this man who indicted them for their sin. But God ordained the evil of the cross for the good that it would bring namely, the salvation of his people from their sin. (1)

Man is free [meaning that] he can under ordinary circumstances do what he wills to do. But the will is not free [because] man's will [operates out of] his nature, which is what it is by sin [unless acted upon] by the sovereign grace of God. All of which leaves responsibility fully grounded, for nothing more is required for holding a man accountable than his acting with the consent of his own will. (2)

1 MacArthur & Mayhue, *Biblical Doctrine*, 491-492.

2 Henry Stob, *Ethical Reflection* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 152.

God's good intents follow the mischievous path of the brothers or, rather, the brothers unwittingly follow the path that God has blazed. They work in His service. The purpose of God lights up the horizon of evil, jealous, malicious activity...[This neither] undermines either the Providence of God or human responsibility. They do not exist together in the Scriptures as something problematic. They both reveal the greatness of Divine activity, in that it does not exclude human activity and responsibility but embraces them and in them manifests God on the way to the accomplishment of His purposes. (3)

God does and will overrule all the designs of men for the furtherance and accomplishment of his holy plan. Not only his friends, but his enemies contribute to it. The wrath of man, so far as it is permitted to act, shall praise him, and the remainder of their wrath, whatever they mean more than is subservient to his purpose, he will restrain. Moses and Joshua were his willing servants, but Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar were equally his servants, though they regarded him not. They acted under his secret commission, and could do no more than he appointed them...We, perhaps, have been tempted almost to wish that some persons had not been born, or had been taken away before they had opportunity of doing so much mischief, but what the Lord said to Pharaoh will apply to all the like, "For this very cause have I raised you up." Pharaoh's oppression of Israel prepared the way for their deliverance and issued in his final overthrow... Thus when I consider all second causes and instruments as mere saws and hammers in the Workman's hands, and that they can neither give us pleasure nor pain, but as our Lord and Savior is pleased to employ them, I feel a degree of peace and composure. (4)

3 G. C. Berkouwer, *The Providence of God, Studies in Dogmatics* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1952), 91, 98.

4 John Newton, *Letters of John Newton*, 360-361.