

Why Did God Allow Sin And The Fall?

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‘What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid’ (*Romans 9.14*).

How could it be that God allowed the Fall, and all the evil, disobedience and horror that was brought into the world, when our first parents fell? How was it that sin was ever permitted in the first place? Our limited, human way of reasoning soon calls into question the righteousness of God. Many unbelievers put this question up as a barricade against believing the Gospel, and seekers and young Christians are frequently troubled by it. Even mature, convinced Christians may worry about it in times of severe assaults of Satan.

God, according to Scripture, is not the author of sin. He created all things and yet he is not the founder of sin. He is presented to us as light and perfection.

Why did God permit the thing that he hated and loathed? ‘Permitted’ is actually too weak as a word, because God is absolutely sovereign. He was not a helpless bystander, even though not the direct author of the Fall. God anticipated and foresaw it, and determined his response to it.

The church fathers (Ambrose and Augustine in particular) employed the *felix culpa*^[1] explanation, meaning ‘blessed or fortunate fault or fall’, because it led to the greater good of God’s glory being shown in mercy and redemption.

Before considering such explanations, we acknowledge that they do not fully tell us why God ‘permitted’ the entry of sin in the first place, giving just some insights. These we will consider, but without losing sight of the anchoring principle of Romans 9.14 — ‘What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.’ God is never the author of sin.

We begin by taking note of what lay behind rebellion against God. -*Isaiah 14.12-14* speaks about the king of Babylon, but it undoubtedly reflects the very fall of Satan. ‘How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer [*shining one*]...how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said in thine heart...’ and here follow the five evil ‘I wills’ which are appallingly applicable to the evil one. ‘For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven [*I will be like God*], I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.’

The five 'I wills' boast autonomy and equality with God: Satan will function without God. And as Satan turned from allegiance, submission and obedience to God, through that turning, all the reverse-values or anti-values or opposite values and standards sprang into being. They came into existence as the result of the turn from God to autonomy, and they are expressed in these verses, which describe Satan's fall as effectively as that of the king of Babylon.

Originally there was only light, morally, but by turning from the source of moral light and authority, darkness came about. Contrasting, antagonistic, opposing actions, desires, objectives, 'principles', and a demonic domain of sin and darkness, anti-morality, and negation of everything that is good and true became the environment of the devil and his angels.

Pride, unbelief, lust and the lie brought down first Satan, and then Adam and Eve when man in response to Satan's temptation wanted to be like God. As our first parents turned to disobedience, the anti-values sprang into being in man's world – disorder, pride, lust, hatred, deceit, violence, self-love, self-seeking and self-service. None of these things were in the world before. Satan had found them, but they were not in the world until Adam and Eve fell.

Why did God permit it? First, we need to condition our minds with some cautions. *Isaiah 55.8-9* tells us, 'For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.' His wisdom is too high and too deep for us. There are matters that defy adequate human explanation.

In *2 Thessalonians 2* the apostle Paul refers to iniquity and evil as 'the mystery of iniquity'. It is not possible to view Satan's operational plan, and it is not possible on earth to know all the reasons why God allowed the Fall.

In *1 Corinthians 13.12* Paul writes – 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.'

There is a time coming when we will have the intellect and spirituality to be shown even more than we are taught by the Scriptures now. We shall know as much as God desires us to know, and we shall be capable of absorbing the information.

2 Corinthians 5.6-8 reads – 'Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (for we walk by faith, not by sight:) we are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.' The implication is that there is substantially more to be known and tasted when faith gives way to sight.

Another caution in *Romans 11* helps us to frame a right attitude as we think about these matters. 'O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?' -(*Romans 11.33-34.*)

Turning from cautions to answers, in *Romans 9.22-23* we are given a substantial clue, but probably only a small part of the reason why God allowed sin and the Fall. 'What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with

much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared?’

This verse has Pharaoh and the Israelites in view, but it is intended to justify God’s predestinating ways. We may reason from it, if there were no Fall, there could be no demonstration and exercise of the wrath of God, or of his mercy and love. If there had never been a Fall, and God had created Heaven populated with a perfect people, there would be a whole dimension of God and his attributes that would never be exercised or displayed. We would never see his power to redeem, his power to rescue from tragedy, and his power to save, deliver and transform. Without the Fall we would never have seen the patience of God, enduring with long-suffering the disobedience of rebellious men.

He is a God of truth. Think of the vast area of truth that would never be seen or known had the Fall not been permitted. It was not known in the Garden of Eden what horrors lay in seeking autonomy from God.

God is truth; the Eternal Reality who does everything in truth and as an expression or demonstration of all that is true. ‘What is truth?’ demanded Pilate, scornfully. In the eternal glory the whole truth will shine forth, including the realisation that there is no alternative to the holy, triune God, and nothing to compare with his ways and works. It will be eternally clear that autonomy is doomed and godlessness is disastrous.

Eve, in the Garden of Eden, could be brought by Satan to suspect that God was withholding something precious from her; that there was a better alternative for her than loyalty to her God. Such thoughts of dissatisfaction, disobedience and rebellion can never be thought in Heaven, because the history of rebellion and redemption will be engraved in every redeemed heart, and reality and truth will reign. There God will be most fully revealed, and we will see – ‘his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he’ (*Deuteronomy 32.4*).

He is ‘the God of truth’ (*Isaiah 65.16*), just as Christ is ‘the way, the truth, and the life’ (*John 14.6*), and truth will be universally understood, embraced and loved in the glorious hereafter. In Heaven we will not be uninformed, naive or unaware in any sense. This gives us a partial insight into why God allowed the Fall.

Because of the Fall, it was necessary for Christ to descend from Heaven, come down into our world and take our place. The Creator came to suffer dreadful humiliation; the perfect One took sin for us and was punished in our stead. Because of the Fall, we really do know the love of God and exactly how far God would go to redeem his people. We would never know this if there had been no Fall.

Without a Fall and redemption, Heaven would be peopled by those who in great measure would be robots without clear understanding. Even angels depend on man’s redemption to admire the mercy of God. In those circumstances we could certainly love him for ever, but we would not know gratitude or indebtedness in infinite measure. Neither would we have ever seen the perfections of God against the backdrop of sin, having only known perfection and righteousness. But when the

redeemed are in the eternal glory, God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, will be appreciated in fullest glory.

Here is one further aspect of the Fall and redemption. If there had been no Fall, God's children (created in glory) would not be entirely free, for they would not be there by choice. This is highly important, for Heaven is ultimately the home of the free. 'The truth,' said Christ, 'shall make you free.' Free from the ceremonial law, yes, and from condemnation and bondage to sin, but also free in the widest possible sense.

Even the created world shall be 'delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God' (*Romans 8.21*). Without a Fall, however, there would not be true freedom in glory.

In salvation, the Holy Spirit enables us to see our state and condition, inclining our minds to believe and making us willing, but all in such a way that we freely and longingly trust and embrace Christ, 'for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure' (*Philippians 2.13*). It is God's irresistible work, yet we are caused to willingly and freely choose. We had no freedom before the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

Furthermore, when we came to Christ and bowed the knee to him we gave our lives to him, saying in effect, 'Lord, take me, and take away my freedom to fall. Bind me to thee, hold and secure me, so that I cannot do so.' The inhabitants of Heaven have voluntarily handed over their imagined freedom to God.

If we had been created in Heaven with no Fall and no redemption, that would not be the case. Those in Heaven will be there for ever *willingly*, having voluntarily surrendered freedom to God.

Romans 9.22-23 gives us a view of some of these things, as being a part of the reason for the Fall. We repeat the quotation. 'What if God, willing to shew his wrath [*his attributes*], and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction: and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory?'

We must think of the revealing and demonstrating of God's attributes and glory, especially his justice, mercy, and love. We must think of God as truth, and of how all of his attributes need to be seen and known. We must think of his intrinsic liberty, and how this must be reflected in the experience of all his redeemed people through the everlasting ages.

The sense of it all is that the Fall ultimately reveals God's full glory, manifests all his infinite attributes, enlightens and inspires the redeemed for ever, clothes them with true freedom, shows that there is no alternative to the King of kings, and that outside him lies only opposite values and disaster.

These thoughts do not provide the whole answer to the question of why God allowed sin, but they assist our trust, and may help us to accept that there are 'secret things' that 'belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever' (*Deuteronomy 29.29*).

'What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid.'

[1] Incorporated from early times into the Catholic liturgy for Easter.