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CREATION—AN INSTRUMENT OF THE DIVINE WILL

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Jesus did not pray that his Father would take Christians out of the world, but rather that he would take the world out of Christians.

—JOHN BLANCHARD

If we loved the world the way God loves it, we wouldn't love it the way we shouldn't love it.

—ANONYMOUS

God uses creation the way a man uses his hand. Frequently Scripture speaks of the activity and influence of God as the "hand of God." Other designations also apply. These are more than figures of speech. They put us face to face with a very powerful reality about how the world operates, and they instruct us to look beyond the material and the human systems which operate the world. We can get much better insight into our world and our personal circumstances if we take a close look at some of these figures of speech.

Begin, for instance, with this insight from Solomon: "The king's heart is like channels of water in the hand of the Lord; He turns it wherever He wishes" (Prov. 21:1). The one most free among men, the one most able to accomplish his will, is the king. His will flows as easily as water. Look around, especially in the ancient world, and you will see nearly nothing which impedes a king's will—especially in his own kingdom. However, his will, which moves so freely, is constrained and directed by the Lord. The image is striking. Here freedom and constraint are combined in the same image.

In contrast, consider Thomas Carlyle's statement about free will: Everywhere the human soul stands between a hemisphere of light and another of darkness on the confines of two everlasting hostile empires—Necessity and Free Will" (*Essays, "The Opera," Shorter Bartlett's*, 62).

For Carlyle, "Necessity and Free Will" were in conflict. For the Bible writer they were two parts of the same reality. Carlyle gives them equal power. In Scripture, the greater power is God's.

A practical implication of the scriptural doctrine is that a will which is irresistible to us is perfectly guidable by God. Like the banks of a river moving a stream of water here or there, he decides its direction and controls it fully. It is a lesson to be taken to heart if we are oppressed by others.

There are negative and positive aspects of such control. "The hand of God was also on Judah to give them one heart to do what the king and the princes commanded by the word of the Lord" (2 Chron. 30:12). This "unity of mind" came from "the hand of God." Here we have a blessing caused by God's control over the hearts of others.

A negative aspect of such control can be found in 1 Kings 12:24 (and context). When the ten tribes rebelled against Rehoboam and split the kingdom, the Lord refused to allow Rehoboam to quell the rebellion because "this is My doing." Here God controls the hearts and actions of others for the purpose of chastisement. Notice that in the same group of people the Lord created both disunity and unity of mind at different stages in their history.

So we see that the heart of the king and the heart of his people are both in the control of the Lord. This is a lesson in politics. We can easily spend too much mental, emotional, and physical energy trying to change our political systems. Certainly it is our right and duty to bring godly influence into politics, but we too easily become consumed by the effort and ignore or underuse prayer.

Read the context of these Scriptures. There was little if any hint in the Kings and Chronicles passages that

God was working, especially during the split. Nevertheless God was there—the riverbank guiding the river.

God's control over the nonrational creation is equally firm. We know about the Sea of Reeds crossing, the fire that fell from heaven on Elijah's sacrifice, the water turned to wine and a host of other "nature miracles," as some call them. But consider the less obvious involvement of God in His creation. The psalmist said, "Thy hands made me and fashioned me" (Ps. 119:73), and another Psalm reads, "For Thou didst form my inward parts; Thou didst weave me in my mother's womb" (139:13). These clearly say that God creates people. Such statements fly in the face of those who want to ascribe all of creation to material forces. But notice, these statements were not made by someone who was ignorant of natural procreation. The "seed of the man" and the "seed of the woman" are mentioned prominently in Scripture as are other material forces surrounding natural procreation. Rather, these statements from the Psalms (and many like them throughout Scripture) point to the ongoing role of God as He molds and shapes His creation.

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In the case of procreation, God's work is indistinguishable from natural processes. In face of this, we have to step back from all natural processes and ask ourselves what is really going on. The quest of modern science is to find a completely material explanation for all that happens in the universe. Perhaps they will succeed. They will never succeed, however, in divorcing God from natural processes. The situation is far more complex than many imagine, because in the scriptural view, self-operating systems do not operate by themselves, even though no other explanation may be needed to describe what we observe.

Scripture puts other natural systems in the same theological framework. Consider the weather. *Van Nostrand's Scientific Encyclopedia* says, concerning rain, that

Nuclei upon which condensation can take place are absolutely necessary for cloud formation and precipitation. . . Lowering of the temperature of air below its dew point, or adding water vapor beyond the holding capacity of the air, is a second requirement for the formation of clouds (*Van Nostrand's Scientific Encyclopedia*, Sixth Edition, 1983, "Precipitation and Hydrometers," 2314).

In short, dust and air with too much water vapor are two necessities for clouds and rain.

But here's what Scripture says, "[The Lord] covers the heavens with clouds, . . . provides rain for the earth, . . . makes grass to grow on the mountains" (Ps. 147:8). And, "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments . . . then I shall give you rains in their season" (Lev. 26:3-4).

Here, as in the case of procreation, the ancients recognized that there were tie-ins between weather and other natural phenomena. Jesus contemporaries recog-

nized that weather was predictable: "When it is evening, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red.' And in the morning, 'There will be a storm today, for the sky is red and threatening.' Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?" (Matt. 16:2-3).

In spite of this predictability, however, Bible-time people did not try to separate God from nature. Nature follows laws. They knew that. Nature also follows God's decrees. *This*, some of us have forgotten.

But God is not only in our natural world, He is also involved in our personal world. After losing her husband and her two sons, Naomi said, "The hand of the Lord has gone forth against me" (Ruth 1:13). Here God's involvement takes on emotional dimensions. Normally, God's people expect blessing. Sometimes they get affliction. Sometimes like Job or Naomi it is undeserved. We may be delighted to find God in nature and in material processes where we do not expect him, but to find God in affliction, and especially in undeserved affliction, is not delightful. It is out of place, unnatural, ugly, distasteful, repellent.

Yet we hope to find God there also, because when He is involved, someone who is good-to-the-core is involved. If it were only the evil—the rotten-to-the-core evil—that we were shut up with, we would be filled with despair. But with God there, not only will good come—it must come.

It was such considerations which prompted the psalmist to pray, "Deliver my soul from the wicked with Thy sword, . . . from men of the world, whose portion is in this life" (Ps. 17:13-14).

David knew that even evil men could be the hand of God; but he also knew that whatever the affliction, God's goodness was reliable. Peter also knew this and

said, "Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:6-7).

Sometimes it is easier to understand that God is with us in our afflictions than it is to know that God is with us in our blessings. We feel awkward, nervous, or ashamed about material blessings. Knowing our proneness to such misgivings, the writer of Ecclesiastes had to exhort us, "There is nothing better for a man than to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen, that it is from the hand of God. For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?" (Eccl. 2:24-25). Since I've taken that verse seriously I've eaten a lot more ice cream, walked in a lot more parks, enjoyed a lot more sunsets, had fellowship with a lot more friends. I hope you will do something similar.

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