

# **God's Efficacious Providence Regarding Sin & Afflictions**

**by John Archer**

***{Comfort for Believers, 1645}***

The reason whence all changes by sins or sorrows arise upon believers is fourfold: First, it is from God. Secondly, it is from God through a powerful decree. Thirdly, it is from God through a decree everlastingly. Fourthly, it is from God through a Covenant of Grace; wherefore it must all tend only to their good. All changes by sins or sorrows come upon believers from God and his Hand; I say all afflictions come upon them from God. This is easily and generally granted according to the drift of Divine Scripture, to raise us up to see and acknowledge God's Hand in every affliction; {Amos 3:6, Job 5:6;} whatever instruments thereof have been, it comes from God; and it is as evident by Scripture and Reason that all sin come also from God and his Hand, and yet he is in no way defiled or dishonored thereby, neither is sin extenuated or the creature excused by it in the least.

The fear of some of these inconveniences hath made believers not acknowledge so much of God in sin, as is in sin; and out of a fear of falling into that error dissuaded from James 1:13-16, they have erred on the other hand, and made sin more of the creature and itself, and less from God than it truly is. They grant that God is willing sin should be, and that he permits it, orders circumstances about its production and therefore overrules it; but that he in no sense hath an Hand in it, neither is he any Author at all thereof; which opinion is safe enough from the error it shuns, and to avoid danger it keeps so far off, that it goes wrong another way; and because it would not give God too much, it gives him not enough in this, not so much as he takes to Himself in Scripture, and tends; yea, is even necessary to his Glory and the comfort of his people; and though Pelagians, Arminians and carnal hearts will abuse this doctrine, and bark against it with pretense that it dishonors God, because it undermines their carnal buildings; yet let us embrace and profess the Truth which is after Godliness, and not fear to say that of God, which he in his Holy Book saith of Himself; namely that, "of him, and through him, and to him, are all things; to whom be glory forever. Amen." {Rom.11:36} "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. Both riches and honour come of thee, and thou reignest over all; and in thine hand is power and might; and in thine hand it is to make great, and to give strength unto all." {I Chron.29:11-12} "The LORD hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." {Pv.16:4}

Thus we assert that God is and hath a Hand in, and is the Author of the sinfulness of his people. For the evidencing whereof; consider these arguments, besides the voice of God in Scripture. God's will and pleasure is the womb that conceived and whence springs every work of the creature, whatever it be, whether it be good or bad; as they are {that is, continue,} for his pleasure. "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and

power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created." {Rev.4:11} So they so do and work, because it is his pleasure that they should so do; the first reason {and that which determines all} why the creature sins, must be because God's will was that it should sin; for "who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him;" {Is.40:13;} or gave advice by counsel to him to let the creature sin? "Behold, God exalteth by his power; who teacheth like him? Who hath enjoined him his way? or who can say, Thou hast wrought iniquity?" {Job.36:22,23} Was it not his own device, counsel and will that it should so be? Did any necessity arising upon the creatures being, enforce it, that sin may be? Could not God have hindered sin if he would? Might he not have kept man from sinning, as he did some of the angelic host? Therefore it was his predeterminate purpose before the creature was, that there should be sin; and what incongruity is it that God's sovereign will and good pleasure should first lay a groundwork to bring forth sin? For what is sin, but an effect and discovery of the weakness and mutability of the reasonable creature? Wherefore God's unchangeableness is alleged in opposition to the creature's sinning, and sinful tempting to sin, {James 1:13,17, as we shall more fully show,} because sin, as it is sin, arises from mutability and weakness. Now what incongruity is it for the Creator to will and order it in such a manner that the creature shall show itself and its own shame? Yea, is it not necessary thus to give to God the first hand in contriving and willing the creature's sin, because most of God's greatest works in this world and the everlasting world to come hinges on the creature's sin; and it is by sin that most of God's glory in the discovery of its attributes doth arise; wherefore must it not be said and thought that his will first and chief was in the providing this means and way for all those his ends. Therefore certainly it limits him much to bring in sin by a contingent accident, simply from the creature, and thus to deny God a hand and will in its being and bringing forth.

Next, there is much good comes by sin; yea, the greatest good either to God's glory, {the manifestations of God,} or the creature's happiness; {in all that eternal glory through Christ;} it is all, only brought about by sin. The creature separate from God, as it is in sinning can produce no good; yet the creatures sin doth produce good, therefore God hath also a hand in the sin of the creature, as well as the creature; and however God may be thought to take up the creature's sin, after it is committed or foreseen to be committed or brought about or did decreed to bring about good by it, without having a will beforehand unto the being of it; yet {if we will consider} this cannot be in God, who so in his will, the ground of everything in the creature and the creation, both its standing and falling; as that he must first will the creature shall stand or fall, before the creature can do either; and the creature therefore falls and sins, because his will before was that it should so do.

For sin is but the weakness of God's creature, its mutability; by which his strength and unchangeableness is the better set forth. Can it be anything to God, his impeachment, that his creature is frail? Can he be a God and impeached by anything? Yea, doth not sin occasion the manifestation of many, yea, most of his attributes? Indeed, sin doth eclipse God's manifested glory; that glory, which he should have from the creature, rising up to him upon his manifestation of Himself, that is much lost by sin; for sin buries and hides that glory of God, it fights against it, sins against God's heart, as contrary to his own Image and the disorder of his whole workmanship, and the ruin of his creature; and the thief which steals away his glory; and in this is sin's vileness, and herein it is in comparatively worse than afflictions; but yet it damages God no more than an eclipse of the sun damages the sun, which is nothing; for the sun shines as gloriously, but the Earth beholds it not, and so

hath not the comfort and benefit of its influence; so that all the evil of sin towards God, is not at all to him in his own essential blessedness, but in his glory which should arise to him from the creature, for the good of the creature; which glory, as he is Creator is his end and most dear to him {as a wise mans end is, because else his work is in vain;} wherefore, the Lord professes his hatred against all sin, and that he hath no will to it, hand in it, nor is the author of it; and yet he may as truly and safely have a will, and a hand in, and be the author of sins, as well as afflictions.

So God wills and is the author of afflictions and wills not, nor is the author of afflictions; for he wills not afflictions simply and absolutely as they be the creatures hurt; for that is against his nature {which is mercy} and his relation, who is their Creator and Father. Neither doth he inflict them until he is moved by some end and consideration which presents greater good, both in regard of his own glory and his people's good. And thus God is brought on to afflict, by a further end than the misery itself; wherefore as to Christ in a more transcendent way, as he was his fellow and no sinner in himself, he would not, or could not afflict him; wherefore his sword slept; yet, on other considerations, as he was the representation of all his elect, God having "made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin;" {Christ made sin by imputation; the sins of all his people were transferred unto him, laid upon him, and placed to his account; he sustained their persons, and bore their sins in his own body on the tree;} for God there willed to strike him; and therefore awakened his sword. "Awake, O sword, against my shepherd, and against the man that is my fellow, saith the LORD of hosts; smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered; and I will turn mine hand upon the little ones." {Zech.13:7} So it is in regard to all afflictions, the Lord wills and works them, and yet he wills and works them not in several respects. As evils simply, and on no other consideration, he wills them not, nor works them; but it is the creature's own harvest which he sowed; but as they tend to and produce high, great and good effects, there is no evil of misery, but God effectually works all. Even thus it is in regard of sins; for in some respects and considerations, God neither doth, nor can will sin, or have any hand in it, or be any author thereof; namely, as it is evil, or a good only in appearance, answering only the absurdity of a weak and mutable creature. Thus, and in these respects only, God wills not, works not sin, but abhors it infinitely, for sin defiles, and is most contrary to his holy nature; and thus the creature wills it, and works, and on no other respects; or, {to express the matter more fully and plainly,} God neither hath a will or hand in sin; as it only springs from an evil root, and rises upon a weak or evil ground; that is, as the mind is moved to sin, out of an evil, inbred principle of inherent corruption; or, from a concomitant weakness and mutability of nature; so God is not moved to will or work sin, for that argues an imperfect and polluted nature; but thus, the devil and man wills and works sin; and that, this is the true scope and sense of that verse found in James. {Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God; for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man; but every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin; and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death. Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." 1:13-17} God doth not so, or on such grounds and respects tempt or move any man to sin as to be moved thereto from an inward principle of sin, or of weakness and mutability; therefore he saith, "God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man;" that is, as it is evil, and the fruit of an evil

principle within him; so God is not tempted, nor temps, but thus man tempts himself; {vs.14,15;} being moved from an evil principle of lust within him; which shows, that this is the Apostle's scope, to show that on these grounds and respects, God is not moved to will and work sin; so that he denies it not to God absolutely, but on these grounds, which further appears because {vs.16,17} the error he confutes is, that God should tempt to sin, as it is sin, an evil and foolish thing, flowing out of an inherent weakness and mutability; for thus to will and work sin only, he proves God cannot; because all good is of Him, as a Father; therefore he cannot send forth evil, and he hath no variableness, whereas all sin, as sin, arises from the mutability of the creature. Hence our Savior refers sin, as it is an evil, to an evil rise, ground and root; all that is of evil, and so evil. {Mt.5:37, 15:19} But now if there be a ground on which sin may be willed and wrought, that is not from evil, or weakness and mutability, moving God to will and work it, God does will and work it.

God neither hath a will or hand in sin, as sin is moved to, or effected by means that is naught; namely, by telling a lie, or any such way; for this evil is in the doer; therefore, when God willed that Ahab should sin in going to Ramoth-Gilead, he would not by lying persuade him to do it, but asked who of his evil ministers would do it; and one of the devils undertook to do it, by filling his prophets with lies, so as to be a liar in them. "And the LORD said, Who shall persuade Ahab, that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-Gilead? And one said on this manner, and another said on that manner. And there came forth a spirit, and stood before the LORD, and said, I will persuade him. And the LORD said unto him, Wherewith? And he said, I will go forth, and I will be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets. And he said, Thou shalt persuade him, and prevail also; go forth, and do so. Now therefore, behold, the LORD hath put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these thy prophets, and the LORD hath spoken evil concerning thee." {I Kg.22:20-23} Thus God neither doth nor can act any ill means to bring about sin, as the devil did to draw Eve to sin, by beguiling her with lies; though God may will that it shall be done by them that are evil.

As sin only respects some appearance of good, but real evil ends namely, God's dishonor and the creatures hurt; so God neither can, nor will; either will or work it, for then it should be evil, for the end of an action in moral things gives the name. Thus in these respects, God wills not, works not and is not the Author in the least degree of any sin; but is of Satan, and one's own evil nature; as when Satan stood up against Israel and provoked David to number the people; that is, Satan from an evil mind, by evil means, to an evil end; namely, to hurt Israel, as they were God's people, provoked David to that particular sin, in these respects, it was Satan and not God. "And Satan stood up against Israel, and provoked David to number Israel." {I Chron.21:1} But in respect to the ultimate glory of God that would at last result from that very sin, we also read; "And again the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he moved David against them to say, Go, number Israel and Judah." {II Sam.24:1} And so also, it is of our own hearts; wherefore David charges this sin wholly upon himself, and not on Satan, nor on God. "And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered; even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done?" {I Chron.21:17} This again corresponds perfectly with that statement that we find in James. {1:13-15} But now, all this notwithstanding, as there are good respects, on which sin may be Divinely willed and wrought, so God may be the Author thereof.

As; firstly; sin may be willed and wrought from good principles and grounds of wisdom, power, sovereignty and holiness, to set up only Himself, &c. Secondly; sin may be

willed and wrought by good means; namely, a wise and holy ordering of things, so as shall draw forth and discover the creatures mutability and weakness, and a leaving the creature to it, being in no way tied to add an assistance and strength against it, as sin was brought about in Adam and Eve; and after sin is in, then by leaving the heart to its own corruption, and by wise and holy dispensations and providences to stir up those corruptions, not by anything in the Providence, but through the sin itself, abusing such providences, as sin is brought about now, since the Fall. Thirdly, sin may be willed and wrought for good ends; as, showing the creature's weakness, in order to set up the Creator's power and glory; and the gaining more glory to God, and good to his people. Thus God is said to move David to number the people, {II Sam.24:1,} in these respects; as in the other, the devil is said to do it; {I Chron.21:1;} and under these considerations, and these only, sin is good, {as poison may be for the body, and as the killing a malefactor by a Law,} and as good as other things; and may as perfectly be willed and brought about by God, and have him for its Author, as anything else.

Yea, in truth it is most congruous that the Lord should be its Author, for whom becomes it so well as the Ultimate Good to bring about the greatest good by the greatest evil; and whoso fitly as the immutable and everlasting God, who can bring out the weakness and the mutability of the creature? Thus we see, that true reason and the Scripture exclude not God from being in any respects the Infinite and Holy One that so wills and authorizes sin; and as it hath good respects it is fathered on Him, the Father of all good.

Therefore we affirm that all changes by sin or sorrow which befall believers come from God by a Decree most powerful; that is a working Decree; he hath so resolved and decreed it, as that his hand and power concurs to affect it. In regard of troubles and afflictions, this is said expressly. "For I am the LORD; I will speak, and the word that I shall speak shall come to pass; it shall be no more prolonged; for in your days, O rebellious house, will I say the word, and will perform it, saith the Lord GOD." {Ez.12:25} "Before the decree bring forth, before the day pass as the chaff, before the fierce anger of the LORD come upon you, before the day of the LORD'S anger come upon you." {Zeph.2:2} "And he hath confirmed his words, which he spake against us, and against our judges that judged us, by bringing upon us a great evil." {Dan.9:12} There was a decree pregnant which conceived and bred trouble for them, and was strong and able to bring it forth, and not miscarry. So in like manner, also for sins. "For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together; for to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done." {Acts 4:27,28; see also Acts 2:23} That sin of theirs in crucifying Christ; all that which they did sinfully against Christ, is said to be determined before by God's counsel and hand; that is, a sovereign decree that was concurring in power to effect what it determined. Yet is not this any excuse to the sinner or extenuation of the sin; for as it is said of Assyria; he thinks not so, as he eyes not this Decree of God in his sinning, nor is he moved by a respect thereto, but he does it out of his own evil heart. "Howbeit he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so." {Is.10:7}

All changes upon believers by sins and sorrows come to them from God by an Everlasting Decree, even by that eternal Love and Counsel, in, and by which they were ordained to life eternal. Wherefore the prophet Habakkuk encourages himself against the great affliction of the Babylonian captivity by this, that God's Decree had ordained them for that end; and therefore the issue should be their good, and not their ruin, {"we shall not

die,"} and sets God before him, as a God from everlasting, and his God; that is, his God from everlasting. "Art thou not from everlasting, O LORD my God, mine Holy One; we shall not die. O LORD." {Hab.1:12} And what doth he instance in this attribute of everlasting but to intimate that God being from everlasting; and so all his decrees being from everlasting; among which this was one, of that their great affliction by the hand of the Babylonians; therefore they should not be hurt or ruined thereby; and when Christ is called the Everlasting Father, {Is.9:6,} it seems to be meant, not only that from an everlasting decree; but as one who designed to make all things, and as it were to beget them, but more especially to be a Father to the elect, and so as a Father to chastise them with afflictions, {Heb.12:5-9,} which afflictions also must be by the same everlasting decree appointed out to them. Wherefore Christ is called their Father, {Is.63:16, 64:8,} who from everlasting had his Name, their Redeemer; for so it is read in the margin and seems to be meant. Now, as their redemption, so their miseries must be decreed from everlasting; even those goings forth, {Mic.5:2,} and not only his councils, but those works of his towards the creature, works without, as the phrase of "goings forth" implies. And as all the sorrows, so all the sins of believers are determined by God's eternal decree; how oft, how many, how great; for, if Christ from everlasting be their Redeemer, and went forth to save them, it was first and chiefly from sins; then must from everlasting the sins be set down from whence he should save them, as it is certain they were, because when he accomplished the decree by dying on the cross, he there actually redeemed them, then all their sins met on him, as it is in Isaiah 53:6, where we read in the margin, "the Lord hath made the iniquity of us all to meet on him." Now none met on him there, but what were decreed for him to remove, when he was predestinated to that work of redemption, which was from everlasting. {Heb.9:12, Rev.13:8} For Adam in his fall and sinning was a figure or type of Christ's taking away sins, {Rom.5:14-21;} therefore, Christ's taking away sins was decreed before Adam, or the world was, and so from everlasting; or else how could Adam typify him, if he were not before intended to that work? And if Christ were from everlasting decreed to take away sins, then were the sins that he should take away decreed from everlasting. This also appears by Deuteronomy 32:32-37, where it is stated, that both the sins of God's people, {vs.32-34,} and their afflictions, {vs.35,} and their deliverance, {vs.36,} are all aforehand laid up in store with God, and sealed among his treasures; that is, in the eternal decrees of his wisdom and knowledge, in the deepest secrecy and hiddenness hath God set down his people's sins and punishments, which in a set time he will avenge, and at the end do his people good. And the reason, ground and further evidence of all this is that by the same decree that sets down the end are all the means thereto set down; wherefore that eternal goodwill and wisdom of God which decreed believers to eternal blessedness, decreed all the afflictions and sins, how much and how long, God would leave them to weakness, and let loose corruptions as the ways and means by which he would bring them to that glory appointed to them in Christ; for everything which befalls believers in this world is a means to that great end of eternal glory to which God hath ordained them; and therefore was fore-ordained for them, in and by that great and eternal love, and so cannot but be in love and for their good. {Rom.8:28-32} "In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will." {Eph.1:11} "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world." {Acts 15:18}

All changes upon believers by sins or sorrows come upon them, by, and through an Eternal Covenant of Grace made with Christ on their behalf; and this Covenant of Grace is but the gathering together, and revealing with an obligation to them, to perform whatever were his eternal purposes in Himself concerning believers; wherefore all that is decreed concerning them is exhibited to them through a Covenant of Grace, which cannot but season it and make it wholesome to them, however pernicious it be to others. Which Covenant encompasses the Father's everlasting decree about them; the Son's eternal union with them, and Headship to them, and his merits and intercession; and the Holy Spirit's inhabitation in them, and office towards them, {to unfold and set forth the glories of Christ unto them,} to work all their works for them, {for God's words as applied by the Spirit are operative as well as imperative, as they carry a power to do that which is a command believers, as in the creation, "let there be light, and there was light, &c."} till he hath made them meet for glory, all which is expressed in the Covenant of Grace; in which they may be assured that nothing shall befall them but for their good; that the corruption of their natures shall be so ordered and overruled, both before and after conversion, as that it shall culminate and turn to God's glory, and their eternal good; and that Christ hath made atonement for all sin, past, present, and to come; inasmuch as the sins of all the elect were laid upon him or met in him. {Is.53:6} Thus all afflictions come through a Covenant of Grace, "which is ordered in all things and sure," and are expressed in it; {Ps.89:32-34;} for they be Fatherly chastisements for good, and tokens of love to which the Covenant binds God; whence it is that God is called the terrible God, keeping Covenant and mercy; because his Covenant for mercy is often to afflict. {Neh.1:5}

So compare we sin in its guilt with Jesus Christ in his Righteousness; and it is not so much as a cloud compared with the Sun in its strength, it is nothing; and so also compare we sin in its being with the Council, Decree and Intent of God the Father, and it is nothing. Thus the Lord puts forth power to nullify sin on the behalf of believers. {For Sin unfits the child of God for his Christian service which is to eat the holy things and keep a continual feast all his lifelong; that is, to feed by Faith with joy continually on the Righteousness, Passion and Merits of Christ which were typified by the holy sacrifices and feasts of old; I Cor.5:7,8; the joy of the Lord; that is, joy in the Lord Christ being their strength. Neh.8:10.} Now then to sum up all; since all changes by sins or sorrows which befall believers come from God, and from his Decree Everlasting and are dispensed to them as a nurture through a Covenant of Grace, it must needs be that they must all work together for their good. Furthermore, troubles either by sin or affliction are to be looked on two ways; both as sins that are our own, and come from our accursed nature, dishonoring unto God, crucifying Christ, grieving the Holy Spirit, and transgressing the commandment, &c.; and so afflictions may be so considered, either as coming from our sin, or at the least, our sinfulness exposing them; and thus, with hope in Christ for pardon, believers do grieve and humble themselves for sins and afflictions; as sins or afflictions are beheld, only as our own, and their bad effects, bitter roots; and God, and his will, and his hand in them, and their good effects through him are not considered; which indeed is rarely done by believers; yea, hardly known and therefore I have enlarged upon it; for believers often judge God's holy dispensations by sense and carnal reason, and not by Faith; and God carries things in contraries, and usually lays foundations of greatest good and comfort in greatest appearances of the contrary. {Is.55:8,9, Ez.18:29}