

# Forum:

## God DIRECTLY at work Graciously IN the Reprobate?

Discussion between Mr. Mark Punford and the Editor  
Continued from Issue No. 21.

### Mr. Punford.

My Fifth point concerns the production of creative works of excellence by the reprobate wicked. Your response to this is to remind me of Coleridge's opium, Liszt's misbehaviour, and the sodomy of say, Tchaikovsky and others, etc. I don't, of course, deny that many great artists lived debauched lives; nevertheless, it seems to me that a greater degree of God's common restraint—— if the doctrine is true, of course——is at work when Handel's music is produced, than when that of a rock group like, say, Black Sabbath are in action. In the case of Handel, there is at least a degree of formal similarity in the general vision of life to that expressed in the music of Bach; whence I am disposed to believe a common restraint is at work. Whilst it is true that the metaphysical structures which render Man as Man, will not dissolve just because man has become totally depraved, it does seem to me that it is as God removes his hand of restraint that the culture degenerates into an ever worsening state of wickedness, manifested in its creative and artistic productions often.

Returning for a moment to the question of the reprobate, and our attitude toward the same: Is it really plausible that we are to manifest justice and kindness toward them along with the undiscerned elect, whilst feeling no affection for them? For to manifest kindness to someone, without hypocrisy, one must surely do so from a kind heart, which heart, will also have kind affections and who knoweth but that that person is in fact elect?

### Editor's Response:

"Creative works of excellence by the reprobate wicked" is herewith advanced as a manifestation of God's alleged "common grace". What seems peculiar to me in this doctrine however, is how the Holy Spirit was supposed to be "restraining" via internal common grace, say, Tchaikovsky such that he can compose "Swan Lake", but was not restraining him to maintain sexual fidelity in his marriage. Also, one finds other examples of those who *have* manifested moral abstemiousness (common grace?) but yet their talents were spent on say, inventing diabolic weaponry like modern nuclear, chemical, and biological warfare systems, or working out a clever scam on the international money markets. What a mix-up this all is! The fact is, that we are here dealing not with grace, but simply *human ingenuity*. And this ingenuity can often be more powerful in the reprobate than in the godly. Hence the cantatas of the godly Bach are not so intricate as a Poseidon missile, or a MIG 29. Again, who will ascribe to the Holy Spirit that he is working "common grace" in the devil when he appears as an "angel of light"? Or in the devil's ministers when they appear as "ministers of righteousness"? (Cf. II Cor. 11 vv. 14-15). Surely, ingenuity, even devilish ingenuity is what is at work here. This should never be confused with the gracious work of the Holy Ghost.



However, a form of “restraint” on the reprobate is clearly taught in the Bible, and an examination of the following verses will indicate how it must not be confused with an allegedly internal, non-saving, but quasi-sanctifying work of the Holy Ghost:

**Ge 6:3** *And the LORD said, My spirit shall **not always strive** with man,*

**Ps. 81: 11** *But my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.*

**12** *So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: [and] they walked in their own counsels.*

**Acts 7:42** *Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven;*

**Rom. 1: 24** *Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:*

**Rom.1: 26** *For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections: for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature:*

**Rom.1: 28** *And even as they did not like to retain God in [their] knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient;*

**2Thess. 2: 6-7** *And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: **only he who now letteth [will let]**, until he be taken out of the way.*

These texts indicate that the divine restraint is external, via the combinations of various providences and/or the preaching of the word/promulgation of divine threats against sin. Under such providential dispensations the full natural propensities of the reprobate are “bridled”, usually against the reprobate’s real desires. That this is so is evident thus:

In the first text, **Gen. 6:3**, the context is set in the ultimate apostasy of the Ante-diluvian world, the history of which was salted with the salt of the godly line through Seth down to Noah. By the time of Noah, it was evident that the godly line of families had dwindled to just 8 souls. This Noah was “a preacher of righteousness” (**2 Pet. 2:5**), and evidently the last such in the world of those days. Hence the influence that had “striven” with man, which the text implies was being removed in Noah’s time, is the outward promulgation of the Word of God, and the witness of the godly in society. The results: All that is anti-God in human nature blossomed forth....the social climate now supported such. Until then, the godly line of Seth had influenced the world sufficiently to act as a frosty chill on sin, nipping a lot of it in the bud before it could entirely mature to fulfill its worst propensions. Added to this was evidently a lower level of chastising providences. The Ante-diluvians lived to immense ages, and were therefore of strong genetic stock, in all probability highly resistant to disease, in a pre-diluvian world which was evidently more amenable for sustaining human life than that of the post-diluvian period.

All we find therefore here is an external restraint, like the bridle on a horse. And against that bridle mankind revolted, until the Lord finally took the bridle off. This external restraint is manifest too in the history of our nation. The last 50 years have seen a removal of restraint. And the restraint that has been removed is that of 1) the ‘salt’ of the godly line dwindling and becoming unfit to ‘salt’ society, and 2) the absence of any such fearful providences that would put the fear of God into society in general. So **Proverbs 30 vv. 8-9** indicates how prosperity can make people forget God.

Now, modern psychologists can tell us how developing infants learn to sublimate their natural depravity via a selfishness which sees advantages in “being good”. This illustrates



how the “bridle” of discipline, of “restraint”, actually functions, and functions externally. Even Al Capone normally drove his car on the correct side of the road. Self-interest was enough to tell him it wasn’t in his interests to meet head-on with a 20 ton truck.

The following text, **Psalm 81: 11-12** amplifies this clearly:

**11** But *my people would not hearken to my voice; and Israel would none of me.*

**12** So I gave them up unto their own hearts’ lust: [and] they walked in their own counsels.

The restraint that is removed there is evidently the restraint brought about externally through God’s voice via the prophets and priests. The triggering factor is the people’s refusal ultimately to pay heed to this outward restraining factor. Again this is portrayed in **Psalm 2:1-3**, where the heathen are depicted as taking counsel against the Lord with a view to breaking asunder what they see as the “bands” that bound them, and that they might “cast away their cords from us.” All this bespeaks an external restraining power, exercised on the godless via their social interaction with the godly, through whom, by word and/or by deed, the Word of God comes to the reprobate.

**Acts 7:42** reinforces this testimony, citing the incident of how the Israelites turned against God in the wilderness and chose to worship a golden calf. This whole incident occurs during the prolonged absence from them of Moses, the Lord’s prophet. The removal of this external influence was the effective removal of the restraint on the corruption which lurked in them by nature. When Moses returned from the mountain, this external restraint was reimposed, and self-interested fear drove the people back under the cords of restraint.

The texts from **Romans ch. 1** illustrate the same phenomenon. The preceding verses 18-21 of that chapter indicates how the reprobate rebel against all the cords of restraint (as per **Psalm 2: 1-3**), whereupon God removes from them all the outward means of restraint, the results, listed for us in the remaining verses of Romans 1, reading like a commentary on modern civilization over the last 50 years.

**2 Thess. 2:6-7** speaks of another external restraint. The word “letteth” here is the old English word indicating “to obstruct”. So one finds it today in legal documents, viz, that a person should be allowed to use a right-of-way “without **let** or hindrance”. Absolutely no evidence is offered in this text suggesting that this “obstruction” is a work of “common grace” active in the hearts of unbelievers, but the context to the contrary speaks of the revelation of the Antichrist, who, according to all Scripture prophecy, would be a Civil and Religious Power. The apostle indicates that there was a power that at that present acted as an “obstruction” to the manifestation of the Antichrist, and he makes absolutely no suggestion that this power is the Holy Ghost. The context and the general current of Scripture teaches us that “he who now letteth” is also a Civil power, that is, the Magistracy, who, according to the Apostle in **Romans 13** is a “*minister of God* to thee for good” (v.4) and a “terror” to evil-doers (v. 3). When the civil magistracy is deflected from this calling, and becomes a terror to the good, then it has come to pass that the “obstruction” to open social evil, and the rise of the Antichrist, has been removed. Such our Saviour prophesied will be the state of the world in the last times. (**Luke 17: 26**). Look around you.

Importantly, the Bible contrasts these clear teachings of “outward” restraint with the kind of restraints God demands of the Christian, and more, by His grace through His Holy



Spirit, *He works* in the Christian. Whereas the Book of Proverbs teaches concerning the outward restraint on the reprobate thus: **Pr 26:3** *A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back.*, God's people are exhorted to something altogether different, and more noble, thus: **Ps 32:9** *Be ye not as the horse, [or] as the mule, [which] have no understanding: whose mouth must **be held in with bit and bridle**, lest they come near unto thee.* In short, the godly bridle themselves from within, empowered so to do by Grace. So David goes on to say: **Ps 39:1** *I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: **I will keep my mouth with a bridle**, while the wicked is before me.*

On the last point, vis a vis “kindness to the reprobate” flowing from a truly kind heart, from our human position, ontologically it is appropriate that we should love our enemies. More, it is Christ-like and lawful that we should love our enemies. And we should do so, whether we feel “kind-hearted” or not. But it would not be Christ-like in the *glorified* Christ if He loved *all* His enemies, as such would not be appropriate to His ontological state and position. True, He loves myriads of His enemies, because He set His heart on them from eternity, and came to atone for their sins. This enables Him to be just, and the justifier of all them which believe in Him. (**So Romans 3:24-26**). But I take it that every reader will agree that God does not love His arch-enemy, the Devil, and the hosts of demonic spirits that serve the old Serpent. To this end, in that the non-elect reprobate are declared in Genesis as being “the seed of the Serpent”, and by the Lord Himself as being “of your father the devil” (**John 8:44**) it follows naturally that God does not love *them*.

However, from our own human ontological standpoint, the very Christlikeness that emerges in the glorified Christ as a wrath against everything evil (**Rom. 1:18**), necessarily must emerge in us as a love for our enemies, especially remembering that “but for the grace of God, there go I”. Such love is appropriate to our condition, but not appropriate to Christ's condition in Heaven. (Similarly, we are not allowed to take revenge. But the Lord in Heaven does take revenge. It is appropriate to Him, but not appropriate to us.) It is appropriate to illustrate this point thus:

The attribute of “good-soldierliness” emerges in the Private soldier as and when he faithfully attends to obeying the Sergeant's orders.

The attribute of “good-soldierliness” emerges in the Colonel, not by obeying the Sergeant's orders, but by giving the Sergeant the orders.

And thus we aver that when the Lord was on this earth, having become human, as a child he subordinated Himself to Joseph and Mary, and also subordinated himself to the Civil authorities even when they came, unjustly, to arrest Him.

Now at any time, He could have called on legions of Angels to assert His authority over all these human powers, viz. **Mt 26:53** *Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?* However His mission and purpose on earth was as the apostle said: **Php 2:8** *And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.* The very Godhood in His nature required that as a human, in fulfillment of the Law of God He had to subordinate Himself to His earthly parents, and the Civil magistrate, and also that He should love His enemies. For on earth, incarnate, He made Himself like a “Private soldier”. In His risen, glorified state, He is now the “Colonel” again, so to speak, and from this position His very same Godhood appropriately manifests itself in *controlling* all Civil Magistrates, and in *hating* His enemies, *and in taking vengeance upon them.* (**Rom.12:19**).

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