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## Gleanings

### The Sovereign Prerogative



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A number of years ago, I was a partner in a real estate development. The project was the renovation of a historic building. At the time, there were significant tax incentives for such projects, which was a major motivator. My role was both an investor and managing partner. As the managing partner I had a major influence on the project vision, plan, and execution. I sought to faithfully and diligently execute the plan, which included seeking counsel from real estate professionals. From my perspective, I did everything correctly and according to plan, but the results were not according to plan. No matter what I tried, I could not get the project to produce a positive cash flow. I was frustrated and confused. What had I done wrong?

This conundrum is not unique to me. Most, if not virtually everyone, either has experienced, or will at some point experience, the reality of doing everything seemingly correctly, but not getting the expected results.

To understand this phenomenon, we must understand how God and his universe work. Generally, God works through the timeless universal principles he created to govern the natural world. But there are exceptions—times when God does things that seemingly violate natural laws in some way, such as, turning water in wine (John 2), multiplying food (Matthew 14), raising the dead (John 11), calming storms (Mark 4), parting seas (Exodus 14), and making the sun stand still (Joshua 10). These examples illustrate that God is not deistic; he is engaged with his creation and will even trump his own laws according to his sovereign purpose.

In my conundrum, did I experience a situation where God exercised his sovereign prerogative? And if so, what might have triggered the divine prerogative?

My hypothesis is that when natural explanations do not explain reality, then either we don't fully understand the natural laws at work in the situation or God has exercised his prerogative to, in some way, trump natural laws to accomplish his purpose.

As to what might trigger the exercise of the divine prerogative, I think there are three major reasons to consider: the wrong motive of man, to introduce people to Christ, and to facilitate maturity in people.

The first reason is the motive of man, specifically, the wrong motive of man. In the story of the Tower of Babel (Genesis 11), the project sponsors seemingly did all the right things. For example, they had a sound plan, excellent leadership, unified teams, effective communication, the right location, and the correct technology. Everything seemed to be going well, and then God exercised his prerogative. He confused their communication by changing the language of the participants so they could no longer understand one another. Scripture does not provide specific details as to how God did this, but we don't have a plausible explanation based on natural laws so it appears to have been divine intervention. We do know, however, the reason why God intervened. The motive of the project leaders was self-glorification. Self-glorification is a symptom of pride and God detests the proud (Proverbs 16:5). However, God forbears and allows proud people to continue in their pride for a time to give them an opportunity to repent, but when people do not repent his forbearance will end and judgment will come (2 Peter 3:9). Motives are important to God and there is only one right

motive—to glorify God.

The second reason for divine intervention is to introduce people to Christ. Early in his life, Saul of Tarsus was a zealous religious man who did not know Christ. It appears that God exercised his divine prerogative to supernaturally ambush Saul while he was on his way to arrest followers of Jesus. Saul's experience defied natural explanation, so most likely it was a divine intervention intended to introduce Saul to Christ.

The third major reason for divine intervention is to facilitate maturity in people. Joseph was

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sold by his jealous brothers into slavery in a foreign land. Later they were reunited during a famine. At that time, Joseph was the second highest ruler in Egypt—the only country prepared for the famine. Joseph became the savior of his own family. The events of Joseph's life were used to mature and prepare him for his destiny; it is difficult to explain how these could have happened without divine intervention. Joseph himself noted this reality (Genesis 50:20). This illustrates one of God's objectives, that is, to facilitate maturity in Christ for those who know the Lord (Ephesians 4:11–16).

Maturity is the process of transformation from our natural fallen state in which we are focused on doing our will according to our ways to a state of doing God's will according to God's ways. In 1 Corinthians 3, the apostle Paul admonishes the believers in Corinth for their failure to mature in Christ. Given that maturity in Christ is the will of God for every believer and that God is a loving Father, it is not surprising that he uses his divine prerogative to set up scenarios that will facilitate transformation in us and therefore growth and maturity in Christ.

I was a believer at the time I developed the aforementioned project, but my motive for doing the project was suspect. My motive was to make money—a lot of money. Looking back, I now recognize that I was an idolater—a mammon worshipper. *Mammon* is an English derivative of the Greek word μαμμονασ. Mammon refers to money. Jesus made it clear that humans do not have the power to worship God and μαμμονασ. It is impossible (Luke 16:13). If you worship money, you do not worship God and therefore you are idolater.

It was a sobering, convicting moment to realize that I was an idolater, even though I was a church leader and Bible teacher.

If your primary motive in life is to make money, you are a mammon worshipper. The only correct motive to do anything in life is to glorify God, that is, to live according to his will and ways (Matthew 4:4). This means that the primary reason to work is because God has directed you to work. Making money is a secondary consideration.

In addition to responding to my wrong motive, God used this real estate project to give me an opportunity to mature in Christ, which is what I really needed. To do this, I had to cast off mammon worship and fully embrace Christ as the centering point of my life. Indeed, it was this project that was a major factor in throwing my life into chaos so that God could rebuild it based on Christ.

The Lord used this real estate project to reveal major spiritual problems in my life. It was a very loving act on his part to not allow me to continue to succeed—although up to that time I had been financially successful. I needed to be stopped and the heavenly Father graciously exercised his prerogative to disrupt his natural laws enough to cause me to repent. This is real love.

This experience was a major learning opportunity for me. I began to understand root issues and how ultimately everything in the tangible world is a manifestation of underlying spiritual reality. Sound spiritual reality leads to blessings. Unsound spiritual reality leads to judgment. Mammon worship and immaturity in Christ are unsound spiritual realities. The worship of Christ is the only sound spiritual reality.

The next time you experience unexplained results, look deeper. Consider the possibility that God might be exercising his sovereign prerogative. Examine your motives. Consider the possibility that you don't really know Christ. Or consider the possibility that you need to mature in Christ. These are the matters that are important to God. And he uses the tangible world as a venue to challenge people into alignment with his will and ways.

May we have the grace to recognize the real root issues of life and how to properly respond so that we can stop living to do our will according to our ways and begin living to do his will according to his ways.

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