Twitter Thread by Lyman Stone ■■■



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the strange reality of strict calvinism is that it makes a mockery of God's claims to hate, abhort, or even be theoretically opposed to evil

the calvinist solution to the problem of evil, which I have *literally heard from the lips of a faithful well-catechized Presbyterian* is, "well, all that happens is God's will, and to do His will is to manifest goodness, and goodness gives God joy, so God must rejoice in evil"

The hypothetical I gave was, "Suppose that there was a city of Christians, and a bomber flew over the city, and the guy at the controls tripped and accidentally armed and dropped a bomb, and wiped out the city: is that God's will? What does God think of that?"

His answer in addition to the above cited the Flood, Soddom, and Nineveh.

Because we all know that God's response to the Flood was, "I REALLY liked that, it was AWESOME, it satisfied my will and purposes to obliterate my creation!"

Once you have drunk the "but muh sovrintee" Kool-Aid you cannot escape the argument that literally everything that happens is not just God's will in some philosophical sense, but His will in the sense of "things that bring him pleasure."

If you suppose that the reason God saved us was simply to bring glory to himself, if you suppose that there is no element of Creation actually in *real revolt* against God, but all is simply as God has ordained it to be from the beginning, then God is a worker of evil.

It is only in God's implacable *opposition* to evil, in the clear scriptural language about the "Prince of this world," in the description of the pain of God we see repeatedly in the OT and NT, that the problem of evil becomes comprehensible.

I'm aware of a kind of compromise which says that it was God's pleasure to create man with freedom; he exercised His sovereignty in restraint of Himself in some sense. And indeed, I think that's the default view of many people.

But I think this answer is too facile.
1) If God knew how things would go, exercising his sovereignty in that way is only a little different

2) Evil begins BEFORE man's fall! Satan fell first! We know little about this, but locating first-evil in *human* free will is an error.

What began in original sin is not "the existence of evil," but "man's inextricable implication in evil." This suggests you should not resolve the problem of evil simply by appealing to that kind of "single moment of direct sovereignty, free will afterwards" view.

That Satan fell from heaven yet is present in the garden raises all sorts of questions: was evil present at creation? We know that "It was good" is not an absolute moral statement, because man's alone-ness is "not good" yet the creation of man was clearly "good"

But these are things approaching the limits of what has been revealed to us. No claim should rest on those details.

The key point is simply that the origin of evil is certainly *before* "original sin."

There's also a problem here about the optionality of goodness for God; it is conventional to say "things are good because God does them," and in our daily life this mandate theory of goodness is always the most practical and correct model.

But at a metaphysical level, there is no theological support for either theory. That God tells us not to try to set our concept of goodness against His revealed goodness is no guide on this question since our concept could just be erroneous.

This is no guide to "Did God have options about what would be goodness?"

This is formally equivalent to the question, "Could the Father discontinue the existence of the Son?" since both are questions about if God has sovereignty over His own attributes.

(Of course "Son" is not an attribute, but also "good" is not an attribute for God in a metaphysical sense; I'm using attribute in an extremely broad and colloquial sense here)

When we understand that the question of "Is God so sovereign that he could make raping a child into a virtue if he wanted to?" amounts to "Is God so sovereign he can not be God?" and other formally similar questions, it seems a lot trickier.

Ultimately again we bump into things we cannot know. So much we don't know! And I'm fine with "we don't know." Calvinists don't accept "we don't know." They assert that yes *of course* goodness is merely a description of whatever God (arbitrarily) decides to do.

But in the Incarnation we see a different situation. The Incarnation shows us at least some things God CAN do, namely, limit himself; but it also hints at some things that maybe God COULD do but he isn't interested in doing, i.e. "not being God." (fullness of God in Christ, etc)

Ultimately, much as I suppose that a "mandate" theory of goodness is the best fit for humanity's experience of goodness, so I would suggest that the use of "omnipotence" is extremely misleading.

The idea of God as "all powerful" is deeply misleading because God has infact repeatedly limited his display of His power in relating to us, and has also never deigned to explain what His power actually is or how it works.

We should never lean any strong claims on God's omnipotence. God's omniscience is extremely well-attested in scripture, as is His goodness. And He reveals extraordinary power beyond the human imagination: but He never describes His power in philosophical terms as to omnipotence

We can lean tons of claims on God's power. He has the power to provide all that we need, and in the end His power will sweep away all evil.

But for "Why does evil persist now?" the answer is either "It just doesn't bother God" or "He can't beat it" or "He doesn't know about it" or "He is beating it and you didn't notice."

Not knowing about it is wrong. It not bothering God (the Calvinist answer) is wrong. So you're left with either a God who is less powerful than evil (that ain't gonna fly), or else a God whose action is ongoing, but forestalled in time.

That last one is I think the best solution! But it does require that we tread lightly around omnipotence per see. The claim is that God *would like to* end all evil now, but there is some compelling reason not to, which cannot be directly altered.

This is not to say that God *cannot* defeat evil, but that he *will* do so, and indeed *is doing so*, but that the full revelation of that power is delayed by some other force which is not merely God's unconcern about that evil.

What is that force?

Who can say! Not even the Son was told the day or the hour! But if God is taking His time there must be a reason. We can't reason about what that may be, as God has not revealed it.

But we can *at least* say that the reason there is evil in the world is *not* that the evil is the working out of God's intentions, desires, or wishes (even if in some higher philosophical sense it is within His will to allow it to continue).

All that to say....

.... love me all my Presby family and friends (literally both sides of the family and many of my best friends!)....

.... and your theology is interesting...

.... but very, very, very wrong.

And if you're one of those Presbies reading this being like "WE DON'T BELIEVE THESE THINGS!" well you might actually, like Tim Keller too, be in denial about the fact that you're actually a Lutheran.

return to mother church i.e. wittenberg

this thread courtesy of a) I'm reading "Theology of the Pain of God" by Kitamori and enjoying it so far, b) I'm aware my "interesting but wrong" comment about Presby catechetical materials got some circulation among the Calvin crowd so I'm elaborating for clarity