

God the Delegator

One of the challenges that God deniers sometimes present to those who are trying to witness to them runs something like this. 'You say that your God can do anything, right?' And many Christians would promptly and confidently answer Yes, and thus fall into the trap that has been prepared for them.

Would you have answered yes?

I would answer No. Remember the prayer of Jesus that if it be possible let this cup pass by? So some things are apparently not possible, even for God.

The challenger then proceeds with, 'I know something that your God cannot do. He cannot make something that is too big (massive?) for Himself to move.'

How would you answer that one?

It is not really very difficult. That person has just presented a logical impossibility. Like asking can your God make "Yes" the same as "No". Or light the same as darkness. (Night and darkness are both alike to You is not saying that light and no light are the same but that light or lack of light does not affect what God is able to perceive.) It is also a physical impossibility. The laws of physics simply rule out the possibility of the existence of a truly immovable object.

Apart from that, there is a logical answer that we can give. After pointing out that there are problems to the question itself we can follow up with; 'Let's take your question as you intended and we will see that there is still no problem. Assume that God has indeed just made some object (we shall call it "Fred") that is too massive for Him to move. Then later God decides that He wants "Fred" 50 light years over nearer some distant constellation. All he has to do is say to "Fred", I want you to move yourself over there, and "Fred" will obey and go over there. Only man has been given free will to make choices. All other created things obey His voice. He does not have to push and strain or heave to get "Fred" over there. Nor to stop "Fred" from going further.' The winds and the waves obeying Jesus is one of the signs of His divinity.

God is The Master Designer and He has designed things for specific purposes and they do those things very well. Even after the fall a lot of things continue on much as they have been designed to do. In Genesis 1 verses 11 and 12 God commanded the earth to bring

forth vegetation including fruit trees into existence with the command that they were to bear fruit according to their kinds and this continues to this day.

In verses 14 to 18 God commands the sun, moon and stars into existence to provide the light. In verse 3 He had commanded that there be light and there was light. Now He delegates the production of light to the lights that He created for this purpose in the heavens. They were also to separate the day from the night and to 'rule' the day and to 'rule' the night. Rule in this context is like a signpost, not as a causer like the astrologists would have us to believe.

In verses 20 to 22 God created the animal kinds into existence and gives the command that they are to reproduce after their kinds, to multiply. And they obey. God does not have to create more to replenish the stock. I noticed that the marine creatures were to fill the waters and the seas but there is no such command to the animals and the birds. I wonder why.

Then, verses 26 to 30, the three partners of the Godhead agree to make man, and to delegate to man "complete authority over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame beasts, over all the earth and over every thing that creeps upon the earth." At that time, this authority did not include eating flesh as verse 29 specifies a vegetarian diet. In the next verse we see that the land animals and the birds also were allotted vegetarian diets at that time, but nothing is mentioned for the fish.

So man is formed (Gen. 2:7, 21, 22) and is told (1:28) to multiply and to fill this beautiful earth and to rule over it and also over the creatures which He has just made. That delegation includes naming the creatures which have been made.

There appears to be a strong distinction between air breathing creatures and those which are not. Insects also appear to be on the fishy side of this divide. Man has tamed many different creatures and often taught them to do work for him or to do tricks for him. Some birds appear to take a mischievous delight in tricks. One man tells a story of hearing somebody calling his dog early in the morning and the dog going nuts. He went out to investigate who was calling his dog. Not seeing anybody he walked over to the kennel to calm his dog and this raven popped up from behind the kennel, saying distinctly, "Here boy!

Come on boy, let's go." Later, and for several weeks after this incident he found that the raven was rounding up the neighbourhood dogs, leading them to the local university campus and all the dogs were gathering around a tree wondering what to do next while this crow up the tree kept calling "Here boy, come on boy, Let's go." It kept them there until the students came out of class then it would fly off with the dogs in pursuit. It happened again and again for some weeks.

More usefully, in a reversal of what I have seen happen, God appointed ravens to feed Elijah when he went into hiding after telling Ahab that there will be no more rain. (1 Kings 17:4) Might not be as bad as it sounds to us as after a while with no rain only the rich would have much to eat. I wonder why God did not just provide manna again? Maybe relying on these birds for every meal helped to strengthen Elija's faith in God's ability to provide anything that was needed.

Some scientists have demonstrated that octopuses are very intelligent but again I know of none who have been able to get the creature to do anything for them apart from things like escaping a trap, negotiating a maze, or climbing out of one aquarium and into another to capture a fish to eat or to escape altogether. They did only things which were of some benefit for themselves.

People have also been able to have meaningful relationships with dolphins but dolphins are air breathers. Not fish! The breath of life is the distinction that the Bible uses. I do not know of any instance of anyone being able to train any fish to do anything. Nor any insect. Nor to make much use of either for anything much except for food.

But God used one of the least trainable creatures, a fish, to help Him to get one of His most intelligent creations, the man, Jonah, on the way to where he should have gone. (Jonah 2:10) It was risky for a fish to 'spit a man out upon dry land' but it obeyed.

God used another fish to pay the temple tax for Jesus and for Peter. (Matthew 17:27) God is certainly able to do things that man cannot do.

He used Locusts and other creatures during the plagues in Egypt.

John ate locusts and wild honey so two kinds of insects helped him.

These examples are not really delegation as the fish and insects are not, so far as we are aware, consciously following some instruction that has been given them.

In Genesis 6 verse 13 we read that God commanded Noah to build a ship. Why do the translations all read "make yourself" or some equivalent, when the ship is for the survival of much more than Noah and his family? This is God's plan for the survival of all of the air breathing creatures. Could not God have provided a fully equipped ship ready made for the purpose which He has planned? After all, God did prepare skins for the man and the woman when they were ashamed. (Gen. 3:21) He provided for them then, why not now?

I believe there are at least two reasons for this.

1) God has delegated the rule over these creatures to man. Taking essential care of them is part of that delegation. Building a ship to take care of the air breathing animals fits that delegation but killing some animal to provide the skin as a covering for himself is not.

There is a principle here. We have been given authority over the animals and are supposed to take care of them just as God has authority over us and He takes care of us. Jesus told us not to worry about tomorrow. Matthew 6:25-34 He cares! So what is the way of the world today? 'Look after yourself because nobody else will,' is a comment that I have heard several times. This attitude is eroding our society today. What a contrast to the Christian caring way. We are accused of turning the world upside down and I believe that is what it needs.

Unfortunately we could spend the rest of the day discussing how best to take care of our environment and still not reach agreement beyond the fact that we ought to. And there are many factors in this which are either unknown to us or outside our control anyway.

2) By doing it this way, the mercy of God is more evident. The rebellious people had an increasingly prominent warning sign for many years of the disaster which was to come before the end for them finally came. And after the construction of the ship, there was a further week while the animals were coming to Noah (7:7-9) and being loaded inside. That should have been a warning that something was imminent. But nobody outside of Noah's immediate family came.

3) Did it also strengthen the faith of the sons of Noah as they helped their father day after day (for 120? years) on this enormous project? They were preparing for something that had never been seen or heard of before? At that time, God had told Noah of what was to come (Gen. 6:13). Probably not the sons but we are not told so cannot know for sure. We are not even told if this ship is anywhere near any body of water which was or had ever been large enough to float it. Then they saw the fulfilment and had a further year on board the ship caring for the animals. That would be a very unforgettable experience, even if you wanted to forget it.

Gen. 9:1 After the flood, God renews His command to Noah and this time his sons were present. Multiply and fill the earth. Also, meat is now allowed as a food for them.

Gen. 9:19 From these three sons of Noah came the people who were to spread over the face of the earth. But, even then, the descendants did not obey very well and God has to intervene at Babel (Gen. 11:1_10) to make them scatter instead of gathering in cities.

There are many examples of God commanding somebody to do something and they obey. Abraham is one example. There are others where people do what they want to do (not always something good) and it brings about something which is good (Joseph being in Egypt at just the right time and place is one such example. Gen. 45:5) but that is hardly delegation. Or is it?

God delegated to Moses the task of confronting Pharaoh and to lead His people out of Egypt. Would it not have been accomplished far more quickly and efficiently if God had Himself appeared to Pharaoh and told him directly? But He chooses and directs one man. We can only guess at what might have happened, but the way it does happen gives the Israelites a legacy of traditions based on historical facts which help to keep them united, though often disobedient, for many years. It also helps them as they enter their land of promise because the reputation of their God has gone before them.

Moses also delegates after receiving good advice from his father-in-law, Jethro. It is worth taking a closer look at this one. Exodus 18:13_23. "The next day, Moses took his seat to serve as judge for the

people and they stood around him from morning until evening. When his father-in-law saw all that Moses was doing for the people he said.

'What is this that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge while all these people stand around you from morning until evening?'

Moses answered him,

'Because the people come to me to seek God's will. Whenever they have a dispute it is brought to me and I decide between the parties and inform them of God's decrees and laws.'

Moses father-in-law replied,

'What you are doing is not good. You and these people who come to you will only wear yourselves out. The work is too heavy for you. You cannot handle it alone. Listen now to me and I will give you some advice, and may God be with you. You must be the people's representative before God and bring their disputes to Him. Teach them the decrees and the laws and show them the way to live and the duties they are to perform. But select capable men from all the people, men who fear God, who are trustworthy, who hate dishonest gain. Appoint them as officials over thousands, hundreds, fifties, and over tens. Have them serve as judges for the people at all times, but have them bring every difficult case to you. The simple cases they can decide themselves. That will make your load lighter because they will share it with you. If you do this, and God so commands, you will be able to stand the strain and all these people will go home satisfied.'

Moses listened to his father-in-law and did everything he said."

That maybe gives us a strong hint as to why God delegates. Is this too, like the six days work and a rest day pattern, a further example that we are supposed to follow so that we are less likely to burn out under what we feel are our responsibilities?

No treatment of this topic would be complete without a mention of the delegating that Jesus does. There are several examples before the crucifixion as well as the one after He has appeared again to them in His resurrected form.

Matthew Chapter 10. The entire chapter deals with the authority given the disciples (including Judas, the betrayer) and the instructions and assurances which were given them. But Matthew does not record their

return and reporting back.

Mark 6:7-12 records the sending out and in verse 30 the reporting back commences. In verse 13 some results are listed.

Luke 9:1-5 records the sending out and verse 10 the reporting back. Luke also records in chapter 10 the sending out of another 70 to similar work but Luke is the only one who records this other sending out. In each case the men are sent out two by two and this practice continued in the early Church. It is a wise practice for many reasons not least of which is that it gives some protection against accusations of malpractice.

I remember being somewhat incredulous back in 1967 when I was very firmly instructed that if I ever found myself alone driving an ambulance I was never to take a solitary female patient anywhere. Even in an emergency! I would have to wait however long it took for another responsible person to be able to come also. Accusations, even false ones can be extremely damaging to the person involved and to the organisation as a whole. That is certainly still true today.

Matthew 28:18, often called the great commission, is another delegation which I believe still applies to us today. "All authority in Heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. Surely I am with you always, to the end of the age."

After His work as a man on earth was finished He delegated the completion of the task to us.