

God's Sovereignty Regarding Evil

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Biblical Parameters for Understanding God's Sovereignty Regarding Evil:

1. God is not evil, cannot sin, or be tempted to sin, nor does He tempt anyone to sin (Psalm 5:4; Luke 18:19; James 1:13).
2. Nothing, including sin and sinful deeds come to pass outside of God's sovereign decree (Ephesians 1:11; Romans 8:28).

Therefore God's sovereign rule is one of righteousness (Psalm 145:17; Daniel 9:14; Ps. 51:4; James 1:13-17).

While these truths form the boundaries within which we must structure our thinking regarding God's use of sin as He accomplishes His will, they do not answer the obvious question, "How does God work all things including sin after the counsel of His will?" And "How does He work all things including sin after the counsel of His will without sinning or tempting others to sin?"

When considering answers to these questions it is necessary that we first undertake the destruction of the false impression that God has absolutely nothing to do with evil. Such an incorrect impression often keeps many from comprehending the fact that God does indeed work even sin after the counsel of His will. Before we undertake the destruction of this first false impression, let's briefly examine another false impression that has become prevalent in recent years. Today, there are many who, after considering the biblical fact that God is love have tossed out the fact that God is just in all His ways. In doing so these have wrongly concluded that God does not and will not pour out His wrath on sinners. However, the fact that God does exercise His wrath on sinners is as biblical as the fact is that God is love and exercises mercy on sinners.

Now in the same manner there are those who, while considering God's holiness have wrongly concluded that God has

absolutely nothing to do with evil. Unfortunately such a conclusion prevents these from seeing the absolute sovereignty of God regarding evil. To destroy the false notion that God has absolutely nothing to do with evil we need look no further than Scripture.

Satan, the very archetype of evil and sin has immediate access to God and God speaks with him (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-6).

God uses Satan to accomplish His will:

- God used Satan to teach Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7; 42:1-6)
- God used Satan in the life of David (1 Chronicles 21:1; 1 Samuel 24:1)
- God used Satan with regard to the betrayal of Christ (John 13:2, 27; Acts 2:23)
- God uses Satan to discipline Christians (1 Corinthians 5:5)

God uses evil spirits to accomplish His will:

- God used an evil (deceiving) spirit to fulfill His decree of disaster for Ahab (1 Kings 21:19; 22:19-2, 38).
- Judges 9:23 and 1 Samuel 16:14 record God as having sent an evil spirit.
- In the last days God will send a deluding influence so that those who do not believe the truth, but take pleasure in wickedness might believe what is false, in order that they all may be judged (2 Thess. 2:11-12). The practical implementation of this is accomplished by the devil working through the antichrist as described in the previous verses (2 Thess. 2:9-10).

God uses evil men to accomplish His will:

- God used Joseph's evil brothers to bring Joseph to Egypt (Genesis 50:18-20) in order to save many people from a famine which God brought on the land (Genesis 41:1-37. See in particular verses 25, 28, and 32).
- God raised up Pharaoh (Romans 9:17).
- The evil King of Assyria is referred to as God's servant of destruction on Israel (Isaiah 10:5-19; 21-7).

- Nebuchadnezzar, Scripture refers to this evil king of Babylon as God's servant (Jeremiah 25:9; 27:6-7; 43:10). God used him to bring judgment on Judah.

God used these evil men and evil nations (Egypt, Assyria and Babylon) as His servants in the execution of His good will.

Scripture also refers to others as God's servants in the execution of His good will. Obviously God used the following as good servants. Nevertheless, Scripture refers to those in each category as God's servants. As communicated in Psalm 119:91, all things are God's servants.

- Abraham- Genesis 26:4
- Moses- Numbers 12:7, 8; Joshua 1:2, 7; 2 Kings 21:8...
- Caleb- Numbers 14:24
- David- 2 Samuel 3:18; 7:5, 8; 1 Kings 11:13, 32, 34, 38; 14:8...
- Job- Job 1:8; 2:3; 42:7, 8 (3 times)
- Isaiah- Isaiah 20:3
- Eliakim- Isaiah 22:20
- Isarel (Nation)- Isaiah 41:8
- Jesus- Isaiah 42:1; 53:11

Jesus spoke with Satan and demons, He even ate with sinful people (Matthew 4:1-11; 16:23; Luke 8:26-33; Matthew 9:10).

God has had all of these dealings with evil and has not once committed any evil or sin. Neither has He in using evil compromised His absolute holiness or goodness (Deut. 32:4; Psalm 94:20; Isaiah 6:3; Luke 18:19).

These examples accomplish at least two things for us. **First**, they destroy the notion that God has nothing to do with evil. **Secondly**, they provide us with biblical information as to determining how God works even sin after the counsel of His will

without sinning or tempting others to sin. Regarding the latter it is obvious that God, as the blessed and only Sovereign (1 Timothy 6:15) raises up individuals and uses their evil desires to accomplish His sovereign and perfect will (Proverbs 16:4). Whether or not Satan or demons are always involved we do not always know. What we do know is that the nature of the flesh in each person is equally as evil as the devil and needs little or no assistance in expressing itself. It is therefore people that sin as opposed to God. They act in full accord with the lusts of their flesh (Proverbs 16:9). At God's discretion He may use the devil and or demons to accomplish His purpose as in the case of Job (Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7)¹ and that of Judas in the betrayal of Jesus (Jn. 13:2, 27).²

Additional Biblical Parameters for understanding God's Sovereignty Regarding Evil

God's sovereign rule over good and evil neither preempts our obedience nor licenses our disobedience. This is another parameter within which we must limit our thinking regarding the fact that God decrees all things that come to pass including sin and therefore uses sin to accomplish His will. Such action on God's part is no excuse to sin. Christians are not to wonder why we should obey nor should we wonder why we shouldn't disobey, seeing that God is going to work all things after His will anyway. Rather, we should always act in accord with biblical revelation (Deuteronomy 29:29). Simply put- we are to obey the Word of God neither minimizing nor esteeming sin. The Bible says we are to; flee from evil desires (2 Tim. 2:22); put off the old self (Eph. 4:22); love neither the world nor the things in the world (1Jn.

¹ God used Satan to demonstrate the character of genuine worship as exhibited in Job. Job worshipped God for the sake of Who God is as opposed to the false worship of men who worship God for the sake of self. Compare Job 1:1 and Satan's accusation in 1:9-10 with Job's description of the false worship of the evil in 21:14-15. Furthermore, as noted in this article, God used Satan's activities to teach Job (Job 42:1-6).

² According to Acts 2:22-23 and 4:27-28 all that transpired in Jerusalem regarding the deliverance of Christ to be crucified was according to the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God. This certainly included Judas' betrayal of Jesus.

2:15); submit ourselves to God and resist the devil (James 4:7), as well as a multitude of other exhortations to live righteously. How shall we who are dead to sin live any longer therein? (Romans 6:1-2).

A Divine Purpose for a Holy People

The presence of evil constitutes a practical aspect of God's sovereign work of conforming all of the saved to the image of Jesus. It is a biblical truth that God raises up sinners and sinful circumstances to test His children as well as demonstrate His glory to them (Deuteronomy 8:2, 16; 13:1-4; 1 Corinthians 11:19; Romans 9:22-24). Such tests enlighten Believers to the presence of sin in their own lives. Thus, revealing to them³ their need for further growth and continued reliance on His grace (Also see Job's response in Job 42:1-6).

That all the trials a Believer experiences come to him or her by the sovereign direction of God is no basis for passive behavior when confronted by evil. Although Christians know that all the trials they encounter come to them by the sovereign will of God, they do not know the details of the secret objective that is behind the trial. Therefore they should always respond with prudence. At times this may involve resisting in a godly fashion, evil actions perpetrated against one's self and others.

³ Statements such as that in Deut. 8:2, "...testing you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commands or not" are not meant to convey that God does not know what is in man's heart. God does know without having to test in order to discover (Jer. 17:9-10). Neither are such statements meant to convey that God does not know whether or not man will obey His commands and must discover this by testing as Scripture exemplifies the fact that God does already know. Compare Deuteronomy 31:14-22). Rather the statements and the tests are for the benefit of men that they might learn.

A summary of Scriptural parameters for understanding God's sovereign use of evil:

- 1.** God is not evil, cannot sin, or be tempted to sin, nor does He tempt anyone to sin (Psalm 5:4; Luke 18:19; James 1:13).
- 2.** Nothing, including sin and sinful deeds come to pass outside of God's sovereign decree (Ephesians 1:11; Romans 8:28).
- 3.** God's sovereign rule over good and evil neither preempts our obedience nor licenses our disobedience (2 Tim. 2:22; Eph. 4:22; 1Jn. 2:15).
- 4.** That all the trials a Believer experiences come to him or her by the sovereign direction of God is no basis for passive behavior when confronted by evil (Proverbs 27:12).
- 5.** God uses evil in the world to the benefit of His people (Genesis 50:20; Deuteronomy 8:2, 16; 13:1-4; Romans 8:28; 1 Corinthians 11:19).