

It is unavoidable that a current trial in one's life will drive a Christian to seek solace in God via his (gracious) means of communication with us. We are driven to prayer, to the excellent Word, and to counsel and fellowship with trusted brothers and sisters. In recent discussions with our kids, Holly and I have been driven to better understand the relationship between (1) God's unequivocal and absolute sovereignty over all creation and (2) the existence of sin. It is one of the "big questions" in Christianity.

*Succinctly: How can a perfect, holy, loving God allow in the universe the existence of "evil," the very essence of which is in opposition to His holiness?*

In seeking some answers to this question, a terrific book was recommended to me by Pastor Emeritus George, "Chosen by God" by R. C. Sproul. Even after reading just a few chapters the eloquence and clarity of thought of Sproul have ministered to me.

So, instead of a unique message from me today, I share an excerpt from Chapter 2 of Sproul's book, as this big question is fresh on my mind, and on my tongue in prayer and praise. If this question grips you as well, I would sincerely love to engage with any of you in further discussion on this topic. And, whether Sproul's words immediately resonate with you or they bristle you, I pray they spur deeper thought and conversation with our Father and your fellow brother, and will result in glory and praise to Christ as we come to know His nature more fully, resulting in God's exaltation akin to Paul's exclamation in Romans 11:33-36:

Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! "For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?" "Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?" For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen!

Sincerely,

Pastor Aaron

## **God's Sovereignty and the Problem of Evil**

By R. C. Sproul, *excerpt of Chapter 2 of "Chosen by God"*

Surely the most difficult question of all is how evil can coexist with a God who is both altogether holy and altogether sovereign. I am afraid that most Christians do not realize the profound severity of this problem. Skeptics have called this issue the "Achilles' Heel of Christianity."

I vividly remember the first time I felt the pain of this thorny problem. I was a freshman in college and had been a Christian for only a few weeks. I was playing Ping-Pong in the lounge of the men's dormitory when, in the middle of a volley, the thought struck me: *If God is totally righteous, how could he have created a universe where evil is present? If all things come from God, doesn't evil come from him as well?*

Then, as now, I realized that evil was a problem for the sovereignty of God. Did evil come into the world against God's sovereign will? If so, then he is not absolutely sovereign. If not, then we must conclude that in some sense even evil is foreordained by God.

For years I sought the answer to this problem, scouring the works of theologians and philosophers. I found some clever attempts at resolving the problem but, as yet, have never found a deeply satisfying answer.

The most common solution we hear for this dilemma is a simple reference to man's free will. We hear such statements as, "Evil came into the world by man's free will. Man is the author of sin, not God."

Surely that statement squares with the biblical account of the origin of sin. We know that man was created with a free will and that man freely chose to sin. It was not God who committed sin; it was man. The problem still persists, however. From where did man ever gain the slightest inclination to sin? If he was created with a desire for sin, then a shadow is cast on the integrity of the Creator. If he was created with no desire for sin, then we must ask where that desire came from.

The mystery of sin is tied to our understanding of free will, man's state in creation, and God's sovereignty. The question of free will is so vital to our understanding of predestination that we will devote an entire chapter to the subject. Until then we will restrict our study to the question of man's first sin.

How could Adam and Eve fall? They were created good. We might suggest that their problem was the craftiness of Satan. Satan beguiled them. He tricked them into eating the forbidden fruit. We might suppose that the serpent was so slick that it utterly and completely fooled our original parents.

Such an explanation suffers from several problems. If Adam and Eve did not realize what they were doing, if they were utterly fooled, then the sin would have been all Satan's. But the Bible makes it clear that in spite of his craftiness the serpent spoke directly in challenge to the commandment of God. Adam and Eve had heard God issue his prohibition and warning. They heard Satan contradict God. The decision was squarely before them. They could not appeal to Satan's trickery to excuse them.

Even if Satan not only fooled but forced Adam and Eve to sin, we are still not free of our dilemma. If they could have rightfully said, "The devil made us do it," we would still face the problem of the devil's sin. Where did the devil come from? How did he manage to fall from goodness? Whether we are speaking of the fall of man or the fall of Satan we still are dealing with the problem of good creatures becoming evil.

Again we hear the "easy" explanation that evil came through the creature's free will. Free will is a good thing. That God gave us free will does not cast blame on him. In creation man was given an ability to sin and an ability not to sin. He chose to sin. The question is, "Why?"

Herein lies the problem. Before a person can commit an act of sin he must first have a desire to perform that act. The Bible tells us that evil actions flow from evil desires. But the presence of an evil desire is already sin. We sin because we are sinners. We were born with a sin nature. We are fallen creatures. But Adam and Eve were not created fallen. They had no sin nature. They were good creatures with a free will. Yet they chose to sin. Why? I don't know. Nor have I found anyone yet who does know.

In spite of this excruciating problem we still must affirm that God is not the author of sin. The Bible does not reveal the answers to all our questions. It does reveal the nature and character of God. One thing is absolutely unthinkable, that God could be the author or doer of sin.

But this chapter is about God's sovereignty. We are still left with the question that, given the fact of human sin, how does it relate to God's sovereignty? If it is true that in some sense God foreordains everything that comes to pass, then it follows with no doubt that God must have

foreordained the entrance of sin into the world. That is not to say that God forced it to happen or that he imposed evil upon his creation. All that means is that God in his wisdom must have decided to allow it to happen. If he did not allow it to happen, then it could not have happened, or else he is not sovereign.

We know that God is sovereign because we know that God is God. Therefore we must conclude that God foreordained sin. What else can we conclude? We must conclude that God's decision to allow sin to enter the world was a good decision. This is not to say that our sin is really a good thing, but merely that God's allowing us to do sin, which is evil, is a good thing. God's allowing evil is good, but the evil he allows is still evil. God's involvement in all this is perfectly righteous. Our involvement in it is wicked. The fact that God decided to allow us to sin does not absolve us from our responsibility for sin.