

Seeing Good in Evil

By Ward Fenley

Revelation 4:11 O Lord, You are worthy to receive glory and honor and power, because You created all things, and for Your will they are and were created.

It's amazing how human nature wants to qualify this verse to only mean nice things, beautiful things, good things, and basically try and remove God from His rightful place as Creator of **all** things.

Proverbs 16:4 The LORD hath made all things for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil.

We tend to act like the wicked were not part of God's plan. Where is the comfort in random wickedness? Where is the consolation in bad luck, chance, and evil on the loose? I'd rather believe in a God who controls evil completely than a god who simply watches random evil have it's way with His children. The perfect example is the crucifixion of Christ. As far as biblical examples of evil, there is no greater atrocity in the history of Israel, let alone human history. Was it a sin to crucify Christ?

Exodus 23:7 Keep thee far from a false matter; and the innocent and righteous slay thou not: for I will not justify the wicked.

Christ was supremely innocent--inherently, spiritually, and practically. They slew Him. They sinned. Was it sin to slay Christ? Absolutely. Did God cause them to commit this sin? Absolutely:

Acts 4:26-28 The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ. (27) For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, (28) For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

To try and twist this, stretch it, augment, diminish the content of this verse is simply an attempt at removing God from His absolute control over this monstrous act of evil.

But if we were to stop there and not ask **why**, fatalism would be our only conclusion. Why did God cause these men to sin? And there we find the greatest comfort in why God caused such sin and evil:

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

God's goal through this sin was to save us and bring us to Himself. There was no failure. There was no mere "attempt." God effectively caused these men to crush Christ on our behalf that we would be brought to Him. For God, the end justified the means. And this is always the case with the hand of the almighty. Whatever evil seems to befall you, it is all being worked for good.

Now, at this juncture the opposition fails miserably while trying to escape this glaring theological truth. They moan, groan, contradict, and attack, but are never able to refute Acts. They will never simply read those three verses and receive them and glory in the sovereign hand of God over evil. Instead, they will make all sorts of accusations, writhing in their own self-sufficiency.

However....

It is equally miserable for us to pretend to know the future and make our decisions based upon what we think God's sovereign will for our life will be rather than on what God has simply revealed. God told Moses to tell Pharaoh to "let My people go." But yet God said, "I will harden his heart so that he will not." Why would God command something where His sovereign hand would bring a contradiction to that command? "Who art thou, O man, to reply against God?" is all God will answer us. We don't have the right. Yet the gainsayer will shake her angry fist in the face of God at such a truth. The objector will then reply, "But didn't God even ordain and cause such a rising up against the almighty?" I answer with a resounding yes. And therein I can rest, that even as the mind of her pride thinks and exalts herself against God, this too is by His mysterious planning. She is a villain and robber, into whose hand God brings her vain wealth:

Job 12:6 The tents of robbers prosper, And those who provoke God are secure; In what God provides by His hand.

She securely rests in her pride and vanity, never knowing it is God who hardens her in her "security." But could she do anything without God's power and sovereign command?

Lamentations 3:37-38 Who is this who speaks, and it occurs, when the Lord does not command it? (38) From the mouth of the Most High does not go out the evil and the good?

Vain humanity imagines it speaking its actions into existence. But nothing can occur, good or evil, unless the Lord has ordained it. "...who works all things according to the counsel of His will," writes the Apostle:

Ephesians 1:11 in whom also we have been chosen to an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His own will,

Some imagine that evil spirits come from the free wills of humanity. But God answers differently:

Psalms 78:49 He sent on them the heat of His anger, wrath and fury and trouble, by sending evil angels.

1 Samuel 16:14 But the spirit of Jehovah departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Jehovah terrified him.

Again, for God, the end justified the means, and it always does. God uses evil for His own end, even when the means involves setting it up for the purpose of making His name great. The hardening of Pharaoh's heart brought about God's promise, "that He might make known His power and wrath." If God chooses to make known His power through bringing evil and hardening hearts, who are we to say to Him who framed us, "Why hast thou made me thus?" "Hath not the Potter power over the clay, of the same lump [of humanity] to make one vessel unto honor and another unto destruction?" It just doesn't seem fair. But our ways are not fair, and we are mere humans attempting to usurp intellectual authority over the omniscient God. David recognized that God invited Shimei to curse. "Let him curse, for the Lord hath invited Him," the Psalmist commanded. Yet, the Bible is clear: "Touch not the Lord's anointed." Why does God do these things? "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good, to them that love God and who are called according to His purpose." This is about the purpose of God. And if we are His children, and we demonstrate that we are His children by our love for Him (submitting to His righteousness) and our love for others (seeing them as righteous in His sight), then we can know that all things, evil and good are working together for our good.

And to fatalistically assess our personal failures and struggles and pursue debauchery is unbecoming. Though "out of the mouth of the most high proceed not evil and good?" the prophet Jeremiah gives us the proper response to God's mysterious sovereignty:

Lamentations 3:32-41 for though He causes grief, yet He will have pity according to the multitude of His kindnesses. (33) For He does not afflict from His heart, nor does He grieve the sons of men; (34) to crush all the prisoners of the earth under His feet; (35) to turn aside the right of a man before the face of the Most High; (36) to pervert a man in his cause. This, Jehovah does not see. (37) Who is this who speaks, and it occurs, when the Lord does not command it? (38) From the mouth of the Most High does not go out the evil and the good. (39) What? Should mankind complain, a living man, because of his sins? (40) Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to Jehovah. (41) Let us lift up our heart and hands to God in Heaven.

God does crush, even His Son:

Isaiah 53:10-11 Yet it pleased Jehovah to crush Him; to grieve Him; that He should put forth His soul as a guilt-offering. He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the will of Jehovah shall prosper in His hand. (11) He shall see the fruit of the travail of His soul. He shall be fully satisfied. By His knowledge shall My righteous Servant justify for many; and He shall bear their iniquities.

We see the sovereign hand of God in crushing, and we then "lift up our heart and hands to God in heaven." But hasn't He hardened?

"Why, O Lord, do you make us stray from your ways and harden our heart, so that we do not fear you?"

Turn back for the sake of your servants,
for the sake of the tribes that are your heritage.”

Do we stray? Do we feel hardened? The prophet knew this too comes from the hand of the Lord. But the prophet is no fatalist. The prophet asks for restoration. Historically, God hardened Israel of old and caused her to stray, but His people would pray for restoration and God would fulfill that restoration through the work of Christ. But even today, though restored, it sometimes doesn't feel like restoration. But we can be sure that any temporal hardening or God causing us to stray is only for God to show us good. But we are not to prognosticate or pretend that we know God's sovereign plan. We simply follow His commands to love one another and love Him. In so doing, we will find much greater delight. But the opponent will foolishly question, "But what if God hardens me from loving Him?" This is merely proof that He is hardening you. I would ask according to our knowledge of what we have before us, "What has God asked of you?"

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good;
and what does the Lord require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?”

Despair and grief surrounds the thoughts of those who insist on attempting to intrude into the ominous depths of the divine Mind. God will only reply, "Who art thou, o man, to reply against God?" Who art thou? Who art thou? That will always be God's response to our questioning of His sovereign hand. But to jettison ourselves to the opposite extreme of denying God's absolute sovereignty is to make an attempt at ripping out this immutable aspect of His character.

Lest we feel God's distance from us, we must rest assured that He is still Abba. As children we do not understand Daddy's ways or decisions. But we can be certain that His ways are perfect and pure and based solely out of His love and His holiness. And what greater testimony of God's power and love than to understand that in such power and love He is able to take evil and make it good and work it out for our benefit and His glory. That is the sovereignty of God in all things. That is how we see whatever befalls us as God's hand lovingly directs us.

Genesis 50:20 But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

“God meant it.” Simply put, God used evil as the *means* (“meant”) to save. “Meant” is the word. If I intentionally burn up a letter from an old girlfriend, and someone asks, “Did you do that on purpose?” I can assuredly respond, “Yes, I meant to do that.” God meant for Joseph's brothers to do their evil in order to save them later. And isn't this the answer to Adam's sin? God meant for that to take place in order to bring the second Adam to restore and “save much people alive.” And to that we must submit with the words of the Apostle to such awesome truth and grace:

O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgements and how inscrutable his ways!

'For who has known the mind of the Lord?

Or who has been his counsellor?'

'Or who has given a gift to him,
to receive a gift in return?'

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory for ever. Amen.

Note: many liberals want to change God's masculine pronouns of He into She. So, when I use "she" instead "he" to refer to the one who venomously attacks God's sovereignty, those liberals should find this comforting.