

GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY – PART 4: IS GOD IN CONTROL OF EVIL?

Do some thinking while we wait to begin...

Discuss: Who killed Jesus?

- See Acts 4:27-28, 2:23, Luke 22:22.

Discuss: Why did Pharaoh reject the word of the Lord?

- See Exodus 4:21, 8:15, 9:16, 10:27

1. INTRODUCTION

- (a) Clarifying the question: Moral evil vs Natural evil.**
- (b) Questions and responses (see Deuteronomy 29:29)**
- (c) Book recommendations:**
Carson, How Long O Lord: Christian reflections on suffering and evil
Jerry Bridges, Trusting God, even when life hurts
- (d) The challenge: "If God is good and God is powerful, then why evil in the world?"**

1. GOD IS IN CONTROL OF ALL EVIL: A PERSISTENT BIBLE THEME

- (a) In the life of Joseph**

Genesis 50:20, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

(b) At the Cross of Christ

Acts 4:27-28, "for truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, ²⁸ to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place."

Acts 2:23, "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men."

Luke 22:22, "For the Son of Man goes as it has been determined, but woe to that man by whom he is betrayed!"

(c) In non-believers who reject the Gospel ("reprobation")

Romans 9:22, "speaks of those whom God has "prepared for destruction.""

1 Peter 2:8, "... They stumble because they disobey the message-- which is also what they were destined for.""

Proverbs 16:4, "The LORD works out everything for his own ends-- even the wicked for a day of disaster."

(d) Many Bible texts

Genesis 50:20, Exodus 10:27, Job 1:6-12, Job 1:21, Psalm 105:24, Proverbs 16:4, Isaiah 45:7, Isaiah 63:17, Lamentations 3:38, John 13:18, Acts 4:27-28, Romans 1:24-28,

2. GOD IS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR EVIL

(a) God is good – and there is no evil in him.

Deuteronomy 32:4 "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he."

Psalm 5:4, "For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you."

1 John 1:5, "This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all."

(b) Holding it together: Compatibilism

1. God is absolutely sovereign, but his sovereignty never functions in Scripture to reduce human responsibility.

2. Human beings are responsible creatures – that is, they choose, they believe, they disobey, they respond, and there is moral significance in their choices; but human responsibility never functions in Scripture to diminish God’s sovereignty or to make God absolutely contingent.

(D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation*, p148.)

(c) Holding it together: Secondary causes (a.k.a. proximate causation)

Explanation:

In matters of moral evil – where the Law of God is transgressed – there is ALWAYS a secondary cause:

Scripture example:

Job believed in secondary causes & God’s sovereignty! See Job 1:12 & 1:21-22.

Further explanation:

“God stands behind good and evil asymmetrically. To put it bluntly, God stands behind evil in such a way that not even evil takes place outside the bounds of his sovereignty, yet the evil is not morally chargeable to him: it is always chargeable to secondary agents... On the other hand, God stands behind good in such a way that it not only takes place within the bounds of his sovereignty but it is always chargeable to him, and only derivatively to secondary agents. In other words, if I sin, I cannot possibly do so outside the bounds of God’s sovereignty... but I alone am responsible for that sin... But if I do good, it is God working in me both to will and to act according to his good pleasure... If this sounds just a bit too convenient for God my initial response (though there is more to be said) is that according to the Bible this is the only God there is. There is no other.” (D.A. Carson, *How Long O Lord*, p213)

“The almighty power, unsearchable wisdom, and infinite goodness of God so far manifest themselves in His providence, that it extendeth itself even to the first fall, and all other sins of angels and men; and that not by a bare permission, but such as hath joined with it a most wise and powerful bounding, and otherwise ordering and governing of them, in a manifold dispensation, to His own holy ends; yet so, as the sinfulness thereof proceedeth only from the creature, and not from God, who, being most holy and righteous, neither is, nor can be, the author or approver of sin.” (*Westminster Confession of Faith* 5.4)

NEXT SESSION

“BUT, LORD, WHY DO YOU ALLOW EVIL?”

WE’RE GOING TO CONSIDER HOW...

- God has TWO ways of willing...
- He wants to bring Himself glory... and do us good
- Now, how do we trust Him?