

# The Goodness of God and the Sovereignty of God

Galatians 5:22; Acts 4:27-28

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If God is good, why is there so much evil in the world? Clearly, Scripture affirms the goodness of God as to His very nature and as to all that He does: “Thou art good, and doest good” Psalm 119:68. And yet if God is good, why is there mass murder, abortion, the beheading of children, rape, the molestation of children, Ebola, cancer, disasters (hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, etc.), devastating wars, hunger, poverty and so many other miseries in this life? How could God be good and yet such evil and such misery exist in the world?

Such questions unavoidably will be raised when the subject of God’s goodness is discussed. And we need not fear addressing such questions as Bible-believing Christians. In fact, much comfort and encouragement to our faith in the goodness of God will come from seeking biblical answers to such questions. Thus, we seek not answers to such questions from a mere curiosity of mind, but from a godly desire to better know, love, reverence, appreciate, rejoice in, hope in, and trust in our one true living God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).

But let me state at the outset that I am not interested in justifying God before the judgment seat of finite, sinful worldlings, or in making God more acceptable in the eyes of man or more palatable to the tastes and sensitivities of those who define good as being “that which pleases me” (rather than that which pleases God). The sovereign and good God needs not the justification of any puny, impotent, sinner. As a minister of this sovereign and good God, I must let God speak for Himself through His own revelation, the Holy Scripture (“Let God be true, but every man a liar” Romans 3:4).

Thus, God is not impressed by the efforts of professing Christians to tone down His sovereign control over all of His creation (including man) and to make Him less than who He is, in order to allegedly preserve His goodness in the eyes of a world that hates Him. Professing Christians continually appear to be attempting to “rescue” God from the attacks of the world, when what we as Christians ought to be concerned with is making God into a false image that pleases man. We ought to be more concerned with what God thinks than we are with what man thinks. We ought to be more concerned about the approval of God than we are about the approval of man.

God makes no apology for Himself (His absolute sovereignty and His absolute goodness), and neither should we—especially when Scripture reveals that none of mankind in his/her fallen nature is good or does good (Romans 3:12). What wicked presumption for those who are not good by nature to think they can rightly judge the God who is absolutely, eternally, and infinitely good (“O man, who art thou that replest against God?” Romans 9:20).

Thus, let us not form a God of our own imagination (idolatry), but let us bow with faith, love, and reverence before the almighty, sovereign, and good God as He has revealed Himself to us.

Dear ones, we cannot truly understand the goodness that God imparts as a fruit of the Spirit to those He saves by His grace and grows in the lives of all who are justified by faith alone in Christ alone unless we understand the infinite fount of that goodness as it is found in the Lord God (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit). For if we define good to mean “nice” (a good God is a nice God, which is a worldly definition but not a biblical definition), we will be twisting Scripture to make God nice (in a worldly sense) rather than good (in a biblical sense).

The main points for the sermon this Lord's Day are: (1) A Brief Review of Events Leading Up To Our Text; (2) The Evil Intentions and Acts of Men Were Ordained by God for a Good Purpose in the Death of Christ (Acts 4:27-28);

## **I. A Brief Review of Events Leading Up To Our Text.**

A. Let us briefly review the events leading up to the words that we find in Acts 4:27-28.

1. In Acts 3, Peter and John are used by the Spirit of God to heal in the name and authority of Christ a poor, afflicted man, who had been born lame and never had walked. The multitudes in and around the temple gathered to hear Peter proclaim that it was not by the power or holiness of Peter and John that this lame man (who was a permanent fixture at the gate of the temple) was healed, but was rather due to the power and holiness of the resurrected Christ.

2. Then in Acts 4, members of the Jewish Sanhedrin (the Jewish Supreme Court) had Peter and John arrested for preaching in the name and authority of Jesus, who was raised from the dead. They were brought before the Sanhedrin and interrogated, but knowing that the multitudes were fully aware of what God had done through Peter and John, the Sanhedrin dared not take any further steps against them at that time (by way of beating or imprisonment), so the Sanhedrin commanded them with threats not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus (Acts 4:18)—to which the apostles responded boldly: Read Acts 4:19-20.

3. Upon being released (Acts 4:23), they joined their brothers and sisters in Christ and reported to them all that had happened and the threats uttered against them. And then they united their hearts in prayer to the Lord (probably through one of the apostles who prayed on behalf of them all) in what is recorded in Acts 4:24-30. Notice the emphasis of this prayer upon the absolute sovereignty of God and His control over all

these circumstances and events.

## **II. The Evil Intentions and Acts of Men Were Ordained by God for a Good Purpose in the Death of Christ (Acts 4:27-28).**

A. Without a doubt, there was not a more sinful, wicked, and perverse intention and act on the part of men in all of history than the judgment, mockery, torture, and crucifixion of the sinless and blameless Son of God. For since the greatest commandment is to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (**Matthew 22:37-38**), then to despise and hate Jesus Christ by judging, mocking, torturing, and crucifying Him is the greatest sin—for Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity. This was a sin greater in aggravation than any sin ever committed against one's fellow man, and yet this heinous sin was pre-ordained by God from eternity and was under the sovereign hand of God for the good and for the salvation of all His people who trust alone in Christ alone. Skeptics argue that God cannot be both sovereign and good. For if He is sovereign, He cannot be good and allow the evil in the world, or if He is good, He cannot be sovereign—He may want to end the evil in the world, but He simply does not have the power to do so. This text of Scripture clearly demonstrates that God is both sovereign and good—He ordains and controls the voluntary wicked intentions and acts of sinners for His infinitely wise and good purposes.

1. First, God sovereignly has created all things (Acts 4:24). Having created all things by the word of His power, certainly the Lord upholds, sustains, and provides for all His creation by the word of His power moment by moment (Hebrews 1:3). If God were to withdraw His almighty power in upholding, sustaining, and providing for what He has created, it would all immediately be destroyed.

2. Second, God sovereignly governs not only all the plants and animals that are not rational and all the rocks and minerals that

move not nor breathe not, but He also governs all human beings and all nations as well (Acts 4:25-26).

a. For here, dear brothers and sisters, we hear how God spoke through the Prophet David (in Psalm 2) concerning the very events that were carried out by the Jews and the Gentiles against the Lord Jesus. How could David prophesy by the Spirit of God concerning individuals, peoples, and nations as to what they would do in uniting themselves against Christ, if God did not sovereignly foreordain these events and the very actions of all these people, and if God were not sovereignly in control of all these events and of all the actions of these people and nations (through their leaders)?

b. Furthermore, the absolute sovereignty of God is revealed not only in the prophecy of David concerning individuals and nations that would rise up against Christ, but also in the process of a sinful, fallible man recording the inerrant, infallible Scripture (Psalm 2). Here we see the absolute sovereignty of God and the free agency of man perfectly preserved. God did not strip the prophets and apostles of their will so that they were mere machines or robots in recording Scripture, but sovereignly worked within them to write precisely what He wanted them to write and without a single error or mistake (2 Peter 1:21; 2 Timothy 3:16-17).

3. Third, God sovereignly ordains and governs even the most wicked intentions and actions of sinful men for His most wise and good purposes (Acts 4:27-28).

a. This becomes an argument from the greater to the lesser. If God ordains and governs the most wicked intentions and actions of sinful men, then He surely ordains and governs all less aggravated wicked intentions and actions of sinful men (**Genesis 50:20**).

b. In fact, God sovereignly restrains sinful men from sin when He chooses to do so (Genesis 20:6) and prevents Satan full exercise of his wicked designs (Job 1:12; 2:6; Mark 1:27), and yet on other

occasions the Lord turns sinful men over to their wicked designs by not restraining them (Romans 1:24,26,28) and does not prevent Satan from exercising his wicked designs, but always under God's express control (Luke 22:31-32; 2 Corinthians 11:13-15).

c. The fact that God restrains sin and prevents sin and Satan makes it clear that sin is ordained of God and controlled by God; for the Lord, who ordained and had foreknowledge of the sin of Adam and of the misery that Adam's sin would bring upon Adam's posterity (by ordinary generation), might have prevented the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden with all the subsequent misery to follow had He chosen to do so. Thus, the Scripture teaches that the sin and the misery of this life are ordained by God from all eternity (**Revelation 13:8**). For none of God's purposes can be thwarted by angels or mankind (Psalm 115:3; Psalm 135:5-6; Daniel 4:34-35; Ephesians 1:11).

d. But always, always, always, God is good and upright in His nature and in what He does (Psalm 25:8; Psalm 119:68; Psalm 145:17).

e. He is not the author of sin and forces no man against His will to sin, for God is not tempted with sin and tempts no man to sin (James 1:13-14). People choose to sin because they want to sin, and yet God uses that sin for His own holy purposes (Isaiah 10:5-7,12-13). God cannot be the judge of sin and yet force men to sin—that would indeed be a contradiction within the very nature of God (but God cannot deny Himself or contradict His own nature, **2 Timothy 2:13**). Men freely sin because they desire to do so, but God sovereignly ordains and sovereignly controls the sinful acts of mankind in order to manifest the glory of His holiness in judging sin (Revelation 15:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9) and the glory of His grace in pardoning sin (Micah 7:18-19; Luke 23:43).

f. Thus, God reveals that the wicked intentions and actions of these individuals and nations (through their leaders) were their

own sin for which they were responsible, and yet their own voluntary heinous intentions and actions were sovereignly “determined before to be done” by God from all eternity, and were sovereignly controlled and governed by His “hand” in bringing it to pass for His most wise and good purposes—namely, our salvation.

4. Fourth, carefully note (in Acts 4:29-30) the boldness and courage in the life of these early Christians because they trusted in God’s sovereign and good purposes in ordaining, controlling, and using the sin of man to bring about that which is for our good (our salvation). These past brethren of ours in the Church of Jerusalem were not making excuses for God’s sovereign ordination of sin and God’s sovereign control over sin to His good purpose, but were exalting God’s sovereignty before the Lord in prayer and resting in it as their great comfort in the persecution that they were suffering.

B. Dear ones, the goodness of God is not inconsistent with or contradictory to the sovereignty of God. It is not either—or, but rather both—and. This is the foundation of our hope, dear child of God. God is absolutely good and yet sovereignly in control of the sin and evil in this world (whether in your life or mine, or whether in the lives of our enemies). Christ is victorious. We are victorious in Him. Because God is both sovereign and good, nothing can halt or prevent God’s goodness in being abundantly supplied to His dear children, whom He has loved with an everlasting love. Therefore, whatever God takes from you, He takes because He is good and knows what is best for you. And whatever He gives to you (by way of prosperity, affliction, trial, or heartache), He gives to you because He is good and knows what is best for you (**Genesis 50:20**).

Dear one, you may be able to see in retrospect how God worked out the His good plan through the evil of Joseph’s brothers and through the evil

of the those who put Christ to death, but you yet struggle to see His goodness displayed in your own life. How are your painful afflictions, heartaches, financial burdens, marital problems, wayward children, and your own sins demonstrating the goodness of God? As a most good and infinitely good Father, He is giving you only what is good for you (Matthew 7:11; **Hebrews 12:5-11**). The Lord is humbling you, chiseling away the stony parts of your life that you might be conformed to His image. Even the sinless Lord Jesus learned obedience through the things that He suffered (Hebrews 5:8—He experientially learned the cost of obedience: the suffering of the cross). The goodness of God is alone our hope, and God is working out His goodness in all the events of your life and in all the events of this world (Romans 8:28).

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