

Dear friend,

We have noted in several of these articles considering the doctrine of God's Providence that this doctrine does raise a most important question. If God directs the weather and a hurricane kills hundreds of people and destroys billions of dollars in property, is God doing evil? If God raises nations up and puts nations down and this often by war which kills and maims hundreds or thousands of people, is God the author of evil? If God determines the time and manner of every person's death and millions of babies die in abortion mills and tens of thousands of people die by murder, then does God do evil? Closely related to this question is the question of human freedom. If God has determined everything that comes to pass, then how can humans be free? If God sovereignly ordains all actions of all human beings, then are my choices real?

In this article I simply want to give a brief overview of the kind of answer that has been given over the years by Christians who take the Bible serious. It is simply not possible to consider every way that humans have sought to deal with the "problem of evil" in this brief article so I will limit my overview to the main one proposed by Bible believing Christians. I will also limit my discussion to God's relationship to human evil and not to the "evil" caused by weather and accidents, etc.

The most common way of dealing with the existence of powerful and loving God and the presence of evil in the world is to say that God made human beings and demons with a free will and so he cannot control what humans choose to do. All the evil that is in the world is the result of either human or demonic free will. God in no sense ever wills or ordains evil but evil is always the result of the free choice of free moral agents. The argument that is put forth is fairly straightforward. First, the Bible regularly describes human beings as choosing to do evil, beginning with Adam and Eve's choice to eat from the tree. Cain chose to murder Able. Noah chose to get drunk. Abraham chose to lie about Sarai to Pharaoh. The sons of Jacob chose to sell Joseph to the Ishmaelite traders, Judas chose to betray Jesus and on it goes. All the evil done in the Bible is done by either humans or demons.

Second, God holds humans responsible for the choices we make. He punishes people for doing evil. Again, there are countless examples of this fact in the Bible beginning with Adam and Eve whom God cast out of the garden in judgment of their eating. He sent Cain to wander in the land of Nod for murdering Able. He burned up Nadab and Abihu for offering the wrong incense in direct violation of his word to them. He rejected Saul as king for not obeying his order to kill all the Amorites as he commanded and the list goes on. The argument is that the only way that God can justly condemn a person for doing evil is if that person freely chose to do evil. Just like it would be wrong for a judge to punish a man who robbed a bank because criminals were holding his family hostage and said they would kill his family if he didn't do what they said so God could not punish someone for doing what he ordained that he or she do.

Third, God commands people to do things and if whether or not people obey God is determined by God, then how are the commands to believe and obey real commands? The point usually made here is in relation to the command to trust in Christ to be saved. If God is the one who determines whether or not a particular person will respond positively to an invitation to repent

and believe then how is it a real invitation to believe? How can God command that the gospel be preached to every person when only the elect can believe?

So the most common biblical answer to the question as to how is it that there is an all powerful and loving God and yet there is so much evil in the world is this: God made demons and humans with free will and so he cannot interfere with what demons and humans choose to do. God has nothing to do with evil in this world as it all is a result of the free choices of demons and humans. Even the evil that comes from natural disasters and disease are the result of human choice, that is Adam and Eve's choice to sin which brought God's curse upon the world.

This brief overview of the most common response to the existence of God and the presence of evil is held by the majority of people who believe the Bible to be God's word. It is my intention in the following articles to show that this is a very inadequate answer as it does not take into account all of what Scripture says and is more the result of a philosophical presupposition than the result of a careful explanation of biblical texts. I hope also to show that believing the full revelation of God regarding the relationship of a sovereign God to moral evil will lead to happier and more holy Christians.

Hoping in a sovereign God,