

God's Good Will and Man's Sin

By Todd Pruitt

Sin is evil. Far worse than our contemporary therapeutic religion will admit; sin is nothing less than rebellion against God. When our first parents sinned in the garden they were mounting an assault against their Creator which resulted in a sentence of death for them and all their progeny. This is the doctrine of Original Sin. It means that we are all sinners from birth. That is, our status as sinners does not begin the moment we consciously choose to sin. Rather, we consciously choose to sin because we are born rebels. What is more, we are fully responsible for every one of our sins whether they be sins of commission or sins of omission. When we sin we are acting upon temptations that come from within our own lustful hearts (James 1:14-15). Our being dead in trespasses and sins (Eph 2:1) does not diminish our accountability before God.

With all the sin and evil in this fallen world it may cause one to wonder how God gets anything done. To illustrate what I am getting at let me ask a few questions: Is God's will overruled by the sinful willing and acting of man? Has God's sovereign providence been hog tied by our sin? If so then how can we have any confidence at all that the will of God will be done in any circumstance? Do God's plans go through constant revisions because of our sin? At the heart of these questions is whether or not God is sovereign and whether He overrules even the sins of others to accomplish His perfect will.

Open Theism, which is more common in evangelical thinking than we may care to imagine, asserts that God neither fully knows nor controls the future. Open Theism is a failure to submit the mind to two themes fully endorsed in Scripture: God's absolute sovereignty and man's absolute responsibility. Open Theists argue that man cannot be held responsible for what he does if God infallibly knows and controls the future. To our own reasoning those two ideas may seem to be contradictory. But the witness of Scripture is clear that God is able to hold them in perfect tension. It will probably never be clear to our finite minds how God is able to do this. But can we not agree that a perfect and powerful God is able to fully exercise his sovereign will without canceling man's responsibility? The cross, the centerpiece of redemptive history, stands as the supreme example of God using even the vilest of human degradation to accomplish His good will. The secret designs of our God are beyond our imagining.

"Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33).

In his masterful little book [All Things for Good](#), the Puritan Thomas Watson shows the many ways "the sins of others are overruled for good to the godly." I will attach my own feeble commentary to Watson's keenly biblical insights.

1. The sins of others work for good to the godly, as they produce holy sorrow. The godly weep over sin: the world's and their own (Matt 5:5). They recognize that sin is an attack on God's glory and are sick in heart to see His reputation sullied. This holy and humble mourning is for our good.

2. The sins of others work for good to the godly, as they set them the more a praying against sin. We can see God's sovereign hand at work in those situations that drive us to prayer. The spread of sin abroad will surely prompt the godly to pray. "Crying sins cause crying prayers."

3. The sins of others work for good, as they make us the more in love with grace. We have cause to be reminded of our own sins in the sins of others. If we are not guilty of one particular sin we observe in another's life how guilty we are still of so many more! The darkness of sin then becomes the backdrop for the brilliance of God's grace.

4. The sins of others work for good, as they work in us the strongest opposition against sin. The sinful preoccupations in culture help to sharpen our passion for righteousness. "The impieties of the times provoke holy passions in the saints." As others deal unrighteously with us may we determine all the more to deal righteously with them.

5. The sins of others work for good, as they make us more earnest in working out our salvation. Is not Christ a better master than sin? Why then would we let the ungodly pursue hell with more zeal than we pursue heaven? How the sins of a fallen world should make us strive all the more for godliness!

6. The sins of others work for good, as they are glasses in which we may see our own hearts. If it were not for grace we would surely be numbered among the greatest of sinners. There is not a sinful thought, motive, or action that we ourselves are not capable but for the grace of God. This works humility into us which is always for good.

7. The sins of others work for good, as they are the means of making the people of God more thankful. The Pharisee once boasted sinfully in the fact that he was not like the pathetic sinner that prayed next to him in the temple. In contrast, the godly, when sinned against, humbly thank God that they have not done the offending knowing full well that apart from grace they are capable of the very thing. The godly are also thankful for the contrition and brokenness that being sinned against inevitably bring.

8. The sins of others work for good, as they are means of making God's people better. God is well pleased to have us wronged if it makes us a better people. If someone's sin spills over onto your life, let holiness and blessing spill over onto them.

9. The sins of others work for good, as they give an occasion to us of doing good. If no one ever sinned against us then whom would we forgive? How could we exercise grace if not for the sins that others commit against us? In this way we are able to point sinners to the good that Jesus has done in forgiving us.

When sinned against do not think that God's sovereign purposes have been frustrated. For even in the doing of wrong the sinner has not overcome God's good will. Indeed, our God is able to take the evil that men do and intend it for our good.