

THE ENCOURAGER

A MONTHLY PUBLICATION OF HUDSON CHRISTIAN CHURCH

Where Did Evil Come From?



Photo courtesy desiringgod.org

Lately I have received a lot of questions about God's absolute control of all things, his predestining some to eternal life and some to eternal destruction, and the existence of evil. These are heavy topics, and one that many people wrestle with and have since the beginning of the church. I want to share with you my answer to the latest question in case you have had the same things rolling in your head.

"Hi Brandon. I have a doubt that has been growing since I learned Reformation theology, especially the doctrine of the sovereignty of God. If God created everything and is in control of everything that happens, how is he not to blame for all the evil in the world? Why didn't he limit man's capacity for evil? I know he can't be the one to blame because that would make him not all good. I feel guilty for even posing such a question, and I deal with it by just choosing to believe that God is both good and sovereign, but I can't rid of the doubt or feeling that something is wrong with my understanding. I really love God and believe in His goodness, but my doubts come up every time I want to praise God and sometimes I wish I had a better answer for my doubts than just choosing to believe what I don't understand."

The issue always is passionate and troubling for people. That makes sense since it really is grappling with the nature and character or "goodness" of God! It also makes a deep impact on our own perception of our relationship with him. I struggled when I first started seeing God's total sovereignty in Scripture. I was convinced it was true from Scripture, but I honestly did not like it and felt my whole relationship with God was a lie because he was not who I thought he was, and I didn't receive him like I thought I did. A God who chooses those who will be appointed to salvation, and those who will be condemned to eternal punishment is not who I first fell in love with! There was no warmth in my relationship with God, and I was distrustful for a season. It was ten

months of wrestling with this before I could even pray a relational prayer to God again. I recorded that prayer in the back of my Bible. I wrote, "Lord, I thank you for the homing device in my heart. No other gift is so great as the unsuppressable desire to seek You. 12-23-01"



So, I certainly wouldn't feel guilty for struggling with your feelings even as you seek to uphold Scripture and want to understand the tension more! The issue of evil within God's design is much of what we see Job struggling with. All kinds of evil had befallen him at the hands of a fallen world (natural disaster) and evil men - yet he attributed it to God and worshiped him, "the Lord gave, the Lord has taken away." His statement is not rebuked, because it is true, even though we see Satan was involved, as well as the evil intents of wicked men. The rest of the book is Job wrestling with the justice of God, and his friend's pious, pat-answers. In the end, Job recognizes he can't understand the most basic of God's works, so how is he to understand the deeper works? God cleared Job of having never spoken evil of Him in any of that wrestling, and rebukes the friends for speaking what was not right of Him. The Psalms also are a continual wrestling with the apparent triumph of evil and a God who has not acted to restrain it, and yet resolving into hopeful expectation of God's perfect justice and power finally working deliverance for those who trusted in him and retribution of those who worked evil.

I think a lot of the struggle comes when we fall into viewing what the Bible says about God's absolute sovereignty - his authoring of all human events and determining them from eternity past - as determinism or fatalism. Those are Greek philosophies and don't fit the picture of Reformed Theology (or Scripture's language) at all.

Scripture says "you do not have, because [causal!] you do not ask." Every Reformed Theologian I have read stresses that point. We are morally determinate creatures. We are created as "causal beings" to quote R.C. Sproul. We make real choices from the volition we have been given by God. Scripture everywhere affirms that. It often speaks of events as the result of man's choices and holds them accountable for them. That lives in perfect harmony with the "God downward" perspective of his purpose being the ultimate cause of all things. It is his sovereignty that is absolute, not ours. We accept this tension (even Armenians) readily in the case of the writing of Scripture. David poured out his own heart in the Psalms. David revised, and edited, and structured his songs according to his creativity and skill to get out his agenda and express his feelings and faith. Yet the very pen strokes he used were chosen, planned, WRITTEN,

by God. So, Jesus speaks of "David says," and "the Spirit says," or "the Spirit, speaking by the mouth of David," etc. Both David and the Spirit are the author. Both had real will, real choices. God's will was determinate as first cause - David's was still free creative will, but somehow determined by God.



Photo courtesy Life, Hope & Truth

I share David, because we all agree with it and because Scripture also says that God planned and moved David to sin in taking a census. Compare 2 Samuel 24 with 1 Chronicles 21 where it says that Satan moved David to sin in taking the census.

Yet, in both passages the story unfolds to show that it was David who sinned. He was morally responsible. And that is because the sin originated from his volitional decision to act upon his wicked pride. He acknowledged his sin, he repented of his sin, and he found mercy from God and atonement for his sin through God's provision. David made and acted on a plan for sin to accomplish his sinful purposes. Satan made a plan of evil and used his power to accomplish his destructive plan in rebellion against God to harm God's people out of his hatred for God and his creation. God decreed the entire thing, for his good purposes to judge and discipline the people for their sin, to uncover the sin in David's heart which existed whether acted upon or not. He used evil as a paintbrush to accomplish good. He was not its author, yet its timing and expression and limits and impact were perfectly orchestrated and designed before any of the true causal actors in it were created. It was God who brought it to pass. The whole story starts with him as the first verb and states his purpose.

That speaks more to how God works in a world where sin exists, not to why he allowed it in the first place, and we probably enter into "who are you O man" territory here, but since Paul was bold to go on with a "what if" from that point, I will tread lightly forward...

The question comes down to, "is it good of God to create the potential for the absence of his character (evil) to exist in a causal being?" It may be helpful to note that those volitional beings are not given absolute sovereignty. They can design purposes in opposition to goodness, but they cannot see the end from the beginning, nor work outside of his control, nor move one twitch outside of his decree. Yet he has created them, and the results is evil, sin, real pain, which is able to mar the goodness of his image which he had given them.

However, from that set of created beings, he has determined to make some of them the unique objects of his love and blessing, to have an experiential seat from which to view his glory and goodness. In the end of all things, all evil and harm that enters surgically into their lives will be rejoiced in perfectly as a true and deep blessing which has worked in them an eternal weight of glory. In that sense, Evil in its final eternal sense cannot, has not, and never will happen to the elect of God.

All evil is accomplishing goodness and blessing. All is to be counted joy. All will be to our eternal happiness and laughter. All will cause us to worship God in a deeper more glorious way than if it had never taken place. Evil was real within us and against us, but it was conquered and its purpose revealed in the cross. Like Joseph comforting his

brothers, "you meant it for evil, but the Lord *meant* it for good." In other words, "I will not dwell on your sin as an evil thing because the reason it came about in God's design was blessing and salvation not only for our family but for the whole world."

Therefore, there is no problem of evil concerning the elect since it was merely the means of our eternal happiness. We are left with only the question, "is it good of God to create the potential for the absence of his character to exist in a causal being...who will eternally suffer as the object of his wrath?"

Here is where the distinction from determinism and fatalism helps us. Had they not willfully rebelled against God, natural revelation, their conscience, and in some cases special revelation, they would have been saved. They go to hell by true choice. They had a true opportunity at redemption. The blood of Christ was potentially sufficient to atone for their sins (this is still consistent with limited - or particular - atonement). "Whosoever" was not disingenuous. Jesus Christ is the Savior of all men, but especially of those who believe. Those in Hell have gone there willfully, not necessarily. Calvin carefully argued from Scripture and reason that men do not sin by compulsion. They sin willfully. That will is enslaved by Satan and dead in concern to righteousness, but it is never forced. In the words of the Westminster confession: "God [fore] ordains whatsoever comes to pass; yet so as thereby neither is God the author of sin; nor is violence offered to the will of the creature; nor is the liberty of second causes taken away, but rather established."



Photo courtesy of media.org

I believe this is why Scripture is so careful to stress that though Pharaoh was "raised up for this very purpose," and "God hardened his heart," it also shares the repeated refrain "Pharaoh hardened his heart." Both wills were active and in agreement with one another.

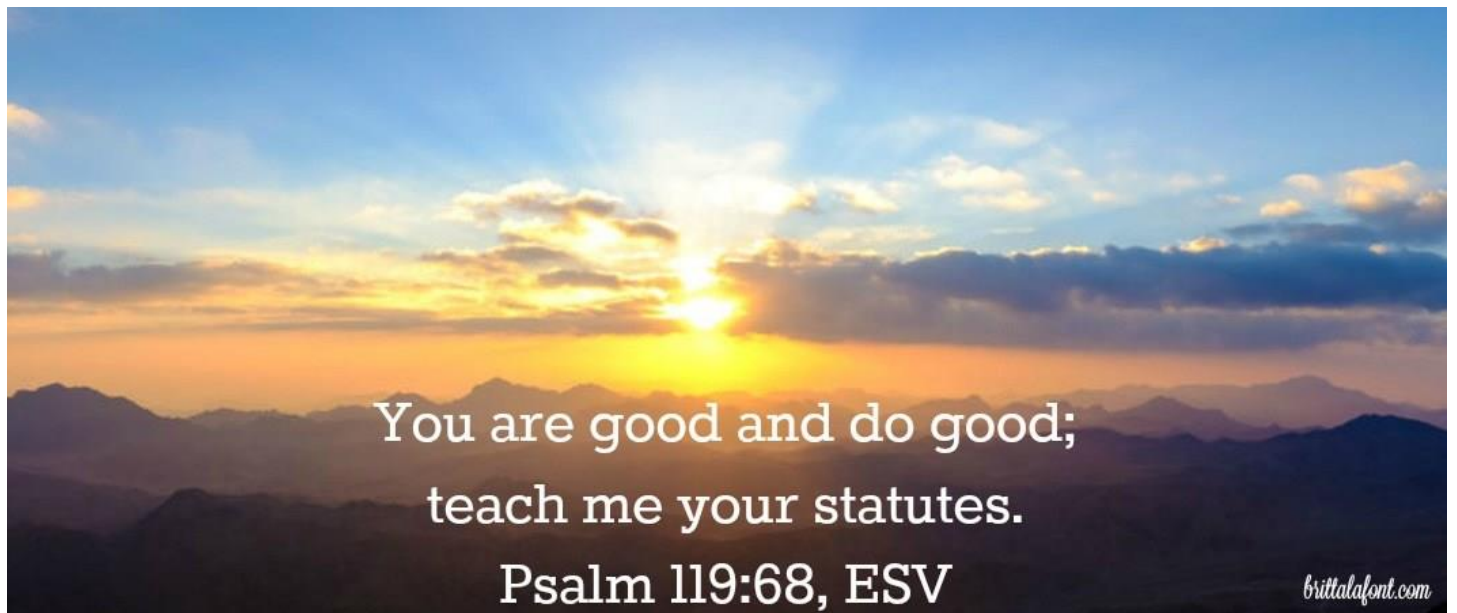
When one is saved through belief in the gospel, they are saved against their former will, for none seek God, and none can come to Christ unless drawn by the Father, but they are saved through their will. God breathes life into their will by the Holy Spirit and draws them irresistibly and tenderly by various words, and proofs, and inner testimony, to a humble confession of sin, and trust in Christ for salvation. No "unwilling" baptism is an entrance into covenant with God! Our will has been won over graciously by Christ. So that we can say, "I choose to follow him," and mean it.

God has willed to create volitional creatures who could act apart from his will (goodness) yet within his will (plan) to accomplish his will (desire) to reveal his glory. He has divided these creatures into two camps; angelic, whom he would give no path to redemption to establish his right to create creatures who would separate themselves from him in their own willful pride and be the just objects of his wrath, thereby displaying his justice and hatred of evil (that which is not like himself), and the other, mankind, whom he would provide a means of redemption and reconciliation. Within that group there were again two camps created; those who would be the objects of his covenantal love to reveal his mercy, compassion, and patience whom he would

intervene by his grace to soften their hard hearts, humble their pride, and effectively draw into saving faith in his Son, and those whom he would "pass by," whom he would leave in their willful hardness of heart, to show their greater sin in rejecting so wonderful a salvation, determined instead to love their wickedness and to suffer the fate prepared not for them but for the fallen angels of the first camp. Redemption was prepared for them and they spurned it. Could they have done otherwise? Not without the working of his grace. Is mercy compelled to rescue them because it rescued others? Then it would not be mercy, but necessary good, and there would be no such thing as mercy, or at least no opportunity for mercy to display itself - and a beautiful attribute of God for which he is to be worshiped would lay hidden within himself and unrevealed.

If the purpose of creation is human enjoyment, and the definition of good is human pleasure, then a portion of that creation eternally suffering cannot be good. However, if the purpose of all creation is the glory of God, and the sharing of that goodness with those whom he has foreknown, then the existence of evil as a result of the purpose of a good God, seems less problematic, but not fully explained and understood by any means!

Ultimately, I believe that this is an issue we have to leave in tension and, like Job, humbly trust that God is good and has done good in creating a world with evil and eternal damnation. I believe the un-answerableness is designed for the purpose of worship. Just as we see from Job in the final chapters. His worship is all the more profound and humble expressly because God does not give him the answer.



We run the continual risk as humans of saying to God, "Lay it all out. Your plans, your ways, your motives, and I will judge within myself if I approve, and if I do, I will worship you." It is God who must judge us, not us who must judge God.

I think that is why Scripture affirms both the wrestling with these issues, and the resting in these issues. The wrestling upholds that we know God must be good, he must be just, he must be true, and consistent under scrutiny. The resting shows that we confess that we are finite and he is infinite, we are evil and he is good, he is judge, and we are not.

If you struggle with these things or know someone who does, I'd love to talk more about it or share some resources I have found helpful.

- Brandon



Summary of the Deacons & Elders Meeting September 19, 2019

Meeting was called to order at 5:41 p.m. and opened in prayer. The members present were Brandon Current, Dave McGraw, and Larry Dowden. The August 8, 2019 meeting minutes were reviewed and approved. The Financial Reports were reviewed and approved.

Team Reports:

- Worship – there was a discussion about pursuing a back-up piano player.
- Building – 1. Baptistry – status, repairs waiting on plumber availability.
- Missions – Ecuador mission trip – report given. In Ecuador, they have intense discipleship classes for new believers, maturing Christians and developing leaders.

Pastor's Report: Brandon gave a report of his activities.

Old Business: None

New Business:

- Preparation for the annual congregational meeting was begun.
- Brandon's annual review was completed.

The next meeting will be moved up to October 3, 2019.



Congregational Meeting

The annual Hudson Christian Church
Congregational Meeting will be held on
Sunday, November 3, immediately following
the worship service.
Everyone is encouraged to attend.

Prayer Requests

**Tina Vaughn is the
HCC Prayer Coordinator**

If you have a prayer request to share or an update, please speak with Tina, write your request on the prayer card in the pew pocket and place it in the offering plate, or contact her at the following number or email.

Tina Vaughn
(309) 530-4588
vaughns777@yahoo.com



Image courtesy trinitywesternuniversity



The Potter's Kids

The Potter's Kids meets upstairs in the classrooms each Wednesday from 6-7 p.m. We will be discussing **Journeys!**

Did you know God often tells his children to **GO?** Sometimes on long journeys, sometimes just down the street. Come to Potter's Kids to find out who went where, and why!
See Terry Dowden for more information.

Image courtesy Lonaviewchurch.org

Wednesday Night Adult Bible Study

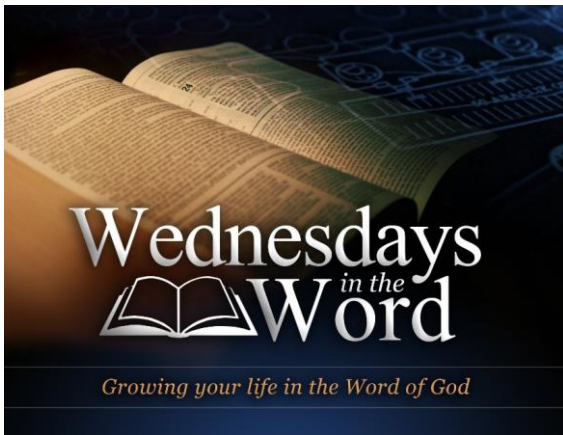


Photo courtesy of Zion.org

Bill Brown will be leading our adult Bible study Wednesday at 6:00-7:00 p.m. We are using a 3-step method of reading through the Scriptures to answer these questions:

- 1) What does this tell me about God?
- 2) What does this tell me about man?
- 3) What should be my personal response to this Scripture to follow Christ?

Everyone is welcome to join us – we meet downstairs! Bible studies are one of our primary avenues of discipleship here at HCC. I hope you all will arrange your schedules to not miss out on this opportunity for God to shape our hearts!

 **COME ON IN**
 from the farm, the field, the office, or the kitchen
 for our annual
HARVEST LUNCH
 » October 17, 2019 «
 11am →  2pm

HUDSON CHRISTIAN CHURCH
 (on the corner of McLean and Clinton in Hudson)

dine in or take out

| | | | | |
|---|--|---|--|---|
|  |  |  |  |  |
|  Meats Vegetables Salads Desserts & Drinks | | |  Cost: Any Donation | |



Mission of the Month

Update from **Adam and Kristy Griffith** serving in **Thailand** where they reach out to youth homes and bring the love of Jesus:

Will you join us in praying for the students who will attend our annual youth camp in October? This year's theme is The Heart of the Father, and we are studying 1st and 2nd Samuel. May each student leave being young men and women after the Heart of God.

Here is a story about how God has been answering prayers amidst our team this past week: Every year, in August, we physically go to each youth home and formally invite them to attend camp. This gives us an opportunity to explain the focus of the camp and talk through any changes. Our relationship with each youth home is the most important part of our ministry.

Since the beginning of PYF, we've known of one youth home, but haven't been able to connect with them. Their campus has a large metal gate and is surrounded by a fence. We've gone to visit, mailed letters, hand-delivered letters, and continually prayed for the youth growing up there even though no one on our team has ever met them. This year is our 6th camp, and it's the 6th time we've tried to invite this home. Each year it seems someone asks if it's worth making the trip over to this home and trying, and each year we decide to continue faithfully inviting them.

We deeply believe what God does in and through our camp has the power to transform students' lives. This week we got a phone call, and tomorrow afternoon we have a meeting with this youth home.



October 2019

| Sunday | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|-----------|--|--|---|--|--|
| | | 1 | 2 10:00 a.m. Ladies' Prayer and Fellowship 6:00 p.m. Adult Bible Study 6:00 p.m. The Potter's Kids | 3 5:30 p.m. Deacons/Elders Meeting followed By Spiritual Focus Meeting | 4 | 5 |
| 6 9:30 a.m. Worship 10:45 a.m. Coffee/Donuts Sunday School 11:00 a.m. 11:45 a.m. 1st Sunday Fellowship Potluck | 7 | 8 | 9 10:00 a.m. Ladies' Prayer and Fellowship 6:00 p.m. Adult Bible Study 6:00 p.m. The Potter's Kids | 10 Food Pantry Preparation Day | 11 | 12 10:00 Food Pantry Distribution Day |
| 13 9:30 a.m. Worship 10:45 a.m. Coffee/Donuts 11:00 a.m. Sunday School | 14 | 15 9:00 a.m. Ladies Aid | 16 10:00 a.m. Ladies' Prayer and Fellowship 6:00 p.m. Adult Bible Study 6:00 p.m. The Potter's Kids | 17 HARVEST LUNCH 11-2 | 18 | 19 |
| 20 9:30 a.m. Worship 10:45 a.m. Coffee/Donuts 11:00 a.m. Sunday School | 21 | 22 | 23 10:00 a.m. Ladies' Prayer and Fellowship 6:00 p.m. Adult Bible Study 6:00 p.m. The Potter's Kids | 24 | 25 | 26 |
| 27 9:30 a.m. Worship 10:45 a.m. Coffee/Donuts 11:00 a.m. Sunday School | 28 | 29 | 30 10:00 a.m. Ladies' Prayer and Fellowship 6:00 p.m. Adult Bible Study 6:00 p.m. The Potter's Kids | 31 | October Birthdays Lance Geshiwms 10/2 Bob Whitwood 10/2 Brendan Decker 10/3 Miriam Koons 10/10 Debbie Waugh 10/20 Tina Vaughn 10/25 Doris Beverage 10/27 Helen Whitacre 10/27 | |