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# Why Did God Allow *Sin* to Exist?

*(Selected Scriptures)*

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## ***A Good Question...***

Not all questions are created equal. Some are somewhat frivolous. For example, when a husband calls out to his wife, “Hunny, where’s the paper?” The question may be urgent (at least to the husband in that moment) but it’s not necessarily important. It’s not a question that carries with it eternal significance. But then there are other questions that climb the ladder of temporal significance. Questions like: whom should I marry? What should I do for a living? Where should I live? These are important questions but they are, nonetheless, temporal questions. But then there are questions of eternal significance, many of which are found in the Bible. Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do you say I am” (Mt. 16:15). Who can forget Peter’s answer – “You are the Christ the Son of the living God” (vs.16). There’s the Philippian jailer’s question to Paul and Silas, “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30). To which they responded, “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved, you and your household” (vs.31). Other questions like, “For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” (Mk. 8:36) or “O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?” (Rom. 7:24) are questions that carry eternal significance.

The question that we’re going to consider shortly may not be an overt, soteriological question – a question pertaining to how one receives the forgiveness of sins that is alone found in Christ, but it is an important one. It’s one that perhaps you’ve asked yourself; it was a question a former employer asked me. While working at a particular accounting firm I had the privilege of having a great relationship with my employer. We had many opportunities to speak about many different things, including the Gospel and different aspects of theology. One day after work I remember him asking me a question that gets to heart of the question concerning God’s sovereignty and the origin of evil. He said something along the lines of this: “We know that sin has entered into the world but here’s my question: couldn’t God have created a world where sin would never exist?” He framed the question well. And too often the quick answer to that question is something along the lines of – ‘Well, there has to be free will.’ Note: The only human beings that ever had a ‘free-will’ untainted by a sin nature that would love darkness rather light or a carnal mind that was naturally at enmity against God would have been Adam and Eve. All of their posterity is by nature children of wrath. Be that ‘note’ as it may, again, too quick comes the response of ‘Well there had to be free will...’ Don’t get me wrong, I think it’s clear that by Adam’s free choice to sin, sin entered the world – meaning humanity and creation were subjected to futility. Yes, sin existed prior to Adam’s sin, due to Satan’s sin; but with Adam’s sin, the creation, including his posterity, would be corrupted. But that fact, the fact that Adam freely sinned, and the fact that Satan freely sinned before Adam, doesn’t answer the question – Couldn’t God have created a world in which sin didn’t exist?

I think we could safely say - yes, based on the text of Scripture it appears that if God had willed to create a world where sin would never exist such would be the kind of world that exists. But clearly such a world was not part of God’s eternal will (i.e. an eternal decree). We do not believe that God is the sin-provoker, as though He tempts man to sin (cf. Jas. 1:13 – “God cannot be tempted with evil neither does He tempt any man”). However, the reality that God determined the existence of sin is

inescapable - both logically and Biblically. **Logically**, simply stated, if God had not intended God-glorifying purposes for the existence of sin it wouldn't exist. And **Biblically**, we have the example of the "elect angels" (1 Tim. 5:21) - angels who were preserved from sinning unlike the other rebellious angels. So, arguably, and quite clearly, God could have elected all the angels, preserving every one of them from sinning but He did not. The fallen angels are, nevertheless, responsible for their own rebellion and God is not at fault for preserving some and allowing others to engage in sin, which He ultimately intended to use for His glory.

### ***Then There's Adam...***

Adam was created good (Gen. 1:31). Thus, his sin did not come as a *result* of his depravity but *despite* his free, untainted-by-a-sin-nature, choice. However, with that being said, let's be clear - the Scripture presents no one else as being intrinsically and indefinitely good other than God - "no one is good except God alone" (Lk. 18:19). I say that, not based on Luke 18:19 alone but upon the Biblical reality that angels who were created without sin either sinned (like Satan) or had to be preserved from sinning (like the elect angels); and mankind, though created good and without sin eventually sinned. There is not one example of a volitional creature with moral and ethical capabilities that independently persisted in doing good! Thus, any preserved, indefinite and prolonged goodness is presented as having to be necessarily and indefinitely upheld and sustained by the God who alone is intrinsically and indefinitely good.

One additional reason why this affirmation is important is because someone can ask, "Where did the first sin come from?" I mean if we are told that our sins result from our own carnal desires and our fallen flesh and deceitful hearts, where did Adam's sin come from?" The answer is - we are not told exactly where the sin "came from" in either Satan or Adam, we are simply reminded that sin *can* still occur in beings without a sin nature. Only God alone is good. Any sustained goodness in a created being comes by way of God's preservation, either pre-sin (like the elect Angels) or post-sin (as in the redemption and eventual glorification of fallen men and women through the Gospel and in union with Christ.)

### ***Why, then, allow any evil to exist?***

This brings us back to the question - why, then, did God even allow evil to exist? Why didn't God preserve all the angels? Why didn't He preserve man?" I think the safest place to begin to answer that question is by affirming the overarching reason for the existence of any created thing - *For God's glory*. While there are numerous texts that affirm God's appropriate passion for His glory, perhaps the one that most clearly answers the question "Why did God even allow evil to exist?" comes from Romans 9:22-23. These two verses come after Paul's extended series of examples regarding the doctrine of election, including the reference of Pharaoh, and most immediately it comes after He described the freedom of the potter to make one vessel for honor and one for dishonor (vs.21). Paul wrote,

<sup>22</sup> What if God, wanting to show His wrath and to make His power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath prepared for destruction,<sup>23</sup> and that He might make known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy, which He had prepared beforehand for glory - <sup>24</sup>even us whom he has called, not from the Jews only but also from the Gentiles? (vs.22-24)

So, according to verse twenty-two, part of the reason for vessels of dishonor, or vessels of wrath, is that God might display (a) His wrath, and (b) His power. So, for example, we would never glorify

God for His holy wrath against sin if sin never existed; likewise we would not glorify God for His justice if there did not exist law-breakers. And as it concerns God's power, redemptive history is filled with acts of divine judgment where God demonstrated His awesome power in events like the global flood or the ten plagues that came upon Egypt. Just as creation glorifies God, so does the revelation of God's wrath and power. And God saw fit to display those attributes that would not have been displayed in a universe without sin.

But the other side of the coin is that He makes known the riches of His glory on the vessels of mercy (vs.23b). The greatness of God's grace is better displayed against the backdrop of our sinfulness. When vessels of mercy see that they are that – *vessels of mercy* – by no merit of their own, but that they could have been by their own demerit, vessels of wrath, God's mercy is undoubtedly more greatly appreciated. For example, a preserved angel never committed a single sin. Gabriel or Michael never worshipped a false god and never took God's name in vain, but we have. We have withstood God to the face every time we have sinned and yet we're vessels of mercy? Preserved angels can praise God for the mercy of preservation but how much more ought fallen sinners praise God for the mercy of redemption?

### ***A Central Point That Must Be Noted***

That brings us to a central point that must be noted in order to attempt to answer the question, "Why did God allow the existence of sin?" Our answer at some point must bring into consideration the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ – a reality that was planned and foreordained in the mind of God before the foundation of the world (1 Pet. 1:20). So, before the creation of the world God had decided that there would be a world in which sin existed. He also planned to redeem a people, known as the elect, before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4), penning their names in the Lamb's Book of Life before the creation of the world (Rev. 13:8; *see* ESV or NASB); and so we see the Scriptures bear witness that the cross was planned in the mind of God before the foundation of the world.

God willed the existence of a world in which sin exists because He willed that the climactic, quintessential display of His love be the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. Even as Jesus said in John 15:13, "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay His life down for His friends", it is fitting that there would be no greater demonstration of love than the fact that the Good Shepherd would lay down His life for His sheep. But it wasn't only the love of the Son that was demonstrated but the love of the Father.

<sup>9</sup>In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. <sup>10</sup>In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son *to be* the propitiation for our sins. (1 Jn. 4:9-10)

The Father's sacrifice in offering His Son, and the Son's sacrifice in offering Himself, while being an expression of God's holiness and justice, is nonetheless the grandest and highest expression of love. And that demonstration of mercy, that expression of love wouldn't have existed in a world without sin. Therefore, for all of eternity God's love and grace will be extolled as the cross is always remembered and celebrated. Angels and saints alike will join in one voice and sing,

"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain  
To receive power and riches and wisdom,  
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!" (Rev. 5:12)

For all of eternity the God who is love, will be loved, by a people who will know and praise Him for the greatest expression of love and mercy.

While the aforementioned reasons do not provide all the reasons and answers for why God willed the existence of a world in which sin exists, it nonetheless bears witness of the following reality: God will receive glory forever, for His love and grace, for His justice and wrath, and all of His other glorious attributes, some of which it appears could not have been fully appreciated and celebrated without the existence of sin.

*In light of that reality we will make two important affirmations and one gloriously comforting application.*

### ***An Affirmation of Freedom***

The first affirmation that appears fitting to make is an *affirmation of God's freedom*. That is one of the inescapable points that Paul appears to be driving home in Romans 9 when he wrote things like this,

<sup>18</sup> Therefore He has mercy on whom He wills, and whom He wills He hardens.

And,

<sup>21</sup> Does not the potter have power over the clay, from the same lump to make one vessel for honor and another for dishonor?

This God is free to show mercy and free to harden. He is the potter who is sovereign over the clay. He doesn't have to meet our expectations. He doesn't have to pass a 21<sup>st</sup> century public relations test. He is beyond our control. And we are not able to mold Him into a preferred image. He is God. Let us, then, embrace and tremble before His great freedom.

### ***An Affirmation of Reprobation and Concurrence***

Then, there's an affirmation of reprobation and concurrence. When you look at Romans 9 and consider how God makes one vessel unto honor and another unto dishonor, you could go so far as to mistakenly neglect to appropriately fit man's culpability with the doctrine of God's sovereignty. So, in an effort to avoid such a mistake, let us consider the two theological terms.

The first is *reprobation*. While election is the act of divine grace whereby God shows mercy to a sinner who does not deserve it, reprobation is the other side of the coin; it refers to those whom God has not elected. By virtue of electing some unto salvation God has chosen to bypass others, who are, nevertheless, responsible for their own sin. So, for example, while the Scripture says in Proverbs 16:4,

The Lord has made all for Himself,  
Yes, even the wicked for the day of doom. (Prov. 16:4)

It also says in the Book of the prophet Ezekiel,

<sup>20</sup>The soul who sins shall die. The son shall not bear the guilt of the father, nor the father bear the guilt of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon himself, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon himself. (Ezek. 18:20)

God does not create wickedness in an individual. He is not the author of sin. The wickedness of the wicked is just that – *the wickedness of the wicked*. And for those independent, yet sovereignly superintended transgressions, transgressors would be, and will be, held accountable. And furthermore, just because God has made all for Himself, yes, even the wicked for the day of doom (Prov. 16:4) don't presume to have God's emotions towards the wicked or the wickedness of the wicked completely figured out. After all, He says through Ezekiel multiple times in slightly varied ways,

I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. (Ezek. 33:11b)

So while affirming the reality of reprobation and man's culpability, it would be folly to think that God takes pleasure in, or is indifferent to, perishing of the wicked. You and I must be careful to hold up Proverbs 16:4 and Ezekiel 33:11 as two paradoxical but non-contradictory realities.

### ***But Back to the Issue of Sovereignty and Sinfulness...***

That brings us to our second theological term under this heading – concurrence. The doctrine of divine concurrence, or divine confluence, teaches us that God sovereignly superintends the culpable behavior of sinful men to sinlessly accomplish His purposes. Two easy-to-remember case studies come from the end of Genesis and the beginning of the Book of Acts, in the statement of Joseph and the prayer of the Apostles. In Genesis 50:20 Joseph spoke to his brothers who had sold him into slavery and told them,

<sup>20</sup> But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. (Gen. 50:20)

There were, if you will, two agents at work *in the same action*: Joseph's brothers had done evil to Joseph (evil that they were culpable for) and, at the same time, the sovereign God sinlessly superintended their evil for His own purposes; namely, Joseph's good and the saving of many people.

Likewise, after Peter and John were released from the Sanhedrin's clutches, after being warned no longer to speak in the name of Jesus, a thing they said they could not do, they went back to the other disciples and as they began to pray they quoted from Psalm 2 and applied it to the persecutors of Jesus saying this,

<sup>27</sup> "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together <sup>28</sup> to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. (Acts 4:27-28)

Again there were multiple agents at work: Herod, Pilate, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, all of whom are either explicitly or implicitly indicted for their sin in the Gospel accounts; and there was

God – who, sovereignly and sinlessly superintended their evil according to His own predetermined purposes.

### ***A Gloriously Comforting Application***

The attempted, partial answer to the question “Why did God allow sin to exist?” not only allows us opportunities to make important and instructive theological affirmations, but it compels us, I think, to make a gloriously comforting application. God doesn’t have to meet our specifications concerning how He exercises His sovereignty because He is free, but I think believers in the Lord Jesus Christ can all affirm that God has *exceeded* our expectations in the demonstration of His love and mercy! Yes, we live in a sin-ridden world where there is pain and suffering and death, but the glorious reality of the Christian faith is that the author of the story of history has written Himself into the narrative and He has experienced pain and suffering on a scale that no human being could ever have known.

Though He had eternally existed as God, Jesus took on the form of flesh and experienced a level of suffering that our fallen minds cannot even begin to quantify. To redeem His people from their sins, Jesus would have to bear in His body the full measure of God’s wrath. Not a little. Not a portion. But the fullness of what every one of His sheep deserved.

Let us look to the moment where we behold Him face-to-face, holding His nail-scarred hands, knowing that we’d be looking into the eyes, and holding the hands, of a Savior who knows what it feels like to bear the fullness of God’s wrath; yet amazingly, that feeling is something His redeemed will never know. That is simply astonishing. Yes, we live in a painful, sinful world. But Jesus, too, lived in a painful, sinful world. He experienced life in a fallen world just like us; He experienced hunger and thirst, just like us; He experienced betrayal just like us; He experienced physical pain just like us; He experienced physical death just like us; but He even experienced the fullness of God’s wrath, *unlike us*. Jesus knows more about the ramifications of living in a sinful world than we do. And His sacrifice secures our entry to eternally dwell in a new earth where there will be no sin.

It’s not surprising, then, that when the Bible provides us with a heavenly, eternal perspective we do not see an endless round table discussion concerning the reason for the painful events experienced on earth. Instead we see an unending symphony of praise, adoration and thanksgiving. This further assures us of the satisfaction we will feel before God’s throne, demonstrating that the questions the redeemed face now will not be impediments to worship then. A suffering, sovereign Savior is worthy of both trust and worship.