

Does God ordain evil? If God is in control over everything, and He is, is He equally sovereign over evil? How do we uphold God's perfect righteousness and at the same time say God ordains evil?

God ordains everything including evil for wise, just, good, and holy purposes, without ever committing evil Himself. A distinction must be maintained between God's *preceptive will* (His commandments which are always morally good) and His *decretive will* (His eternal plan which includes evil).

First, let's agree that evil originates not from God but from created beings (1 John 1:5; James 1:13-15). It's helpful, I think, to understand that sin is not itself a thing created. Sin is neither substance, being, spirit, nor matter. Created beings bear full responsibility for their choices, whether good or evil.

For example, Romans 5:12 says that death entered the world because of Adam's sin. Death, pain, disease, stress, exhaustion, calamity, and all the bad things that happen came as a result of the entrance of sin into the universe (Genesis 3:14-24). All those evil effects of sin continue to work in the world and will be with us as long as sin is.

God is certainly sovereign over evil. Isaiah 45:7, *I form light and create darkness, I make peace and create calamity, I, the Lord, do all these things*. There's a sense in which it is proper even to say that evil is part of His eternal decree. He planned for it. It did not take Him by surprise. It is not an interruption of His eternal purposes. He declared the end from the beginning, and He is still working all things for His good pleasure (Isaiah 46:9-10; Eph. 1:3-14).

God's role with regard to evil is never as its author. He simply permits evil agents to work, then overrules evil for His own wise and holy ends. Ultimately, He is able to make all things-including all the fruits of all the evil of all time-work together for a good (Romans 8:28). We see this most plainly in the death of Christ, an evil that God ordained but for which He is not morally responsible (Acts 2:23). He used the vilest of evils for a greatest good, indeed-our salvation! God's absolute sovereignty does not lessen human responsibility or moral culpability (Rev. 20:11-15).

"God never does evil Himself. He stands behind it indirectly; He directly stands behind good. The Lord can never be blamed for evil but evil does not take place apart from His decree. We cannot fully explain how this can be, but the Lord's ability to ordain evil without being morally responsible shows His greatness. He can ordain evil without compromising His character; that is impossible for us to do. Surely, His ways are past finding out." John Piper

We confess that God is not the author of evil, and yet we also confess that He's in absolute control over it, and none of it escapes His notice or governance. Is it easy to reconcile those ideas? No, not with our feeble, finite minds. God can allow something that He doesn't actually do. He never acts in any evil way; He cannot do that.

Why did He allow it? And all we can say is without Him being culpable in any sense, He decreed that evil would exist, and that He would manage that evil for His own eternal glory. It's a matter of Him allowing it, but it is not something that God does. I mean, that's the best we can say.

The Westminster Confession of Faith says when God allows evil, it's not a bare permission. In other words, it's not an unwilling permission. He not only allows it, He decreed it. He intended for this to happen, but not in a way that makes Him the author or cause of evil. These are hard concepts, right?

The ultimate problem that people come to when they talk about the problems in the world: "Why did God allow this? Why did He allow it?" And all we can say is without being culpable in any sense, He decreed that evil would exist, and that He would manage that evil for His own eternal glory. I'll end with this. If God were small enough to be understood, He wouldn't be big enough to be worshiped!