

The story of the exodus from Egypt repeatedly affirms that God hardened the heart of Pharaoh: God says, “I will harden his heart” (Ex. 4:21), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 7:3), “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh” (Ex. 9:12), “the LORD hardened Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 10:20, repeated in 10:27 and again in 11:10), “I will harden Pharaoh’s heart” (Ex. 14:4), and “the LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh king of Egypt” (Ex. 14:8). . . .

What was God’s purpose in this? Paul reflects on Exodus 9:16 and says, “For the scripture says to Pharaoh, ‘I have raised you up for the very purpose of showing my power in you, so that my name may be proclaimed in all the earth’” (Rom. 9:17). Then Paul infers a general truth from this specific example: “So then he has mercy upon whomever he wills, and he hardens the heart of whomever he wills” (Rom. 9:18). In fact, God also hardened the hearts of the Egyptian people so that they pursued Israel into the Red Sea: “I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they shall go in after them, and I will get glory over Pharaoh and all his host, his chariots, and his horsemen” (Ex. 14:17). This theme is repeated in Psalm 105:25: “He turned their hearts to hate his people.” . . .

Later in the Old Testament narrative similar examples are found of the Canaanites who were destroyed in the conquest of Palestine under Joshua. We read, “For it was the LORD’s doing to harden their hearts that they should come against Israel in battle, in order that they should be utterly destroyed” (Josh. 11:20; see also Judg. 3:12; 9:23). And Samson’s demand to marry an unbelieving Philistine woman “was from the LORD; for he was seeking an occasion against the Philistines. At that time the Philistines had dominion over Israel” (Judg 14:4). We also read that the sons of Eli, when rebuked for their evil deeds, “would not listen to the voice of their father; for it was the will of the LORD to slay them” (1 Sam. 2:25). Later, “an evil spirit from the LORD” tormented King Saul (1 Sam. 16:14). . . .

Still later in David’s life, the Lord “incited” David to take a census of the people (2 Sam. 24:1), but afterward David recognized this as sin, saying, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done” (2 Sam. 24:10), and God sent punishment on the land because of this sin (2 Sam. 24:12–17). However, it is also clear that “the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” (2 Sam. 24:1), so God’s inciting of David to sin was a means by which he brought about punishment on the people of Israel. Moreover, the means by which God incited David is made clear in 1 Chronicles 21:1: “Satan stood up against Israel, and incited David to number Israel.” In this one incident the Bible gives us a remarkable insight into the three influences that contributed in different ways to one action: God, in order to bring about his purposes, worked through Satan to incite David to sin, but Scripture regards David as being responsible for that sin. . . .

In the story of Job, though the LORD gave Satan permission to bring harm to Job’s possessions and children, and though this harm came through the evil actions of the Sabaeans and the Chaldeans, as well as a windstorm (Job 1:12, 15, 17, 19), yet Job looks beyond those secondary causes and, with the eyes of faith, sees it all as from the hand of the Lord: “the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD” (Job 1:21). The Old Testament author follows Job’s statement immediately with the sentence, “In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (Job 1:22). Job has just been told that evil

marauding bands had destroyed his flocks and herds, yet with great faith and patience in adversity, he says, "The LORD has taken away." Though he says that the LORD had done this, yet he does not blame God for the evil or say that God had done wrong: he says, "Blessed be the name of the LORD." To blame God for evil that he had brought about through secondary agents would have been to sin. Job does not do this, Scripture never does this, and neither should we.

Elsewhere in the Old Testament we read that the Lord "put a lying spirit in the mouth" of Ahab's prophets (1 Kings 22:23) and sent the wicked Assyrians as "the rod of my anger" to punish Israel (Isa. 10:5). . . .

In many of the passages mentioned above, God brings evil and destruction on people in judgment upon their sins: They have been disobedient or have strayed into idolatry, and then the LORD uses evil human beings or demonic forces or "natural" disasters to bring judgment on them. . . . Therefore, when God brings evil on human beings, whether to discipline his children, or to lead unbelievers to repentance, or to bring a judgment of condemnation and destruction upon hardened sinners, none of us can charge God with doing wrong. Ultimately all will work in God's good purposes to bring glory to him and good to his people. Yet we must realize that in punishing evil in those who are not redeemed (such as Pharaoh, the Canaanites, and the Babylonians), God is also glorified through the demonstration of his justice, holiness, and power (see Ex. 9:16; Rom. 9:14–24). "¹²

Question #39: Summarize your understanding of Grudem's teaching in three or four sentences.

Question #40: Did Grudem's teaching generate any questions in your mind? If so, record them here:

Distinctions in God's Will - Is everything God's will?

Armed with this understanding of God's control over and use of evil, we will now turn to the second question: ***Is everything that happens God's will?*** As we have seen, God's will must be seen as the final authority behind and ultimate reason for everything that happens. God's providential ***permitting*** or ***preventing*** determines whatsoever comes to pass (Isaiah 14:24). Does this mean, however, that everything that happens is God's will? Answering this question requires us to distinguish between God's ***sovereign will*** and His ***moral will***. ***Scripture clearly reveals that*** God often ***permits*** His moral requirements to be violated by the free choices of men and women. This reveals that God's ***sovereign will*** clearly ***includes*** certain violations of His moral will. God's ***moral will*** is discerned by simply reading His ***precepts*** and ***commands***

¹² Grudem, 322-326.

regarding human conduct. God's **sovereign will** is discerned only when the **secret** counsel of God is **revealed** as events actually happen. Whatever comes to pass is what He has sovereignly planned and **decreed** from all eternity. Thus, we answer questions like, "Is it God's will for me to do this or that," by simply looking to God's revelation of His moral will in Scripture. But as events actually occur, we come to know God's sovereign will, i.e., what He has ordained and then approved, permitted or prevented. When discussing these matters, therefore, we must clearly distinguish between **Two Wills of God**. The following Table will help us do that.

The Two Wills of God Deuteronomy 29:29 - "The <u>secret</u> things belong to the LORD our God, but the things <u>revealed</u> belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law. NASB	
SOVEREIGN WILL	MORAL WILL
<i>Also called.....</i> SECRET WILL WILL OF DECREE	<i>Also called.....</i> REVEALED WILL COMMANDED WILL WILL OF PRECEPT
<i>God's Sovereign will includes God's hidden decrees by which He governs everything that happens. We find out God's Sovereign will when events actually happen.</i>	<i>God's moral will expresses God's general desire concerning things and usually contains God's commands about our moral conduct.</i>
Ephesians 1:11 James 4:15 Genesis 50:20 Matthew 11:25-26 1 Corinthians 4:19 Acts 2:23, 4:28, 21:14 Romans 1:10, 9:18, 15:32 1 Peter 3:17, 4:19	Exodus 20:1-17 Ephesians 5:17 Romans 2:18 1 John 5:14 Matthew 6:10, 7:21, 12:50, 18:14 1 Timothy 2:4 2 Peter 3:9 Ezekiel 33:11

Question #41: In your own words, distinguish between God's sovereign will and His moral will. _____

Question #42: How would you explain the difference between God's sovereign will and His moral will to a young child? _____

Examples of the two wills of God are clearly seen in Scripture and in the world around us. When we see evil take place, we know that, although it is *a violation of* His moral will (His revealed will, commanded will, or will of precept), God *permitted rather than prevented* it by His sovereign will (His will of decree or secret will) which He determined from all Eternity.

Consider the following:

Joseph and his brothers:

Genesis 50:20: And as for you, you meant evil against me, but **God meant it for good in order** to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive.

The murder of Jesus:

Acts 2:23: this Man, delivered up **by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God**, you nailed to a cross by the hands of godless men and put Him to death.

Genocide in War

9/11/2001: The Attack on the Twin Towers

How can we explain such things in the light of God's absolute sovereignty? **Jonathan Edwards** well states what is taught in Scripture: "*God decreed from all eternity all the evil that He ever does permit, because God's permitting is God's forbearing to act or to prevent.*"¹³

Simply stated, God permits the existence of evil in His world, which He hates, to accomplish higher purposes in His world which he loves.

Question #43: Formulate a short response to someone who asks you, "How can a good God allow all this evil to exist in our world?" (This response should briefly answer the question from a biblical perspective while serving as a foundation for further discussion.) _____

Government: *God is continually involved with all created things in such a way that he . . . (3) directs them to fulfill his purposes."* Grudem further defines this third aspect of God's Providence by saying, "*God has a purpose in all that he does in the world and he providentially governs or directs all things in order that they accomplish his purposes.*"¹⁴

The **Scripture plainly declares** that everything happens ultimately under the *sovereign authority* of God as He *directs them* so that *in the end His purposes are fulfilled*.

Psalms 103:19: The LORD has established His throne in the heavens; And **His sovereignty rules over all**.

Paul affirms that God works "*all things after the counsel of His will*" and to His "*ends.*"

¹³ Edwards, 529.

¹⁴ Grudem, 331.

Ephesians 1:11-12: ¹¹also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to **His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will,** ¹²**to the end** that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory.

Romans 8:28: And we know **that God causes all things to work together for good** to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.

Romans 11:36: **For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things.** To Him be the glory forever. Amen.

The **Scripture plainly declares** this same truth in the Old Testament.

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14: ¹³Consider the work of God, For **who is able to straighten what He has bent?** ¹⁴In the day of prosperity be happy, But in the day of adversity consider—God **has made the one as well as the other** So that man may not discover anything that will be after him.

Daniel 4:34-35: ³⁴But at the end of that period I, Nebuchadnezzar, raised my eyes toward heaven, and my reason returned to me, and I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever: For **His dominion is an everlasting dominion,** And His kingdom endures from generation to generation. ³⁵And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, But **He does according to His will in the host of heaven And among the inhabitants of earth;** And no one can ward off His hand Or say to Him, “What hast Thou done?”

Psalms 135:5-6: ⁵For I know that **the LORD is great, And that our Lord is above all gods.** ⁶**Whatever the LORD pleases, He does,** In heaven and in earth, in the seas and in all deeps.

The **Scripture plainly declares** that everything in the universe, seen and unseen, is under the sovereign authority of the Lord Jesus Christ, God the Son.

1 Corinthians 15:27: For **He has put all things in subjection under His feet.** But when He says, “All things are put in subjection,” it is evident that He is excepted who put all things in subjection to Him.

Ephesians 1:19b-22: ^{19b}These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might ²⁰which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, ²¹**far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named,** not only in this age, but also in the one to come. ²²And **He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things** to the church, ²³which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills all in all.

Philippians 2:9-11: ⁹Therefore also **God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name,** ¹⁰that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, ¹¹and that **every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord,** to the glory of God the Father.

Question #44: Based on your reading of the above Scriptures, describe in your own words the *effectiveness* of God’s providential governing of His creation. _____

Question #45: Based on your reading of the above Scriptures, how do you think God’s government of His creation relates to human governments? _____

(If necessary, see also Proverbs 21:2 and Romans 13:1-7.)

Summary

We have seen that the **Bible clearly teaches** that: 1) God providentially implements His sovereign rule over all of creation; and 2) He is directing nature and history to fulfill His own purposes. His Providence displays His sovereign authority in clear and unmistakable ways. Dear reader, hear now the word of the Lord!

Deuteronomy 4:39: Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, **that the LORD, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other.**

As we struggle in our human frailty to understand the profound truth of God's providence **Wayne Grudem** helpfully reminds us to bow in humility before its great mystery: *"What if we cannot understand this doctrine fully? - Every believer who meditates on God's providence will sooner or later come to a point where he or she will have to say, 'I cannot understand this doctrine fully.' In some ways that must be said about every doctrine, since our understanding is finite, and God is infinite But particularly is this so with the doctrine of providence: we should believe it because Scripture teaches it even when we do not understand fully how it fits in with other teachings of Scripture."*¹⁵

Question #46: Are you willing to bow in humility before the great mystery of God's providence and believe it while frankly admitting that you cannot understand it fully? _____

Application

Applying this doctrine in our lives so that it impacts our thoughts, words, attitudes, and actions requires us to:

- Believe God is providential
- Appreciate God's wise providential purposes and rule
- Humbly submit to God's will
- Never complain against God's providence
- Be thankful for God's providence
- Trust in God's good promises to His people

Believe God is providential

Chances are good you believe in God's providence, whether you realize it or not. Is this not your assumption each time you pray for God's intervention in your life? Indeed it is! When you bow your knee, head, or heart to Almighty God, you acknowledge His sovereign authority (His right and power) to change things even as you humbly request that He do so. Your prayer reflects your belief that God is almighty and in control of all things as you rest in trusting God.

Isaiah 26:3-4: ³The **steadfast of mind Thou wilt keep in perfect peace, Because he trusts in Thee.** ⁴Trust in the LORD forever, For in GOD the LORD, we have an everlasting Rock.

Proverbs 3:5-6: ⁵**Trust in the LORD with all your heart,** And do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶**In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He will make your paths straight.**

¹⁵ Grudem, 336.