

GOD'S RULE AND OUR RESPONSIBILITY

“As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good.”

Genesis 50:20

Christians have long wrestled with the relationship between God's rule and human freedom. Scripture teaches both truths clearly: God is sovereign over his world, and human beings are responsible for their choices. God's foreknowledge does not make human choices meaningless; rather, it assures us that no human choice, whether righteous or sinful, can surprise God or overthrow his purposes. We must be careful not to explain either truth, God's sovereignty or human free will, in a way that cancels the other.

The Bible presents human sin as voluntary and accountable. James writes that each person is tempted when he is “lured and enticed by his own desire” (James 1:14). Sin is not forced upon us by God. We choose it, and therefore we are responsible for it. At the same time, sin is not merely a series of isolated mistakes. It enslaves, deceives, and corrupts. Jesus said, “Everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin” (John 8:34). We need more than better information; we need grace, redemption, and transformation.

God's sovereignty does not mean that he approves of evil or directly causes people to sin. God may permit evil without approving evil, and he may govern history without becoming morally responsible for the sins people freely commit. Scripture is clear: God is holy, righteous, and never the author of sin. Yet God is wise and powerful enough to work through even human rebellion to accomplish his purposes. Joseph could say to his brothers, “You meant evil against me, but God meant it for good” (Genesis 50:20). Their actions were wicked, but God was able to bring about deliverance through them.

We see this most clearly at the cross. Jesus was delivered up according to God's “definite plan and foreknowledge,” yet those who crucified him acted with “lawless hands” (Acts 2:23). God's purpose was fulfilled, but human guilt was not erased.

For everyday faith, this means we should neither blame God for our sins nor imagine life is outside his care. We are responsible to choose faith, repentance, and obedience. And we can trust that even when evil is real, God remains good, wise, and able to redeem what we could never repair.

How do human responsibility and God's providence fit together?