

# Thoughts on God's Rulership

The substance of this article was originally written during a discussion with some other Christians regarding Joseph and his brothers, and the way that they sold him into Egypt. Some of the people in the discussion believed that God coordinated the whole thing, even to the point of inspiring the brothers to sell Joseph into Egypt. They looked at this as "God's sovereign will".

I agree that it is good and right to trust God, even in great difficulty and bitterly discouraging circumstances, and to believe in God's providential working. But when we speak about God's actions, we must clearly divide between what He allows or permits, and what He is actively involved in. This article attempts to do that, to draw a clear line regarding God's involvement in man's affairs, especially in the story of Joseph.

**S**OME people believe that God's rulership means that He must have control of everything that happens. If He is not in control of something, then they think it would take away from His omnipotence.

## The Extent of God's Direct Control

But is God in control of everything? Does He directly "create evil"<sup>1</sup> and then manipulate it to bring a result that is desirable to himself? Is He responsible for every bad action I do, every bad word I speak, every bad thought that passes through my mind?

Keep in mind the following principles:

### **1 John 3**

<sup>4</sup> ...sin is the transgression of the law.

God's will is expressed in the law:

### **Psalm 40**

<sup>8</sup> I delight to do your will, O my God, yes for your law is in my heart.

Therefore, sin is contrary to the will of God. God will not use methods that are contrary to His will. He will not use sinful methods to accomplish His work. However, at times, He has been compelled to use people who still adopt sinful methods, and meet

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<sup>1</sup> *Isaiah* 45:17.

them half-way. These examples cause people much confusion in their attempts to understand God.

The simple solution is to study what God has revealed of himself in His Son, because in Jesus Christ, God had a person who always followed the true ideal; He had a pure and purified vessel through which to work.

### **The Principle of the Law**

The main problem with most interpretations of God's character is that they do not give proper place to the Law of God. The Law is an expression of His will. Love is the fulfilling of the Law. Love works no ill to his neighbor. Therefore, it is never God's will to harm or destroy His creation. God's sovereign will is not something above His law; it works through those principles.

### **The Principle of Love**

The exercise of force to compel obedience, or to destroy those who do not obey, is contrary to the principles of love. Loving obedience cannot be compelled, and fear (of being destroyed) is also contrary to the obedience of love.

Jesus came to show what God was really like, and His revelation was so contrary to what men understood by their interpretation of the Old Testament, that they rejected Him as an impostor, deceiver, and blasphemer.

If it would have been God's special plan and design to have the Jews reject Christ, then the weeping of Christ over that city would have been just a mere hypocritical show.

We must flee from every theory that implies that God is the author of sin. This is to confuse Satan's character with God's, and that is just what Satan wants to do. He is a mastermind, and able to outwit us with his fine philosophical theories. Our only defense is to flee to God's word, and His character as revealed through Christ.

## God Plans Ahead

God, as a good father, plans for emergencies. He foresaw the entrance of sin—He saw that some would choose to abuse the freedom He gave. He made provisions for the event, but He did not plan the sin. There is a big difference. If God actually planned the sin, then He is the author of it, and bears responsibility for the pain, suffering, and loss of life. Such a view of God will lead either to atheism or blind superstition.

If I, as a father, not only planned for the event that my house would burn down, but actually set fire to it (or invited a bunch of pyromaniacs to come and do it), would you call me righteous? I think you would lock me up in prison. Then why should we project a view of the Father of Love which is the same?

### **2 Peter 3**

<sup>9</sup> The Lord is...longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

There is a clear statement about God's will, and it has nothing to do with planning death or destruction.

## The Principle of Babylon

It is a principle of Babylon, the great mother of all false religion, that one should be sacrificed for the good of others. That is how the Jewish leaders justified their crucifixion of Christ:

### **John 11**

<sup>50</sup> It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.

How do we know this is also a principle of Babylon?

### **Revelation 18**

<sup>24</sup> And in her [Babylon] was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

The blood of all that were slain on the earth is found in her, because she holds to this teaching that you can sacrifice another in

order to do good, and this principle is responsible for the death of all who have died in the earth.

This is the principle that Lucifer adopted in heaven, when he was willing to sacrifice whoever, and whatever, in order to exalt himself. Babylon, or the Babylonian system of religion, is just the incarnation of his ideas. Self is served, and self is preserved. The cost to others is justified in the name of god.

This Babylonian principle is expressed in the text:

### **Romans 3**

<sup>8</sup> Let us do evil that good may come.

Another common way of phrasing it would be:

“The end justifies the means.”

This view, that it is okay to practice evil as long as there is a good reason or motive, is projected onto God through false religious teaching. This Babylonian idea then goes further and proclaims:

“If God does it, it is not sin!”

It is then a logical conclusion that the church “acting for God” can do the same evil things “in God’s name,” and likewise be guiltless! Thus God becomes the ultimate excuse for any evil action or persecution. If this is the lesson we have drawn from the Old Testament, then we have utterly failed to see the truth that is revealed in the death of Jesus Christ.

## **God Respects Rights**

God never tramples on the rights of the least of His subjects, in order to help another or to further His own designs. His plans are always for the best of all His creation.

It is true that “the wrath of man will praise You,”<sup>2</sup> but only in the sense that when a sinner destroys himself, he simply proves

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<sup>2</sup> *Psalm 76:10.*

that sin leads to death, and that life can only be found in faith and obedience. God does not delight in his destruction. He says,

**Ezekiel 33**

<sup>11</sup> I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked.

**How God Uses Sin**

God doesn't use the weapons of sin directly. He allows sin to develop, but injects truth and love into the situation to circumvent the destruction as much as possible. God's ability to turn evil actions into good depends on having a person like Joseph: someone who unswervingly maintains faith and obedience. This was a key element in the solution.

The original charge that Satan made at the tree of temptation, was that God's laws were a hindrance, and that you could get further if you disregard them. Eve believed this, and here we are today. Therefore, the struggle between Christ and Satan is not one of mere physical power. The fact that God has more power than Satan does not give Him the automatic victory.

This is because God's kingdom is not based on power, but on love; and love cannot be compelled. God wins people to His side by demonstrating His unselfish care and love towards them, and the blessings that come through obedience to His laws, thus disproving Satan's charges that He is selfish and oppressive.

Every Christian is called to be a soldier in this battle, but they cannot be effective unless they too are convinced that God's laws and ways are not only one of the best ways, but the only way to success.

**Joseph Reveals God**

Joseph was such a person. And so God could use him mightily in this battle.

Joseph's brothers were not like that (at least not in the beginning), and they thought they knew better how to handle their difficulties than God. In fact, they, by their actions, showed that

they supported Satan's arguments. They believed that God's way was not the best way, but that sometimes you just had to take things into your own hands and "get the job done."

They thought that by getting rid of Joseph, they would have family unity and peace. This was a manifestation of the principle, "the end justifies the means." Therefore, they were witnesses against God, and so God could not use them at that time.

But Satan certainly could. This fallen angel saw the holy character that was forming in Joseph, and heard the dreams he was given. He surmised that Joseph was going to be a key element in God's plan, and therefore desired to be eliminate him, just as he later tried to eliminate Jesus Christ through the slaughter of the children of Bethlehem. It was therefore he, and not God, who inspired the brothers with the thought of getting rid of Joseph.

Joseph suffered some real unrighteous treatment at the hands of his brothers. Then in Egypt, he had a real up-down experience, but during the whole time, he consistently trusted God and followed the ways of righteousness. He had learned that victory is gained over evil only by righteousness.

When he finally met his brothers, he spoke the following words:

**Genesis 45**

<sup>4</sup> And Joseph said unto his brethren, Come near to me, I pray you. And they came near. And he said, I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt.

<sup>5</sup> Now therefore be not grieved, nor angry with yourselves, that you sold me hither: for God did send me before you to preserve life.

<sup>7</sup> And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance.

<sup>8</sup> So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and He has made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.

Later, after Jacob died, the other sons feared that Joseph would still take revenge on them:

**Genesis 50**

<sup>15</sup> And when Joseph's brethren saw that their father was dead, they said, Joseph will peradventure hate us, and will certainly requite us all the evil which we did unto him.

<sup>16</sup> And they sent a messenger unto Joseph, saying, Your father did command before he died, saying,

<sup>17</sup> So shall you say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray you now, the trespass of your brethren, and their sin; for they did unto you evil: and now, we pray you, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father. And Joseph wept when they spoke unto him.

<sup>18</sup> And his brethren also went and fell down before his face; and they said, Behold, we are your servants.

<sup>19</sup> And Joseph said unto them, Fear not: for am I in the place of God?

<sup>20</sup> But as for you, you thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive.

<sup>21</sup> Now therefore fear not: I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spoke kindly unto them.

Joseph again reveals God's character. The brothers feared for the consequences of their actions, and still having some heathen ideas of God, they thought He, through Joseph, would now punish them.

They knew what they had done when they had the power in their hands; how they had thrown Joseph in a pit and then sold him as a slave. And now they feared, because Joseph was a ruling man in Egypt and had even more power in his hands. But instead, Joseph spoke peace to them, and reminded them that God is the source of blessing. In Joseph's hands, such power was only used as a blessing to others; it only brought good, not evil.

The evil that his brothers wrought, had been overruled by God for good. Joseph reiterated that it was God who "sent him," not them. That does not mean they were guiltless. God did not inspire

his brothers with “hatred” in order to get them to sell Joseph. But He overruled the sinful actions for good. We are called to be like God, and to...

**Romans 12**

<sup>21</sup> ...overcome evil with good.

If Joseph had not submitted himself entirely to God during his time in Egypt, the situation could well nigh have ended in disaster. So there was no glory to the brothers for their hatred, but all glory to God for what He had done, and all blessings on Joseph for cooperating so faithfully.

Just before Jacob died, he blessed his sons, with prophetic words. Joseph especially was given a rich prophetic blessing. Among that blessing, the following words are spoken:

**Genesis 49**

<sup>23</sup> The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him:

<sup>24</sup> But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel).

Here, the “hatred” of the brothers is contrasted with the help of God. If God directly inspired both actions then He would indeed be a “god of confusion.” But we are assured:

**1 Corinthians 14**

<sup>33</sup> For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace.

Through Joseph’s ministry, and his brothers’ meditation on the results of their own sinful course, they were converted to see the benefit of God’s ways. Nevertheless, Jacob had some pretty hard things to say about some of the brothers in his dying discourse in *Genesis 49*. He clearly recognized that sin brings consequences, and although God can at times overrule the consequences, there is always suffering and trouble involved that need not have been, both to men and to God.

When Jacob and his family had to come to Egypt to get grain, it was not such a great witness, for here they were, claiming to serve the true God, and yet they were suffering the same famine that the nations who served false gods were suffering.

While Joseph was giving a strong testimony that Jehovah was the true God who could deliver, the rest of his family were not. That was a lost opportunity. Yes, God still worked mightily through Joseph, but He could have worked even more mightily with eleven more Josephs. God could have, and would have, used the whole family for the salvation of Egypt. It would have been a more impressive testimony!

Ask yourself this: if Joseph's brothers had accepted him, and given him the respect he should have had, how else might God have worked to save Egypt? It could have been much more glorious if that family had true gospel unity and love. They could have shown that to the astonished world, instead of a bunch of murder, hatred and grief.

How do we know that God would have used the whole family this way? Because 1700 years later, when Jesus prepared twelve disciples (who were the New Testament counterpart of the twelve sons of Jacob), they ALL were sent out to be a blessing to the world, and to reveal God's grace. What happened in the New Testament, could have happened in the Old. God's purposes have not changed.

## **God Salvages the Failures**

Sin always bring suffering and great loss. God has had many great plans for His people, which they have frustrated again and again, and then God has to pull out "plan B", and "plan C", etc. Eventually, God's glory is revealed, but at a terrible cost of human life and dignity.

Think of the many lives and property that were lost when the northern and southern kingdoms of Israel and Judah fell into Babylonian captivity. God's glory was still revealed through men

like Daniel, Daniel's three friends, Esther and Mordecai, Ezra and Nehemiah. The heathen were introduced to a knowledge of the true God, and eventually Nebuchadnezzar the king, and other people among them were converted.<sup>3</sup>

Some wonderful stories of God's dealings through His people come from those dark days, but how much more glorious it could have been.

We only need to consider some of the promises to Israel, how they were to be the light and center of the world,<sup>4</sup> messengers of peace to all countries,<sup>5</sup> to realize what a glorious destiny they could have fulfilled. Most of that was lost through sin and unbelief.

God still has His plans for dealing with the consequences of sin, but where we stand in those plans depends largely upon our acceptance of the fact that has been proven over and over again: that sin brings death, and that it is not safe at any time to depart from God's perfect ways. Jesus proved that, and what a glorious life He lived.

It is not a display of supernatural power that converts people, nor the fear of pain or death. It is rather the revelation of God's care and love, and the goodness of His ways IN CONTRAST TO the results of departure from those ways.

## **Fear of Power**

In our world, there have been many governments that ruled by the fact that they had the military power on their side. Just watch a few videos about Romania, or North Korea, or Russia, when these countries were ruled by dictators (North Korea still is). You will see all sorts of fantastic displays of adoration and respect to the powers that be. But this kind of obeisance is simply due to

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<sup>3</sup> *Daniel 4, Esther 8:17.*

<sup>4</sup> *Genesis 22:17-18; Deuteronomy 28:1-14.*

<sup>5</sup> *Psalm 72, Isaiah 60, Isaiah 66:10-13.*

fear. The people fear that if they don't do this, they will be executed, and so great expressions of love are shown.

Many people in our world today, even many Christians, are influenced by the world, and project an image of God that is not much different from the rulers of this world. In this they confuse Satan and God, and do not distinguish properly between the opposing principles by which those kingdoms (God's and the world's) are governed.

But not to make this distinction means eventually falling into the trap of serving Satan while you think you are serving God... which is what Jesus warned about:

**John 16**

<sup>2</sup> They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time comes, that whosoever kills you will think that he does God service.

There is a control exercised by God. He is the sustainer of everything; and He exercises an influence through His angels and his people on earth to be the "salt of the earth," to render good for evil, and to preserve it by their godly influence.

But there are also certain forces which He permits, that are not directly under His control, namely the powers of evil angels and ungodly men. In these forces we see the will of Satan and self, not the will of God.

**Is God "weak"?**

Some think this is a "weak view" of God, but so the Jews also thought Christ was a "weak" Messiah, who could not even save himself from the cross. They didn't want such a God, who would allow himself to be tortured, and would advocate that they submit willingly to the rulership of heathen kings. But Christ understood that the only way to win the battle was to adhere unswervingly to faith and obedience.

Truth will win in the end, not because God steps in with violence and crushes the opposition, but because it is an eternal

principle, and simply will outlast evil. Evil has within itself the seeds of its own destruction.

As God works to bring light to and through His people on earth, the harvest of evil and good will be hastened. This is what will bring about the final events of the book of *Revelation*. This is how God's control is exercised.

Some people think that God actually inspired Joseph's brothers to plan murder and then slavery for Joseph, that God actually put those thoughts in their heads.

I don't believe that God ever uses evil methods. He may overrule them for good, but He never resorts to them himself. He is a righteous God, and righteousness means right-doing, or harmony with the principles of His own Law. This is the view of God that Jesus and Joseph demonstrated.

## **Heathen Ideas**

The idea that God, because He is all-powerful, works outside of His Law, or is above the Law, is a heathen idea, and it leads to views of God which are no different than the Greek idea of Zeus, or the Roman idea of Jupiter. Both of these were father-like deities, who were considered to have ultimate control over all things.

The God of the Bible is entirely different, not just in name, but in character. It was for this reason that God gave the Israelites clear instructions to have nothing to do with the gods of the heathen, because if they did, their ideas of Jehovah would become polluted with heathen thoughts, and then they would not be able to relate to Him properly, nor to serve Him correctly, nor to represent His glorious character before the world.