

## God Loved Pharaoh

Our all-knowing, all-powerful sovereign God is always good and always loving.

In the beginning God created the world and it was good. All of it was good according to Genesis 1.

Sin is bad. Evil is evil. God couldn't have created them in His good creation.

Lucifer was part of God's good creation. Lucifer looks at himself and instead of it causing him to give thanks and praise to the perfect Creator, he thinks of himself and how beautiful and perfect he is (Ezekiel 28:13-17). He thinks he's the best and deserves to be equal with God.

He had the ability to make the choice to love himself instead of loving God. God must have created him with the ability to make that choice. He's also our first example of why we need suffering, why we need troubles in our lives -- because the abundance of God's blessing can cause us to forget Him.

Adam and Eve were more of God's perfect creation. They were good. It was all good according to the word of God. And yet, they were able to choose to love themselves instead of loving God and obeying His word. God must have created them with the ability to choose. He didn't create evil hearts in them to cause them to sin. He created only good. They were His good creation, yet they had the ability to make a choice that wasn't good. Just like Satan, they were enticed by the thought of being like God.

God only ever acts within His character. 2 Timothy 2:13 says that if we are faithless, He is faithful because He cannot deny Himself. Hebrews 6:17 says that God's nature is unchangeable. God is love and will always be loving. He can't not be loving. God is good. He can never not be good. God doesn't stop acting in one attribute to take on another. God is loving when carrying out His wrath. God is good when carrying out His justice. He never stops being Himself or He would cease being God.

For God so loved the world that He sent His Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. John 3:16 is true. God loved the world. 1 John 2:2 says that Jesus is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and for the sins of the whole world. Who did God send Jesus for? The world, the whole world, according to the word of God. Whosoever believes will have everlasting life because Jesus came and died for them all, as God's word says.

Jesus said that no one could believe, no one could come to Him, unless the Father drew him or her (John 6:44). Whom does the Father draw? We know that God desires all people to be saved and that He wants all to come to repentance, that none should perish, but all come to a saving knowledge of truth (1 Timothy 2:4, 2 Peter 3:9). Again, God's word is true!

God desires all to be saved, but all are not saved. Why? Because God is love and God is good! God is love and love is not selfish; it doesn't seek its own way (1 Cor. 13:5). God does not insist on His own way. He doesn't force anyone to love Him. Love is a choice we make, and if we

were forced into loving God, it wouldn't be true love. God wants to be in a loving relationship with us. Because of His goodness and love, He will allow us to choose Him or reject Him.

Can a sinful person choose a good God? The Bible says we have no good in us (Ps. 16:2, Rom. 3:10). Are we able to make the right choice? If a sinful man can fear and act selfishly, then, yes, a sinful man can make the right choice and choose God. All they need is the fear of the Lord. All they need is to see the raging storm, whether from God or manmade, and turn to God in fear, selfishly wanting to preserve themselves. There are all sorts of blessings prepared for those who fear God. It's the beginning of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding. God can take it from there and lead them in the everlasting way and teach them His paths. There are dozens of amazing promises to those who fear Him, including deliverance and mercy, teaching those who fear Him the goodness and love of God.

Jesus gives us a look at the invisible God (Col. 1:15). We can look at Jesus and see the Father. Jesus gave salvation (healing, deliverance, forgiveness of sin) to all those who came to Him seeking. He never turned anyone away. He never turned away these sinful people seeking salvation. They had made the right choice and had come to Him.

Whom does the Father draw if He wants all people to be saved? Everyone! We read in John 12:32 that Jesus would draw all people to Himself if He was lifted up. How did God draw all people to Himself? He sent Jesus to be lifted up on the cross, that all might not perish but have everlasting life if they would choose to believe, choose the love of God over the love of self.

Since we know that God desires all to be saved and that He loved the whole world, then we know that God loved people like Pharaoh. God's heart was for Pharaoh to be saved. God did more to show Pharaoh who He was, His power and supremacy over all gods, than most would ever see. Yet, Pharaoh chose not to believe. Why?

It says God hardened His heart. But we know God's character, that He is loving and good; and we know God's heart, that He desires all to be saved and none to perish. God couldn't have been preventing Pharaoh from believing and being saved. That would be like locking the door on someone trapped in a burning room. That would be evil. We know God is good. So, how did God harden Pharaoh's heart? God loved him. God gave Pharaoh exactly what he needed in order to be saved. What did Pharaoh need? Humility. He was set up as a god over his people. We learn in Joseph's story how the Egyptians despised shepherds. Whom does God send? He sends a shepherd to tell Pharaoh what to do. Pharaoh could have been saved if he had humbled himself to obey. He refuses to humble his heart before this shepherd. His heart was hardened at the thought. God's plan for the mighty Exodus was never in danger because God knew the end from the beginning and put a man in Pharaoh's place for such a time as this, knowing what his reaction would be.

There is evil in the world, but it's not because God is plotting evil and dreaming up new ways to torture people. God is good! There is evil in the world because God, in His loving goodness, allows people the freedom to choose Him or not.

God is not only loving and good. He's a lot of other wonderful things as well. He is sovereign. He is all-powerful. He is all-knowing. He will protect and care for His children. We are not at the whim of the choices of others. God sets up His hedges of protection around His own, lines that cannot be crossed until He removes the boundary for our good and His glory. Jesus was never at the whim of the Pharisees' plotting. He died in the way and at the exact time and place God chose, and God is big enough, wise enough, and powerful enough to be able to use their choices to make that happen.

When God instructs Joshua to have everyone in Jericho killed, is God acting against His good and loving character? Of course not! God was acting in justice and in love. How do we know? God is just. God is love. If they lived, they would be a snare to His children. It would lead to their death. He was protecting His children. And in being all-knowing, God knew from the foundation of the world who were His. When He created each of us, He knew the end from the beginning (Is. 46:10). He knew who would choose Him. That's how we could be predestined, chosen from before the foundation of the world (Eph. 1:4). He knew us. He knew it all. He couldn't possibly choose the elect apart from His knowing our choices because He sees it all. He could put those who were His in the place of His choosing and those who were not His in another place (Acts 17:26). No one was destroyed who would have come to repentance. God saves out the one who would choose Him, and in fact doesn't kill everyone, but saves a whole family.

Why was Rahab's family saved out of Jericho? She acted in the fear of the Lord. The others in the city were all in the same circumstance. God didn't do anything special for Rahab other than present her with an opportunity to make a choice. She was in the same predicament as the rest of the city, but the rest didn't humble themselves under the fear of the Lord. They felt the fear and instead of turning to God for salvation, put their trust in their wall and in their own gods.

Why did the children of Jericho have to die? God is good and loving. Instead of creating orphans, He brought the children home to Himself to always have a perfect and good loving Father; He assured them salvation.

When God has His prophets speak of the destruction that God will send on Israel, it's out of His love for them. His plans for them are good. His desire is to prosper them, to bless them. He sets before His people a choice. He repeatedly sets a choice before them. He would be lying (and therefore no longer God) if He were saying they had the choice but they really had no choice, if He was forcing their hand like a trickster magician. God presents an actual choice. They could have chosen Him, chosen life. They choose their own destruction, and even that isn't at the whim of the invaders. Their destruction will all happen in the time and in the way God allows. He will allow it only because His end goal is to save them. He loves His children. He will save Israel. He will always act on their behalf. There will always be a remnant because He will always love His children. God can and will assure there is always a remnant.

How? The Bible tells us that God will have mercy on whom He wants to have mercy (Romans 9:18). God will sovereignly act to intervene to help some choose Him, and we're told that it is God's prerogative to be loving and merciful and we have no right to question that (Romans 9:15). We have to recognize He's God and we're not.

Paul is a good example of this. He gets special treatment in how God works to get his attention. The disciples were told by Jesus to pray for those persecuting them. There's a good chance some of them were obeying Jesus and praying for Paul and the other Pharisees persecuting them. There's a good chance that God was working on Paul's heart before the dramatic events on the road to Damascus. Jesus says to Paul, "It's hard to kick against the goads."

It would seem God had been prodding, goading Paul along to knowing Him. Paul knew the Scriptures. Jesus had been lifted up and all men were being drawn to Him. Paul knew Isaiah 53 and all of Moses' teaching. God was working on Paul's heart and Paul was fighting it. People tend to be overly zealous against the thing they are struggling with themselves. Paul was ready to immediately make the choice to humble himself and repent when God dramatically showed up in His life. God can have mercy on whom He wants to have mercy, but Paul still had to make the choice.

Why does God not show mercy to everyone? Why does God create people knowing that they will go to hell? If He knows the end from the beginning, then why go through with creating the people who wouldn't choose Him? Because He loves His children. He does it for us. He is not acting unjustly or unloving toward those who will not choose Him. He gives them life. He gives them food. He gives them rain in its due season. He gives them the sun and displays of His power and majesty so that none have an excuse (Rom. 1:20). God is good and just and holy and perfect in all of His ways.

He allows them to be born and to be destroyed at their own choosing because of His love for the elect, for His children, for those He knew would come to a knowledge of truth and repent and walk in abiding love with Him through faith.

Isaiah 43 records God saying that He will give Egypt for the ransom of Israel, peoples for them. He is able to use the evil choices of others for the sake of His beloved children. He is willing to go through the heartache of losing rebellious children for our sake. God lives in sadness and anger over sin and hurt and rebellion and oppression, for our sake. He does not seek His own. He is love. He seeks our welfare. We needed to see the choice so that we would choose God. If we only saw good, we would be in danger like Satan and Adam and Eve. Ease and comfort are a danger to us. God uses the evil choices of others to urge us toward the good choice of Him.

He allows them to live and carry out their evil choices. God's choice is to allow them their free will. That's why surrendering our lives to Him and prayer are so integral. We need to give Him the "right" to act on our behalf and on the behalf of others. Not that we can prevent all suffering from the evil choices of others, but God is in control and can protect us from them or use their choices and redeem them in our lives to carry out His heart purpose of teaching us who He is. God says that He will show Paul how very necessary it is for him to suffer (Acts 9:16). God wasn't plotting evil against His chosen child Paul. God was going to instruct Paul about the necessity of suffering. It is then Paul who teaches us about sharing in the fellowship of Christ's suffering (Phil. 3:10).

God takes what is intended for evil and turns it to good (Gen. 50:20, Rom. 8:28). Jesus endured the cross so that many could come to righteousness. We need to die to self, that Christ might live

in us. We need the help crucifying self. We aren't good at doing it ourselves. But we need to die to gain Christ. That's our abundant life that we seek and desire. In allowing suffering in our lives, God is bringing about the desires of our hearts if we are truly seeking to live as Christ and to love God with our whole hearts.

We can't do anything without God acting first. We choose to love God with our whole heart, mind, soul, and strength because He perfectly loved us first. He is good. He is our good Father who provides and protects, guides and comforts, blesses with joy and peace. That's the heart of God. He never hurts anyone willingly (Lamentations 3:33). His heart-choice is never to hurt, afflict pain, or cause grief.

No one can stop God's plans (Job 42:2, Is. 43:13), but God Himself. He can change His plans. However, He also must act within character, or He wouldn't be Himself and we'd all be in trouble. If God stopped loving, He would cease being God. If He stopped being just, He would cease being God. He is and always was and always will be. He can't not be, and He can't not be who He is. He cannot lie. He must remain holy and separated from sin. He must carry out justice. His hand is forced by our choices. He presents His people with a choice: if you choose this, this bad thing will happen. If you choose that, this wonderful thing will happen. God is trying to help them make the right choice. The right choice is so clear. However, He sovereignly gave them freewill, and He must let them choose. He also has to remain true to His nature, character, and authority. He must afflict; he must bring punishment and wrath. He must carry out His word against them, at their choosing, even if it's not what He would have chosen, not what His heart wants for them.

God is only good. God is only loving. May we always act, speak, think, and even react in ways that only honor our God who is perfect in all of His ways.