

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

Polytheism, Tritheism, Dualism, Monotheism, and Atheism are religious terms to express the varying beliefs of humanity about God. Polytheism is the doctrine of many gods; tritheism is the belief that there are three gods; dualism is the teaching that the universe is under the dominion of two opposing forces or principles; monotheism is the belief in one God; and atheism is the teaching that there is no God at all. These varying beliefs witness to the sad fact of human depravity, and prove that the human mind is in a state of darkness concerning the true God. If I, myself, were not a Christian with the Bible, I would probably be a dualist. I look about me and see a world of conflict. I see two opposing forces, one good and the other evil. Or I might be an atheist as a result of pure reason, for there really seems to be no Supreme Being. Nobody appears to be in control, but there seems to be many powers competing for dominion. On every hand when people begin to reason, independent of the Scriptures, they ask, If there is a God, who is good and almighty, why does He allow things to be as they are? Why does He not triumph over evil? Why does He not kill the devil? Why does He not stop this war? and so on, ad infinitum.

The Christian believes what he does because he has the Bible and a certain inward experience. And God is the Author of both. The Bible is God's objective or external revelation, and the experience is God's subjective or internal revelation. The Bible without this inward experience (truth in the inward parts) will not make one a Christian. On the other hand a religious experience which is out of harmony with the Bible is both false and dangerous. Saul of Tarsus was religious long before he became a Christian, and thought that he ought to do many things contrary to Jesus Christ. People may be subject to evil spirits as well as to the Holy Spirit. Paul judged the Thessalonians to be the elect of God,: *"For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake"* (I Thes. 1:5). As a Christian with the Bible, I am a monotheist, a believer in the one true and living God who is absolutely supreme. The monotheistic religions are the Jewish, the Mohammedan, and the Christian, and all three have at least a part of the Bible. Thus it appears that no people will be monotheistic without the Bible. Man is a religious being by intuition, but he is not a believer in one God by intuition. The idea of one God is a revealed doctrine, found only in the Bible. The cultured and educated Athenians of Paul's day believed in a plurality of gods. And many of the self styled intelligentsia of this century have gone to the opposite extreme and contend there is no God at all. So without the Bible and a God wrought experience

men range in their beliefs all the way from many gods to no God.

Who Is Running This World?

There are four distinct views of the happenings of this world, four theories of how things come to pass. There is the view that things come to pass according to a fixed law, called the law of nature. Those who hold this view are rationalists, and refuse to believe anything that cannot be explained on natural grounds. Their so-called faith is the result of looking through a microscope or examining a test tube. Then there is the view that things happen by a sort of chance. According to this view there is nothing fixed or certain; one thing is as likely to happen as another. There is the third position that everything comes to pass by a cold, impersonal force called fate. And finally there is the Christian view that things come to pass by the Providence of God. According to this view the Creator is also the Administrator.

Definition

Providence may be defined as God's government of His creation. The government of God in the affairs of the world is a subject of deep importance to the Christian, for by proper views of Providence the believer will learn to look for and will be able to see God's hand and heart in all his experiences. He will not talk like the uncircumcised Philistine when they said, *"it was a chance that happened to us"* (I Sam. 6:9); but with Job *"And said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD"* (Job 1:21).

God is not idle. The Savior said, *"My Father worketh hitherto and I work"* (John 5:17). God is the one person always on the job. He is not like the football squad that must take time out to rest and plan the next play. He is not like the tired farmer who must sleep and eat to recuperate strength for another days work. He is not like the prize fighter who must go to hi corner between rounds to be worked over and patched up. Our God knows nothing of weariness and emergencies. *"Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding"* (Isa. 40:28). He is never at wits end; He always knows what to do, and how to do it, and when to do it. He is the one and only person qualified to govern and control His creation.

There are a lot of people who might think that God is doing a bad job in governing this world. Men might propose a lot of changes. Some may think the present situation calls for a new deal. Some might suggest that God kill the devil, and put men like Hitler and other war lords out of the way and replace them with peace loving men. If God is the Almighty and in control, He could easily do any

one or all of these things. But He will not be dictated to; *"In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will"* (Eph. 1:11).

If God its not running this world, who is? If we judge by sight, by appearances, we might think the devil is running things. From another view it appears that the politicians are in command; or, since there are so many "rackets" in the world, it might seem that the racketeer are in the saddle. There is no doubt but that Hitler meant to rule this world, and make all countries contribute to his personal glory, and to the good of his so called superior race. Obviously there is a lot of competition among men for positions of authority. The lust for power is everywhere evident. Now it is freely admitted that Satanic and human agencies have their place and do their work, but over and above all, God is on the throne, *"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain"* (Ps. 76:10). Men rule; God overrules. Men turn; God overturns.

If He who created the world is not running it, why isn't He? It must be either because He does not want to, or is unable to. The thinking man will have to admit that God is running the world; otherwise He has either lost interest in it or control over it. Men manufacture articles and lose control over them. A man may be killed in an airplane he builds. He may be poisoned by a medicine he compounds. A mother may be disgraced by a daughter or son born to her. But God is in no danger from His creation. He cannot be disgraced by His creatures, while all who oppose Him will sooner or later find themselves in disgrace and forever ruined.

The Kind of World God Is Running

It will help us to understand and appreciate Divine Providence if we will take a look at the world God is governing. It has a devil in it, and the devil is more popular with the citizens of this world than is God the Creator. Satan is called the god of this age, and the prince of this world. In the very dawn of human history our first parents deliberately and of their own accord rebelled against the will of God and became the devil's ally. *"And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?"* (Gen. 3:8-11). They transferred their allegiance from the God of truth to the father of lies. The Lord Jesus told the hypocrites of His day that they were of their father the devil, and were doing his will. *"In whom the god of this world hath*

blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them" (II Cor. 4:4).

It must be remembered that the devil operates through Divine sufferance. He is only tolerated not endorsed by God. His activities are circumscribed and ordained for Divine ends. He had to get Divine permission before he could afflict Job, "Then Satan answered the LORD, and said, Doth Job fear God for nought?..And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, all that he hath is in thy power; only upon himself put not forth thine hand. So Satan went forth from the presence of the LORD" (Job. 1:9,12), or sift Peter, "And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat" (Luke 22:31).

The world God is running is filled with depraved men and women. Every man, apart from inwrought grace, is an enemy of God. "*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be*" (Rom. 8:7). None but the born again people are lovers of the true God: "*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.*" (I Jno. 4:7,8). Now listen to the lips of incarnate truth: "*For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies: These are the things which defile a man: but to eat with unwashen hands defileth not a man*" (Matt. 15:19,20).

The world God is running is overrun by fallen angels or demon spirits. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations!" (Isa. 14:12). "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;" (II Peter 2:4). "*But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils*" (I Cor. 10:20). "*Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places*" (Eph. 6:11,12).

Now we should be able to understand that God is not running this world as He would run it if there were nobody in it but good people, people in love with Him, and delight to do His will. Our prisons are not run like our children's homes. Earth is not run like heaven, although God is running both places.

The Nature of Providence

1. It is Mysterioius. Everything seems to be in disorder and confusion. As we look at the world we

see conflict and there seems to be no plan or order. The world appears to be one vast battle field of conflicting wills and opposing forces. There seems to be no order in the movement of bees to and from the hive, but examine the honey and you will see plan and arrangement and order. And just as bees gather their stores of sweets against a time of need, but are colonized by man for his own good; so men plan and work and yet are overruled by the infinite wisdom of God to His praise and glory.

God tells us that we cannot understand His dealings with us. "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God" (Rom. 3:11). The psalmist says that the judgments of God are a great deep. "Thy righteousness is like the great mountains; thy judgments are a great deep: O LORD, thou preservest man and beast" (Ps. 36:6). Paul declares "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out" (Rom. 11:33). Providence is mysterious and perplexing because the God of Providence is incomprehensible to finite minds, and therefore His ways are too deep for us to understand. We must take Him at His word and I believe that He is too wise to err, and too good to afflict His children without a reason. This is a time of perplexity and many hearts are crying out, "Why doesn't God do something?" Well, dear heart, God is doing something, but we can't understand His ways. We have to walk by faith that He doeth all things well. Remember, dear reader, that God keeps the key to all life's problems.

"Is there some problem in your life to solve,
Some passage seeming full of mystery?
God knows, who brings the hidden things to sight.
He keeps the key.

"Is there some door closed by the Father's hand
Which widely opened you had hoped to see?
Trust God and wait for when He shuts the door
He keeps the key.

"Is there some earnest prayer unanswered yet,
Or answered NOT as you had hoped 'twould be?
God will make clear His purpose by and by.
He keeps the key."

2. Providence Is Minute. It covers all things, little things as well as great things. Providence has been defined as God's attention concentrated everywhere. Man is finite and has such limitations that he can only concentrate his attention on one thing and in one place; God is infinite in space

and power and wisdom and can concentrate on everything in every place. His providence is microscopic as well as telescopic. God is interested in the hairs of our head, and in the fall of the little sparrow. A preacher once remarked to his congregation, that the Bible said the hairs of their heads were numbered, but he was afraid some of them did not even think their heads were numbered.

(1) God is in control of inanimate matter. Scriptures abound in illustrations of this. "And God said, Let there be light: and there was light" (Gen. 1:3). "And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry land appear: and it was so" (Gen. 1:9). At God's word the waters of the Red Sea were divided and stood up in walls; "And the children of Israel went into the midst of the sea upon the dry ground: and the waters were a wall unto them on their right hand, and on their left" (Exo. 14:22); at His word they came together again. "And the LORD said unto Moses, Stretch out thine hand over the sea, that the waters may come again upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots, and upon their horsemen" (Exo. 14:26). At God's word the earth opened its mouth and swallowed up Korah and his rebellious partners. "And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that appertained unto Korah, and all their goods. They, and all that appertained to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation" (Num. 16:32,33). At His word the fires of Babylon's furnace were rendered harmless to His faithful servants. "Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego: therefore he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace one seven times more than it was wont to be heated. And he commanded the most mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, and to cast them into the burning fiery furnace" (Dan. 3:19,20). The very elements are under His control. He sends the rain. "For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater" (Isa. 55:10). He calls for a famine. "And the famine was sore in the land" (Gen. 43:1). He withholds the harvest, "For these two years hath the famine been in the land: and yet there are five years, in the which there shall neither be earing nor harvest" (Gen. 45:6), or gives abundance at His will. "And God sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance" (Gen. 45:7).

(2) God has control over irrational creatures. He formed the beasts of the field and brought them to Adam to be named. "And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every

beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" (Gen. 2:20). He caused two of every unclean animal to come to Noah into the ark, to perpetuate their kind in the earth; and seven pairs of clean beasts, that Noah might have sufficient for sacrifice. "Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that are not clean by two, the male and his female. Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth...There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah" (Gen. 7:2,3,9). God's control over irrational life was manifested in the plagues visited upon Egypt. "And the fish that was in the river died; and the river stank, and the Egyptians could not drink of the water of the river; and there was blood throughout all the land of Egypt" (Exo. 7:21). At His biddings swarms of flies invaded the homes of the Egyptians, "And the LORD did so; and there came a grievous swarm of flies into the house of Pharaoh, and into his servants' houses, and into all the land of Egypt: the land was corrupted by reason of the swarm of flies" (Exo. 8:24), while none came into the homes of the Israelites. "And I will put a division between my people and thy people: to morrow shall this sign be" (Exo. 8:23). At His will Egypt was plagued with frogs and locusts. Daniel was cast into the den of lions, "Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee" (Dan. 6:16), but God locked their jaws and Daniel was not devoured. "*My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt*" (Dan. 6:22). God opened the mouth of the ass to rebuke Balaam. "And the LORD opened the mouth of the ass, and she said unto Balaam, What have I done unto thee, that thou hast smitten me these three times?" (Num. 22:28). Jonah did not want to be a foreign missionary, so he took a ship to Tarshish; "But Jonah rose up to flee unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD, and went down to Joppa; and he found a ship going to Tarshish: so he paid the fare thereof, and went down into it, to go with them unto Tarshish from the presence of the LORD" (Jonah 1:3). God sent a great wind that rocked the boat, "But the LORD sent out a great wind into the sea, and there was a mighty tempest in the sea, so that the ship was like to be broken" (Jonah 1:4), and when the sailors threw Jonah overboard, "So they took up Jonah, and cast him forth into the sea: and the sea ceased from her raging" (Jonah 1:15). God had a big fish ready for Jonah. "Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights" (Jonah 1:17). He caused the fish to vomit up Jonah just as it reached the shore. "And the LORD spake unto the fish, and it

vomited out Jonah upon the dry land" (Jonah 2:10). At God's will the cock crowed three times just when the Lord told Peter it would. "Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, That this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny me thrice" (Matt. 26:34). "*The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all*" (Ps. 103:19).

(3) God's control extends to men, all men, both good and bad. We have no trouble in seeing that God is in control of the good; "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning" (James 1:17). The difficult thing for many is to see that He reigns everywhere; "And the LORD said unto Samuel, Harken unto the voice of the people in all that they say unto thee: for they have not rejected thee, but they have rejected me, that I should not reign over them" (I Sam. 8:7); that He is in control over the wicked as well as the good. God allows sin because He is able to overrule it for His own glory. God is not the author of sin, but He is the Controller and Director of it. Augustine has a very helpful word on this point:

"Men's sin proceeds from themselves; that in sinning they perform this or that action, is from God who divideth the darkness according to His pleasure."

God is not the causative force, but the directing force in the sins of men. Men are rebellious, but are not out from under the control of God. God's decrees are not the necessitating cause of the sins of men, but the foredetermined and prescribed boundings and directings of men's sinful acts.

"Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know: Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain" (Acts 2:22,23). An English brother, Percy W. Heward, puts the truth clearly. He says:

"The wishes of sin are the wishes of man; Man is guilty; man is to be blamed. But the all wise God prevents those wishes from producing actions indiscriminately. He compels those wishes to take a certain Divinely narrowed course. The floods of iniquity are from the hearts of men, but they are not allowed to cover the land; they are shut up to the channel of God's sovereign appointment, and men unwittingly are thus held in bounds, so that not one iota of God's purpose shall fail. He brings the floods of the ungodly into the channel of His providence to turn the mill of His purpose."

A Practical and Comforting Doctrine

It is a joy to know that God, our Heavenly Father, is ruling this world. "*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his*

purpose" (Rom. 8:28). This truth would not be possible were He not in control. He can and does assure His children that all things work together for their good;

"The world is wide in time and tide, and God is guide;

Then do not hurry.

"The man is blest who does his best, and leaves the rest;

Then do not worry."

Let us take another illustration: Here is a farmer who has an artesian well on his place, a huge stream of water that will ruin his place if left alone to spread itself over the farm. There must be a channel for that water to flow through or it must be capped and the water checked. This well can be made an asset if the water can be controlled. He decides to make a channel for that water; he will control it and make that which would injure him to serve him. So he runs a pipe line from that well to his house and with the turn of a faucet he gets water for cooking and drinking and bath. He runs another line to the barn and with the turn of a spigot waters hundreds of cattle and hogs. He runs another line to his grove and keeps it in excellent condition in time of drought. Wherever he needs water he runs a line to it from that well. Now, the human heart is an artesian well of sin. If God did not control it, it would destroy His purpose and overthrow His government. So He makes it run through channels of His purpose. And that which He does not turn to His glory, He holds back. *"Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain"* (Ps. 76:10).

One pipe line from the well of sin ran to Calvary. Human sin is seen at its worst when wicked men nailed the Lord of glory to the tree of the cross. And yet God's purpose was fulfilled. The death of God's sinless Son required a terrible amount of sin, but the carnal mind that hates God was equal to it. So God turned human hatred in that direction. He fixed all the details about the death of Christ. *"Who hath believed our report? and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed? For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he is brought as a lamb to the*

slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he openeth not his mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment: and who shall declare his generation? for he was cut off out of the land of the living: for the transgression of my people was he stricken. And he made his grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death; because he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he hath poured out his soul unto death: and he was numbered with the transgressors; and he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:1-12). He was to be crucified between two wicked men. "Where they crucified him, and two other with him, on either side one, and Jesus in the midst" (John 19:18). His garments were to be divided among the soldiers, His vesture was to be the prize in gambling, "And they crucified him, and parted his garments, casting lots: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture did they cast lots" (Matt. 27:35). "They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture" (Ps. 22:18). He was to be given vinegar with gall to drink, "They gave him vinegar to drink mingled with gall: and when he had tasted thereof, he would not drink" (Matt. 27:34). His bones were not to be broken and it all came to pass just as it had been Divinely planned and predicted. "*For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together, For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done*" (Acts 4:27,28). What a motley and mighty crowd! And yet all they could do was what God had predestinated to be done.

Yes, dear child of God, our Father rules. Our times are in His hand, so that we can say with the poet:

"Yes, leave it with Him;
 The lilies all do,
 And they grow
 They grow in the rain,
 And they grow in the dew
 Yes, they grow:

They grow in the darkness, all hid in the night
They grew in the sunshine, revealed by the light

Still, they grow.

"Yes, leave it with Him,
'is more dear to His heart,

You will know,
Than the lilies that bloom,
Or the flowers that start

'Neath the snow:

Whatever you need, if you seek it in prayer,
You can leave it with Him, for you are His care

You, you know."