

## CHAPTER XXV

### THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD (Concluded)

In the preceding chapter we sought to define and explain Divine Providence, and to show that God is reigning in every place and over every thing.

God rested from His work of creation, not because He was tired, but because He was satisfied with His work and could pronounce everything good. "Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made" (Gen. 2:1-2). His rest did not mean cessation from work, but satisfaction with His work. Since creation He has been at work in sustaining and administering the affairs of His creation. "*And he is before all things, and by him all things consist*" (Col. 1:17); "*Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high*" (Heb. 1:3); "*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).

#### The Two Alternatives Considered

If God is not running the world, it is either because He does not wish to or because He is not able to. Let us examine these two alternatives separately.

1. If God does not wish to run the world it means that He has lost interest in it, and the world may be considered an abandoned project. To such a premise no believer can subscribe. The voice of Scripture is against such an idea. God would not give His Son to die for a world He had no interest in.

2. The view that God is not able to run the world is also unreasonable in the light of Scripture. We believe, however, this to be the position many people take, and it is because they do not know or do not believe in the God of the Bible. How often we hear people talk about God trying to do this and trying to do that! This view puts God in the position of a boy with a pair of runaway horses. Any boy who has had horses to run away with him knows what a feeling of helplessness came over him. Now the Scriptures do not at all, in any sense, represent God as distracted and helpless. "He is able," is the happy refrain of Scripture.

The three Hebrew worthies, when facing the wrath of a heathen king, said: "*If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of*

*thine hand, O king" (Dan. 3:17).*

*"And when he (Darius) came to the den, he cried with a lamentable voice unto Daniel: and the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" (Dan. 6:20). And from the den of lions, Daniel answered and said, "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).*

To those Jews who thought natural kinship to Abraham was all they needed, the Lord Jesus said, *"And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say unto you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham" (Matt. 3:9).*

To the Ephesian elders at Miletus, Paul said, *"And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).*

James tells us that: *"There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?" (Jas. 4:12).*

In beautiful benediction Jude says; *"Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen" (Jude 24,25).*

Either of the two alternatives makes prayer useless. There is no use praying to a God who has no interest in His creation, nor to a God who is helpless to deliver us.

### **How Is God Governing the World?**

In running the world God is not openly and publicly manifesting Himself. He is running the world in Providence and Providence is secret and mysterious.

1. In running the world God is giving the devil an opportunity to reveal himself and to show what he would do if he could. What would the devil do if he were able? He would do exactly what he has tried to do. He has tried to usurp the place and prerogatives of God in government. In the long ago, he said, *"For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north" (Isa. 14:13).* Satan was perhaps the most beautiful and most exalted being in the original creation. If anybody should have been satisfied with his place and position it was he. But he was lifted up with pride because of his beauty and craved more authority. He had a lust for power and sought to

seize the reins of government in his own hands.

2. In Providence God is allowing man to reveal himself and show what he would do if he had the power. What has man tried to do? He has followed the example of Satan and has tried to be like God in the matter of authority. In the garden of Eden there were two trees which stood as symbols of two very important truths. There was the tree of life, "And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever" (Gen. 3:22). symbolizing the truth that man is not self sufficient, that he is dependent upon God for everything; and there was the tree of knowledge of good and evil, "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Gen. 2:17), symbolizing the truth that man is not sovereign, that he is not allowed to do as he pleases, that he cannot determine for himself what is right and what is wrong, but that God's word is to determine that. That tree stood as a solemn reminder that God is Lord of creation. God determined what Adam and Eve could have, not they themselves. God had said, You may have this, but you must not eat that. Your life and happiness will depend upon obedience to my word.

Now, Satan came into the garden and told Eve that God had lied; "Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1); that the truth was, that to do what God had forbidden would mean their good, that to eat the fruit would mean opened eyes (eyes of the understanding), so that they could know for themselves what was right and what was wrong. They would no longer be tied to God's word about the question of good and evil. He told Eve they would become as gods, knowing (determining) what is good and what is evil.

We are told that Eve was deceived by Satan. She believed his lie and trespassed on God's authority. She believed that great benefit would come from eating the forbidden fruit. Here is the divine record of the first human sin: "*And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat*" (Gen. 3:6). From this simple but tragic story we get a definition of sin. Sin is entering into competition with God for authority. John says that sin is the transgression of the law of God, and the law of God is His word on any and every subject. Sin is setting God's word aside as the law of my life, and doing what I please. After the fatal step had been taken by Adam and Eve, "*And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know (determine) good and evil: and now, lest he put*

forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:" (Gen. 3:22). This can only mean that man had become like God in spirit and aim. He had the spirit of independency and aimed to compete with God for sovereignty and do that which was right in his own eyes; moreover, he would determine for himself what was right.

How often we hear some person ask, "What is the harm of it?" or say, "I do not see any harm in it," when the thing referred to is expressly forbidden in God's Word. Why was it wrong for Adam and Eve to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil? Only because God had said *"thou shalt not eat of it."* What harm was there in Moses striking the rock at Kadesh? It was wrong only because God had told him to speak to the rock. "And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, Take the rod, and gather thou the assembly together, thou, and Aaron thy brother, and speak ye unto the rock before their eyes; and it shall give forth his water, and thou shalt bring forth to them water out of the rock: so thou shalt give the congregation and their beasts drink. ...And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also" (Num. 20:7,8,11). What was wrong with Uzzah putting forth his hand to stay the ark, and keep it from falling off the cart? "And when they came to Nachon's threshingfloor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God" (II Sam. 6:6-7). It was wrong only because God had said that only the priests were to carry the ark, and no human hands were to touch it. What was the harm of King Saul sparing Agag, and the best of the sheep when he destroyed the Amalekites? "But Saul and the people spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, and of the oxen, and of the fatlings, and the lambs, and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them: but every thing that was vile and refuse, that they destroyed utterly" (I Sam. 15:9). It was wrong only because God had commanded otherwise. And so when Saul offered the excuse that he had saved the sheep and oxen to sacrifice unto the Lord, "And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (I Sam. 16:22). Insofar as assigning any reason for them, many of God's commandments are arbitrary, that is, they have their source in the sovereign pleasure of God. To be sure, God has a reason for all He commands, but as an absolute Sovereign He is under no necessity to make them known to His creatures.

### **Providence Is Preventive**

In governing the world God prevents much sin which would otherwise be committed. When we

think about the awful amount of sin, and the terrible degree to which sin has gone, and the awful effects of sin, we are apt to think that it would be impossible to draw any more or any worse sins from the heart, the fountain of sin. But God does exert a restraining influence on the wicked so that they do not commit all the sins possible to them. "Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee: the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain" (Ps. 76:10). To Abimelech He said, "*And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her*" (Gen. 20:6). If this heathen king had been left to his own heart's lust, he would have harmed Sarah. A young man, holding an important position and handling much money, was tempted to take a large sum with seemingly no danger of detection; it would be the perfect crime. But on the very day he planned to take the money he found a card on his desk, saying "*Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal*" (Matt. 6:19). He was stopped cold in his plan, and always regarded the incident as an act of Providence to keep him from taking the money. And, no doubt, the reader as well as the writer can think of times when he, too, was restrained from executing the designs of his heart.

### **Providence Is Permissive**

God permits sinful men to manifest the evil of their hearts. In II Chron. 32:31, we are told that God left Hezekiah: "*Howbeit in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, who sent unto him to enquire of the wonder that was done in the land, God left him, to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart.*" In Ps. 81:12,13, we find God speaking concerning Israel: "*So I gave them up unto their own hearts' lust: and they walked in their own counsels. Oh that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways!.*" Also: "*Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways*" (Acts 14:16); "*Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves:... And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient*" (Rom. 1:24,28). A woman, who had been slandered, protested when told that God had permitted it for her good. She maintained that Satan had inspired her accuser. But she needed to learn that God had permitted the work of Satan.

### **Providence Is Directive**

God directs the sinful acts of evil men to the accomplishment of His own purpose. When God permits the evil in the human heart to come out, He directs its flow in one direction rather than

another for the fulfillment of His purpose. In this way sinful acts of men become the holy acts of God. Joseph's brethren sinned in selling him into slavery, but because of an overruling Providence, he could and did say to them: "*So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God: and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt*" (Gen. 45:8). That which made their act a sinful act was their motive. Joseph says to them again: "*But as for you, ye thought evil against me; but God meant it unto good, to bring to pass, as it is this day, to save much people alive*" (Gen. 50:20).

### **Providence Is Determinative**

God determines the bounds reached by the evil passions of His creatures and the measure of their affects. God set the bounds to which Satan could go in afflicting Job. "*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 1:12). And to Satan's second challenge concerning Job, God said, "*Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life*" (Job 2:6). This illustrates what we have in I Cor. 10:13: "*There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.*"

### **The Divine Objective**

What is the Divine objective or purpose in administration? To what end is God running the world? For whose pleasure and profit is the world being governed? What will be the ultimate and manifest results of God's government?

#### **Negatively**

1. The objective in Divine Providence is not the pleasure and profit of the devil. If we take a short sighted view of the happenings of this world we might think that God is catering to the devil; that His policy toward the devil is one of appeasement. The devil does seem to have a lot of power. Peter likens him to a roaring lion in search of prey. He does seem to be enjoying much success. But look at his latter end and it will be seen that God is not governing for his pleasure and profit. Go to a farm and look at a pen of fattening hogs. It might seem that the whole farm is being run for the benefit of those hogs. They have nothing to do but eat and rest, they have all that a hog can want. But follow those same hogs to the abattoir and your view will be corrected.

2. Nor is the world being run for the good of humanity as such. God is making all things work together for the good of His people, but not for the sake of humanity as a whole. Let us face some facts: millions of people are born in poverty, live in poverty, die in poverty, and will spend eternity in

the poverty of hell. And again: millions are born in sin, live in sin, die in sin, and will spend eternity in the hell of sin. We make so bold as to say, that if God is running the world for the good of humanity, He is a colossal failure. Think of the millions of young men under arms today, not of their own choosing, but because of circumstances beyond their control. God's objective is not human happiness. If it were there would be no bombed and burning cities; there would be no wailing women, starving and crying children, bleeding and dying men on a thousand battlefields.

### Positively

God is governing the world for the highest good; for the greatest and noblest objective. What is the highest good? What is the greatest objective possible? What is the most important thing in the universe? Who is the most important being in the universe? These questions will put us on the right track for the answer to our query, or search for the Divine objective.

(1) The highest good is not the pleasure and profit of the devil. He is the enemy of God and of the good. He is not the most important person, and his welfare is not even a part of the Divine objective.

(2) The highest good is not the welfare of the human race. Man is the acme of creation, but as compared with God "*And all the inhabitants of the earth are reputed as nothing: and he doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What doest thou?*" (Dan. 4:35). Paul, speaking of himself and Apollos as workmen of God, confessed they were nothing: "*So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase*" (I Cor. 3 :7).

(3) The highest good, the greatest possible objective in Divine government is the glory of God. We reach this conclusion by following two lines of approach: first, the duty of man, and second, the testimony of Scripture.

(a) The chief duty of man must be the same as the Divine objective. What God demands of man is equal to what He aims at in government. God would not require one thing from man and pursue another end or objective in His administration. To illustrate: Our government demands from its citizens an all out effort for victory in this war, and what the government demands from its subjects is exactly what the government has for its objective: the winning of the war. Now the chief duty of man is to glorify God. "*Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God*" (I Cor. 10:31). "*And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men*" (Col. 3:23); "*For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's*" (I Cor. 6:20). We are to put God first in our prayers. His glory comes before our

needs. *"After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name"* (Matt. 6:9).

(b) The Scriptures declare the Divine objective in running the world to be the glory of God. *"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created"* (Rev. 4:11), tells us that all things exist for the pleasure of God. *"For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen"* (Rom. 11:36) gives us this truth in marvelous language. Weymouth translates it like this: "For all proceeds from Him, and exists by Him, and for Him. To Him be the glory for ever! Amen." :Dr. Robertson, in his "Word Pictures," says, "By these three prepositions Paul ascribes the universe (ta panta) with all the phenomina concerning creation, redemption, providence to God, as the source (ex), the agent (di), the goal (eis)." He also says that Alford terms this doxology in verses 33 to 36 "the sublimest apostrophe existing even in the pages of inspiration itself."

God is the one and only person in all the universe who has the right to act for His own glory. His glory is the rule of all His actions, and His glory is the rule of human conduct. Yes, the chief duty of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Salvation is not primarily for our good, but for His glory. In Eph. 1:6 we read, *"Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,"*. And in Eph. 1:11,12: *"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. That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ."* God is saving sinners that He might exhibit the trophies of His grace to an onlooking universe in the ages to come: *"That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus"* (Eph. 2 :7).

If the writer knows his heart at all, there are two things he is eminently satisfied with. First, he is satisfied with what Jesus Christ did at Calvary, when He put away the guilt of our sins by the sacrifice of Himself. We are satisfied with it because we believe God was satisfied with it. We own no theory of the atonement except the "satisfaction theory," by whatever name it may be called. Second, we are satisfied with the providence of God in our life. The road has not always been plain nor pleasant, but we believe His way has been profitable for us.

"God holds the key If all unknown,

And I am glad,

And I am glad.

If other hands should hold the key,  
Or if He trusted it to me,  
I might be sad,  
I might be sad.

"What if tomorrow's cares were here  
Without its rest,  
Without its rest?  
I'd rather He'd unlock the day,  
And, as the hours swing open, say,  
My will be best,  
My will be best.

"The very dimness of my sight  
Makes me secure,  
Makes me secure.

For, groping in my misty way,  
I feel His hand; I hear Him say,  
My help is sure,  
My help is sure.

"I cannot read His future plan,  
But this I know,  
But this I know:

I have the smiling of His face,  
And all the refuge of His grace,  
While here below,  
While here below.

"Enough this covers all my need,  
And so I rest,  
And so I rest;

For, where I cannot, He can see,  
And in His care I safe shall be,  
Forever blest,  
Forever blest."