

BRYAN STATION BAPTIST CHURCH

THE PIONEER BAPTIST

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THE PROVIDENCE OF GOD

By: Dr. C. D. Cole

Psalm 103:19, *“The LORD hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all.”* Psalm 135:6-7, *“Whatsoever the LORD pleased, that did he in heaven, and in earth, in the seas, and all deep places. He causeth the vapours to ascend from the ends of the earth; he maketh lightnings for the rain; he bringeth the wind out of his treasures.”*

Introduction: There are five distinct views concerning God. Polytheism is the belief in many gods; Tritheism is the doctrine that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are three distinct Gods; Dualism is the doctrine that there are two opposing forces struggling for mastery; Monotheism is the belief there is one supreme being, and Atheism is the denial of any supreme being.

I take it that all here today are monotheists; we believe there is only one God; One Supreme Being. That is, we subscribe to that doctrine without much thought; we do not follow it to its logical conclusion.

These varying beliefs witness to the fact of human depravity and a darkened understanding. If I were not a Christian with a Bible and thought the thing through, I would probably be a dualist, for as I look around me there seems to be two forces striving for mastery; good and evil; and I might become an atheist, for really there seems to be no supreme Being at all. So far as I can judge by what I see, there is no God at all, nobody in control.

I do not believe anybody but a Christian is a real monotheist. A

Christian is the product of the Bible and the Holy Spirit. I am a Christian because I have the Bible and a certain inward experience. And God is the Author of both. The Bible is God’s objective and external revelation, and the experience is God’s subjective or internal revelation. And it takes both to make one a Christian. A man may have the Bible and yet not be a Christian. The truth of the Bible must become an internal revelation to my soul. The truth must be in the inward parts. Just as Christ opened the understanding of his disciples that they understand the scripture; Luke 24:45, *“Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures.”* Christ opened Lydia’s heart. Acts 16:14, *“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.”* Just so the Holy Spirit opened our understanding to receive the gospel. And that is the process by which we become saved people. I Thessalonians 1:5, *“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.”* John 3:3-7, *“Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother’s womb, and be born? Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the*

Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.”

FOUR DISTINCT VIEWS

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 not based upon the Bible, but 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, nothing fixed or certain; one thing is as likely to happen as another. There is another view according to which everything comes to pass by a cold, impersonal something called fate. And finally there is the Christian view that things come to pass by the providence of God. Ephesians 1:11, *“...being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.”* Daniel 4:35, *“...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?”*

PROVIDENCE

Providence may be defined as God’s government of His creation; it is the doctrine that God is running this world and the universe. And He is Sovereign

everywhere and always. God is the efficient cause of all that is good and the permissive cause of all that is evil. The government of God in the affairs of the world is a subject of deep importance to the Christian. By a proper view of providence the believer will learn to look for and be able to see God's hand and heart in all his experiences. He will not talk like the uncircumcised Philistines when they said: I Samuel 6:9, "...it was a chance that happened to us." But in the deepest hour of sorrow he will say with Job, in Job 1:21, "*the LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD.*"

God is not idle. John 5:17, "*But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work.*" God is one person who is always on the job. He is not like a football squad that must take time out to rest and plan the next play, or like a prize fighter, or a tired farmer, who must rest. Isaiah 40:28, "*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.*"

ANOTHER POSITION

Suppose we take the position God is not running the world. What then? If God isn't, who is?

This is important, for we are weak and need to be on the winning side. For safety's sake we must trust the one who is supreme. To me the God of the Bible is supreme. To make it more practical and comforting Jesus Christ, God manifest in the flesh, is supreme. All authority is given Him in heaven and earth. He has power over all flesh.

The lust for power is everywhere evident. It is freely admitted that Satanic and human agencies have their place and do work, but over and above all, God is on the throne making even the wrath of man to praise Him. 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. Either alternative renders us hopeless. If God isn't running the world it is either because he has lost interest in or has lost control over it. Surely God has not lost interest in a world he gave His Son to die for. And it cannot be that he has lost control over it. Men make things they cannot control. A man may be killed in the airplane he builds. He may be

poisoned by a medicine he compounds. A mother may be disgraced by a daughter born to her. But God is in no danger from His creation.

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 running. It has a devil in it and he is more popular with the citizens than God. He is the god of this world, the prince and power of the air. In dawn of human history our first parents deliberately turned away from God and became the devil's ally. They transferred their allegiance from the God of truth to the father of lies. John 8:42, 44, "*Jesus said unto them...Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.*" II Corinthians 4:3-4, "*But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: 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.*"

But for our comfort we need to see that the devil operates by divine sufferance. He is tolerated, but not endorsed. His activities are circumscribed and ordained for divine ends. He had to get permission before he could afflict Job or sift Peter. The world God is running is filled with depraved men and women. Every man apart from inwrought grace is an enemy of God. Romans 8:7, "*Because the carnal mind is enmity against God: for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.*" I John 4:7, "*Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.*" Matthew 15:19-20, "*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.*"

The world God is running is overrun with fallen angels or demon spirits. I Corinthians 10:20, "*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.*" Ephesians 6:11-12, "*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."

Now we should be able to see that God is not running this world as he would run it if everybody in it was good. Our prisons are not run like our children's homes. Earth is not run like heaven although God is running both.

THE NATURE OF PROVIDENCE

It is mysterious. Romans 11:33, "*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!*" Is there some problem in your life to solve.

It is minute. It covers all things; little as well as big. God is interested in the sparrow and in the hairs of our head. Matthew 10:29-30, "*Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered.*"

God is in control of inanimate matter. Genesis 1:3,6, 9, "*And God said, Let there be light: and there was light...And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters...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.*" Exodus 14:21-22, "*And Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD caused the sea to go back by a strong east wind all that night, and made the sea dry land, and the waters were divided. 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 the right hand, and on their left.*" The rebellion of Korah. Numbers 16:30-33, "*But if the LORD make a new thing, and the earth open her mouth, and swallow them up, with all that appertain unto them, and they go down quick into the pit; then ye shall understand that these men have provoked the LORD. And it came to pass, as he had made an end of speaking all these words, that the ground clave asunder that was under them: 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.” The three Hebrew children. Daniel 3:19-25, “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. Then these men were bound in their coats, their hosen, and their hats, and their other garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Therefore because the king’s commandment was urgent, and the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste, and spake, and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God.” The elements are under his control. Matthew 5:45, “...for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.” He calls for a famine. Genesis 12:10, “And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine was grievous in the land.” He withholds the harvest or sends abundance at His will. Luke 12:16-18, Jesus teaching, “And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods.”

God controls irrational creatures. Genesis 2:19, “And out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam

called every living creature, that was the name thereof.” The Lord caused the animals to come into the ark unto Noah. Genesis 7:2-3, “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.” God opened the mouth of the ass to rebuke Balaam. Numbers 22:28, “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?” He locked the jaws of the lions so they did not harm Daniel. Daniel 6:16-22, “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. And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the signet of his lords; that the purpose might not be changed concerning Daniel. Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting: neither were instruments of musick brought before him: and his sleep went from him. Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. And when he 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? Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions’ mouths, that they have not hurt me...” What happened to Jonah? Jonah 1:17, “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.” At God’s will the cock crowed when He wanted it too. Luke 22:34, 55-60, “And he said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, before that thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest me...And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with him. And he denied him, saying, Woman, I know him not. And after a little while another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not.

And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with him: for he is a Galilaean. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew.” The Lord hath prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom ruleth over all.

God’s control extends to men; all men, both good and bad. We have no trouble in understanding that God controls good men, but it is hard for some to see 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. Men are rebellious but not out from under the control of God. This is abundantly illustrated in the death of Christ. Wicked men worked but all they did was what God had determined. Acts 2:23, “Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.” Acts 4:28, “For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.”

*“God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform;
He plants His footsteps in the sea,
And rides upon the storm.*

*Ye fearful saints, fresh courage take;
The clouds ye so much dread
Are big with mercy,
and shall break with blessings on your head.*

*Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace
Beneath a frowning providence
He hides a smiling face.*

*His purposes will ripen fast,
Unfolding ev’ry hour;
The bud may have a bitter taste,
But sweet will be the flower.”*

--William Cowper

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