

Doctrine of Divine Providence

Questions of Concern on Divine Providence

1. Define the providence of God.

Response. The providence of God may be defined as the preservation and gracious governance of what He has created.

2. How does the providence of God differ from His sovereignty?

Response. The sovereignty of God has reference to His rule over the affairs of men. The providence of God has reference to the outworking of His sovereign will.

3. Does the providence of God extend into every area of life or are there places where we can say that God does not care much about that. For example, does God care who wins the Super Bowl or the heavy weight boxing title. Does God care what you wear on a particular day or where you go? How extensive is the providence of God?

Response. The extent of the providence of God is complete. There is no minute detail of our lives that God does not take a vital interest which is why the command comes,

1 Corinthians 10:31 Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

Jesus taught that not even a sparrow can fall to the ground without the knowledge and will of the Father. He said that the hairs of our head are numbered. And, Jesus said, we are valuable to God.

- *Matthew 10:29 Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30 But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.*

4. How does belief in the providence of God differ from other religious concepts such as deism?

Response. Deism teaches that God set the world to operate according to fixed natural laws such as the Law of Gravity. According to deism there is no need for the supernatural or even for God in the final analysis. Like a well-made watch wound up, the world will operate according to natural law. God does not become involved in the details of life.

5. What Scriptural evidence is there that God is still actively involved in His creation?

Response. The Bible says that God created all things according to His word. God said let there be light and there was light. God creates all that was or ever shall be. And He shall sustain all this is.

- *Hebrews 1:3 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;*

6. Does anything in life ever happen outside the will of God?

Response. The short answer is, “No.” Nothing ever happens apart from divine providence whether it be good or bad. If something could happen outside the known will of God then the promise of Romans 8:28 could not be true.

- *Romans 8:28 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.*

Someone has suggested that a person qualifies as an atheist if they sincerely believe that anything happens apart from God’s providential activity.

7. Does the providence of God extend more over the Church than over the world and the unbeliever?

Response. The providence of God does extend over all of His creation in a general sense. But there is a special sense of care for the Church. Every event in the universe must in some way serve the good of the Church. God oversee all things for the sake of His people.

- *Ephesians 1:18 The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, 19 And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power, 20 Which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, 21 Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: 22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, 23 Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.*

8. When people talk in terms of “bringing God back into our schools [homes, lives etc],” what should be a biblical reply in light of the absolute providence of God?

Response. It is certainly true that all of the cultural problems stem from the attempt to exclude God from the culture. However, God cannot be excluded for He has established a moral universe. God is not waiting until some future judgment day to deal with individuals for their sins. One way that God judges sin is by allowing more sin. When sin has reached a saturation point there is death or revival and a return to honoring the Moral Law of God. In the end God gets His will done.

- *Daniel 4:35 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?*

9. In the area of divine providence, what comes directly from God and what is the product of secondary means?

Response. In the area of salvation God works directly upon the soul to instill a new life principle. Where there are miracles God works directly even to the suspension of the known laws of nature. Sometimes a miracle occurs when God restores the natural powers of nature as He did with Abraham and Sarah. Sometimes God will intervene in the natural laws so that their normal effect is different. When a poisonous viper bit St. Paul God was with him and Paul did not die.

However, God is generally pleased to use secondary means for most events. For example you get a job and then you receive wages. With the money you can buy clothes and food and other items of necessity. God has provided you with food and clothing and all other items but He has done it through a secondary cause. If you go to a doctor and he gives you medicine, God is the ultimate provider, but again through a secondary cause. But He is still to be glorified and thanked for the gifts He has given to men.

10. What should be said to those who contend that using medication shows a lack of faith in God?

Response. The first thing that can be said is that there is a difference in faith in God and faith in faith. In some theological circles this distinction is being lost. Secondly, it can be stated that all truth is God's truth, all knowledge is God's knowledge and the Lord has been pleased to give medical knowledge to men. One of the authors of the Word of God is St. Luke who was a beloved physician. Doctors are not the enemies of the Church or faith.

11. If God has ordained all that shall be, and if God has established natural laws to govern the universe, why pray?

Response. God has ordained not only what shall come to pass but also how all things shall come to pass. God has decreed that some things shall come to pass through prayer. Prayer is to be offered to the Father, according to His will, in the name of Christ and in the power of the Holy Spirit. That which God has ordained to come to pass because of prayer shall happen only if people pray. As far as nature goes, none of the laws of nature operate independently of God. Therefore it is not wrong to pray for rain as Elisha did and it rained.

12. What is the relationship between God's providence and human sin? Why do bad things happen to good people? If God is all good and all powerful how can evil exist in a moral universe?

Response. Those who are enemies of the divine like to pose these type of problems because they are hostile to the rule of God in their lives. It is easier to get angry at God then to bow before a great mystery which is the mystery of sin. The Christian affirms what the Bible reveals: God is all-good, God is all-powerful, and He is the Ruler of the Universe. This means that God rules and reigns over sin, all sin, even that which He has foreordained, including the death of Christ at Calvary.

- *1 Peter 1:20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,*

Human beings, who are moral beings, have fallen into sin. Nevertheless there is a freedom to act according to one's nature.

Since the fallen nature is enslaved to sin every person is free to sin. But the natural man is not free to be righteous in the sight of God. First, sin has to be subdued. Second, a new nature has to be implanted into the heart so that the soul has the seed of God to grow. In order for all of this to happen, God must in divine sovereignty arrest sin's expression as he did with the madness of Saul of Tarsus.

The bottom line is that ultimately bad things do not happen to good people. Bad things happen because there is none good no not one (Romans 3:10; 3:23). Every person is caught up in the web of sin. This does not mean that every bad thing that happens to a person happens because that individual is evil in a direct cause and effect relationship. Jesus told the disciples one day that a man was born blind in order to manifest the glory of God (John 9:2).

There is another truth. Sometimes God punishes sin with sin (Romans 1:24:1 26; 1:28). It is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of God.

The Biblical revelation is that God hates evil as per the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20).

God prevents the occurrence of evil actions as he did with Sarah and Abimilech (Genesis 20:3- 8).

Whether God ordains evil, permits evil, or prevents evil in the end whatever expression of evil there is must serve to glorify the Lord in some way. It was a bad action, it was an evil moment when the brothers of Joseph sold him into slavery. And yet their evil actions served to glorify God (Genesis 44: 1-13). Where sin increases, grace increases all the more (Romans 5:20).

13. Is God's sovereignty contingent upon the free will of man?

Response. The sovereignty of God must be upheld. To believe in a God who creates but does not sustain His creation in a direct manner is to become a deist.

13. Can man's stubborn will inhibit God's will and God's providence in our lives?

Response. When we violate the Laws of God we are violating the will of God. But in the ultimate sense no man can frustrate God's will and Law. There is a payday someday. God's will always contains a contingency. The soul that sins will die. This is a moral universe and there is a price to pay for every violation of the divine will. God says, "Thou shalt not covet." Paul confessed that he was a covetous man. He broke the will of God. He violated His law. And Paul said, "I died."

While there is divine providence there is also human responsibility. From a human perspective all things are options. From the divine perspective all things have been foreordained. This is brought out in the death of Christ.

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:

15. Must all things occur as they do or can things happen otherwise?

Response. From God's viewpoint all things are fixed and are certain. All things must occur as they do. But, from the human point of view things might happen otherwise. Things are contingent.

This tension between divine certainty and human contingency is reflected in Scripture.

The Death of Christ

- *Acts 4:27 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, 28 For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.*

The Betrayal of Judas

- *Matthew 26:24 The Son of man goeth as it is written of him: but woe unto that man by whom the Son of man is betrayed! It had been good for that man if he had not been born.*

Jesus warns Judas about betraying Him and yet there is a divine certainty that he will.

Conclusion

In the final analysis there is a great mystery in this matter of the relationship between the sovereignty of God and human responsibility. It is a mystery that the stained minds of men with sin cannot resolve in time. Despite the mysteries of the Christian faith it is good to embrace the biblical revelation of the sovereignty of God and His providential care, for the soul can rest upon the goodness of the Lord and His control of the universe.

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