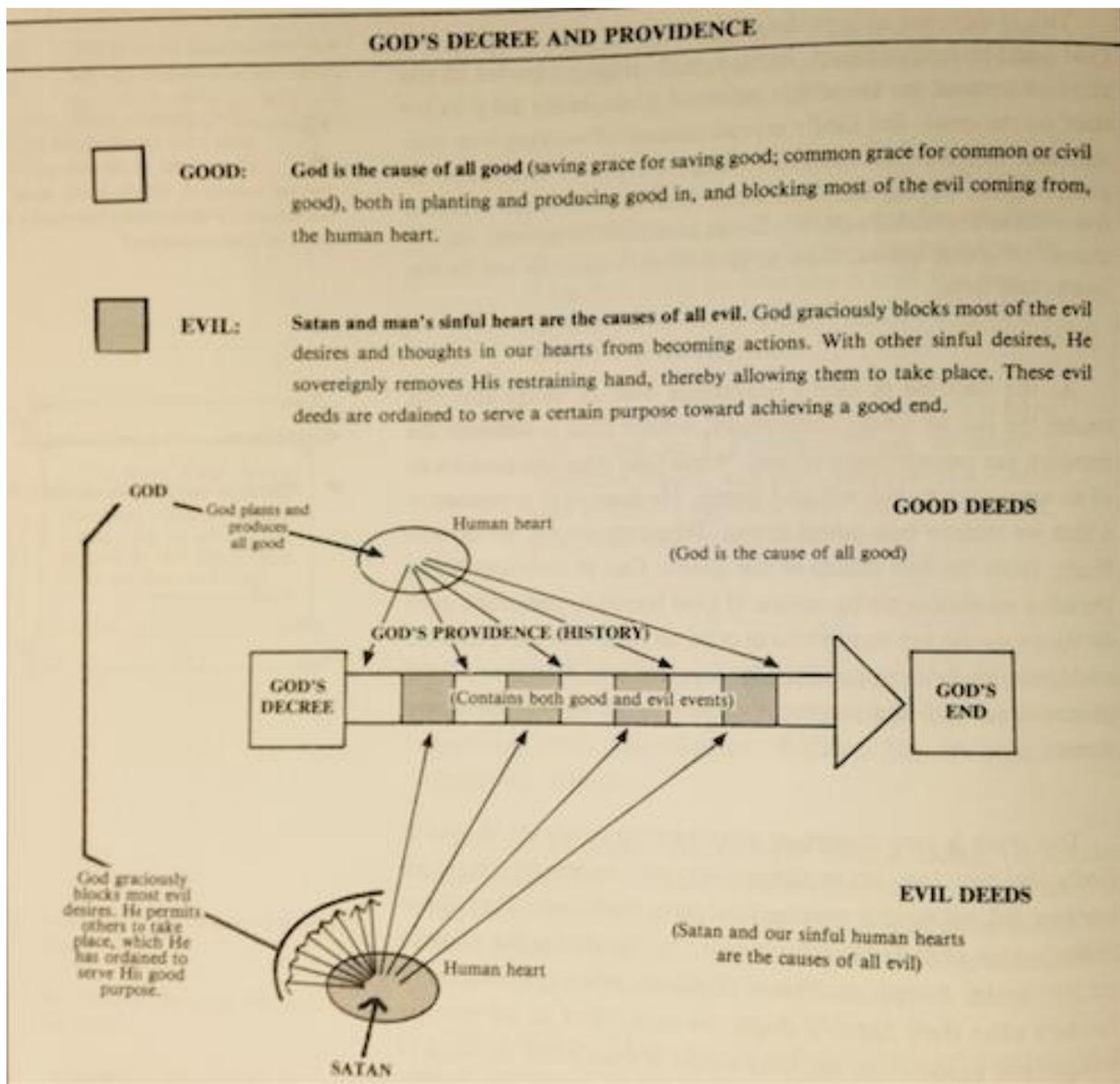


**KNOWING GOD - Theology - part 2**

**13. What is the Providence of God?**

- a. Providence (from Latin word, *providentia*) means foresight, or to see beforehand.
- b. God, the great Creator of all things, upholds, directs, disposes, and governs all creatures, actions, and things, by His most wise and holy providence, according to His infallible foreknowledge, and the free and immutable counsel of His will. [abridged from WCF ch. 5.1]
- c. "Providence is that continued exercise of the divine energy, whereby the Creator preserves all His creatures, is operative in all that comes to pass in the world, and directs all things to their appointed end." [Berkhof]
- d. Providence comprises:
  - Preservation: God controls and governs creation (Ps 103:19, 104:14), the affairs of all nations & rulers (Ps 22:28; Prov 21:1), man's birth & success (Ps 139:16, Ps 75:6, Prov 16:33, Mt 10:30), provides for all (Ps 136:25, Mt 5:45) and God's people (Deut 8:3, Phil 4:19); and
  - Protection: God protects the righteous (Ps 4:8, 5:12, Rom 8:28), and answers prayers (Ps 65:2, Mt 7:7, Jer 33:3).
- e. Man's Responsibility, God's Providence & Sovereignty. Man is free to make choices and is accountable to God for our actions. But at every point of our actions, God remains sovereign. Sproul explains: "*There are times He works through secondary causes to bring about His will, and there are times He works without those secondary causes. Sometimes He just intrudes into the scene as He did in the blaze of Jesus' miracles in the New Testament; other times He makes use of our decisions and our activities to bring about His sovereign will. The providence of God means that God is sovereign over everything that happens in this world.*"
- f. John Flavel describes the wisdom of God's providence in bringing trials in our lives: "*We are clouded with much ignorance, and are not able to discern how particular providences tend to the fulfillment of God's design; and therefore, like Israel in the wilderness, are often murmuring, because Providence leads us about in a howling desert, where we are exposed to difficulties; though he led, and is now leading us, by the right way to a city of habitations. If you could but see how God in his secret counsel has exactly laid the whole plan of your salvation, even to the smallest means and circumstances; could you but discern the admirable harmony of divine dispensations, their mutual relations, together with the general respect they all have to the last end; had you the liberty to make your own choice, you would, of all the conditions in the world, choose that in which you are. Providence is like a curious piece of tapestry made of a thousand threads, which single, appear useless, but put together, they represent, a beautiful history to the eye.*"
- g. Apply: To know that God upholds all things by His providence encourages us to be patient in adversity, thankful in prosperity, and in all things which may befall us, to place our firm trust in our faithful God and Father, that nothing shall separate us from His love (paraphrased, Heidelberg Catechism Q. 28).



J.W. Beeke (*Bible Doctrine, Vol 1, p.228*).

#### 14. What is Predestination?

- a. *Pre* means before; *destination* means conclusion or final place. Predestination is God's sovereign decree in determining the eternal state of all moral creatures, both men and angels, according to His glory, mercy and righteousness (Rom 8:28-29, 9:11-14, 22-23; Mt 20:16; Eph 1:4-5). {Note: In the Westminster Standards, *predestination* only refers to the election of men and angels, while *foreordination* is used of non-elect men and angels.}
- b. God elects some people to salvation (election), and chooses to bypass some (reprobation, Rom 9:21-22; 1 Thes 5:9; 1 Pet 2:8; Jude 4). Even before Jacob and Esau were born, God chose Jacob (Rom 9:11-13). On what basis? God chooses "according to the good pleasure of His own will" (Eph 1:5).
- c. "God's predestination clearly teaches that: (1.) God deserves all the credit and praise for each sinner who is saved. God sovereignly and graciously elected this totally lost and unworthy sinner. (2.) Man deserves all the blame and guilt whenever a sinner remains lost. God sovereignly decreed to leave this person in the sin he chose, and to justly punish him for it." - J.W. Beeke (*Bible Doctrine, Vol 1, p.141*).

- d. Predestination exalts God to the highest and humbles man to the lowest. By nature, our selfish sinful hearts want to be God - we want everything and everyone to centre upon and honour us and our wills i.e. we rebelliously fight to be God, and rejects sovereign will of God in predestination.
- e. Election is God's gracious act of love and cannot be charged with injustice. Rom 9:14-16 "What shall we say then? *Is there* unrighteousness with God? God forbid. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion ... but of God that sheweth mercy." The sinner has absolutely no claim on the blessings of God. All men have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. God would have been perfectly just to cast all men to hell. God's predestined decree to elect some to salvation is therefore an act of His sovereign grace and love.
- f. God's predestination does not take away human responsibility. For example, if a man lives carelessly and neglects his health by eating unhealthy food, drinking excessively, refuse to exercise or consult the doctor nor uses medicine when ill. He defends himself: "I cannot add one year to my life. If God has decreed that I will be healthy, I will be. If He has decreed that I will be ill, I will be. Nothing I do, or do not do, will change God's decree. I cannot make, nor keep myself healthy. Health is a gift from God." How would you correct his misunderstanding of predestination?
  - *Answer:* Predestination does not remove my responsibility and activity. To be spiritually healthy, I must use the means that God has provided. Although I cannot save myself and salvation is a gift from God, I must seek it through the means God has given, and through which He has promised to bless.

### **15. How can a good God send people to hell?**

- a. This question presumes that God sends people to hell against their will. But this is not the case. God desires everyone to be saved (2 Pet 3:9). Those who are not saved do not will to be saved. Jesus said, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, *thou* that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under *her* wings, and ye would not!" (Mt 23:37).
- b. There are two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, "Thy will be done," and those to whom God says, "Your will be done!" All that are in hell, chose it. God is just and must punish sin (Habakkuk 1:13; Rev 20:11-15). But He is also love (1 Jn 4:16) and His love cannot force others to love Him. Hence, God's love demands that there be a hell where persons who do not wish to love Him can experience the great separation when God says to them "Your will be done!"

### **16. Why does God allow terrorist activities, random shootings, tsunamis, plane crashes, fatal accidents and other horrible things to happen?**

- a. If God is good, why does He allow unjust sufferings? If God were all-powerful, why would He not protect innocent people from the wicked or from natural disasters? We find our first answer in Genesis where we are told of the fall of humanity. Man's rebellion resulted in God's curse upon earth and human life. Death and suffering entered the world as a direct result of sin. Thorns became a part of the garden, and work is now made more difficult through the sweat of the brow. Even the happy birth of a baby is attended by pain. The world we live in is full of suffering, sorrows and tragedy.

- b. But we must never conclude there is a one-to-one cause-effect relationship between the suffering and the guilt of the people who suffer. Jesus in Luke 13:1-6 teaches that our right response to tragedies is not to be judgemental of the victims, but to be reflective on our spiritual state - am I repenting of my sins? am I ready to face death and judgment by God? God lets these things happen as part of the judgment on the sinful world.
- c. Suffering reminds us that we live in a world tainted by sin, but there is hope in Jesus, if we repent. The pain in this world makes us yearn for God in heaven. There are no sinless people in this world: we all deserve death and condemnation to hell for our sins. It is the grace of Jesus that gives us hope.

### **17. How can God be both Loving and Just?**

- a. The characteristics of God are not contradictory. He is both absolutely just and yet conditionally loving. His justice is administered in love, and His love is distributed justly.
- b. The perfect example of how God's love and justice meet is in the cross. In His love, God sent His Son to pay the penalty of our sins so that His justice could be satisfied and His love manifested. Sin against the eternal God demands death (Rom 6:23). When Christ died for our sins (Rom 5:8), the Just suffered for the unjust (1 Pet 3:18) so that He might bring us to God. "For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor 5:21).
- c. God's justice demands that sin be punished, but His love compels Him to save sinners. By Christ's death for us, His justice is satisfied and His love is manifested. God is like the judge who, after passing sentence on the guilty defendant, laid aside His robe, stood alongside the convicted, and paid the fine for Him. Jesus did the same for us on Calvary. Surely, justice and mercy kissed at the cross of Jesus.