

GOD PROVIDES

Previously we looked at the nature of God's providence, and saw how 1- deism doesn't work, because God is active in the world; 2-determinism doesn't work, because everyone is responsible for their choices. The Bible presents a picture of "divine compatibilism" such that human choices are compatible with God's will, as in His sovereignty He sustains the universe and works out His perfect plan and purpose.

3- God provides everything you need to do His will. This "divine confluence" is the outworking of divine compatibilism. God's providence works out His will in human history, in conjunction with the actions of creation and of His rational creatures. Amazingly, Abraham trusted and obeyed God and went to sacrifice his promised child Isaac. He says in Genesis 22:8 "*God will provide for Himself the lamb for the offering.*" This test of faith looks toward the Lord Jesus Christ, "*the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.*" Scripture helps us understand God as Jehovah-Jireh, "the God who provides." Let's look at three mysterious aspects to how God works out His will in confluence with human choices.

"God's will by decree" is what God has created, ordained and cannot be broken. Ezekiel 24:14 "*I am the Lord. I have spoken; it shall come to pass; I will do it.*" Deuteronomy 29:29 "*the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*" RC Sproul says, "it is a great tragedy to be preoccupied with secret decrees of God to the neglect of His preceptive will, and to be more concerned with a horoscope than with obedience."

"God's will by precept" is what God has commanded. The imperatives and instructions in the Bible are summarized in Mark 12:30 and Exodus 20. Sproul says, "it is the will of God that we not sin, to have no gods before Him, to love Him with all our being, and our neighbor as ourself. Yet the will of God is broken whenever His law is broken." Such a mystery! Yet, 1 Corinthians 10:13 says that with every temptation, God provides the way of escape. Titus 2:12 says God gives His people the power to say no to sin.

"God's will by disposition" is what God wants that conforms to His character. This mystery relates to the ability of mankind to disobey the preceptive will of God. 2 Peter 3:9 says, "*God is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.*" Not all are saved, yet whosoever calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. Ezekiel 33:11 "*As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that he turn from his way and live; turn back, turn back from your evil ways, for why will you die? says the Lord.*" John Frame notes, "the sinner is able to receive Christ, he is not forced to remain a sinner contrary to his desires. His inability is moral and spiritual, for which he is himself responsible." That's why you spread the good news about Jesus! Whoever believes will be saved!

4- God's providence works for our good and His glory. About "divine concurrence" JI Packer says, "the nature of God's concurrent involvement of all that occurs in this world, without violating the nature of things, the ongoing causal processes, or human free agency, as He makes His will of events come to pass, is a mystery". Having faith doesn't mean you will understand every nuance. Romans 8:28 "*we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose*" to be conformed to the image of Christ, as He does all things for our good and His glory.

The classic example is the life of Job, whom God allowed Satan to afflict, to the glory of God and the ultimate good of Job and of all who read his story. Likewise, Joseph. He bragged to his brothers about God's plans for him, got sold into slavery, thrown into prison, raised to rule over Egypt, all then to save his brothers from famine and preserve the line of the Messiah. Genesis 50:20 "*you meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, to bring about that many people should be kept alive.*" A picture of Christ's salvation.

It is a mystery how and why God allows evil in the world, but He is in control, and He works everything together for good - for those who are His redeemed children. For the rebellious, His judgment is coming. Sproul says, "God works out His plan through means, via the real choices of willing and active creatures. But He is sovereign. I am subordinate. With respect to God's preceptive will I am active and therefore responsible and accountable." So what to do with the mystery of God's providence? Trust and obey.

He ordains means and ends. Colossians 1:9-14 says God's will is that you grow in faith, bearing fruit and being strengthened by Him. Sometimes when we get overwhelmed we forget how big God is. He is greater than you ever imagined, and loves you more than you ever knew. Trust and obey Him!