

Dispensations Of Providence

Part 3

James 5:13-20

13 Is anyone among you suffering? Let him pray. Is anyone cheerful? Let him sing praise. 14 Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. 15 And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.
(James 5:13-15 (ESV))

As we have continued in this study about God and about His “Divine Sovereignty” and His “Divine Providence”, we began first by asking some simple questions about our personal understanding of God, especially about His personal involvement in all the many ordinary matters and events that take place in each of our lives each day?

We asked first, is God “passive” in His involvement with us? Yes, He is always observing, but is He actually engaged with us in our daily struggles and sufferings. Or is He simply “watching us, from a distance”, as the Bette Midler song tells us. And from that distance, does He then “allow” what some would call “a natural course of events” to take place, only intervening if we ask Him to in prayer. And what are those “natural courses of events”? Are they uncontrolled “maverick molecules” of trouble that float around us and “just happen” to bump into us, bringing us suffering of some form?

Or, secondly, as God observes our troubles and struggles, is He also immediately much more “up close” and “personal” and “directly involved” in our circumstances, and especially, always ready to come to our aid as we call out to Him.

Or, thirdly, is God actually involved long before any of our circumstances ever arise, even initiating some, or perhaps even many of them? And then, with His Spirit working within our spirit, does He guide us toward His desired plans and purposes, as He expressed in Jeremiah 29:11, saying,

11 For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.
(Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV))

And we said that God’s involvement is most often expressed using two words, “Sovereignty” and “Providence”, “sovereignty” being God’s position of authority and power, who with His omniscient knowledge and omnipotent power exercises complete

and absolute control over everything that takes place, both in the heavens and on the earth, from the greatest to the least.

And “Divine Providence” being the manner in which God carries out His divine will. By His “Providence”, God cares for and directs all things in the universe. He is sovereign over the universe as a whole (Psalm 103:19), the physical world (Matthew 5:45), the affairs of nations (Psalm 66:7), human destiny (Galatians 1:15), human successes and failures (Luke 1:52), and the protection of His people (Psalm 4:8).

And may I strongly add, that to give credence of any kind to the idea that “chance” or “fate” is at all involved in causing the occurrences or circumstances of the daily lives of men is morally foolish and bordering on blasphemy. The ideas and concepts of “chance” and “fate” are simply the way in which the world, the flesh and the devil deny God. And we must never join them in their denial.

So then, with this understanding about the “sovereignty” and the “providence” of God as the foundation of our thinking, how then do His plans and purposes fit into all the many ordinary, and sometimes extraordinary events, activities and circumstances that take place daily within our lives.

May I say that for myself, as it relates to these three questions that I posed a moment ago, it is my own particular understanding and belief that God really is personally and intimately involved in every thought, plan, activity and circumstance that takes place on the earth and especially within each of our personal lives, and long before they begin to take place, that God is the “first cause” of all things that take place. There is no such thing as a “maverick molecule”, of any kind, floating around us that is not under God’s control. Every molecule in existence is wholly under God’s power, control and purpose.

May I give us an example of what I’m talking about. Our minds tend to give credence to such ideas as there being some source or power floating around us that has nothing to do with God? In conversations over my years, I’ve heard people say, “I hope that this thing or that thing will take place”. When I have asked “what is your hope based on”? Too many times, they have responded with some vague form of the answer, “oh, nothing in particular, I just hope that it will happen”, their answer and their hope seeming to depend on nothing more than that some “maverick molecule” of goodness will “just happen” to float by, bump into them and bring them an answer to their troubles and suffering.

May I ask you, do you ever find yourself doing such as that? I confess that before I received Christ as my Savior and Lord, I did that. But also, and unfortunately so, I realized that I was still doing that even after I received Christ.

And so, I'll ask you again, "do you do that", do you just have hope, perhaps in some unknown "force of nature"? May I strongly urge each of us to focus our hopes on the only "One" who can truly bring answers for our hope, our sovereign God. When you begin to do that, you will begin to realize that God has already been involved in those matters even from the beginning.

Here in our scripture text, God is saying to you and to me that in every matter of daily life, we are to turn to Him first. These things that are mentioned here, the suffering, the sickness, those things that most people seem to refer to as "natural causes" by saying, "oh, I caught the virus that is going around in my workplace", or, "a driver was texting and not watching where they were going and ran a red light and hit me". Or, "a drunk driver, turned in front of my friend, causing a wreck that killed them both".

It is so easy for us to ascribe to God the good and sweet blessings that we receive. And we really love the joy of knowing that we can call on Him in our times of trouble, asking Him to come to our aid. But we never want to think that any of the difficult things, such as our sufferings and sickness, could actually have initially come from God's own hand.

Our Arminian brethren, seem always to want to use the expression "God allows" those things to happen. And I can agree that He does "allow" many things to take place, especially as it has to do with our free will behavior. But in another sense, for God to only "allow" things to take place implies that He was not around when those things started, that He is a "late arrival" to the circumstance.

We often blame the world, the flesh and the devil for those things. And yes, they truly are ever and always involved. But that implies that the world, the flesh and the devil are some forms of "maverick molecules" who are able to do their evil things, causing God to have to run behind them, playing "catch up", as He fixes what they caused to take place.

Now, I do fully agree that "free will" has a lot to do with many, perhaps even most all of the daily occurrences that take place. But the question that we have been considering here is, "What about God? What is His role?" "If He is intimately involved in all these daily occurrences, how is He involved, and when did His 'Providential Hand' first become involved?" "Was His Hand part of the very inception, the 'first cause', or did He

get involved later, as so many people choose to believe, coming in, after the fact, as the 'clean-up' crew of Roman's 8:28, 'working all things together for our good'?"

May I ask us again about our understanding of the definition of "sovereignty"? Most all believers in most all church denominations agree that God is "sovereign". But when we each begin to define the small details of the concept of "sovereignty", that is where our thoughts begin to differ.

As to "sovereignty", our Federal Government is said to be "sovereign" over our nation, meaning first that our government can form and carry out constitutional laws to govern the activities and behaviors of its citizens.

And further, being sovereign means that no other nation can come across our borders and interfere in any manner with anything that might be taking place here. And especially, no foreign power can be allowed to invade our nation, and hurt our people and subvert our sovereign governmental control, as the terrorists have tried to do. Our police forces and our armies will respond to protect us.

Our nation's form of sovereignty is patterned after God's sovereignty, but can never reach to the extent of His. God is "absolute"! As with the words in Isaiah 45 where God declares to us,

5 I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, 6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. 7 I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things. (Isaiah 45:5-7 (ESV))

The point where we seem to go astray in our understanding of God's sovereignty is in our acceptance of the extent and the "absoluteness" of it. It seems that the average human mind wants to "soften" and "shave off the sharp edges" of the severity of declarations such as these that we just read about in Isaiah 45. Even the most devout of believers seem to want to "re-explain" such words from God, especially when the words are as "absolute" as these seem to be.

I think of the way that news reporters gather to hear a presidential speech. But then they regather to themselves afterwards and "re-explain" what the President said. And invariably, their "re-explanation" is very, very different. They "reinterpret" and add in their "opinions", with the end result most often being very different from the original version.

And so it seems to be with each of us as we read God's words and consider such matters as these about His "sovereignty" and His "providence". We re-explain His words of truth so that they "better fit" our idea of who we think God ought to be.

As to "sovereignty", the words that we have been given in these scriptures are quite clear. And as simple as it sounds, we each have to make a choice. Do we believe these words to be truth, the absolute truth, or not? If we choose not to believe them, then none of the rest of the concepts about sovereignty will matter. And either there is no God, or if there is a God, He is reduced to being only as I want to define Him to be, making me to be the one who is ultimately in power.

But if I do choose to believe these words of truth, then God does indeed prove to be "sovereign". This world and everyone and everything in it were created by Him and for Him. And you and I really don't get to have the "say" that we think we do! As we're told in Colossians 1,

16 . . . by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (Colossians 1:16-17 (NIV))

One of the things about God that makes Him trustworthy to be God is this truth that is given here. In the beginning, there was no one else, no person nor power that could contend with Him. The world, the flesh and the devil did not exist. Anything and anyone that now is, whether people or angels or satan or "mother nature" and "natural systems", and whatever else our minds imagine to be that might "happen" or "cause to happen", all came from the mind of God and were created, as these words tell us, by Him and for Him. He was truly the "first cause" of the existence of all things, and in Him the whole creation is held together each day, moment by moment, being sustained and kept in order by His all-powerful and righteous hand.

He is "omnipotent", all powerful. And everything that is was created by Him and for Him simply by Him thinking it and then speaking it into existence, whether it be animals, people, angels, principalities and powers, even the climatic and weather systems that take place on the earth each day, and on and on, God simply spoke, and out of nothing more than the imagination of His own mind, each person, process and thing suddenly came into being.

And as the Book of Revelation tells us, there will come a point in time when He will wipe away the things He created, at which time, He will then create a whole new heaven and

earth. There are no “maverick molecules” out there that will escape His power. That is absolute “sovereignty”!

So then, with all this being true, we have no other course of belief than to accept that God’s sovereignty really is total, absolute and complete in every way, over people, over angels, over the systems of nature, over weather and climate, over our sicknesses and suffering, and on and on.

It’s time for us to close for today, and hopefully, we’ll pick back up next week. As we leave, please take this thought and this question with you. “What does this conclusion that we have just spoken about concerning God’s “sovereignty” clearly say to us about the matters of this day? Does it not tell us that all things, our suffering, our sickness, the climate and weather phenomena, hurricanes, earthquakes and tornados, everything is under God’s absolute sovereign control, from their beginning to their end, to do with as He pleases?”

Think about those things, and the Lord willing, we’ll pick back up with these words, next week.

God declares to us,

5 I am the LORD, and there is no other, besides me there is no God; I equip you, though you do not know me, 6 that people may know, from the rising of the sun and from the west, that there is none besides me; I am the LORD, and there is no other. 7 I form light and create darkness, I make well-being and create calamity, I am the LORD, who does all these things. (Isaiah 45:5-7 (ESV))