

God's Providence

Russell Elliott

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The foresight and care of God concerning all His creatures is a truth which circumstances seem, at times, to dispute. So impenetrable are the dark clouds that sometimes surround us, so heavy and crushing the blows which fall upon us; so swift and unexpected the lightning flash that blasts and withers our hopes, and, what is more mysterious than all, and often more staggering, so unnecessary and undeserved seems the waste of joy and life that we are at times sorely tempted to doubt whether God is mindful of His creatures or has any real interest in them. Or, we wonder, if He has, does He possess any power to mitigate these unrelieved calamities? We are tempted to argue that we should be only too willing to shield our children from suffering which God allows to come upon His own.

Is there any explanation of this mystery? When we see hundreds and thousands of lives sacrificed as the result of what appears to be a mere freak of nature, or when we see a young man of great ability and usefulness cut down in early life, when we contemplate cruelty — so often allied with power — allowed to work havoc in peaceful homes, and when we behold the innocent suffering with, and sometimes for, the guilty, how can we reconcile all this with the belief in a God who is infinitely holy, just and merciful?

In endeavoring to answer these difficulties, it is no use pretending that they do not exist, or that there is no mystery after all. The mystery is there, and always will be there, in one sense, but it need not be a mystery that blinds or stupefies us, but one which leads to a deeper faith in God.

The Universe Is in Disorder

It must be remembered, in seeking any explanation of God's providential government of the universe, that things are out of joint, and that we are not living under a perfect system. Sin has to be taken into account. It has brought about a state of things which otherwise would never have existed. Under its influence man has built up a world of his own from which God is largely excluded. And nothing is more clearly revealed in the Bible than that we only see one act of the great drama of human existence, and until the whole is played out we are not in a position to judge the questions involved. If the innocent suffer for the guilty it is because of the abnormal state of things. In ordinary human affairs the same thing occurs. In time of war, people who had no hand in promoting the quarrel, and take no part in it, may be called upon to suffer just as much, if not more, than those who are directly responsible. But then, everybody recognizes that war is abnormal. So is the present state of things. It is not, however, to continue forever. God in His Word, gives us a bright outlook.

“And in this mountain shall the Lord of Hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things; a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. And He will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of His people shall He take away from off all the earth: for the LORD hath spoken it” (Isaiah 25:6-8).

It is only because we are ignorant of, or lose sight of, the fact that the present condition is not a perfect one, and forget the prospect held out to us in the Bible, that we distrust Him, and call in question His ways. As the passage we have just quoted so beautifully intimates, the covering that is cast over all people, and the veil that is spread over all nations — the dark providence

of God — will one day be destroyed, and then God's way will be known upon earth, His saving health among all nations. This means that God will one day directly and manifestly order the affairs of this world, and He will no longer be hidden. Every mystery will then be solved. Let us always remember these two things, first that God is working out a plan, and until that plan is perfected we are not in a position to judge, and secondly, God promises that His plan shall result in world-wide blessing and rest.

How Do We Wait for God?

It may be said, what are we to do in the meantime? Is it not an occasion for childlike trust, and for faith and patience? "They that know Thy name will put their trust in Thee." It is remarkable that some of those whose lives have been most bitter in this world, and most hard, are the people who continue to trust God most. Why? They have discovered His plan. "Behind a frowning providence, He hides a smiling face," was written by one who passed through deep waters. He himself could not always see the smiling face, but, nevertheless, it was, and is, always there. Many thousands of God's people have been comforted by this true, and beautiful, and uplifting thought so aptly expressed.

"Apt words have power to calm the tumors of a troubled mind, and are as balm to festered wounds."

Allow us to quote some words written by a man of great gifts — a student of Edinburgh University — who soon after leaving was struck with fever, which left him exhausted for six months, and with an incurable defect of speech, and in constant pain. "The God of love has taught me to see the meaning of my own dispensation in the clearest light, and I now perfectly approve of it with all my heart. I am the most withered and insignificant thing in this part of the universe, but weak, poor and afflicted as I am, I can truly say that my lot has become to me one of almost unmingled happiness. The sublime paradox, 'Having nothing, and yet possessing all things' is a mystery to me no longer. It is just what I feel. I have met with no person so happy as myself, and it is to be ascribed chiefly to my sufferings, or rather to the grace of our Redeemer, who has made them His instruments to refine and free my spirit and bring it into more full communion with Himself." So wrote one who, as far as nature went, had reason to doubt the wisdom of God's strange dealings, but he proved, like many another, the wisdom of the words-

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

What lessons we may learn from Job in this connection. Bereft of his possessions and his children, and withal a righteous man, he, yet, did not express unhappiness, but—"Fell down upon the ground, and worshipped, and said, Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the Name of the Lord. In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." And when sore personal affliction came upon him he still retained his integrity, and instead of cursing God he exclaimed, "What? shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil? In

all this did not Job sin with his lips.”

The Bible Never Questions God's Goodness

The Bible has much to teach us about the subject of God's providence. It is to be noted that though in the writings composing this Book there may be the record of want of faith on the part of individuals, yet the Book itself never questions God's goodness, or the ultimate triumph of His plans. A fine illustration of the way things are working in the universe is afforded by the book of Esther. There we find the wicked Haman plotting the destruction of the Jews, and, in furtherance of his plans, "Letters were sent by posts into all the King's provinces, to destroy, to kill, and to cause to perish, all Jews, both young and old, little children and women, in one day." Yet God was working behind the scenes, and, while the Jews were mourning and fasting because of the decree, He was depriving King Ahasuerus of sleep, so that he commanded to bring forth the book of records and they were read before him. Therein he found something to the credit of Mordecai, the Jew. This apparently simple circumstance led to the overthrow of his prime minister's diabolical plans, and the complete emancipation of the Jews from their terrible situation. In this case the catastrophe was averted, but even where it is not averted, the same Providence is at work for good, and not for evil. If, for instance, to take the case of China, a number of devoted missionaries are called to lay down their lives, it leads eventually to greater security and to doors being thrown open for the gospel far more widely than before.

The epistle of James affords us instruction on this same subject: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." Here is a reward for all our trial. And the last clause reveals a very remarkable thing, namely, that God expects us to love Him, and not to dread Him and doubt Him, even though His dealings may be painful instead of pleasant. Loving God does not give us immunity from trial, nor is trial a proof of any lack of love on God's part, for it is often in the furnace that His children prove His love most, but we are enabled to trust and to leave all things in the hands of a loving Father. For the very same passage assures us, that, "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." If we look only at providence it may seem there is darkness over God's face, but, as His children, we are privileged to know Him as the Father of Lights, and to expect only good, and we are assured He is not changeable or fickle. One reason why people are often perplexed and led to question God's ways is because they are occupied only with outward circumstances and do not know God Himself. Until we know Him as revealed in Jesus Christ all is inexplicable. In Christ, He is no longer only a God whose way is in the sea, and His path in the deep waters, nor One hidden in the thick darkness, but He becomes the Father of Lights.

God's Purpose for Good

Romans 8 reveals to us God's beneficent purpose behind all the seeming contradiction of a groaning creation. "The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared," Paul says, "with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (or "to us"). We are bound to regard the sufferings as leading to some good result. "For we know that the whole creation groaneth and

travailleth in pain together until now." Yet "the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." A groaning creation and a suffering humanity may seem the sport of fate and present a problem that is insoluble, but, with the Word of God in our hands, we hold the key to the puzzle. If we persist in remaining at enmity with the Ruler of the universe, there can be no explanation. We are not in a position to find an explanation, but "to them that love God" we are assured "all things work together for good." Reconciled to God and loving Him we shall soon be at peace about the world.

Sometimes it is a trouble to certain people that the wicked seem to prosper, and the good suffer. Such should read and ponder Psalm 73. It deals with this very point. It was within the sanctuary that the Psalmist learned his lesson. We cannot go over the ground here, but only just notice the beginning and close of the Psalm. "Truly God is good" and "It is good for me to draw near to God." We must not forget that God disciplines His children, and that calamities and sorrows are meant for their profit. This is the lesson of Hebrews 12, "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth." Our place is to be in subjection. Are we not reminded the discipline is for "our profit"?

In judging, therefore, of all that happens in this world of uncertainty and mystery, whether it affects ourselves or those we love, we must learn to regard all in the light of the future and the end God has in view.

In the pocket of one sorely afflicted, upon whom a terrible blow had fallen, were found these words written on a slip of paper-

"The mist lies dim on the coming year,
I know not the way I go;
But my Captain standeth above the clouds
'Tis enough for Him to know."

We know not; but He knows. Let this suffice. Let us rest there-"Tis enough for Him to know."
Let us not fret and fume in trying to solve the insoluble.

The Chief Reason to Trust God

This is the time for trusting Him, and the supreme reason for trusting Him is CHRIST. Had Christ never come — had God never sent His Son — then the riddle of the universe would have been a riddle indeed. But through the incarnation, the death, the resurrection and the glory of Christ we already see that riddle in solution, while His coming again will solve it completely.

God has loved, and He will never take that love back. A day is coming when, for those who love God, every pang and pain will find its answer, and the whole universe will be a witness that God is love.

Calvary, O Calvary,
Mercy's vast unfathomed sea,
Love, eternal love to me.

Jesus, we adore Thee.

Angels in White — OR — Words to the Worried. P. 38